

**Sherlock's Pharmacy: Drugs in Detective Stories, 1860s to
1890s**

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Statement of originality

The undersigned hereby acknowledges that this thesis is solely an original work and any references henceforth used have been appropriately acknowledged.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emma Kareno', written in a cursive style.

Emma Kareno

The ideal mystery was one you would read if the end was missing.

Raymond Chandler

An ideal detective story [is one] in which not only does the criminal remain unknown but one has no clear idea whether there has been a crime or who the detective is.

Raymond Queneau

A solution explained is a mystery spoiled.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	iv
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. MOONSTONED: WILKIE COLLINS'S <i>THE WOMAN IN WHITE</i> (1860) AND <i>THE MOONSTONE</i> (1868)	38
3. IN THE OPIUM DEN: CHARLES DICKENS'S <i>THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD</i> (1870)	85
4. A CITY IN A NIGHTMARE: ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON'S <i>THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE</i> (1886)	123
5. COCAINE: SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE'S <i>A STUDY IN SCARLET</i> (1887) AND <i>THE SIGN OF FOUR</i> (1890)	159
6. CONCLUSION: OSCAR WILDE'S <i>THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY</i> (1891)	209
7. SOME DETECTIVE STORIES CONTAINING DRUGS: A CHRONOLOGICAL LIST 1860-1900	233
8. BIBLIOGRAPHY	235

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1 An opium pipe by J. L. Kimbush ("A Night in an Opium Den", p. 627).

Figure 2 "Awful Apparition" (*Punch*, April 6, 1861, p. 140).

Figure 3 "The Bull's-Eye Lantern", illustrating a visit to the East End with the police by Gustave Doré (Doré and Jerrold).

Figure 4 "Dickens's opium den" by Gustave Doré (Doré and Jerrold).

Figure 5 The frontispiece of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* by Charles Collins and S. L. Fildes.

Figure 6 Piranesi's "Prison XIV: Carcere with a staircase ascending to the left". According to Mr. William Archer, Stevenson had two "Roman prints" by Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778) on the wall in Skerryvore at the time he was writing *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Hammerton, 76).

Figure 7 Piranesi's "Prison III: Carcere with a circular tower".

Figure 8 Hyde with the transforming drug by Mervyn Peake. Published in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, London: Folio Society, 1948, 110.

Figure 9 "Licensed to kill" by Arthur Conan Doyle in 1881, reprinted in *Memories and Adventures*.

Figure 10 Holmes and test tubes by Sydney Paget, illustrating "A Case of Identity" (*Strand*, September 1891, 255).

Figure 11 "The Victim of Fiction" (*Punch*, January 14, 1865, 19).

1. INTRODUCTION

I

This work examines the significance of drugs in Victorian stories of detection through a selection of detective fiction published between the years 1860 and 1890. The main purpose of the work is to show how these texts make a specific link between drugs and detection, and use this link to engage themselves in questions concerning reading and the consumption of fiction. I wish to argue, first, that drugs play a significant role in Victorian detective stories as a device to produce a sense of mystery and excitement in these texts. Secondly, I shall hope to show how this is achieved especially by presenting detection as having the drug-like qualities of intoxication and addiction. And thirdly, I shall examine how this particular characterisation of detection evokes a conception of detective fiction as a drug and invites the reader to consider her experience of reading in terms of an experience of drugs. In short, drugs, in these narratives, do not appear as a mere theme or a plot element, but can be seen to affect the very narrative form and structure of the fiction.

These arguments are initially encouraged by two observations. The first of these is the significant amount of drugs; poisons and medicines, featured in mid and late-Victorian stories of detection. The second observation is the way in which nineteenth-century criticism tends to describe the genre(s) of sensation and detective fiction in terms of its drug-like power, resorting to a strangely pharmaceutical terminology and

imagery without, however, apparently noticing the implications of this particular tendency and without formulating any coherent view of the fiction in terms of drugs.

Before a further elaboration on these initial observations, it is necessary to define what I mean by a detective story, to what kind of literature the arguments made in this work extend. Detection is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “exposure, revelation of what is concealed” and as “the finding out of what tends to elude notice, whether on account of the particular form or condition it is naturally present, or because it is artfully concealed”. This activity of detection, bringing to light the previously hidden, characterises the detective story and suffices here to describe a detective story as a text where the theme of detection is strongly present. In this century, the detective story has been regarded (at least until very recently) as one of the most formulaic genres often with such rigid definitions as the one offered by Erik Routley in *The Puritan Pleasures of the Detective Story* (1972); for him, it is “a story involving crime, a police force, a detective (who may or may not be a member of that force) and a solution. It must evoke a major interest in the finding of that solution” (Routley, 19). Of this definition, the last sentence expresses sufficiently the description of a detective story adopted in this work. A more recent and a more flexible definition is offered in *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1991) compiled by J. A. Cuddon, which defines the detective story as “a form of fiction in which a mystery, often a murder, is solved by a detective”. Even this definition raises such questions as whether it is necessary for the detective to actually solve the mystery, and what constitutes a “detective”. This work adopts the minimal characterisation or description (I would not like to call it anything so strict as a definition) of a detective story as a story which has detection (as defined by the *Oxford*

English Dictionary) as a major theme or interest. Although the term “detection” implies a successful investigation, where a hidden secret is revealed and a mystery is unravelled, I would like to extend my characterisation of detective fiction to include stories where detection is attempted but not successfully concluded. A detective is identified on the basis of this description as a fictional character engaging in detection, whether in a purposeful or a random way.

The term “detective story” was first introduced into print by Anna Katharine Green as a subtitle to her *7 to 12 and X.Y.Z.* in 1883.¹ By this decade, the 1880s, the concept of detective fiction was quite established, and what was meant by this term is not unlike our modern conception of the genre. In 1886, a year before the publication of the first Sherlock Holmes story by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the *Saturday Review* published an article entitled “Detective Fiction”, which acknowledges Edgar Allan Poe as “the father of the so called detective fiction” (“Detective Fiction”, 749; see also “Detectives in Fiction”, 713). The article concludes: “If the abundance of supply affords any accurate test, the demand for the detective novel is great and increasing” (“Detective Fiction”, 749), showing that by this date detective fiction was an identifiable, established genre with growing popularity. However, the detective was a familiar figure and detection a major theme in popular fiction long before the 1880s, in the sensation fiction of the preceding decades.

In . . . *And Always a Detective: Chapters on the History of Detective Fiction* (1980), R. F. Stewart argues that part of what is known as sensation fiction can be termed detective fiction. Stewart draws attention to Victorian criticism of sensation fiction in the 1860s and the 1870s observing that “it is in the criticism of sensation fiction’s emphasis on plot that the word ‘detective’ begins to appear as a critical term.

. . . 'detective' was used originally as a useful derogatory description for the type of story which rested on the unravelling of a secret - sensation fiction, in other words" (Stewart, 71). Detection was an issue from the very beginning of sensation fiction. In 1861 the anonymous writer of "The Enigma Novel" in the *Spectator* remarked:

We are threatened with a new variety of the sensation novel, a host of cleverly complicated stories, the whole interest of which consists in the gradual unravelling of some carefully prepared enigma. Mr. Wilkie Collins set the fashion, and now every novel writer who can construct a plot, thinks if he only makes it a little more mysterious and unnatural, he may obtain a success rivalling that of the "Woman in White." ("The Enigma Novel", 1428)

This extract suggests that already what has come to be conceived as the first as well as the archetypal sensation novel (Hughes, 138), Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860), was considered an enigma novel with a mystery requiring detection as its main focus of interest. By 1864 detective fiction appears to have further distinguished itself as a specific kind of sensation fiction, so much so that the writer of "Detectives in Fiction and in Real Life" introduces the term "romance of the detective" to mark the emerging new genre:

Of all forms of sensation novel-writing, none is so common as what may be called the romance of the detective. . . . Whether the contrast between the stern prose of the officer and the awfulness of the offence, or whether a Pre-Raphaelite delight in the representation of familiar objects, is the true source of the popularity of this kind of plot, it would be rash to decide; but of the fact itself there is no doubt. . . . It may perhaps be a little ungracious to object to what may be described as a well-trying, serviceable, common form which has sold a considerable number of popular novels and which, in the natural course of things, may be expected to sell several more; but to any one who has any practical acquaintance with the proceedings of detectives and with the transactions which they try to detect, this detective-worship appears one of the silliest superstitions that ever were concocted by ingenious writers. ("Detectives in Fiction", 712-713)

Detectives and detection were seen as conventional features of sensation fiction.

"Detectives in Fiction and in Real Life" does not only describe "a well-trying, serviceable common form" of detective fiction, but talks about "the normal detective

of a sensation novel" ("Detectives in Fiction", 713). The anonymous author of "Our Novels: The Sensational School" in *Temple Bar* in 1870 regards the detective as a "stock-device" ("Our Novels", 416) of the sensation novel:

We have said that in the stories we are discussing there is always a wonderful detective; a superhumanly shrewd barrister, who has nothing else to do but to go about and unravel the mysterious threads that envelope the lives of his friends; or some seeming fool, who is in reality devoting himself to the solution of personal problems apparently insoluble. . . . That such a situation should culminate in a murder is, we own, natural enough, . . . The wonderful detective is once more introduced, to trace the crime to its real source. ("Our Novels", 416)

The extent to which detection was an issue in popular fiction already in the 1860s is further illustrated by an article entitled "Amateur Detectives" in the *Saturday Review* in 1868 (at a time when two instalments of Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*, the celebrated "first" English detective novel, had appeared in *All the Year Round*). The article criticises the public's belief in the deductive method of detection "generally accepted in constructing the well-known detective in fiction" ("Amateur Detectives", 234). It further claims as "absurd" the belief that "given any fragment of the universe . . . a person of sufficient knowledge and ability might construct all the rest" (*Ibid.*). Two decades later, in 1887, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle would make Sherlock Holmes hold exactly this view in *A Study in Scarlet* (*A Study in Scarlet*, 18-19).

A look at nineteenth-century criticism shows that detection was a significant theme in popular fiction already in the 1860s, although the detective story, as it is generally viewed today, was not established as a separate genre until the 1880s. The scope of the present work and its examination of the presence of drugs in stories of detection extends from the first sensation novel with an enigma, Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860), to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories of the

1890s. Although the detective story changed considerably during the four decades from the 1860s to the 1890s and this change must be taken into account, throughout this period the genre retains its interest in drugs and its specific characterisation of detection as intoxicating and addictive. Also, the selection of texts in this work cuts through a wide spectrum of Victorian popular writing from the “classic” sensational three-deckers of Wilkie Collins and the unfinished final novel of Charles Dickens to the shilling shockers of Robert Louis Stevenson and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. All of these texts are bound together by their status as popular fiction; they are not (yet) canonised works of literary art. More importantly, they are all stories of detection; detective work is the main theme and the motoring force of the plot in each of these stories. They all feature drugs in their plots and, as I hope to show in the following chapters, present detection as a drug, introducing questions about reading and consumption of fiction through this particular representation of detection.

Attention is paid initially to the ways in which drugs appear in these texts. In a sense, then, this work can be seen as a study of a literary convention: how the use of drugs as a theme recurs in mid and late-Victorian detective stories. It further examines how these texts present detection as an addictive activity whose immediate effects are those of intoxication: uncertainty of sensory perceptions, overall sense of unreality, dissolution of identity, states of temporary madness, paranoia, monomania, obsession. Detection in these works is portrayed as neurotic and compulsive, as a kind of drug. And, it is argued, this portrayal functions as a significant device to produce excitement and suspense within the narratives. Finally and most importantly, this work is also an attempt to consider how the chosen texts reflect the alleged drug-like qualities of light reading and address the question of fiction as a drug.

II

Given the abundant use of drugs in Victorian society, it is by no means surprising that they should find their way into fiction. Many Victorian novels reflect aspects of the nineteenth-century drug-scene. A look into Lady Audley's medicine cabinet in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) gives an idea of the variety of drugs present in a Victorian home:

A tiny medicine chest was open upon the dressing table, and little stoppered bottles of red lavender, sal-volatile, chloroform, chlorodyne, and ether were scattered about. Once my lady paused before this medicine-chest, and took out the remaining bottles, half absently perhaps, until she came to one which was filled with a thick dark liquid, and labelled "Opium - Poison." (*Lady Audley's Secret*, 335)

Opium, the most popular medicine of the nineteenth century was commonly used in the form of laudanum, mixed with alcohol to form a dark, almost ruby-red liquid. It was prepared in numerous chemists' shops around Britain, while raw opium was imported in large quantities, mainly from Turkey. In Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* (1866) Bella looks at merchant ships coming up The Thames past Greenwich and dreams of her father making a fortune out of the opium trade, like his employers, the drug-house of Chicksey, Veneering and Stubbles. Bella's dream shows how the opium trade was a perfectly legitimate business in which to make a fortune. There were a number of companies importing opium and several opium brokers who passed the drug on to retail shops.

In Wilkie Collins's *No Name* (1862) the swindler Captain Wragge eventually makes his fortune in the drug trade and invents a "Pill", as he proudly declares:

I invested the whole of my capital. at one fell swoop, in advertisements - and purchased my drugs and my pill-boxes on credit. The result is now before you. Here I am, A Grand Financial Fact. Here I am with my clothes positively paid for, with a balance at my banker's; with my servant in livery, and my gig at the door; solvent, flourishing, popular - and all on a Pill. (*No Name*, 710)

Captain Wragge's "Pill" illustrates in a comic way how the field of patent medicines was open for all kinds of speculators and that success required no medical knowledge whatsoever, only good advertising. These products of Captain Wragge and other entrepreneurs who "prey on the public stomach" (*No Name*, 709), found eager customers among such characters as Lady Southdown in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848) and Mrs. Pullet in George Eliot's *The Mill on The Floss* (1860). Lady Southdown forces "Saunders M'Nitre, Luke Waters, Giles Jowls, Podger's Pills, Rodger's Pills, Pokey's Elixir" upon her relatives (*Vanity Fair*, 334) as well as preparing her own concoctions (*Vanity Fair*, 418). Her enthusiasm for "quack theology and medicine" (*Vanity Fair*, 334), combined with her distribution of tracts and drugs, enhances her comical but formidable character in *Vanity Fair* and also gives an idea, first, of the amusing as well as frightening popularity of various dubious patent medicines and, second, of the way in which theology and medicine, spiritual and bodily health, often became inextricably linked and intermingled. Mrs. Pullet in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) indulges in various medicines herself and appears as a comic yet more realistic and sombre character than Thackeray's Lady Southdown. Self-medication is part of her psychology and she is obsessed with death and drugs. Later, in *Middlemarch* (1872) Eliot presents the young doctor Lydgate opposing specifically the over-zealous prescription of drugs by the older, established medical men of Middlemarch, and comments on the profuse drug use of the time (*Middlemarch* is set in the period preceding the Reform Bill of 1832):

since professional practice chiefly consisted in giving a great many drugs, the public inferred that it might be better off with more drugs still, if they could only be got cheaply, and hence swallowed large cubic measures of physic prescribed by unscrupulous ignorance which had taken no degrees. (*Middlemarch*, 175, see also Chapter 45)

These examples indicate the breadth of drug use in Victorian society and the commonplace existence of drugs in the Victorian home and daily life. Fiction also highlights particular aspects and problems introduced by this omnipresence of drugs. The deaths of Eppie's mother in George Eliot's *Silas Marner* (1861)² and of Nemo in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853) present a more tragic side of drug use in their descriptions of poverty-stricken opium addicts. In Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), Mary's father John Barton is driven to opium addiction by the drudgery and frustration of Manchester working-class life. As John C. Hawley observes in his essay on *Mary Barton*, the availability of drugs and their wide-spread working-class use at the time would have ensured that "John Barton's addiction would not, therefore, have surprised Gaskell's readers. They knew this happened and had probably seen it firsthand" (Hawley, 24). Gaskell's novel, as other novels mentioned above, reflect the drug-laden reality of Victorian life.

Another aspect of drug use in Victorian Britain which caused increasing alarm, was the drugging of small children. The most famous of these "soothing syrups" for children was Daffy's Elixir and it gets a mention in several novels of the period. In *Vanity Fair* Amelia catches Mrs. Sedley administering Daffy's Elixir to Amelia's little son George (*Vanity Fair*, 386-387). Also, Thackeray's *The Newcomes* (1853-55) describes how a "pauper child in London . . . is dosed with Daffy's Elixir, and somehow survives the drug" (*The Newcomes*, 536-537). In Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers* (1857) the Elixir is recommended to Eleanor Bold for her son Johnny's teething problems (*Barchester Towers*, 201). In Mrs. Gordon Smythie's sensational three-decker *Alone in the World* (1861), a child is drugged with opium for criminal purposes, to keep her quiet during kidnapping (*Alone in the World*, 181, 182).

And, finally, in Charlotte M. Yonge's *The Three Brides* (1876), Rosamond Charnock's baby is drugged by a careless maid and afterwards rushed to a doctor, who reassures the agitated parents:

it only remains to be proved whether an aristocratic baby can bear popular treatment. I dare say some hundred unlucky infants have been lugged out to the race-course to-day, and come back squalling their hearts out with fatigue and hunger, and I'll be bound that nine-tenths are lulled with this very sedative, and will be none the worse. (*The Three Brides*, 217)

As the nineteenth century advanced and drug use became problematised in British society, the way it appears in fiction also changes. Drugs become alienated from the domestic routine of life and are increasingly portrayed as exotic, mysterious and dangerous. Opium is no more a familiar pain-killer, but a potent drug wrapped in Oriental mysticism. Indications of this change can be seen in Wilkie Collins's combination of the familiar medicine of laudanum with the adventures of the mysterious Indian diamond in *The Moonstone* (1868) and, more explicitly, in the emerging myth of the opium den launched by Charles Dickens's *The Mystery Edwin Drood* in 1870, which was later utilised by both Oscar Wilde in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in "The Man with the Twisted Lip" (1891). Both the mysteriousness as well as the number of Chinese opium dens in London's East End were widely overestimated by the public. The mundane pastime of Chinese sailors became an image of an alien, exotic, fantastical world of opium, which had little to do with the reality of the Chinese community in London.

Another indication of the changing attitude towards drugs, is the curious disappearance of Sherlock Holmes's cocaine syringe; according to Owen Dudley Edwards, Conan Doyle was persuaded to do away with it, because of the fear that it would encourage the habit in his readers (personal communication with Mr. Edwards).

This emerging uneasiness toward drug use is related to the medicalisation of drugs, the way in which the medical profession established its control over the prescription and administration of drugs in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This development can also be observed in fiction, in the way in which drugs are no longer presented only as self-administered, domestic drugs, often found in the cabinets of such sensational heroines as Lady Audley and Magdalene Vanstone (the heroine of Wilkie Collins's *No Name*), but are increasingly associated with the sciences of chemistry and medicine. The change in the context of drug use is also well illustrated in the characters emerging in the 1880s such as Sherlock Holmes, an enlightened amateur chemist whom we first meet in the chemical laboratory of St. Bartholomew's hospital (*A Study in Scarlet*, 9), and Robert Louis Stevenson's professional toxicologist Dr. Jekyll in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886).

These are but few examples of ways in which drugs, especially opium, appear in Victorian fiction. Detective stories, however, do not reflect the Victorian drug-scene in a haphazard or general manner, but display a significant interest in drugs, which cannot be explained solely by the Victorian fascination with the domestic crime of poisoning. The Victorians' interest in sensational poisoning cases, such as those of William Palmer in 1856 and Madeleine Smith in 1857,³ was expressed in popular fiction. The cheap penny-dreadfuls often explicitly and directly utilised famous trials as material for plots full of murderous horror.⁴ In sensation fiction, topics of the day would appear in a more shrouded form, but still identifiable by readers. Specifically, the myth of the beautiful female poisoner made poisoning as a means of murder extremely seductive; it is domestic and feminine. Poisoning also requires cunning, and administering poison to a victim needs intelligence and power of persuasion. Becky Sharp in William

Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848) and Lydia Gwilt in Wilkie Collins's *Armada* (1866) are examples of the subversive female poisoner,⁵ while Baron R** in *The Notting Hill Mystery* (1862) is an example of a terrifying, sensational murderer with a mastery of mesmerism and drugs, following in an exaggerated fashion the example set by Count Fosco in Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860). However, the abundance of intoxicants in popular stories of detection is by no means limited to the possibilities they give for achieving mysterious murders. As the texts discussed in this work will show, drugs circulate in detective stories in various strange ways, and they are as often used by detectives as by criminals and as often affect detectives as victims of crime.

As significant as the large amount of drugs featured, and the role they play in these texts, is their particular characterisation of the experience of detection, which is depicted as an intoxicating and addictive activity, as an ungentlemanly bad habit, not outrightly improper but, nevertheless, morally suspect. In Victorian detective stories, detection is both fascinating and repulsive, attractive and abhorred. This reflects the general public attitude towards the police, especially plain-clothes detectives, during most of the nineteenth century. Detectives were regarded as domestic spies threatening the privacy of respectable Victorians by dragging the family skeletons out of their closets for the world to see (Rumbelow, 175).⁶ The Detective Department of the Metropolitan Police came into existence in 1842 at Scotland Yard with a modest force of two inspectors and six sergeants. In 1845 *Punch* described the dangers of the new police force:

This society was ostensibly instituted for the preservation of peace; . . . Its real object has at last become apparent, being no other than universal domination. Its members, disguised in plain clothes, are now known to mix in all societies, to whose manners and peculiarities they are instructed to adapt themselves.

They mingle, as exquisites, in the *salons* of fashion; they creep, as cads, into the “crib” of the coster-monger. They frequent every species of tavern, from the first rate Hotel to the Jerry-shop; and neither the freedom of the tap nor the sanctity of the parlour is safe from their intrusion. They thus insidiously worm themselves into all sorts of secrets, and ascertain who is who, what is what, and what is going on; to the utter subversion of all privileges of Britons. . . . How much longer are free born Englishmen to submit to the *espionnage* and be victimised by the voracity of an X10, a Y15 or a Z20? (“Policemen, Servants and Families”, 259)

The strong language of this extract illustrates well how plain-clothes detectives were seen as a threat to privacy, from the *salons* of the wealthy to the pubs of the lower-middle class. Their “intrusion” knows no limits, they “worm themselves” into citizens’ secrets and “victimise” respectable Englishmen. In the early 1850s Charles Dickens published a series of short articles in *Household Words* describing the detective officers, whom he knew personally, in an extremely favourable manner, glorifying their intelligence and moral stature. Although these descriptions undoubtedly affected the public attitude to the police detective, suspicions lingered on for decades. In 1869 the Commissioner’s report observed that a detective force “was viewed with the greatest suspicion and jealousy by the majority of Englishmen and is, in fact, entirely foreign to the habits and feelings of the nation” (Critchley, 161).

With the debated status of the police detective in society and the aura of domestic spying and probing associated with the task of detection, it is understandable that popular fiction, too, presents detection as a controversial activity, surrounded by extreme textual unease. In her *Domestic Crime in the Victorian Novel*, (1989) Anthea Trodd draws attention to the wider literary context of this unease arguing that: “It was the secrecy of the home and its problematical relationship with the public sphere which was the real theme of the Victorian novelist who used plots of domestic crime” (Trodd, 2). For Trodd, the police detective is one of the figures at the centre of this

tension between the private and the public spheres, manifesting itself in Victorian popular fiction (Trodd, 5). However, I believe that Trodd's identification of the police detective as a key figure is too narrow. Detective activity, regardless of whether it is performed by a police detective (as Trodd argues) or by some other character(s) in a novel, displays a sense of social unease, even anxiety concerning the divide between domestic privacy and public respectability. Mary Elizabeth Braddon and, particularly, Anna Katharine Green use the morally suspect nature of detection to enhance the sense of mystery and excitement in their narratives. In Green's novels, such as *The Leavenworth Case* (1878) and *Hand and Ring* (1883), the detective character is agonisingly aware of his or her detection as a vice. For example, in *Hand and Ring*, Horace Byrd, a professional gentleman detective, experiences the contradictory passions of detection as he is led to suspect a beautiful woman of murder:

As a professional he could not fail to experience that quick start of the blood which always follows the recognition of a "big affair", while as a gentleman he felt himself recoil from probing into a matter that was blackened by a possibility against which every instinct in his nature rebelled. (*Hand and Ring*, 27)

Byrd's psychosomatic symptom, the "quick start of the blood", testifies to the pleasurably stimulating effects of detection, while his "respectable", gentlemanly side simultaneously recognises the impropriety of his body's response to the excitement of detection. This game of desire and resistance creates a tension in the narratives which present detection as a dangerous and forbidden pleasure, like a drug.

A drug, within the context of this work, is essentially defined by its attributes of intoxication and addiction. Intoxication results in an altered perception of reality and of oneself. It produces such effects as uncertainty concerning sensory perception; blurred vision, hallucinations, an overall sense of unreality and fragmentation. It can also be

described as a temporary insanity, which may take the form of paranoia or monomania. Furthermore, it is associated with fragmentation or dissolution of identity, and a dislocation of the self, characterised by split consciousness and out-of-body experience. These are effects of drugs, listed in medical descriptions of opium and cocaine use, and they are strikingly similar to characterisations of detection in Victorian detective stories.

The intoxication with detection becomes manifest in the constant doubt detectives express concerning their surrounding reality. As every detail becomes impregnated with potential meaning as a possible clue to the mystery, detectives experience an overall sense of uncertainty. This turns into a haunting feeling of unreality, suspected madness, whose symptoms include blurred vision, a sense of fragmentation, and dissolution of identity. The world of detection in Victorian fiction is an uncanny world, specifically being a defamiliarised world, the “normal” made strange, out of joint. This sense of superimposed realities, where the world of crime, seduction and sensation is revealed beneath the familiar Victorian reality is a characteristic common to all sensation literature, and termed as “proximity” by H. L. Mansel in 1863: “Proximity is, indeed one great element of sensation. . . . we are thrilled with horror, even in fiction, by the thought that such things may be going on around us and among us” (Mansel, 488-489). Sensation fiction is a distorting mirror for the familiar everyday world, it plays tricks with reality. The reviewer of Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Uncle Silas* in 1865 describes this phenomenon in writing: “The English country-house becomes a veritable Castle of Otranto. The British squire . . . is either a dreamy mystic or a polished fiend. The peasantry are in league with the powers of

darkness. There is a twist of mystery about the most ordinary personages and transactions" (*Uncle Silas: a Review*", 146).

In *Phantastica: Narcotic and Stimulating Drugs* (1931) Louis Lewin, a famous German authority on toxicology, lists the immediate effects of cocaine: "suspicion . . . false interpretation of things . . . insomnia . . . hallucinations" (Lewin, 84). These as well as the "almost magical intensity of mental functioning, . . . expanded mental powers and increased physical energy" (Andrews and Solomon, 4) resulting from a dose of cocaine, are the very characteristics we observe in the detective of Victorian popular fiction, when she or he is "on the scent". In *Opium and the Romantic Imagination* (1968), Alethea Hayter records similar responses of opium users emphasising the mentally and intellectually stimulating effects of the drug:

Many drug-takers have claimed that in this early stage of addiction their mental powers and activity have been enhanced. Their intellectual faculties are ready, vivacious, lucid, and their ideas copious and original; opium, said an addict, made him think of things he would not otherwise have thought of. The power of associating ideas is immensely stimulated, in long unfolding links and networks of thought which can be creatively revealing. Projects are formed for huge philosophical works which will be a synthesis of all knowledge and will explain the pattern of existence. The most difficult works, the most elaborate conceptions, can be read and understood with ease. Abstract ideas become images, brilliantly distinct but melting and evolving in swift metamorphoses, or the mind leaps with intrepid audacity and self-reliance across the gaps between idea and idea. Anything could be achieved - if it were worth achieving; but there is no need to make an effort, for the thing is, in effect, done already; intention and performance are no longer distinguished. (Hayter, 42-43)

There are several similarities between this description of the effects of opium and the experience of detection as it is portrayed in Victorian popular fiction. Firstly, the intellectual stimulation, the heightened sensitivity to ideas, the ability to link ideas and form convincing chains or patterns of ideas, as well as the originality and creativity of analytical thought, are all characteristics associated with detective heroes and heroines.

Secondly, the sense of performance as superfluous to intention, is similar to the way in which detection culminates in the knowledge of the solution rather than in the punishing of the culprit. Once the chain of evidence has been formed (although not always even verified) the interest in the mystery has passed its climax, the actual act of justice, the capture and punishment of culprits, is left to the official police machinery on the margins of the text. *The Notting Hill Mystery* (1863) by "Charles Felix" is an illustrative example. The story consists of a series of reports by an insurance agent investigating Mme R**'s death; he concludes his report by stating that as far as he is concerned, the amassed evidence is sufficient to prove that a murder by Baron R** has occurred. No actual decision about the possible prosecution and "official" investigation into the matter is made. Many of the Sherlock Holmes stories similarly conclude with the knowledge of the solution and an intention to capture of the culprits without actually doing so. The interest in detective stories lies in the experience of the process of detection, rather than in the performance of the punishment of criminals, and this disregard concerning the punishment of the culprits is shared by the detective and the reader.

Addiction denotes a compulsion and a desire; a drug does not satisfy the need which calls for its use, but creates an increasing need for itself. In *Opium and the People* (1981) Berridge and Edwards write:

Addiction to opiates may best be pictured as both a psychological and biological condition, characterized by a desire to continue taking the drug in high dosage, a salience of this drug-seeking drive over other life considerations and a tendency to relapse. It seems likely that repeated experience of the powerful euphoriant effect of the drug contributes to the initiation of addiction: in simple terms a habit is built up because it is intensely pleasurable. (Berridge and Edwards, 279)

In Victorian popular fiction, detection is also presented as addictive. Detectives experience detection as fascinating and are drawn to the physical and mental excitement and stimulation it produces. Although detection is initiated in the name of honour, justice, love, financial or social gain, or revenge, it tends to leave behind all external motivations and proceeds with mounting intensity as detectives become obsessed with their investigations. Often, detectives are painfully aware of their own addiction and try to extinguish it: they realise that the overwhelming desire to ~~detect~~ has superseded all other considerations and motivations, or that detection has gone beyond the initial goal and there is no justifiable need for it to continue. In Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860), Walter Hartright does not and cannot limit himself to re-establishing his wife as the heiress, Lady Glyde. He is compelled to find out also Anne Catherick's parentage, which does not in any way affect the happy closure of the tale. Nevertheless, the text reveals a compulsion to solve all the questions it has created, and this is done, while further suspense is generated, by presenting Hartright as obsessed with detection. Detection does not cease until every possible morsel of mystery has been consumed by it.

In addition to its main features of intoxication and addiction, a drug is further characterised by moral ambiguity concerning its effects; it remains impossible to define whether a drug, such as opium, is to be regarded as beneficial or detrimental, it is both at the same time. Opium, which "in its various medicinal forms has probably relieved more human suffering than any other remedial agent," (*Pears' Shilling Cyclopaedia*, 841) is a lethal poison. A drug may thus be defined as a substance which is a medicine, a poison or both at the same time. This is well illustrated by nineteenth-century pharmacology which employed such "medicines" as arsenic, prussic acid and antimony

(all of which are still listed as medicines in “The Dictionary of Health” of *Pears’ Shilling Cyclopaedia* in 1911). Detection in Victorian fiction occupies a similarly ambiguous position; it is a means to justice, but also to the disclosure of hidden secrets and scandals. There is always an inherent danger of an overdose of detection; it may go too far and reveal something which should remain hidden. Detectives in Victorian detective stories are usually very aware of this danger, constantly question the extent to which their detection should proceed and try to calculate its effects. For example, in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862), the amateur detective Robert Audley is plagued with the ambiguities of detection, its attractiveness versus its terror, its beneficial results versus its dangers, and its necessity versus its uselessness: “If he [Mr. Talboys] is content to let his son’s fate rest a dark and cruel mystery to all who knew him . . . why should I try to unravel the tangled skein, to fit the pieces of the terrible puzzle, and gather together the stray fragments which when collected may make such a hideous whole?” (*Lady Audley’s Secret*, 161). Despite these doubts Audley is compelled to continue, while wondering about his strange compulsion to detect: “Why do I go on with this? . . . how pitiless I am, and how relentlessly I am carried on” (*Lady Audley’s Secret*, 172). The effects and value of detection in the community as well as for the individual, are constantly questioned in Victorian stories of detection.

Finally, a drug can be described as a foreign body; it is an injected or an inserted force functioning within a system or an organism but not indigenous to it. This is a general characteristic assigned to modern detectives, who appear as outsiders, as experts in crime called in to help in a criminal emergency. However, in Victorian fiction the detective is more often the young hero or heroine of the novel intimately

connected with the community plagued by mystery. In the earlier novels of the 1860s and 1870s, the foreignness of a drug is rather reflected in the ways in which the mystery separates detectives from their surrounding communities, singles them out as detectives through the narrative's focalisation on the detective character and the alienating effect of detection produced by the pervading sense of suspicious uncertainty assigned to this character. Only in the 1880s and the 1890s, with the rise of the professional private detective in fiction, do detectives become outsiders in a more tangible sense. Even then, until the arrival of Sherlock Holmes, detectives tend to retain or to develop some kind of a personal bond to the community affected by the mystery. Most often this is admiration for a member of the opposite sex.

There are various ways in which detection in the popular fiction of the mid and late-Victorian era may be related to the concept of a drug. The description of detection as a drug-like force in the narratives extends itself to the experience of reading this fiction. In this work, I shall examine how narratives produce a sense of excitement and suspense, attract readers and keep them reading, by transporting the drug-like qualities of detection into the experience of reading; in other words, how detective fiction can be a kind of drug. I shall also suggest that the specific use of drugs in these texts functions as a means to address questions concerning the consumption and reading of fiction.

III

The second initial observation inspiring this study, suggests that authors did succeed in conveying to their readers the intoxication and addictiveness of detection.

Criticism of detective fiction has maintained, since the 1860s, a strangely pharmaceutical vocabulary. Sensational stories of detection are thrillers addressing themselves directly to the readers' sympathetic nervous system. This acknowledged aim of sensation fiction is illustrated in an amusing advertisement in *Punch* in 1863 for an imaginary, new periodical "The Sensation Times":

This journal will be devoted chiefly to the following objects; namely, Harrowing the Mind, Making the Flesh Creep, Causing the Hair to Stand on End, Giving Shocks to the Nervous System, Destroying Conventional Moralities, and generally Unfitting the Public for the Prosaic Avocations of Life. ("Prospectus of a New Journal", 193)

The sensational text aims to cause physical sensations by affecting the mind. Nervousness, a state of excitement and extreme stimulation is the state experienced by the characters in these stories. As *Punch* implies and D. A. Miller has suggested, it is also the state required of the reader. In his reading of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* in *The Novel and the Police* (1988), Miller argues that "the novel makes nervousness a metonymy for reading, its cause or effect" (D. A. Miller, 151). Following Miller's suggestion, one can see nervousness, excitement and stimulation in detective stories not only as the achieved effects of the sensational narrative but as reading strategies implied by the texts themselves. Stories of detection in the nineteenth century use drugs to circumscribe the act of reading; their drug-like power of intoxication and addiction define the position of the implied reader in the text. In short, mid and late-Victorian stories of detection ask to be read in terms of drugs.

I would like to suggest that in Victorian popular fiction we can see a circular effect where fictional texts use the idea of the drug-like power of popular fiction to produce thrilling stories, and define the position of the implied reader in terms of this calculated, sensational effect of the texts. This, in turn, is responded to and further

encouraged by critical readers of the fiction, who associate this fiction directly with drugs. In this way, there seems to emerge a self-enforcing circle between detective fiction and its criticism, where drugs are all the more firmly associated with sensational stories of detection.

Contemporary critics commented on the large amount of poisons employed in sensation novels and observed how “Poison plays a considerable part in their pages” (“Our Novels”, 411; see also Story, 695). This association of sensation fiction with drugs was soon extended to characterise the genre in more general terms. The 1863 *Punch* parody of the phenomenon of sensation fiction assures the readers of “The Sensation Times” that “Arsenical literature will find in these columns its best exponent, and all Poison Cases will be watched” (“Prospectus of a New Journal” 193).

Sensation fiction was dangerous reading, and was described both as escapist and intoxicating, as well as corruptive and addictive. In 1864 the Archbishop of York urged members of the Huddersfield Church Institute to be wary of the temptations and dangers of sensation fiction.⁷ This new type of fiction was suspect specifically because of the way it “teaches people not to trust to appearances, but to believe that behind there lies a world of crime and misery” (“The Perils of Sensation”, 559). The main criticism of sensation fiction was its unreality; the large amount of crime and impropriety featured in these novels was declared preposterously unrealistic, and the genre as a whole was accused of presenting a twisted, falsified world as real(istic). The combination of sensational events and contemporary setting enhanced this sense of dangerous falsification of reality. Sensation fiction, whether attacked by its critics or defended by its proponents, was consistently discussed in terms of its effects on the reader’s mind, with the emphasis on its stimulating and corruptive effects.

The author of "The Perils of Sensation" in 1864 wrote: "Mr. Wilkie Collins and Miss Braddon possibly exhibit literary defects, but the true objection is that their books have a most dangerous influence upon the minds of their readers" (*The Perils of Sensation*", 559). In 1867 the *Saturday Review* described sensation fiction specifically as "the medium through which moral poison is frequently administered" ("Novel Reading", 196). The same tone continues throughout the decade; in 1870 "Our Novels: The Sensational School" maintained that:

No doubt the reading of sensational novels must have a deteriorating effect on the mind, and we doubt if a single human being has ever reaped one iota of benefit from them. They stimulate only to depress. They are the worst form of mental food, if we except that which is absolutely poisonous. ("Our Novels," 424)

The drug-like qualities of fiction, its stimulating and depressive effects, its being "mental food", were common remarks; in 1864 "Our Female Sensation Novelists" declared:

sensationalism . . . [is] . . . drugging thought and reason, and stimulating the attention through the lower and more animal instincts, rather than by a lively and quickened imagination, and especially by tampering with things evil, and infringing more or less on the confines of wrong. ("Our Female Sensation Novelists", 210)

The emphasis on the intoxicating, sedative and stimulating effects of sensation fiction is accompanied by a fear of its addictiveness. In 1890 "Crime in Fiction" in the *Saturday Review* compared the reader of detective stories to a drunkard: "Criminal fiction does little direct harm . . . but it steadily demoralises the palate for anything milder and more delicately flavoured: the habitual dram-drinker will have his stimulants stronger and stronger" ("Crime in Fiction", 173). The general alarm about the spread of sensation and mystery fiction reflects the idea that "this perverted and vitiated taste" ("The Popular Novels of the Year", 262) was becoming a national scourge.

H. L. Mansel's essay "Sensational Novels" in the *Quarterly Review* in 1862, is an illustrative example of the kind of vocabulary used to describe sensation fiction, emphasising the theme of unravelling a secret. It also displays the critic's fear of the detrimental effects of "fiction-abuse". "Excitement, and excitement alone, seems to be the great end at which they aim", Mansel begins, drawing attention, once again, to the stimulating effect of sensation novels. He continues:

And as excitement, even when harmless in kind, cannot be continually produced without becoming morbid in degree, works of this class manifest themselves as belonging, some more, some less, but all to some extent, to the morbid phenomena of literature - indications of a wide-spread corruption, of which they are both the effect and the cause; called into existence to supply the cravings of a diseased appetite, and contributing themselves to foster the disease, and to stimulate the want which they supply. (Mansel, 482-483)

Mansel's paragraph outlines a circle of drug-addiction; sensation fiction is both "the effect and the cause" of a need for itself. Although it is read to satisfy "the cravings of a diseased appetite", it satisfies no desire, but enhances and creates a further desire for more fiction of its kind. This desire for sensation fiction is morbid, a sign of mental corruption, a disease. The fiction itself is characterised as an addictive drug. Later in the article, Mansel proceeds to note the immediately stimulating and intoxicating effects of the fiction:

Written to meet an ephemeral demand, aspiring only to an ephemeral existence, it is natural that they should have recourse to rapid and ephemeral methods of awakening the interest of their readers, striving to act as the dram or the dose, rather than as the solid food, because the effect is more immediately perceptible. And as the perpetual cravings of the dram-drinker or the valetudinarian for spirits or physic are hardly intelligible to the man of sound health and regular appetites. so, to one called from more wholesome studies to survey the wide field of sensational literature, it is difficult to realise the idea which its multifarious contents necessarily suggest, that these books must form the staple mental food of a very large class of readers. (Mansel, 485)

Sensation fiction is here directly associated with the intoxicating substances, alcohol and drugs, a novel is a dram or a dose of drug with immediate and short-term

stimulating effects. The reader of this fiction is associated with alcoholics and drug addicts (as this concept was understood in 1864) perpetually craving for her dose. She is a diseased, abnormal individual as opposed to the “healthy” reader of “good” literature.

Nineteenth-century criticism associated detective fiction directly with drugs. The genre of sensational mystery stories was described (although not defined) as a drug with its effects characterised as mentally corrupting and physically stimulating. The terminology used by critics reflects this connection made between the genre and drugs. This tradition has not been broken even today; throughout the twentieth century detective fiction has continued to be associated with escapist unreality and addiction.⁸ For Lord Balfour, reported by H. Douglas Thomson in 1931, “detective novels act like iodine on a gum and serve as a counter-irritant” (Thomson). W. H. Auden opens his essay “The Guilty Vicarage” (printed in *The Dyer’s Hand* in 1948) with “the confession” that for him “the reading of detective stories is an addiction like tobacco or alcohol” (Auden, 146). Edmund Wilson, writing in 1950 about a letter received from a detective “addict” recommending the genre, has his “blood run cold: so the opium smoker tells the novice not to mind if the first pipe makes him sick” (E. Wilson, 39). And he continues, “the true addict, half the time, never even finds out who has committed the murder. The addict reads not to find anything out but merely to get the mild stimulation of the succession of unexpected incidents and of the suspense itself of *looking forward* to learning a sensational secret” (E. Wilson, 39). The association of detective stories with drugs has outlived the Victorian period without, however, developing into any uniform or articulate view of the detective story as a drug.⁹

Why should drugs particularly provide this kind of imagery and terminology to describe detective fiction in the mid and late-Victorian period? I have suggested that the use of drugs in popular fiction prompted criticism to utilise similar associations. More significantly, I believe, drugs provided the authors of sensation and detective fiction with a means to respond to criticism of popular fiction and to participate in the contemporary discussion concerning the role of popular fiction in a society with a vastly expanding reading public. Drugs in detective fiction can thus be related to the wider literary and cultural sphere in Britain in the second half of the nineteenth century. However, reasons why drugs should attract the attention of authors and critics alike, and why drugs specifically should be associated with the popular genre of detective fiction, can perhaps be found in the Victorian drug-scene.

IV

Drugs, especially opiates, were a constant presence in Victorian everyday life. Opium, laudanum, morphine, cocaine, chloral, chloroform etc. were all widely and “largely unselfconsciously” (Berridge and Edwards, 3) used as medicines, often in self-medication, and they were freely available throughout the nineteenth-century. In her biography of Wilkie Collins, Catherine Peters records some of Collins’s desperate attempts to relieve his gout and other illnesses by various drugs. Collins’s laudanum use is well-known, but according to Peters, he also resorted to quinine, potassium, colchicum, amyl nitrate, sal-volatile, spirits of chloroform and morphia (C. Peters, 258, 315, 407-8). Peters suspects that Collins’s further claim of taking arsenic is a joke, because he also writes about taking nitro-glycerine (C. Peters, 413). Both of these

substances, however, had their advocates in the mid-Victorian medical world. Whatever the case, Collins certainly did not need to exaggerate his drug use for effect, the list of chemical substances in his biography is very impressive, and it shows how drugs, medicines which were often poisons, were available and used daily. Samuel Flood's description of drug use in Leeds, published in the *Lancet* in 1845, illustrates the "normality" of drugs at the time before the 1868 Pharmacy Act:

It is an absolute fact, that in this very town many of the working-class actually make their Saturday night marketings in pills and drops as regularly as in meat and vegetables; and in the public marketplace, and almost within a stone's throw from this hall, are to be seen, in creditable juxtaposition, one stall for vegetables, another for meat, and a third *for pills* ! . . . Men think nothing of swallowing pills by spoonfuls. (Flood, 203)

Flood's tone in this description of a scene which local people found utterly commonplace, already indicates the growing awareness of drugs as a problem. In *Opium and the People: Opiate Use in Nineteenth-Century England* (1981) Virginia Berridge and Griffith Edwards describe the problematisation and medicalisation of drug use in the nineteenth century. The entirely unrestricted use was, by the end of the century, transformed into a "modern" view of drugs as a social problem and of drug use as a disease. Toxicology and pharmacology came to be identified as separate fields of expertise and specialisation at the same time as such new drugs as morphine, chloral, cannabis and cocaine were introduced into British medicine.

Dolores Peters, in her essay "The British Medical Response to Opiate Addiction in the Nineteenth Century" (1985), confirms that "habitual opiate use was not widely regarded as a social problem and a danger to public health until the last quarter of the nineteenth century" (D. Peters, 455). It is during this period that the growing concern with drugs peaked and drug use was increasingly regarded as drug *abuse*. As Berridge

and Edwards observe, the second half of the nineteenth century saw a radical change in the perceptions of opium use:

This came about in two ways. There was an increased concern about the availability of the drug, and that this should be in the hands of professional men. It began with the agitation leading to the 1868 Pharmacy Act . . . But there was also the concern at the way the drug was used and about the medical control of its users, exemplified in the establishment of the particular problem of hypodermic morphine use and the outlining of disease theories of addiction. (Berridge and Edwards, 113)

In the 1850s and the 1860s the attention of the medical establishment and the public concentrated on the question of the availability of drugs. The growing alarm initiated by fears of working-class opium use (as echoed in Flood's article) resulted in the 1868 Pharmacy Act. The Act removed opium from corner shops and public houses, to be sold solely by pharmacists, but it did little to check the sale and use of opiates. Although opium was now only dispensed through pharmacists, and was to be labelled as "Poison", it was still openly available. Furthermore, the Act did not extend to the various patent medicines on the market, most of them based on opiates. These continued to proliferate unchecked until 1892, when the debate over chlorodyne finally led to the inclusion of patent medicines in the 1868 Act (Berridge and Edwards, 130). Self-medication with opiates continued and they remained freely available throughout the nineteenth century. Cocaine was introduced into medicine during the last quarter of the century, when the medical profession was already establishing its control over drug dispensation, and thus it was from the beginning excluded from as wide a general use as opium enjoyed. Overall, efficient control over the availability of drugs was only created with the 1908 Pharmacy and Poisons Act, which dictated that opium, all preparations containing more than one percent of morphine, and cocaine, "could be sold only if the

purchaser was known to the seller or to an intermediary known to both. A detailed entry was to be made in the poisons [*sic.*] register” (Berridge and Edwards, 116, 228).

After the 1868 Pharmacy Act attention shifted from the availability of drugs, which had now been dealt with, towards the ways in which drugs were used and the dangers of addiction. Addiction, up until this period, had not been treated as a notable problem (Berridge and Edwards, 36), and “the medical uses of opium shaded imperceptibly into ‘non-medical’ or what can be termed ‘social’ ones” (Berridge and Edwards, 49). From the 1870s onwards the problem of addiction, or “chronical poisoning” emerged in the field of public awareness, the medical establishment developed such concepts as T. S. Clouston’s “morbid cravings and paralysed control” (Clouston, 508), and the overall view of drug use as a disease related to types of moral insanity gained sway. While opium moved from the sphere of popular use into the medical sphere, cocaine and the hypodermic use of morphine were always more expensive and their use was limited by the medical establishment. Therefore the problems associated with these drugs were also limited and their abuse was assigned to small groups of middle and upper-class users¹⁰ (in the case of morphine especially women).

Throughout the nineteenth-century, Berridge and Edwards maintain, there existed no drugs sub-culture as there is today. Drug use was not a particular way of life associated with moral and economic degradation, crime and squalor. The experimentation with drugs by the members of the Romantic movement in the first half of the century had never been a major issue, and was at the most reflected in the way in which the most famous drug-addicts of the early century, Thomas De Quincey and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, were used as examples in the argumentation against opium

use.¹¹ Romantic poets, such as Shelley, Byron, and Keats, as well as De Quincey and Coleridge, resorted originally to drugs as medicines, not as instruments of poetic inspiration (Hayter, 32; De Quincey, 15). Alethea Hayter notes that “Their habit was not considered an exotic and secret vice, but the excess of a normal indulgence, as drunkenness was” (Hayter, 34).

By the mid-nineteenth century the large-scale opium use of the poorer classes of the society was the focus of the opium-discussion. This focus moved in the second half of the century from the availability of drugs to the methods of their use and addiction. Towards the end of the century, with *fin-de-siècle* decadence, drug-use obtained a more glamorous air, spiced by a new sense of impropriety, which was a result of the drugs-debate of the preceding decades. I have here outlined the development of the drugs-question in general terms, and the following readings tracing the use of drugs in detective stories from the 1860s to the 1890s will further touch upon this development. In *The Opium and the People* (1981) Berridge and Edwards emphasise the significance of the overall problematisation and medicalisation of drug use and the ideological shift accompanying it; they see it as a major social development related to wider questions of social control and organisation in Britain. With drugs as a prominent public issue, it is reasonable to conclude that topical popular fiction should avail itself of this vehicle of excitement. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the problematisation of the role of popular fiction, which accompanied the proliferation of sensational mystery stories and the emergence of a mass audience for fiction, coincided with the problematisation of drug use. I would like to claim that the concurrence of these two phenomena suggested drugs to critics and authors alike as a useful and descriptive framework in which to consider the consumption of fiction. Drugs offered a

contemporary, topical terminology and imagery to address questions of popular literature and mass reading.

Within the wider context of the Victorian literary scene, drugs provided popular novelists with a concept and vocabulary to discuss the effects of proliferating popular fiction and the implications of the widening reading public. The emergence of sensation fiction in the beginning of the 1860s raised the debate concerning the social role and significance of literature to its peak. As Colin Watson remarks: "Literature had joined the list of human products that the industrial revolution brought within the field of organised commercial exploitation. It had become a commodity" (C. Watson, 16). The increase in works of popular fiction catering for an ever widening reading public, enhanced by the 1870 Education Act, the proliferating periodicals serialising fiction and the growth of the circulating libraries, had already initiated a discussion on the role of the author in society. Creative writers had become conscious of their calling as a profession and of their power as a force influencing public opinion (for example, Walker [1897], 262; Chapman, 171). As David Skilton points out at the opening of *The Early and Mid-Victorian Novel* (1993), Victorians recognised their time as "the age of the novel" (Skilton, 1), and engaged in a vigorous debate concerning the artistic merits and social and moral significance of the form.

With the relatively sudden appearance of the sensation novel at the beginning of the 1860s, after the publication of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (serialised in 1859-60) and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (serialised in 1861-1862), the debate concerning the moral and social effects of popular fiction intensified and the criticism of sensation fiction acquired a vocabulary which invariably described this genre in terms of disease, poison and drugs, as H. L. Mansel's review well

demonstrates. Authors themselves were involved in this debate and displayed an awareness of and interest in the effects of their own fiction upon their readers. As early as 1858 Wilkie Collins's essay "The Unknown Public", published in *Household Words*, shows his delight in the idea that there is a vast new reading public to be catered for, once they would graduate from penny-dreadfuls to "proper novels". By the 1860s, as the immense popularity of sensation novels indicates, this had taken place, and in 1887 the *Edinburgh Review* could declare that "the host of young readers has multiplied thousandfold" ("The Literature of the Streets", 42). This vast "unknown public" was embracing the new genre of detective stories.

The portrayal of drugs and detection in fiction allowed popular writers, such as Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, Robert Louis Stevenson, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and others, a means to respond to contemporary criticism of popular fiction. The ways in which these authors used their portrayal of detection as a drug, relating it to issues of reading within their narratives, can, I believe, be seen as part of the more general debate taking place at the time about the moral, social and cultural significance of popular fiction. As the more prestigious novelists, George Eliot, George Meredith and Anthony Trollope among them, were involved in considerations of the artistic and moral merits of the novel as an art form, the popular novelists, producers of shockers and thrillers, were often equally engaged in debates and theorisations concerning the novel, only their interest lay in the specific question of reading as an experience. Thus, although these works of popular fiction do not appear to carry significant artistic merits, I do maintain that they contribute in an interesting way to the overall conceptions of the novel prevalent in the Victorian era and discuss the role of the novel

in society from their own vantage point of mass reading and the consumption of fiction.

V

What, then, would it mean to consider fiction in terms of drugs? In her *Crack Wars: Literature, Addiction, Mania* (1993), Avital Ronell talks about “the pharmacodependency with which literature has always been secretly associated - as sedative, as cure, as escape conduit or euphorizing substance, as mimetic poisoning” (Ronell, 11). These “drug-purposes” of literature are particularly relevant to popular fiction and the phenomenon of mass reading. The presumed and anticipated effects of light reading are associated with mental states, rather than with cognitive thought processes. Works of popular fiction, sensational mystery stories specifically, address themselves to the reader’s sympathetic nervous system, aiming to affect her emotional state of mind, to sedate or to stimulate. Reading as being-on-drugs denotes a state where the reader is lost in fiction, she loses the awareness of her real environment and gives herself up to the language of fiction. In his Introduction to *Readers and Reading* (1995), Andrew Bennett writes:

Reading may be understood in terms of what we might call the ‘trance of reading’ - ‘trance’ as in transition or transit, transference, transposition, translation, transformation, transgression and, finally, entrancement. In the trance of reading, the identity of the reading subject is itself unstable, yet to be determined or constituted in the ‘experience’ of reading. In its most extreme form, the trance of reading would involve forgetting one’s surroundings, being ‘lost in a book’ - in what Blanchot calls ‘fascination’ of reading and what Derrida refers to, in a portmanteau neologism, as *delireium*. (Bennett, 12)

Bennett describes reading as “transformational”, a characterisation used also by Jacques Derrida (*Positions*, 63), specifically in the sense that reading is not a regulated performance following a predetermined protocol, but an experience involving “a necessary otherness or alterity” (Bennett, 15), a drug-like substance transporting the reader out of herself.

Georges Poulet’s description of his personal experience of reading in “Criticism and the Experience of Interiority” (1972) characterises the state of reading exactly as this kind of being-on-drugs, although he does not use this specific metaphor. Instead, he describes reading as “this strange displacement of myself by the work” (Poulet, 47). Poulet refers specifically to thrillers as an example of this existence of the text in the mind, where the boundary between the mind and the text is obliterated, one is lost in fiction, losing track of time and a sense of surrounding reality (Poulet, 45). Poulet tries to explicate an experience where “the work forms the temporary mental substance which fills my consciousness” (Poulet, 47), thus resorting to an expression which implies a proximity between reading and drug-use.

Poulet approaches a theorisation of reading through the concepts of subjectivity and objectivity and the opposition of the reader as a subject and the text as an object. A text, while it is read becomes “mental objects” or “interior objects” (Poulet, 43), which invade the reader’s mind as the experiences and thoughts of another. This interiorisation or subjectivisation of the text as an object breaks down the distinction between any outside and inside of the reading mind: “In short, the extraordinary fact in the case of a book is the falling away of the barriers between you and it. You are inside it, it is inside you; there is no longer either outside or inside” (Poulet, 42). Reading, for Poulet, is an experience of otherness, a suspension of identity and a schizoid co-

habitation of his mind with the text (Poulet, 47-48): "Whenever I read, I mentally pronounce an *I*, and yet the *I* which I pronounce is not myself" (Poulet, 44-45). The text blurs the distinction between the reading subject and the read object. The reader finds herself on the mercy of the text, dependent upon it; she is helplessly lost in fiction:

As soon as I replace my direct perception of reality by the words of a book, I deliver myself, bound hand and foot, to the omnipotence of fiction. I say farewell to what is, in order to feign belief in what is not. I surround myself with fictitious beings; I become the prey of language. There is no escaping this take-over. Language surrounds me with its unreality. (Poulet, 43)

A theorisation of reading, an analysis of the reading experience is only possible, because Poulet maintains that "the annexation of my consciousness by another (the other which is the work), in no way implies that I am a victim of any deprivation of consciousness" (Poulet, 47). Reading is a strange experience of a split mind, where one thinks and feels the thoughts and emotions of another, of the text one reads, while maintaining one's subjectivity and observing oneself reading as if from a distance. Reading is an experience of losing oneself into fiction, thinking and feeling as another; an experience where subjectivity and objectivity merge and the distinction between the inside and the outside, the reading mind and the text, even life and death, becomes suspended. At the same time, however, reading maintains the opposition of the subject and the object, the reader and the text, allowing the reader to observe herself reading. Reading, then, becomes an experience of the impossible; the reader both losing herself in the text which thinks and feels within her, and maintaining herself separate in order to observe and record the effects of the text upon her.

This short theorisation of reading, following Poulet's "Criticism and the Experience of Interiority", suggests a way in which reading can be viewed in terms of

drugs. Poulet's essay specifically considers the ways in which the text affects the reader at the moment of reading, and it explores the phenomenology of the reading state. It describes this state in terms of an obliteration of the boundaries between the reading subject and the text. It characterises the text as a source of "temporary mental substance" filling the reading mind and taking control of it. The similarities between Poulet's characterisation of reading and the imagery of drug use are strong. The reader observing her own reading, as Poulet depicts it, recalls both Théophile Gautier's carefully recorded hashish experiments in the 1840s as well as nineteenth-century self-experiments conducted by medical men in order to map the effects of cocaine and other new drugs.¹² Reading resembles drug use, and what is attempted in the following pages is a self-experiment with the drug of fiction; I shall try to examine how these texts achieve their intoxicating effects, and I shall read "in much the same spirit in which a suicide has been known to take notes of the effects of the poison which killed him" (Conan Doyle, *The Parasite*, 97).

Notes

¹ This form of the title has been taken from a list of Green's works on the inside cover of her *The Golden Slipper and Other Problems for Violet Strange*, published in 1915. There has been plenty of misunderstandings concerning this title; the *Oxford English Dictionary* erroneously gives the title as *X.Y.S.*. R. F. Stewart in ... *And Always a Detective* (1980) has the correct title *X.Y.Z.* (Stewart, 28) and notes the mistake made by various critics who have attributed the subtitle "A Detective Story" to Green's first novel *The Leavenworth Case*, published in 1878. It appears that the mistake was originally made by Alma E. Murch in her influential *The Development of the Detective Novel* (1958) (Murch, 158). She may have been led astray by the careless and abridged edition of *The Leavenworth Case* in 1943, which has the subtitle "The Great Detective Story".

² For an interesting reading of George Eliot's works in terms of drugs and writing, see Kathleen McCormack's essay "George Eliot and the Pharmakon: Dangerous Drugs for the Condition of England" (1986).

³ For a contemporary report on the Palmer case, see "The Demeanour of Murderers", published in *Household Words* in 1856. The story of Palmer is also told in Richard D. Altick's *The Presence of the Present* (1991) and in John Sutherland's article "Wilkie Collins and the Origin of the Sensation

Novel" (1991). For the story of Madeleine Smith, see Chapter two in Mary S. Hartman's *Victorian Murderesses* (1977) and Chapter five in John Brophy's *The Meaning of Murder* (1966).

⁴ Penny-dreadfuls were small leaflets or broadsheets, eight pages long, produced entirely for commercial gain and marketed to the increasing numbers of literate working-class people. For a thorough history of this genre, see *The Penny Dreadful, or, Strange, Horrid and Sensational Tales!* (1975) edited by Peter Haining.

⁵ Both *Vanity Fair* and *Armada* portray the female poisoner in a tantalisingly ambiguous way. While the reader is only led to believe that Becky poisons Jos Sedley to obtain part of his fortune, thus leaving room for doubt, Collins in *Armada*, presents Lydia Gwilt as a tragic figure, an intelligent and ambitious woman whose only way forward in life has been through crime. In both novels, the female poisoner does not appear as unambiguously evil and guilty, but as a complex and contradictory character.

⁶ The extreme public unease, even hostility, towards the detective force is described in all histories of the police listed in the bibliography (see, for example, Rumbelow, 175; Emsley, 150; Crichtley, 161).

⁷ The sermon was recounted in *The Times* on November 2, 1864 (Stang, 58). It created some discussion and for responses to the Archbishop's sermon see, for example, "The Sin of Light Reading" and "The Perils of Sensation".

⁸ A remarkable example of the cultural connection between detection and drugs comes from the film industry. Early Sherlock Holmes films all laid emphasis on his drug-habit, but perhaps the most amusing example is the 1916 film *The Mystery of the Leaping Fish* starring Douglas Fairbanks Sr. as detective 'Coke Ennyday' (Starks, 38, 40).

⁹ Kate Flint makes a tentative step in this direction in her article "The Woman Reader and the Opiate of Fiction: 1855-1870" (1986). She examines ways in which the reading of sensation fiction was related to the female body and feminine psychology. Although Flint's description of "the addictive drug of fiction" (Flint, 47) is extremely evocative, her view is limited within the confines of the female (body), and she does not discuss the wider implications of the view of leisure reading as an opiate in the Victorian period.

¹⁰ In the United States the situation was slightly different. There, morphine became the most popular recreational drug of the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Latimer and Goldberg, "Morphine tablets, ointments, solutions, tinctures, suspensions, and clysters were on all the drugstore shelves by the 1850s, gradually easing out the traditional crude preparations of laudanum" (Latimer and Goldberg, 181).

¹¹ John George Hargreaves's vehement attack on a variety of "modern" sins and vices, in his *The Blunders of Vice and Folly* (1870), is a good example of the way in which the lives of De Quincey and Coleridge were used to illustrate the dangers of opium use. In Chapter six, Hargreaves describes the detrimental effects of the drug upon both writers concluding: "Nothing is more painfully noticeable in the lives of Coleridge and De Quincey than the smallness of their performance in comparison with the vastness of their powers" (Hargreaves, 211), the genius of the men being paralysed by their addiction to opium.

¹² For descriptions of Victorian medical self-experimentation on drugs, see Mantegazza (1859), Hammond (1886) and Mortimer (1901), all printed in *The Coca Leaf and Cocaine Papers* (1975), edited by George Andrews and David Solomon. For information on self-experiments conducted by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, when he was a student at Edinburgh University in 1879, see Rodin and Key's *Medical Casebook of Doctor Arthur Conan Doyle: from Practitioner to Sherlock Holmes and Beyond* (1984), pp. 80-83.

2. MOONSTONED: WILKIE COLLINS'S *THE WOMAN IN WHITE* (1860) AND *THE MOONSTONE* (1868)

I

The significance of opium in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* has been well noted (for example, Hayter, 259; Nadel, 245). The plot of the novel hinges upon the effects produced by the drug, it features a hero drugged by opium and a doctor addicted to it. Also, by 1868, Wilkie Collins's (1824-1889) own dependence on opium was well established and well known. The novel, declared by T. S. Eliot "the first and the greatest of English detective novels" (Eliot [1932], 464),¹ is deeply connected with opium. This interest in drugs displayed in and by *The Moonstone* is present in all four of Collins's novels published in the 1860s: *The Woman in White* (1860), *No Name* (1862), *Armada* (1866), and *The Moonstone* (1868). Although *No Name* is littered with various medicinal drugs and its comic swindler Captain Wragge makes his fortune by inventing a "Pill", and *Armada* features a villainess addicted to laudanum, this chapter will deal with Collins's two most famous novels. Both *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* explore the intoxicating and addictive force of drugs. In them, drugs function as important plot devices and are also a central aspect of both crime and its detection. They affect the novels' characters and colour the atmosphere, contributing to the sensational and thrilling quality of the narratives. By relating drugs to detective activity and describing the effects of detection as drug-like, these novels further associate drugs with writing and reading. The detectives in Collins's novels are

also internal narrators or narrator-editors, and the texts create an illusion whereby detection involves these characters in the production of the fiction which creates them. Collins's detectives resort to documents as clues in detection; they read and refer to various written texts, often presented as parts of the narrative of the novel. Through this textual dove-tailing Collins's texts develop an analogy between the activity of detection within the novel and the experience of reading them. Thus, the novels suggest interesting ways in which the narrative structures of the novels may be understood in terms of drug-effects.

The aim of this chapter is, first, to examine how drugs are featured in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*. Second, to show how Collins portrays detection as drug-like, intoxicating and addictive, in order to produce a sense of mystery and a high level of sensation in these texts. And, third, I shall examine how the use of drugs in these novels alerts the reader to an awareness of the intoxicating and addictive power of this (detective) fiction and invites her to consider the experience of reading in relation to the experience of drugs. Specifically, I suggest that the fragmented multiple narration of Collins's novels, which produces a kaleidoscopic vision and a sense of uncertainty and unreality for the reader, as well as arousing her curiosity compelling her to read on, can be seen to reflect the intoxicating and addictive qualities of a drug within the narrative as transposed into the experience of reading.

The 1860s, the decade of sensation fiction, was the most successful period in Collins's career. It is still considered the period of his best writing, during which he developed his own characteristic language, produced the ingenious plots which were (and are) his trademark and used successfully an innovative method of multiple

narrative. *The Woman in White* is the first novel where Collins uses multiple first-person narratives to create a mixture of subjective viewpoints or focalisations. Collins's assertion in his 1860 Preface to *The Woman in White*, which states that his chosen narrative technique is "an experiment . . . which has not (so far as I know) been hitherto attempted in fiction," is not quite correct. Such eighteenth-century epistolary novels as Choderlos de Laclos's *Dangerous Liaisons* (1782) and Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) make use of the same technique. Also, earlier in the nineteenth century, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853) use multiple and double narratives respectively, to convey their stories.

The shifting vision of events produced by the multiple narrative, where the reader is asked to reassess what she has read in the light of later narratives, is an important device in the creation of an atmosphere of interest and intrigue in Collins's texts. The uncertainty and lack of authorial/narrative voice sets the reader in the place of a detective; she is offered fragments of narrative as pieces of evidence, and she is then left to compile a solution to the enigma of and in the novel. It also compels the reader to read on in the hope of reaching a certainty, a truth about the described events. In *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* this detective work of the reader is ultimately frustrated by the realisation that the master narrators (who are also the main detectives), Walter Hartright and Franklin Blake, are unreliable. This turns the novels themselves into pieces of evidence, subjective narrations requiring interpretation, and the final truth about the texts and the events described in them becomes suspended. In this way, in Collins's two masterpieces, although the detection inside the narrative apparently arrives at a truth, the detective work of the reader never ceases, and the novels question the validity of narrative closure. The narrative forms of

these novels draw attention to their status as fiction and, by allocating the reader the place of a detective alongside the fictional detective(s) within the text, invite us to consider the drug-like intoxicating and addictive power of this fiction.

In her article "Multiple Narratives and Relative Truths: A Study of *The Ring and the Book*, *The Woman in White*, and *The Moonstone*" (1982), Sue Lonoff discusses the disorientating and unsettling effects of the multiple narrative in Collins's novels. Although Lonoff maintains that Collins himself believed "that something called truth exists absolutely" (Lonoff [1982a], 150) and "that multiple narration conduces to truth" (*Ibid.*), she proceeds to show how this narrative technique produces insecurity, doubt and relative truths, rather than absolute affirmations. Writing about the use of multiple narration in the works of Wilkie Collins and Robert Browning, Lonoff argues:

By consigning the narration to speakers whose views and motives are frequently disparate, Browning and Collins encourage the reader to question and compare. The reader's work does not consist merely of forming an estimate of various characters, judging each witness's reliability, weighing evidence, or putting the pieces in order. The narrative method induces him, as well, to think about the uses of perspective and the ways in which point of view affects the act of reading. (Lonoff [1982a], 155)

Initially, the narrative techniques of Collins's novels of the 1860s create an analogy between the activity of detection within the novel and the activity of reading the novel. This technique alerts the reader to an awareness of the text as fiction and, as Lonoff notes, "invites the reader to consider his activity as reader" (Lonoff [1982a], 156). Thus Collins's novels encourage detection of their own fictionality. The 1860s is also the period when Collins became addicted to opium. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Collins's name was often mentioned alongside the even more famous drug addicts Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Thomas De Quincey (Berridge and Edwards, 56, 189). In 1862 Collins was already using opium to ease rheumatic pain,

and his doctor Francis Carr Beard had begun to prescribe laudanum regularly as a palliative (C. Peters, 240).² By the time Collins was writing *The Moonstone* in 1867, he was strongly dependent on opium. The extent to which the drug participated in the creation of this novel is, however, debatable.

Several critics and biographers have argued that opium is the reason for what is generally regarded as a decline in the quality of Collins's fiction after the 1860s (Hayter, 270; Robinson, 282, 330; C. Peters, 312-3). Although it is reasonable to assume, as Nicholas Rance points out in *Wilkie Collins and Other Sensation Novelists* (1991), that the change in Collins's fiction at the end of the 1860s "seems to be related at least as much to the changed social climate in which he was writing in the 1870s as to gout, laudanum, or the baneful influence of [Charles] Reade" (Rance, 129),³ the consistent emphasis laid by critics on the importance of Collins's opium habit for his work is notable. Alethea Hayter's *Opium and the Romantic Imagination* (1968) contains a chapter dedicated to Collins, with a detailed analysis identifying changes in Collins's ability to describe landscapes during his growing dependence on laudanum. In the final pages of her book Hayter acknowledges that it is impossible to identify the effects of a drug on a literary imagination: "We know that De Quincey took opium. We know what he afterwards wrote. We do not know what he would have written if he had never taken it" (Hayter, 335). Hayter deems her own attempt to explain Collins's fiction in terms of his drug use impossible (see also De la Mare, 97; and Berridge and Edwards, 51). Although extracts from Collins's novels are often used to describe his own opium addiction, Lydia Gwilt's praise of opium in *Armadale* (*Armadale*, 426-7) cannot be seen as directly reflecting Collins's gratitude towards opium. Neither can Ezra Jennings's depiction of his opium addiction in *The Moonstone*

(*The Moonstone*, 440, 445) be directly read as a depiction of Collins's own experience.⁴ Drugs in a body of fiction cannot be explained solely in terms of the drugs in an author's body, and attempts to explain Collins's fiction (or its decline) in terms of his drug use must remain speculative and hypothetical.

It is, however, notable that from the beginning of the 1860s Collins's fiction displays an interest in drugs; both medicines and poisons, which continues throughout his later writing career.⁵ For example, the plot of *Poor Miss Finch* (1872) is built around the unfortunate side-effect of Oscar Dubourg's medication for epilepsy which turns his skin blue. In *The Law and the Lady* (1875) Valeria Woodville solves the mystery of the arsenic poisoning of her husband's first wife. *The Fallen Leaves* (1879) describes a suicide by poison. In *Jezebel's Daughter* (1880), according to Robinson, "there is more than enough of obscure poisons and their antidotes - a subject which never ceased to fascinate" Collins (Robinson, 298). *The Legacy of Cain* (1889) contains an attempted poisoning, and, finally, in Collins's last novel *Blind Love* (1890) (completed by Walter Besant and published posthumously), a man is murdered by poison. These intoxicating substances, ranging from brandy-and-water and eau-de-cologne to opium and arsenic, far exceed the average doses found in late-Victorian popular fiction, or even in the sensation fiction of the 1860s.

II

The Woman in White, published first in *All the Year Round* in 1859-1860 and as a book in 1860, has been called the "archetype of the sensation genre" (Hughes, 138). It created an immediate and immense interest (Robinson, 142; C. Peters, 227), and was

quickly exploited commercially by being accompanied by *The Woman in White* bonnets, perfumes and other paraphernalia (Ellis, 29-30; Robinson, 149; C. Peters, 227). It was considered a genuinely new type of fiction, its novelty being its sensationalism, the way it thrilled and puzzled its readers in an unprecedented way. *The Woman in White* excites and stimulates without resorting to the supernatural or to an explicit revelling in violence. As Margaret Oliphant noted in 1862, "The distinguishing feature of Mr. Wilkie Collins's success is, that he ignores all these arbitrary sensations, and has boldly undertaken to produce effects as startling by the simplest expedients of life. It is this which gives to his book the qualities of a new beginning in fiction" (Oliphant [1862], 566). Rather, *The Woman in White* creates more sophisticated psychological and emotional sensations by portraying the unravelling of a mystery as intoxicating and by efficiently using the transparency and realism of the narrative and setting to produce a thrilling sense of proximity to Victorian reality. Oliphant identifies particularly the detective element as a source of this new "much more delicate subtle power" (Oliphant [1862], 566). She writes:

What Mr. Wilkie Collins has done with delicate care and laborious reticence, his followers will attempt without any such discretion. We have already had specimens, as many as are desirable, of what the detective policeman can do for the enlivenment of literature: and it is into the hands of the Literary Detective that this school of storytelling must inevitably fall at last. (Oliphant [1862], 568)

Oliphant moves directly from the praise of Collins's subtle ways of thrilling his readers by resorting to the excess of "neither murder, nor seduction, nor despair" (Oliphant [1862], 566) to conclude that those attempting the same result are bound to use the police detective to provide a similar effect of unravelling a mystery. Oliphant describes



AWFUL APPARITION!

Mrs. T. (to T, who has been reading the popular novel). "PRAY, MR. TOMKINS, ARE YOU NEVER COMING UP-STAIRS? HOW LONGER ARE YOU GOING TO SIT UP WITH THAT 'WOMAN IN WHITE?'"

Figure 2 "Awful Apparition". (*Punch*, April 6, 1861, 140).

The Woman in White as a detective story, and later critics have identified Walter Hartright as its amateur detective (Lambert, 269; Peterson, 43).⁶

The thrilling description of detection in *The Woman in White* is achieved largely by the use of an intimate first person narration, which carries the reader along with the detective-narrator. Walter Hartright, whose narration covers most of the novel and who is presented as the compiler and editor of the narratives which comprise the novel, experiences several sensational moments. In these scenes Collins effectively describes Hartright's experience as baffling, disorientating, and physically and emotionally thrilling. One of the most famous scenes in the novel, and one of the most sensational scenes in Victorian fiction, can be used to show how the text creates its effects through the description of the emotional and physical sensations of the first person narrator. Walter Hartright is walking to London in the early hours of the morning, returning from the familiar and domestic setting of his mother's cottage, when he meets Anne Catherick:⁷

I had now arrived at that particular point of my walk where four roads met - the road to Hampstead, along which I had returned; the road to Finchley; the road to West End; and the road back to London. I had mechanically turned in this latter direction, and was strolling along the lonely high-road - idly wondering, I remember, what the Cumberland young ladies would look like - when, in one moment, every drop of blood in my body was brought to a stop by the touch of a hand laid lightly and suddenly on my shoulder from behind me.

I turned on the instant, with my fingers tightening round the handle of my stick.

There, in the middle of the broad, bright, high-road - there, as if it had that moment sprung out of the earth or dropped from the heaven - stood the figure of a solitary Woman, dressed from head to foot in white garments; her face bent in grave inquiry on mine, her hand pointing to the dark cloud over London, as I faced her. (*The Woman in White*, 14-15)

The novel has suggested its development in the previous scene by describing Hartright's decision to accept Mr. Fairlie's offer of employment and prepare to leave

London. Anticipating this professed direction of the plot, Hartright is “idly wondering” about his future. This anticipation is suddenly broken off by the hand which stops “every drop of blood” in his veins. Mystery here enters the novel through Hartright’s physical sensation disrupting the anticipated course of events. As Margaret Oliphant remarked in her review of *The Woman in White* in 1862:

Few readers will be able to resist the mysterious thrill of this sudden touch. The sensation is distinct and indisputable. The silent woman lays her hand upon our shoulder as well as upon that of Mr. Hartright - yet nothing is more simple and clear than the narrative, or more free from exaggeration. (Oliphant [1862], 571)

The scene creates a strong tension between the clearly defined geographical setting and the mysterious event. The description of the cross-roads and the mention of familiar London suburbs, produce initially a sense of realism and transparency in the scene. This is strongly contrasted with the miraculous appearance of the woman in white. Also, the paragraph produces a strange sense of simultaneous distance and proximity; although the woman is close enough to surprise Hartright with her touch, when he turns around, he sees her as a tableau against the empty road. The intimacy of the physical touch is followed by a strange zooming-out and the woman becomes a “solitary” figure. The text suggests a similar kind of tension between distance and proximity in relation to the positions of Hartright and Anne Catherick, as that of the familiar London high-road of Victorian reality and the mysterious scene of sensation enacted in it. Hartright’s “stroll” is contrasted a little later to the strolling “holiday people”, which emphasises the sense that he has been plunged from the world familiar to Collins’s readers into a strange world of sensation. Once Hartright recovers from the petrifying effects of the woman’s touch, they set off together on their way towards London. Hartright continues to experience the unreality of his situation:

I, and this woman, whose name, whose character, whose story, whose objects in life, whose very presence by my side, at that moment, were fathomless mysteries to me. It was like a dream. Was I Walter Hartright? Was this the uneventful road, where holiday people strolled on Sundays? Had I really left, little more than an hour since, the quiet, decent, conventionally-domestic atmosphere of my mother's cottage? (*The Woman in White*, 18)

With the touch of the woman in white the novel has changed into a sensational thriller. The hero has left behind the "conventionally-domestic" maternal cottage and is making his way into the "dark cloud over London"; his idle stroll and romantic thoughts are dramatically disrupted by the touch which transports him into a mysterious, sensuous world of sensation, superimposed upon, or existing beneath, Victorian reality. Hartright is suddenly plagued by questions. All the things he does *not* know about the woman in white, all the things that "at that moment were fathomless mysteries", are piled up to emphasise the fascination of the woman, and to indicate that the woman is a mystery to be solved. As Hartright becomes aware of Anne Catherick as an enigma, he is led to doubt the surrounding reality, even his own identity. The world has become like a dream.

The scene of the meeting in the high-road sets the sensational tone of *The Woman in White*, defining the text as a mystery story. This introductory scene also sets the atmosphere of detection, since it is permeated by a sense of unreality and doubt. The identity of the characters is in suspense; Hartright's own identity has become as uncertain as the identity of the woman in white. The scene illustrates well how Collins's use of the intimate first person narrative and the focalisation on a single character, make the reader adopt the character's (in this case Hartright's) viewpoint and draws her into Hartright's experience of mystery and detection.

After Anne Catherick leaves Hartright, he continues in a dazed state: "I found myself doubting the reality of my own adventure, . . . I hardly knew where I was going, or what I meant to do next; I was conscious of nothing but the confusion of my own thoughts" (*The Woman in White*, 21). Throughout the novel, this dream-like existence, with its heightened questioning of reality, is presented as the mental state of the detective characters (Walter Hartright, Marian Halcombe and the implied reader). The actual process of detection leads Hartright constantly to doubt his own perceptions, thoughts and even his sanity. In the opening narrative of the novel, when Hartright and Marian Halcombe instigate the investigation into the mystery of the woman in white and take their first steps in detection, the image of the woman inhabits Hartright's mind like a foreign body haunting him wherever he goes. He is aware of his growing paranoia, doubting his perceptions and conjectures:

Judging by the ordinary rules of evidence, I had not a shadow of a reason, thus far, for connecting Sir Percival Glyde with the suspicious words of inquiry that had been spoken to me by the woman in white. And yet, I did connect him with them. Was it because he had now become associated in my mind with Miss Fairlie; Miss Fairlie being, in her turn, associated with Anne Catherick, since the night I had discovered the ominous likeness between them? Had the events of the morning so unnerved me already that I was at the mercy of any delusion which common chances and common coincidences might suggest to my imagination? Impossible to say. I could only feel that what had passed between Miss Halcombe and myself, on our way from the summer-house, had affected me very strangely. The foreboding of some undiscoverable danger lying hid from us all in the darkness of the future, was strong on me. The doubt whether I was not linked already to a chain of events which even my approaching departure from Cumberland would be powerless to snap asunder - the doubt whether we any of us saw the end as the end would really be - gathered more and more darkly over my mind. (*The Woman in White*, 66)

This long self-analysis by Hartright shows, once again, how the text uses the disturbed state of the detective's mind to produce a sense of mystery and suspense in the narrative. The strong foreshadowing of future events is presented as Hartright's

superstitious fatalism, which is, nevertheless, riddled with self-doubt. The string of questions emphasises the element of mystery. Here, as in the scene in the high-road, the narrator questions his own observations and thoughts, producing a feeling of uncertainty and foreboding.

The same effect is again present when Hartright identifies Anne Catherick as the author of the anonymous letter of warning to Laura: "I began to doubt whether my own faculties were not in danger of losing their balance. It seemed almost like a monomania to be tracing back everything strange that happened, everything unexpected that was said, always to the same hidden source and the same sinister influence" (*The Woman in White*, 69; also 62). The first narrative by Hartright describes the initial effects of the mystery and detection; the first meeting with the woman in white unnerves him and transports him into a sensational world. At his arrival at Limmeridge House, "A confused sensation of having suddenly lost my familiarity with the past, without acquiring any additional clearness of idea in reference to the present or the future, took possession of my mind" (*The Woman in White*, 24). Hartright's stay in this house and his falling in love with Laura are characterised as a dream-like state; time "flows on with me like a smooth stream with a swimmer who glides down the current. All memory of the past, all thought of the future, all sense of the falseness and hopelessness of my own position, lay hushed within me into deceitful rest" (*The Woman in White*, 55). In this "brief dream-time" of the first narrative (*The Woman in White*, 102) Hartright experiences both the strangely stupefying effects of his love for Laura, and the heightened excitement of detection. The text creates a sense of mystery and unreality by using the detective as a first person internal narrator describing and questioning his own sensations, emotions, motivations and experiences.

The questions specifically, enhance a sense of passivity and helplessness. The detective appears at the mercy of the mystery, on the one hand helpless and out of control, on the other hand doubting his own conjectures and suspicious of his own thoughts.

Hartright's narrative is followed, first by a short narrative by Mr. Gilmore, and then a long section of Marian Halcombe's diary, which introduces us to the villains Count Fosco and Sir Percival Glyde and their ingenious plan to exchange the identities of Laura Fairlie and Anne Catherick. Count Fosco, the mock-Gothic Italian villain, whose initial position as an unwanted foreign relative (*The Woman in White*, 133) reminds us of Count Montoni in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794),⁸ is described by Marian Halcombe as a master of chemistry and rhetoric:

[Fosco] can talk, when anything happens to rouse him, with daring independence of thought, a knowledge of books in every language, and an experience of society in half the capitals of Europe . . . [He] is (as Sir Percival Glyde himself has told me) one of the first experimental chemists living, and has discovered, among other wonderful inventions, a means of petrifying the body after death, so as to preserve it, as hard as marble, to the end of time. (*The Woman in White*, 198-199; see also 197)

Fosco's eccentric fondness for his pets and his "old-maid's" (*The Woman in White*, 199) manners combine with social eloquence, and it is specifically the gifts of rhetoric and chemistry which are ascribed to him. In his confessional narrative, Fosco describes his involvement in chemistry:

The best years of my past have been passed in the ardent study of chemical and medical science. Chemistry especially, has always had irresistible attractions for me, from the enormous, the illimitable power which the knowledge of it confers. Chemists, I assert it emphatically, might sway, if they pleased, the destinies of humanity. (*The Woman in White*, 560)

Fosco's enthusiasm ironically reflects the Victorian fascination with chemistry, which remained the most prestigious and most popular science until the 1860s.⁹ On the other hand, his interest in the preservation of corpses adds a morbid streak to his hobby,

suggesting that his character combines the scientific glamour of chemistry with a morbid interest associated with such Gothic scientists as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Count Fosco's and Sir Percival's plot hinges on their success in drugging Laura Fairlie, now Lady Glyde, in order to incarcerate her in an asylum as Anne Catherick, and then to dispose of Anne, by murder if necessary. This elaborate scheme which forms the backbone of the narrative is achieved through Fosco's careful administration of drugs. Equally significant as his use of drugs, is his abstinence from their use. Thus, a balance of drugs is crucial to the intricately woven plot of *The Woman in White* and ensures the narrative's maximum sensational effect.

In his article "Wilkie Collins and the Origins of the Sensation Novel" (1991), John Sutherland bluntly asks: "Why not just poison Laura?" (Sutherland [1991], 255), and continues: "The sensible course of action for any unscrupulous gang would be to poison Laura during one of her many indispositions" (*Ibid.*). In his narrative, Fosco refers to this simple solution to the villains' dilemma:

With my vast resources of chemistry, I might have taken Lady Glyde's life. At immense personal sacrifice, I followed the dictates of my own ingenuity, my own humanity, my own caution - and took her identity instead. Judge me by what I might have done. How comparatively innocent! how indirectly virtuous I appear, in what I really did! (*The Woman in White*, 571)

Fosco's admission that he would have quite willingly murdered Anne Catherick, assisted "worn-out Nature finding permanent repose" and opened "the doors of the Prison of Life" (*The Woman in White*, 570), draws further attention to the possibility of murder and raises the question of the superfluosity of Fosco's scheme. Fosco mentions his "ingenuity", "humanity" and "caution" as the reasons for this scheme. The two latter reasons can be seen in terms of the social status of his victim; within the world of the novel, Laura's position as an upper-class heiress protects her, and

although Fosco is willing to use his chemistry to remove the poor, lonely, mad and lower-class Anne Catherick, he will not kill Lady Glyde. The ingenuity, which compels Fosco to adopt his intricate scheme points in another direction; to the way in which the novel portrays crime and detection as a thrilling game. Fosco notes earlier in the novel: "The hiding of a crime, or the detection of a crime, what is it? A trial of skill between the police on the one side, and the individual on the other" (*The Woman in White*, 210-11). Despite his indulgence in the exciting game of crime and detection, ultimately Fosco's declaration of innocence appears convincing (Sutherland [1991], 256); the arch-villain has committed no worse a crime than planning the wrongful confinement of Laura Fairlie, which fails. Fosco's own words alert us, on the one hand, to notice his failure as a criminal. John Sutherland remarks that it is only because of the intricate narrative structure that we do not notice what an incompetent villain Fosco is (Sutherland [1991], 255). On the other hand, Fosco's words of defence make us aware of the implausibility of the excessive intricacy of the plot of *The Woman in White*.

Fosco's use of his powers of chemistry creates the game of detection in Collins's novel. The central crime of the novel results from Fosco's choice of drugs and his careful administration of them. His relation to chemistry and drugs is interesting specifically because, although he flamboyantly argues for the near-omniscient power of chemistry, he tells us that his practice of chemical skills is limited to "two occasions only - both equally harmless to the individual on whom I practised" (*The Woman in White*, 561). According to Fosco, these two occasions are a drugging of a maid to intercept Marian Halcombe's letters and the drugging of Laura Fairlie to remove her to an asylum (*Ibid.*). Although Anne Catherick's death and Marian Halcombe's illness are incidents Fosco utilises as part of his plotting, he assures us that

“no chemical assistance was needed, or used” (*The Woman in White*, 565) on either occasion. This abstinence of drug-use does not diminish the power of drugs in the novel. Instead, the balance of drugs, the illimitable powers assigned to them as opposed to the actual use of them, creates a sense of the power of drugs and of their potential, and at the same time maintains a mystic aura around chemistry and Fosco as its master. On the level of the plot, drugs are used to provide the curious convolutions of the story. The discrepancy between the specific use of drugs in the plot and the emphasis laid on the potential power of drugs, contributes to the sensational and thrilling atmosphere of the novel by creating a drug-myth, or a drug-fiction. *The Woman in White* employs the homeopathic principle, where a minuscule dose of a drug is sufficient to extend, through a placebo-effect, into the myth of a masterful arch-criminal Fosco.

Fosco’s grand criminality is all a chimera, a fiction within a fiction we are persuaded to believe. It is at first created in the text through Marian Halcombe’s observation of the Count, and again, a first person narration is effectively used to draw the reader to adopt the narrator’s viewpoint. Fosco’s chemical fame is initially filtered to the reader through Marian’s recording of Sir Percival’s words (*The Woman in White*, 199). The text introduces it in connection with Fosco’s eloquence and knowledge of languages and books (*The Woman in White*, 198-99). Fosco’s gift of the gab is recognised by Marian Halcombe as a powerful weapon, as dangerous as any lethal poison. She describes his “poisonous lips” (*The Woman in White*, 278), whose effects on Marian establish Fosco as a magnetic, powerful villain. The influence of Fosco’s tongue is formidable; Marian is both charmed and disgusted by this rhetorical villain (*Ibid.*), who achieves his aims as much with the aid of intoxicating fictions as

with actual drugs. Thus Fosco's character and, specifically, his intoxicating influence upon Marian Halcombe, who acts as the amateur detective in the narrative of her diary, introduces the question of text and fiction as a drug.

Marian's relation to his overpowering admirer begins with her acknowledgement of Fosco's power of fascination: "He looks like a man who could tame anything" (*The Woman in White*, 195), including Marian herself. Only a few pages further into the novel, she decides to resist "the influence which Count Fosco has exercised over my thoughts and feelings" (*The Woman in White*, 208). Despite her resolution, Marian is hooked, Fosco is under her skin, she cannot hide anything from this drug-master (*The Woman in White*, 216), who has become the "master of everything" (*The Woman in White*, 224). The narrative describes Fosco's mesmeric power on her:

He fixed his unfathomable grey eyes on me, with that cold, clear, irresistible glitter in them, which always forces me to look at him, and always makes me uneasy, while I do look. An unutterable suspicion that his mind is prying into mine, overcomes me at these times. (*The Woman in White*, 240)

The intoxicating, drug-like power of Fosco's words is related to his other scientific interest, mesmerism. The "magnetic science" referred to by Fosco, is a remedy he tries to impose upon Marian during her illness (*The Woman in White*, 308, 335). Mesmerism, which *Butterworths Medical Dictionary* (1978) defines as "a method and practice of hypnotism in which the patient becomes subject to the will and suggestions of the operator", was believed, by its Victorian proponents, to be a near-universal cure, "a clue to ultimate reality, to the power behind *all* things" (Kaplan, 9).¹⁰ Like chemistry, mesmerism suggests that Fosco has illimitable powers over his fellow characters. Although Dr. Dawson prevents Fosco from exercising a hypnotic cure on

Marian, his mesmeric powers are present throughout the novel in the fascinating force of his words. Fosco's eloquence is presented as a verbal, or should one say a literal, drug, which penetrates Marian's mind and body: "His eyes seemed to reach my inmost soul through the thickening obscurity of twilight. His voice trembled along every nerve in my body, and turned me hot and cold alternately" (*The Woman in White*, 261-62). Marian's physical sensations, produced by Fosco's voice, her sense of mental nakedness before his gaze, echo Hartright's experience of the touch of the woman in white.

The section entitled "The Narrative of Marian Halcombe Taken from Her Diary" develops Fosco's character as an arch-villain by describing his effect on the internal narrator. Fosco overwhelms Marian, masters her, while she struggles to resist his power. She feels attracted to him and repulsed by him, and cannot define her own feelings for him: "Is it because I like him, or because I am afraid of him?" (*The Woman in White*, 201). Marian's suspicions concerning Fosco drive her further into detective work, until finally she commits the manly deed of spying on Fosco and Sir Percival. As a result, she succumbs to an illness in a powerfully melodramatic scene describing a gradual increase of delirium, loss of consciousness and, significantly, loss of control over her writing and the narrative (*The Woman in White*, 306-307). The text thus uses a first person narration by the detective to create the sensational and mysterious colour of the narrative. Marian's analysis of her own emotions and motivations, her self-questioning as well as her experience of disorientation, paranoia and confusion caused by Fosco's influence upon her (*The Woman in White*, 242, 282, 284-85) are initially similar to the effects of Anne Catherick upon Walter Hartright. But additionally, by describing the influence of Fosco's rhetorical skills upon the internal narrator as

disorientating, confusing and overwhelming, the text plays with the idea that language and fiction can have drug-like effects.

This idea is further highlighted by the ways in which Fosco affects Marian's writing. Her diary is saturated with Fosco: "How much I seem to have written about Count Fosco! . . . He seems to have established over me the same sort of ascendancy which he has evidently gained over Sir Percival" (*The Woman in White*, 210). This culminates at the end of Marian's narrative, where her delirious, incoherent words questioning the surrounding reality, are cut off and replaced by Fosco's sacrilegious penetration of her text. He turns the narrative into his own, writing a note which concludes Marian's narrative and signing it with his own name "FOSCO" (*The Woman in White*, 309).

In Fosco's villainy drugs and rhetoric come together in a curious way, which draws attention to the role of drugs in the text. In the second part of the novel, as Walter Hartright returns to take over the narration as well as the detection in the novel, the text continues to explore the connections between fiction and drugs specifically within the context of detection. Whereas the initial meeting between Walter Hartright and Anne Catherick describes the presence of mystery as intoxicating, and Marian's narrative further describes her experience of detection as a disorientating combat with an arch-villain who masters both rhetoric and drugs, the latter part of *The Woman in White* develops these themes further and examines the battle of detection between Hartright and Fosco as a war of texts. And it is specifically the proliferation of texts within the novel which produces a sense of intoxication both for the detectives in the text as well as for the reader.

In his article "The Sensationalism of *The Woman in White*" (1977) Walter E. Kendrick observes the importance of various texts within the novel and points out that: "Just as the villains are rhetorical criminals, whose principle crime is the distortion of the written word, Hartright is a rhetorical hero, who engages in a long campaign of textual reconstruction, the final achievement of which is the novel itself" (Kendrick, 29). Fosco's drug-crime is, in the end, also rhetorical; the exchange of names crowned by "the narrative of the tombstone" (*The Woman in White*, 373). As Kendrick observes, Fosco's and Sir Percival's crimes are a "distortion of the written word", and, furthermore, their scheme proceeds by a play of falsification and misrepresentation of written documents. Fosco uses the correspondence between Mr Fairlie and Marian Halcombe to remove Laura Fairlie to London (*The Woman in White*, 350, 352), and he provides Anne Catherick with a false death certificate as Lady Glyde (*The Woman in White*, 372). Sir Percival's shameful secret, leading to his downfall, is the forged marriage record of his parents (*The Woman in White*, 491-92).

Hartright responds to the villains' textual manipulations by compiling and editing the narratives which form *The Woman in White*. The pharmaceutico-textual crime in the novel is thus repeated in the fragmented, polyphonous structure of the narrative. Detection becomes an issue of reading, and the detective game a battle over textual control. The disorientating, mysterious experience of detection becomes an experience of fiction. A crucial text in the narratives assembled and edited by Hartright is Fosco's confession. Upon this text depends his success as a detective, as well as his success in re-establishing Laura Fairlie's identity and social position. Hartright writes a letter speculating on Fosco's involvement in a mysterious Italian "Brotherhood" (*The Woman in White*, 540). With this document he successfully forces Fosco to write his

confession as a response, as an exchange for his own document. The resolution of the novel as well as the solution of its criminal mystery depend upon Hartright's ability to match text with text. When Fosco prepares to begin his own narrative (in a scene where *The Woman in White* shows itself in the making, as Hartright describes Fosco writing part of the novel), he addresses Hartright:

'I shall make this a remarkable document,' he said, looking at me over his shoulder. 'Habits of literary composition are perfectly familiar to me. One of the rarest of all the intellectual accomplishments that a man can possess is the grand faculty of arranging his ideas. Immense privilege! I possess it. Do you?' (*The Woman in White*, 552)

Fosco's words suggest that the detective game in the novel has been a struggle over the control of texts. The "remarkable document" Fosco is about to produce is not only his own written confession, but can be read to refer to the way in which his character and his flamboyant narrative contribution make *The Woman in White* a remarkable novel. Fosco's challenge to Hartright implies that despite Hartright's success in extorting a confession from Fosco, the actual control of the text is not necessarily in Hartright's possession.

In *The Woman in White* the reader is presented with a multitude of written texts. According to Kendrick, "the endless chain of text on text cannot get beyond the fact that a true word is indistinguishable from a forged one. . . . The textual chain cannot verify itself; it must be broken at some point and attached to a trust not derived from words" (Kendrick, 31). Kendrick suggests that the reader, plunged into a whirl of circulating narratives and written documents which form both the plot and the narrative of Collins's novel, must find a point of trust "not derived from words", an extralingual foothold, in order to make sense of the text. Kendrick suggests that for the reader such a point is her belief in Walter Hartright as a reliable narrator-editor

(Kendrick, 32). This reliability, according to Kendrick, is not destroyed by the narrative technique or Hartright's position as an internal narrator; although all other narrators are limited in their viewpoint, the fact that Hartright is writing retrospectively claims omniscience for him (Kendrick, 33), and thus also overall textual control in the battle of texts he wages against Fosco. I agree with Kendrick to the extent of recognising the textual delirium which is *The Woman in White* and the way in which the novel "derives its sensations from tricks with its own nature as a text" (Kendrick, 34). But, I would like to suggest, unlike Kendrick, that Hartright is not a reliable, omniscient narrator-editor. Quite the contrary, the nature of his experience of detection renders him unreliable, equally dazzled, disorientated and confused by the circulating texts as the reader. *The Woman in White* plays with its own fictionality and creates an analogy between the experience of detection, finding out the truth, within the novel, and the reading of it. I shall conclude my reading of *The Woman in White* by suggesting that the text repeats the thrillingness and intoxication of detection, experienced by Walter Hartright and Marian Halcombe, in the reader's experience of the novel by presenting detection as a process of trying to make sense of circulating narratives and fragments of fiction. Hartright, the detective-narrator-editor, is revealed as an extremely unreliable narrator, struggling to gain textual control by producing and manipulating his own fictions. This pulls the rug from beneath the reader's feet; the novel offers no "point of trust", as Kendrick suggests, but a delirium of texts, an intoxicating multitude of fictions.

Fosco concludes his celebration of the illimitable powers of chemistry by giving the following example:

Give me - Fosco - Chemistry; and when Shakespeare has conceived Hamlet, and sits down to execute the conception - with a few grains of powder dropped

into his daily food, I will reduce his mind, by the action of his body, till his pen pours out the most abject drivel that has ever disgraced paper. (*The Woman in White*, 560)

The image of Fosco adding a drug to Shakespeare's meal draws attention to the idea of an author's use of drugs. Ironically, it raises the question, would Fosco exist if Collins's dinner had been drugged? Or is it because of the author's drug use that Fosco is a Fosco, a sensational villain, and not a Hamlet, a celebrated tragic hero? Fosco's words, occurring towards the end of the novel, alert the reader, once again, to question Walter Hartright's narrative control and his reliability as a narrator-editor. This control and this reliability, I suggest, are effectively undermined by Hartright's experience of detection. Detection has everything to do with the reading and compiling of narratives. Hartright collects the texts which form *The Woman in White* by inviting characters of his choice to submit narratives. He edits these narratives by adding explanatory notes and abridging them (*The Woman in White*, 145, 160, 168, 176, 307). Hartright proceeds in his detective work and in his pursuit of Count Fosco by reading the various narratives for clues to the villains' crime, thus directly and explicitly repeating the actions of the reader. He refers back to Mr Fairlie's narrative and quotes from Marian's diary (*The Woman in White*, 524), both presented to the reader as parts of the narrative earlier in the novel. To solve the remaining mystery of Anne Catherick's parentage, he re-reads and analyses Mrs. Catherick's letter to construct a story of past events (*The Woman in White*, 513-14). Like the reader of the novel, Hartright is trying to produce a master narrative out of fragments, reading the very pages which have earlier been presented to the reader as parts of *The Woman in White*. This self-reflexivity of Collins's novel, the way in which it sets the detective in the place of the reader, and the reader in the place of the detective, displays the text's

interest in the question of reading and its effect upon its reader, and suggests an analogy between the activities of the detective and the reader.

The sensation, excitement and fascination of *The Woman in White* arise specifically from the experience of reading, from the interpretation of the various texts circulating within the novel. The narrative technique of multiple narratives creates a polyphony of multiple subjective voices which are equally unreliable. As Kendrick points out, the narrative technique is "the principal means by which [the events in the novel] become blurred and ambiguous" (Kendrick, 33). Furthermore, the play of texts within the novel, the way in which textual control is a key issue in the detective game in *The Woman in White*, enhances the feeling of textual delirium, of a mysterious suspended state where no truth is absolute, but where only various fictions circulate setting themselves in the place of truth.

To conclude, drugs play an important role in Collins's *The Woman in White*. The chain of events which forms the plot of the novel is built upon the master villain's careful use of drugs. This villain, the character of Count Fosco, combines a mastery of chemistry with a mastery of rhetoric, and the novel presents his very language as having narcotic effects. Most directly, Marian Halcombe is subjected to Fosco's mesmeric power and her narrative develops Fosco as a powerful, fascinating criminal. This portrayal of Fosco as a rhetorical villain, employing language as a drug to gain his criminal aims, draws attention to the use of texts and documents within the novel. *The Woman in White* plays with texts and its own textuality. The detective Walter Hartright finds himself amidst a multitude of narratives and alternating textual fragments, from which he compiles a master narrative. The novel thus builds up an analogy between the activity of detection within the novel and the activity of reading

the novel. The textual delirium and the ambiguity as to the reliability of the various written documents, experienced by the amateur detective(s) in the novel is repeated in the experience of the reader. And the lack of an authorial, omniscient voice leaves the reader at the mercy of these circulating texts, leaves her lost in fiction.

III

The Moonstone was first serialised in *All the Year Round* in 1867-68, and it appeared as a book in 1868. Its important position in the history of the detective novel, established by such authorities as T. S. Eliot, G. K. Chesterton and Julian Symons, has separated the novel from Collins's other work as well as from the genre of sensation fiction. *The Moonstone* has been celebrated as the first and the best detective novel ever produced in English (Eliot [1932], 464, Chesterton [1913], 132).¹¹ At the same time, as Sue Lonoff notes in *Wilkie Collins and His Victorian Readers* (1982), Collins "was also working within the tradition of mid-nineteenth-century fiction - specifically, of the sensation novel - and that every one of these detective-story elements can also be explained in terms of readers' tastes and interests" (Lonoff [1982b], 175). Instead of cutting off the novel from its contemporary context, the detective interest further connects it to the genre of sensation fiction.

Of all Collins's novels, *The Moonstone* (1868) has been most associated with his drug-habit. Critics, as well as Collins himself, have offered various versions as to how much of the novel was dictated by Collins during his opium delirium. The most extensive role is given to the drug by Alethea Hayter in *Opium and the Romantic Imagination* (1968). She claims that "*The Moonstone* was dictated, and its

denouement invented, while Wilkie Collins . . . was under the sway of the laudanum he had to take at that time because of acute pain in his eyes" (Hayter, 259; see also Berridge and Edwards, 58). In truth Collins did not dictate the entire novel (Hayter, 258), and neither is it reasonable to presume that he invented the solution to the mystery under the influence of opium. Sue Lonoff observes in *Wilkie Collins and His Victorian Readers* (1982) that in the manuscript of the novel only seven pages within the narrative of Miss Clack are in a handwriting other than Collins's (Lonoff [1982b], 171) and doubts the accuracy of the "opium-myth" of the novel. Hayter, as well as Robinson, who both maintain that opium played a decisive part in the writing of *The Moonstone*, rely on *A Few Memories* (1896) by Mary Anderson, Collins's friend, who narrates his own description of the writing of the novel: "It was under its [opium's] potent influence, he told me, that he invented the dénouement of "The Moonstone" . . . 'When it was finished, I was not only pleased and astonished at the *finale*, but did not recognise it as my own'" (M. Anderson, 142-143; Robinson, 214).

The accuracy of this information has also been doubted by Catherine Peters, who maintains that drug use did not affect Collins's writing of the novel and points out that the surviving notes of *The Moonstone* show that the solution of the crime follows an earlier plan (C. Peters, 303). Hayter, too, acknowledges that the notes made by Collins for the writing of *The Moonstone* show his interest in somnambulism, indicating the form the solution to the mystery would take (Hayter, 260). Clues to this solution are scattered throughout the first part of the novel, which further indicates that the resolution was already plotted out by the time Collins began writing. Furthermore, the example of Collins's last novel *Blind Love*, published posthumously in 1890, shows that his method of working consisted of a preparation of careful notes,

including parts of dialogue, prior to the writing. This allowed Walter Besant to complete *Blind Love* according to Collins's plans (on this method of writing, see also Trollope on Collins in his *An Autobiography*, 257).

Overall, then, the intriguing tale of *The Moonstone* having been written under the influence of opium and rising solely from the opium dreams of its author appears to be little more than a rumour and a myth. Collins himself may have aspired to spread this myth; it follows quite closely Sir Walter Scott's experience of writing *The Bride of Lammermoor* in 1819 (Hayter, 293-94; Berridge and Edwards, 57). As Hayter notes, Collins's admiration for Scott and his knowledge of the anecdote relating to the writing of *The Bride of Lammermoor* may have "coloured his own account of the writing of the latter part of *The Moonstone*" (Hayter, 294). Thus Hayter's earlier claim that "the very odd story of the composition of *The Moonstone* is one of the plainest statements made by any writer of how he produced a major piece of work under the influence of opium" (Hayter, 259), appears outright erroneous, and it remains impossible to estimate what part opium may have had in the creation of *The Moonstone*.

Opium does, however, play an explicitly crucial role in the novel's plot. It leads to the theft of the eponymous diamond as well as offering the means of its detection. Franklin Blake, the amateur detective, learns that he himself has stolen the diamond under the influence of opium, and the resolution of the novel consists of his clearing his name, culminating in a reconstruction of the crime, once again with the help of the drug. The novel features both a detective hero drugged with opium and an assisting physician, Ezra Jennings, addicted to it (see Hayter, 259, Nadel, 245). Sue Lonoff, in her extensive reading of *The Moonstone*, maintains that:

the drug element, while it is effective and powerful, never dominates the novel. In fact none of these elements - the exotic, the criminal, the domestic, or the drug-linked - consistently dominates the novel. Like the luster of the diamond, they wax and wane as they are called into play to further the plot or illuminate the actions of the characters. (Lonoff [1982b], 188)

Lonoff continues to observe various waxing and waning effects of imagery in the novel: the play of light and darkness, the deceptive appearances of the characters and the uncertainty of their perceptions, the unreliability of reason as a source of knowledge as opposed to emotion and instinct (Lonoff [1982b], 212, 214, 216). She concludes: "Throughout *The Moonstone* one message is clear: appearances are deceiving" (Lonoff [1982b], 227). In *In the Secret Theatre of Home* (1988) Jenny Bourne Taylor reaches a similar conclusion: *The Moonstone* is "a study in ambiguity itself" (Taylor, 176). In both critics' readings, the only truth yielded by the novel appears to be the uncertainty of any truth. I would like to suggest that this "dark side of *The Moonstone*" (Lonoff [1982b], 211) is a drug-effect in the text.

When the solution to the mystery of the Moonstone is dawning in the novel, Ezra Jennings gives Franklin Blake Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1856)¹² saying, "Take the book away with you and read it" (*The Moonstone*, 435). Jennings has used the book to show that opium does not necessarily produce sleepiness, but that activity is possible even under the influence of the drug. As Ira Bruce Nadel notes in "Science and *The Moonstone*" (1983), the "reference and inclusion of the book in the story, with its presentation of a powerful imaginative truth about opium and its vivid personal account of its impact, has an important, authoritative place in the novel" (Nadel, 256). Nadel thus suggests that De Quincey's book bears wider relevance to *The Moonstone*, without, however, considering or

suggesting any way in which these two works could be related to each other beyond this general notion.

If Franklin Blake (or the reader) follows Jennings's suggestion and reads *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, she will come across De Quincey's description of his opium nightmares, the worst of which appears strangely relevant to Blake's (and the reader's) recent experience of the mystery of the Moonstone. In the third part of the *Confessions* entitled "The Pains of Opium", De Quincey describes his opium dreams in May 1818:

The causes of my horror lie deep, and some of them must be common to others. Southern Asia, in general, is the seat of awful images and associations. As the cradle of the human race, if on no other ground, it would have a dim, reverential feeling connected with it. But there are other reasons. No man can pretend that the wild, barbarous, and capricious superstitions of Africa, or of savage tribes elsewhere, affect him in the way that he is affected by the ancient, monumental, cruel, and elaborate religions of Hindostan. . . . I am terrified by the modes of life, by the manners, by the barrier of utter abhorrence placed between myself and *them*, by counter-sympathies deeper than I can analyse. I could sooner live with lunatics, with vermin, with crocodiles or snakes. All this, and much more than I can say, the reader must enter into before he can comprehend the unimaginable horror which these dreams of oriental imagery and mythological tortures impressed upon me. (*Confessions*, 441-442)

The Oriental Moonstone, itself part of "the ancient, monumental, cruel and elaborate religions of Hindostan", arrives from this world of opium nightmares to wreak havoc in the familiar English environment. The reference to De Quincey's book, and its significant description of "Southern Asia" and Hindostan as the landscape of opium nightmares, with all its associations of Orientalism and racism, draws attention to the ways in which the whole adventure of the Diamond in *The Moonstone* suggests a dream-like limbo, where a drug-induced dream disturbs the waking state. The novel exploits this drug-connection to enhance its sense of mystery. The first period of the novel, recounting the arrival and the disappearance of the Moonstone, establishes the

gem as an object of fascination exercising a strong, seductive influence upon the characters, and portrays its theft as an intoxicating mystery.

A reading of *The Moonstone* in terms of drugs suggests that as laudanum drunk by the detective is both the cause and the effect of the mystery, the mystery itself, the absent Diamond, functions like a drug in the narrative. The Moonstone, an alien Oriental presence, injected into an upper-middle-class English community, causes widespread “detective fever” and confusion, transports characters “out of their heads”, creates an overall sense of unreality, deception and fictionality. My reading of the novel will centre on the Diamond. Particularly, again, I will pay attention to the experience of the detective hero in the novel, and examine how the mystery of the stone affects his perceptions and sense of identity. Also, I shall attempt to relate the effects of the mystery and detection in the novel to the narrative structure and the language of the text, showing how *The Moonstone*, too, creates an analogy between the activities of detection and reading, thus transferring the symptoms of detective fever to the reader.

The Moonstone or the Diamond (written as a proper name with a capital ‘M’ or ‘D’ throughout the novel) is a field of various oscillating ambiguities around which the text (r)evolves. Like the rays of the sun, the stone gathers into itself the passions of the people surrounding it and reflects them back, thus exercising power in the text specifically by functioning as a focus and a mirror of desires and passions. The name of the stone (and thus of the novel) is deceptive. The Moonstone is not a moonstone; it is not of the feldspar-family of semiprecious stones as its name would indicate, but a true diamond. The play with this name and its capitalisation, together with the stone’s personal history, introduces the diamond almost as a character, as a thing with an

identity. The name of the Moonstone further associates the stone with the moon, and thus with lunacy, madness and lying. The Moonstone denotes both the enduring hardness of a diamond, and the shifting inconstancy of the heavenly rock, the moon. Duplicity, deception, and falsity are engraved in the very name of the novel and the jewel at the core of its mystery.

The eponymous, mythological diamond has been interpreted as a symbol of female virginity (Rycroft, 119) as well as a symbol of British imperialistic greed (Ashish, 658; Heller, 146). In these readings it retains its status as an object of desire and igniter of passions. But rather than a symbol or a signifier, the diamond is a point of intersection for several processes of signification. In his essay "Detecting Collins's Diamond: From Serpentstone to Moonstone" (1984), Mark M. Hennelly Jr. observes that "the Diamond's rich mineralogical and mythological pedigree significantly clarifies the narrative and plot structures, presentation of character, and the thematic values of Collins's tale" (Hennelly, 27). For Hennelly, the Diamond is a key to the novel. Also, for Patricia Miller Frick, in "Wilkie Collins's 'Little Jewel': The Meaning of *The Moonstone*" (1984), "the Yellow Diamond enables Collins to expose and to assess the many false assumptions and dubious values underlying Victorian life" (Frick, 317), and thus it functions as a force revealing the truth beneath the deceptive facade. Although these critics have produced interesting readings concentrating on the role of the Moonstone in the novel, I shall concentrate on the ways in which the Diamond encompasses all the associations of deception and false appearances embedded in its name, and how Collins uses its given mytho-psychological power to enhance the complexity and sensational effects of his novel, rather than to offer a key or a truth. The Diamond's influence upon the characters and, through the use of internal first-

person narrators, upon the text itself, makes *The Moonstone* a complex and self-reflective work of fiction, which like the Diamond in it, responds to the reader's gaze, her reading, practising its intoxicating and addictive power upon her.

The stone exercises a terrible fascination on the characters in the novel. The Moonstone is stunning, its audience "stoned" before it; the initial revealing of the stone in the Verinders' house is depicted as a frozen image, a timeless moment with the characters stone-still repeating their words in petrified excitement:

There stood Miss Rachel at the table, like a person fascinated, with the Colonel's unlucky Diamond in her hand. There, on either side of her knelt the two Bouncers, devouring the jewel with their eyes, and screaming with ecstasy every time it flashed on them a new light. There, at the opposite side of the table stood Mr. Godfrey, clapping his hands like a large child, and singing out softly, 'Exquisite! exquisite!' There sat Mr. Franklin in a chair by the bookcase, tugging his beard, and looking anxiously towards the window. And there, at the window, stood the object he was contemplating - my lady, having the extract from the Colonel's Will in her hand, and keeping her back turned on the whole of the company. (*The Moonstone*, 67-68)

Collins paints a picture where each character stands still, the only movements being Godfrey Ablewhite's clapping and Franklin Blake's tugging hands. These repetitive movements are echoed in the Bouncers' screams accompanying and regulated by the flashing of the stone, and in Ablewhite's low, chant-like singing of the word "exquisite". In the middle of this tableau Rachel stands upright holding the precious gem with the two Bouncers kneeling in a worshipping attitude. Betteredge's narrative describes a quasi-religious scene, and his language equally repeats the tension of excitement and stony stillness. The repetition of the word "there" at the beginning of each sentence brings Betteredge into the scene as one of the participants and echoes the repetitive movements and exclamations of the other characters. In this way, the

scene implies that the power of the stone works through the narrative itself, and affects the very language in which the events of the novel are described.

The scene presents the Diamond as exercising power over the characters. The admiring screams of the Bouncers kneeling before the stone are effectively regulated by the stone. As they devour it with their eyes, the stone returns the gaze by flashing its light on the women. It is the mesmerising eye of a god (*The Moonstone*, 1, 521). Godfrey Ablewhite, too, is influenced by the stone so that he is not only entranced by it, but is reduced to “a large child”, losing the adult qualities of self-control and responsibility. Betteredge records the effect of the stone upon himself: “No wonder Miss Rachel was fascinated: no wonder her cousins screamed. The Diamond laid such a hold on *me* that I burst out as large an ‘O’ as the Bouncers themselves” (*The Moonstone*, 69). The scene presents a picture of both fascinated excitement and stony timelessness. The trance-like state of petrified excitement generated by the Diamond in this scene works throughout the narrative of the novel. Its influence upon the narrating Betteredge, emphasised by the italicised “*me*”, suggests that the Diamond exercises power over the very narrative which creates it and functions as a structuring force in the novel rather than as a mere plot element.

Blake’s anxiety and Lady Verinder’s ominous back “turned on the whole company”, including the reader, contribute to the mounting tension and ambiguity concerning the strange power of the stone. Is it a blessing or a curse, is the Colonel’s legacy his posthumous gift of forgiveness or his vengeance from beyond the grave (*The Moonstone*, 44-45)? In his *Antique Gems: Their Origin, Uses and Value as Interpreters of Ancient History; and as Illustrative of Ancient Art* (1860),¹³ C. W. King quotes the medieval Camillo Leonardo: “*Diamond* has the virtue of resisting all

poisons, yet if taken inwardly is itself a deadly poison" (King [1860], 419). According to King, "This notion, though quite ungrounded, long prevailed" (*Ibid.*). King describes the mythological status of a diamond as that of a *pharmakon*, a drug. The diamond functions both as a poison and a remedy; a diamond can protect against its own poisonous influence. In *The Moonstone*, the eponymous diamond has such a contradictory drug-like power. Its influence, from the moment of its introduction into the Verinder household, is ambiguous, whether it arrives as a blessing or as a curse remains uncertain.

The stony double-power of the Moonstone figures as a double-bind throughout the narrative of Collins's novel, which is riddled with undecidable duplicities inside and outside the stone. The very distinction between the inside and outside of the stone becomes blurred as the narrative structure of the novel repeats the chemical structure of the diamond in its reflecting layers of surfaces and facets.¹⁴ There is the duplicity of the settings; the mystical and violent Indian world with its stone mythology invades the scientific and "modern" Victorian England. There is the duplicity of the crime; the double-theft of the stone can only be solved by repeating the (first) act of crime. There is also the duplicity of detection; when Sergeant Cuff withdraws from the investigation, Franklin Blake follows in his footsteps at Frizinghall, performing the same enquiries. And there is the duplicity of characters; Rachel Verinder and Rosanna Spearman, as well as Franklin Blake and Godfrey Ablewhite, form pairs of virtuous and dubious characters between whom suspicion shifts as the narrative proceeds, and all of whom harbour secrets and lead double-lives. The resolution and the silence of the women, Rachel, Penelope and Rosanna is contrasted with the shifting and inconstant oscillations of the male characters, Franklin and Godfrey.

As Patricia Miller Frick has pointed out, "The Moonstone acts as destructive force in the lives of the English narrators, separating them, pitting them against one another in suspicion and mistrust" (Frick, 318). Before the theft, before the Moonstone has been introduced into the Verinder household, Betteredge foreshadows its violent potential: "here was our quiet English house suddenly invaded by a devilish Indian Diamond" (*The Moonstone*, 36). This destructive effect is further confirmed in Blake's observations following the night of the theft: "Look at the household now! Scattered, disunited - the very air of the place poisoned with mystery and suspicion!" (*The Moonstone*, 203).

The Moonstone, arriving from India, the land of opium, is within the novel closely associated with the drug. These associations connected with its mythological past in the drug-laden Orient, are further strengthened by the references to its corrupting effects upon Colonel Herncastle, who keeps the Diamond "in flat defiance of assassination" as well as of public opinion (*The Moonstone*, 34):

Sometimes they said he was given up to smoking opium and collecting old books; sometimes he was reported to be trying strange things in chemistry; sometimes he was seen carousing and amusing himself among the lowest people in the lowest slums of London. Anyhow, a solitary, vicious, underground life was the life the Colonel led. (*Ibid.*)

The Colonel's way of life is specifically linked to the possession of the Diamond and to the insistence in retaining it intact, uncut. He becomes a smoker of opium and a bibliophile, combining addictions to drugs and literature. The Diamond is here also associated with chemistry and alchemy, as the narrative hints at Herncastle's "strange things in chemistry". Herncastle goes through moral degradation resulting in an "underground", literally mineralogical, life.

The loss of the Diamond, sending it into an uncontrollable circulation, has dramatic effects upon the community in the novel, which enhance the already established drug-like power of the stone. The mystery causes “detective fever”, a term introduced into the narrative by Gabriel Betteredge: “If there is such a thing known at the doctor’s shop as a *detective-fever*, that disease had now got fast hold of your humble servant” (*The Moonstone*, 135). It is a kind of brain fever, with symptoms of nervousness, compulsive detection and slight paranoia. It could be described as a withdrawal symptom once the Diamond has been removed from the narrative. “Detective fever” is introduced and experienced by Gabriel Betteredge, the first and most inviting of the internal narrators recounting the story of the Moonstone. Sue Lonoff has paid attention to the ways in which Collins uses the various narrators to balance and control the rhythm and pace of his narrative (Lonoff [1982b], 202). Betteredge’s informal style and frequent direct addresses to the reader provide a comfortable and engaging narration, which draws the reader into the novel. In Lonoff’s words: “[Betteredge’s] function is not just to narrate but to establish a bond of intimacy between the characters and the audience” (Lonoff [1982b], 194). This “bond of intimacy”, developed in the opening pages of the novel, strangely repeats the petrified excitement produced by the Diamond in the characters of the novel.

Betteredge opens the narrative of the story with two “false starts”; the first chapter concludes: “I seem to be wandering off in search of Lord knows what, Lord knows where. We will take a new sheet of paper, if you please, and begin over again, with my best respects to you” (*The Moonstone*, 9). The second chapter is another detour and concludes: “here is another false start, and more waste of good writing-paper. What’s to be done now? Nothing that I know of, except for you to keep your

temper, and for me to begin it all over again for the third time" (*The Moonstone*, 13-14). Betteredge's problems in starting the story are not only an ironic play with the difficulties of authorship, but work to set up the relationship between the text and its implied reader. The promise of future excitement and thrills, the recurring detours, which are expected to arouse the reader's "temper" but also give relevant background information to the events, work as an attempt to get the reader hooked. This aspiration of Betteredge's narrative to capture the reader and to keep her enthralled and reading is also manifest once Betteredge gets going with his story. Chapter four of the novel opens with Betteredge "detaining" the reader: "I am sorry to detain you over me and my beehive chair" (*The Moonstone*, 21), and later "I am sorry again to detain you; but you really must hear the story of Rosanna . . . Let us take it easy, and let us take it short; we shall be in the thick of the mystery soon, I promise you!" (*The Moonstone*, 22). The narrative of *The Moonstone* invites the reader to join Betteredge on a trip through the mystery of the Diamond. The "we" in the narrator's address envelops the reader in a sense of communal experience, while the sudden jump to "I promise you" at the same time assures the reader of the narrator's ability to provide her with stimulating excitement. The use of the verb to "detain" to describe the action performed by the narrator and the text upon the reader is significant; like all successful mystery stories, the text detains its reader, keeps her reading in petrified excitement, deferring its (re)solution, or, as T. S. Eliot has remarked, "delaying, longer than one would conceive it possible to delay, a conclusion which is inevitable" (Eliot [1932], 139).

Betteredge's narrative, the first period of the novel, establishes the Diamond as a maddening object of fascination igniting detective-fever. It also sets up the position

for the reader in the text; she is addressed by the text as “detained”, captured by the text and seduced to follow the narrative. This first third of Collins’s novel (comprising the first thirteen episodes of the thirty-two in which the novel was first serialised) also examines the effects of the mystery upon the community. Betteredge observes how “The cursed Moonstone had turned us all upside down” (*The Moonstone*, 91). It describes the mystery as intoxicating: “The horrid mystery hanging over us in this house gets into my head like liquor, and makes me wild” (*The Moonstone*, 160).

In addition to coining the term “detective fever”, Betteredge records his experience of detection as strange, disorientating and absolutely compulsive. Throughout “The Loss of the Diamond” he observes his own state of mind while he is compelled to follow the scent with Sergeant Cuff and act as a Watson to him: “The only thing I could *not* do, was to keep off the subject of the Moonstone!” (*The Moonstone*, 198). Just as Betteredge detains the reader over his beehive chair in the opening chapters of the novel, he is detained himself by detection. He tries twice to walk out of the Yollands’ cottage while Cuff is engaged in interviewing Mrs. Yolland (*The Moonstone*, 141, 142), and twice more to persuade Cuff to leave (*The Moonstone*, 142, 143) with him, but “For the life of me I couldn’t help following them” (*The Moonstone*, 142). The mystery of the Diamond keeps Betteredge detained on the threshold of the fisherman’s cottage as well as on the threshold of the solution to the mystery. The narrator’s experience is echoed in the experience of the reader; the reader too is detained in a constant state of suspension, on the threshold, as it were.

Betteredge also observes the intoxicating effects of the mystery upon himself. The mystery renders him “in fifty different minds about it, all at the same time” (*The Moonstone*, 170) and his head eventually reaches “such a condition, that I was not

quite sure whether it was my own head, or Mr Franklin's" (*The Moonstone*, 194). The absent Diamond spreads feverish nervousness into the (already divided) mind of Betteredge:

I find it impossible to give anything like a clear account of the state of my mind in the interval after Sergeant Cuff had left us. A curious and stupefying restlessness got possession of me. I did a dozen different needless things in and out of the house, not one of which I can now remember. I don't even know how long it was after the Sergeant had gone to the sands, when Duffy came running back with a message for me. (*The Moonstone*, 172-173)

The "stupefying restlessness" taking possession of Betteredge echoes the description of the influence of the Diamond upon the characters, when it is first revealed: a sense of helplessness, of possession by a strange mixture of stasis and excitement, is repeated in Betteredge's state of mind here. He loses his memory, his sense of time and his sense of his own state of mind. His inability to "give anything like a clear account of" these implies, again, that Betteredge's narration is affected by the drug-like power of the mystery. The very reason why Betteredge narrates the story is because he is supposed to be able to give a clear and objective account of the events, but here the reliability of the narrator breaks down, and Betteredge momentarily loses control of his writing.

The disorientating and confusing influence of the mystery culminates in Franklin Blake's discovery of himself as the thief. Before this climax, however, Blake's experience of detection is carefully depicted as a growing experience of uncertainty, unreality and ambiguity. The changes in his character as his detection proceeds show a progress of fragmentation and dissolution of his identity caused by the mystery. Blake's task as a narrator-editor and the character with an overall internal control over the text presented to us as *The Moonstone*, raises again the question of the effect of

the mystery upon him being transported into the narrative itself; in other words, how the text of the novel can be understood in terms of Blake's drug-like experience of detection. Already, the opening of the novel, Betteredge's narrative, implies that the text detains its reader and enthrals and captures her by its Diamond-like fascinating power. A reading of Blake's detective activity suggests further a way in which Collins's novel plays with the analogy between detection and reading and describes the effects of detection as similar to the effects of reading a detective story.

Franklin Blake's curiously compound personality is like the multi-faceted surface of the Diamond: he has "so many different sides to his character, all more or less jarring with each other, that he seemed to pass his life in a state of perpetual contradiction with himself" (*The Moonstone*, 47). The mystery of the Diamond brings out the various facets of Blake's different, foreign "sides". And it is also the dilemma of the Diamond which forces Blake to confront the question of subjectivity and objectivity. As he ponders on the curious history and the potential curse of the Moonstone, sitting by the equally unfathomable Shivering Sands, Betteredge observes Blake go through several "puzzling shifts and transformations" of character (*Ibid.*; see also 45-46, 400) from French to German to English, not forgetting the Italian side. This first scene of detection, where Blake hypothesises on the meaning of the Diamond, depicts his personality as fluctuating and inconstant as the waxing and waning lustre of the Moonstone. Betteredge, trying to follow Blake's reasoning, recording the changes in his personality, does not understand him and "stared hard and said nothing" (*The Moonstone*, 46). Betteredge's observations and reaction here foreshadow the later effects of the revealed Diamond in the Verinders' drawing room, only here the object of petrified fascination is the amateur detective. Once a decision is

made by Betteredge, and Blake is sent off to deposit the jewel in a bank, Betteredge concludes the scene (and the chapter): “when I turned about in the yard and found I was alone again, I felt half inclined to ask myself if I hadn’t woke up from a dream” (*The Moonstone*, 49). This conclusion, once more, indicates the dream-like state in which detection takes place, later further emphasised by Blake’s somnambulistic detective triumph.

The doubt concerning the effects of the mystery upon the narratorial reliability of Betteredge, implied in the quoted passage above (*The Moonstone*, 172-173), is introduced earlier in the novel as the dilemma of subjective and objective truths, which is closely related to the Moonstone. Franklin Blake identifies these two separate approaches as two different sides of the Diamond: “This question has two sides,’ he said. ‘An Objective side, and a Subjective side. Which are we to take?’” (*The Moonstone*, 46). The two sides of the problem are cleverly repeated in the scene of Rachel’s birthday party, where she, wearing the Moonstone, is seated between Dr. Candy and Mr. Murthwaite. According to Betteredge: “the only two of the company who said anything out of the common way about it [the Moonstone] were those two guests” (*The Moonstone*, 72). Dr. Candy takes the scientific, “Objective” side:

He gravely entreated her (in the interests of science) to let him take it home and burn it. ‘We will first heat it, Miss Rachel,’ says the doctor, ‘to such and such a degree; then we will expose it to a current of air; and little by little - puff! - we evaporate the Diamond, and spare you a world of anxiety about the safe keeping of a valuable precious stone! (*Ibid.*)¹⁵

Dr. Candy’s apparently candid suggestion is counterbalanced by Mr. Murthwaite’s sombre prediction of the “Subjective”, mythologico-religious side of the Diamond:

After looking at it silently for so long a time that Miss Rachel began to get confused, he said to her in his cool immovable way, ‘ If you ever go to India, Miss Verinder, don’t take your uncle’s birthday gift with you. A Hindoo diamond is sometimes part of a Hindoo religion. I know a certain city, and a

certain temple in that city, where, dressed as you are now, your life would not be worth five minute's purchase. (*The Moonstone*, 73)

Dr. Candy suggests the destruction of the gem, Mr. Murthwaite that of its wearer. The extreme counterpoints emphasise the two different approaches to the stone throughout the novel; it is both an object of desire as well as a subject exercising power. Also, Candy's and Murthwaite's suggestions underline the opposition of the Objective and Subjective views introduced earlier by Blake. His oscillation between these two approaches in his detective work results ultimately in his inability to distinguish them from one another. The effect of the mystery upon his character dissolves any distinction between objectivity and subjectivity, not simply making objectivity impossible, but resulting in an overall lack of a basis for any kind of truth. This is made apparent in the scene of Blake's sleepless night, echoed in numerous later detective stories:

For the greater part of the night, I sat smoking, and building up theories, one more profoundly improbable than the other. When I did get to sleep, my waking fancies pursued me in dreams. I rose the next morning, with Objective-Subjective and Subjective-Objective inextricably entangled together in my mind and I began the day which was to witness my next effort at particular action of some kind by doubting whether I had any sort of right (on purely philosophical grounds) to consider any sort of thing (the Diamond included) as existing at all. (*The Moonstone*, 398-399)

The result of Franklin Blake's attempts at detection is to lose all certainty concerning any kind of reality, including the reality of the Moonstone. Detection in *The Moonstone* leads to a fundamental ontological doubt. It is impossible to maintain a singular point of view (whether Objective or Subjective) to make sense of the mystery of the Diamond. The novel describes detection as a disorientating, displacing experience, necessitating multiple viewpoints, "fifty different minds about it, all at the same time" (*The Moonstone*, 170). This specific characterisation of detection as an

experience of the Moonstone's drug-like influence, associates detection within the novel with its narrative structure.

Ezra Jennings provides the most blatant model for reading (in) *The Moonstone*. The solution to the mystery of the theft begins to unravel in earnest when Jennings interprets Dr. Candy's delirious words about his administration of opium to Blake without the latter's knowledge:

I reproduced my shorthand notes, in the ordinary form of writing - leaving large spaces between the broken phrases, and even the single words, as they had fallen disconnectedly from Mr. Candy's lips. I then treated the result thus obtained, on something like the principle which one adopts in putting together a child's "puzzle." It is all confusion to begin with; but it may be all brought into order and shape, if you can only find the right way. (*The Moonstone*, 415)

The text explicitly offers two models of reading, this interpretation of a feverish man's verbal delirium, and Betteredge's dipping into *Robinson Crusoe* for guidance. Although Betteredge's belief in Defoe's novel has been related to the theme of imperialism in *The Moonstone* (Nayder, 215), it also functions as a model of reading. In both of these cases, Jennings's and Betteredge's, reading does not proceed as a chronological journey through the text, but through fragmented textual pieces or "doses" requiring interpretation.. Furthermore, *Robinson Crusoe*, a novel with an apparently transparent and realist narrative, combines for Betteredge medicinal and religious values. His belief in the "truth" of the novel as almost a holy scripture and his physical need for it as a sedative and a composing "draught" comment upon the functions of fiction in more general terms. Jennings's as well as Betteredge's models of reading embedded in *The Moonstone* imply, first, that reading is a fragmented and layered, continuous process of interaction between the reader and the text and, second, that fiction, its production as well as its consumption, is linked to the psychosomatic.

The Moonstone thus repeats the multifaceted structure of the shining Diamond. In an analogous fashion *The Moonstone*, with its layered structure and multiple-narrative technique captures its reader and, like the surface facets of the diamond, reflects the gaze of the reader and responds to the reading by detaining the reader in a petrified excitement, a state of suspense. My reading of *The Moonstone* has hardly touched upon the explicitly spelled-out significance of opium in the plot of the novel as a vehicle of self-detection for Franklin Blake and an element of both crime and its detection; instead I have tried to demonstrate how the novel exploits the drug-like power of the mystery of the Diamond. Detection in Collins's novel, as I have shown in relation to the narratives of Gabriel Betteredge and Franklin Blake, repeats the intoxicating and addictive effects of the Moonstone. The narrative works to extend these effects of detection to the experience of reading by showing, first, how the internal narrators and their writing are affected by detection and, second, by suggesting detection as a model for reading the multiple narratives of the novel.

Both *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* feature drugs as crucial plot elements. Both of them also employ a specific characterisation of detection as having drug-like effects in order to enhance the sensationalism and thrills of the narratives. In *The Woman in White* Walter Hartright is petrified by the appearance of Anne Catherick in a similar way to how the characters in *The Moonstone* are affected by the appearance of the Moonstone. In both novels the entrance of an enigma is depicted as a moment of static excitement. In both novels the amateur detectives go through a similar experience of doubt. Walter Hartright doubts his own sanity and his own observations, Franklin Blake is confronted with a metaphysical doubt concerning the existence of any reality. Whereas the mystery of the Moonstone sends Blake and

Betteredged out of their heads, Count Fosco exercises a terrible mesmeric power over Marian Halcombe. Detection is described as a strange, intoxicated state of mind and as highly addictive. The use of internal first-person narrators conveys a sense of intimacy allowing the narrators' minute recording of these effects of the mystery and detection upon herself or himself.

The Woman in White plays with the literariness of its chemical villain Fosco and presents detection as a question of textual control. *The Moonstone*, in a similar fashion, explores the analogy of detection and reading. Detection is, in both of these novels, an issue of making sense of fictions, of being able to control the textual delirium produced by circulating fictions. Both of Collins's masterpieces utilise a depiction of detection as having drug-like qualities, to engage in a commentary upon reading.

Notes

¹ These words from T. S. Eliot's essay "Wilkie Collins and Dickens" published in *Selected Essays* (1932) are perhaps the most often repeated critical estimation of *The Moonstone* (see, for example, Hughes, 137; Rance, 130; Heller, 142; Hennelly, 26, Ashish, 657). In his Introduction to *The Moonstone*, for the edition published by the Oxford University Press in 1928, T. S. Eliot describes the novel as "the first, the longest and the best of modern English detective novels" (*The Moonstone*, v)..

² According to Catherine Peters's biography *The King of Inventors: A Life of Wilkie Collins* (1991), by 1862 "Wilkie had almost certainly been an occasional opium user for years" (C. Peters, 240). According to Ira Bruce Nadel, Collins took laudanum from 1862 onwards (Nadel, 245), and Kenneth Robinson's biography *Wilkie Collins: A Biography* (1951) describes Collins having painful "chills" already in 1856, which would most likely have been alleviated by an opiate drug (Robinson, 93). Finally, Walter de la Mare writes in "The Early Novels of Wilkie Collins" (1932) that Collins had begun to take opium "as far back as at least 1851" (De la Mare, 97).

³ The most popular reason given for the development of Collins's fiction after the publication of *The Moonstone*, is expressed in Algernon Charles Swinburne's well-known lines of 1889:

What brought good Wilkie's genius nigh perdition?
Some demon whispered - 'Wilkie! have a mission' (C. Peters, 313; Robinson, 240).

Rance's comment on the "baneful influence of Reade" (Rance, 129) refers to this development; Charles Reade, Collins's close friend, wrote 'fiction with a purpose'. His *It's Not Too Late to Mend*

(1856) attacked the existing penal system and *Hard Cash* (1863) criticised private madhouses. Collins appears to have followed in Reade's footsteps and to centre his novels increasingly around some social injustice in order to convey a message arguing for social change. *No Name* is an early example of this tendency in its use of the theme of the social position of illegitimate children. Also, Cooke and Stevenson write in *English Literature of the Victorian Period* (1949) about Collins: "During the remaining twenty years of his life his novels deteriorated, partly because he tried to introduce social problems, in the manner of Dickens and Reade, and was not successful in combining this element with his own particular brand of melodrama" (Cooke and Stevenson, 284).

⁴ For example, Berridge and Edwards (57-8), Robinson (163) and Hayter (258) have seen Lydia Gwilt's laudanum addiction in *Armada* as expressing Collins's own experience. Ezra Jennings's opium addiction has been related to Collins's drug use by Catherine Peters (303), Robinson (222-3) and Hayter (261).

⁵ In "Wilkie Collins and the Origins of the Sensation Novel" (1991), John Sutherland attributes Collins's interest in drugs "not found before *The Woman in White*" to Collins's fascination with the famous trial of William Palmer, the Rugeby poisoner, which Collins allegedly attended in 1856 and which, together with the French eighteenth-century case of Madame Douhault, served as a model for *The Woman in White* (Sutherland [1991], 248). Sutherland describes Palmer's case in detail. The case of Madame Douhault is also recounted by Hyder in "Wilkie Collins and *The Woman in White*" (1961) (Hyder, 129-131).

⁶ Several histories of detective fiction mention *The Woman in White* (for example Symons, 50; Murch, 107. See also Lonoff [1980], 164). On the other hand, Carolyn Wells's *The Technique of the Mystery Story* (1913) maintains that *The Woman in White* is "a good example" of "many entire novels with a mystery interest but which are in no sense Detective Stories" (Wells, 39), because it is a Mystery Story "which in no way implies or includes the work of a detective, either professional or amateur" (Wells, 37). Wells's argumentation is interesting, because she goes on to define a "proper" Detective Story as a story where "An actual detective need not necessarily figure in the story, but detective work must be done by some of the characters" (Wells, 43). This elusiveness of what constitutes a detective, or an "actual detective" is quite intriguing.

⁷ For other careful considerations of this particular scene, see for example, D. A. Miller, 152-153, who sees its thrilling effects in terms of gender, and Taylor, 98, who it reads in relation to discourses of madness.

⁸ Radcliffe's Gothic best-seller, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) hovers on the background in *The Woman in White* in such scenes as the one where Marian is locked up in the derelict Elizabethan wing of Blackwater Park (*The Woman in White*, 362) and where Sir Percival Glyde tries to force Laura Fairlie to sign a document without showing her what she is to sign (*The Woman in White*, 220). For a more extensive argumentation on the role of Gothic fiction as a backdrop for sensation novels, see, for example, Chapter one in Hughes.

⁹ In *Science versus Practice: Chemistry in Victorian Britain* (1984) Robert Bud and Gerrylynn K. Roberts describe how in Victorian Britain "the chemical discipline grew dramatically" (Bud and Roberts, 14; see also Chapple, 25), and they quote Captain J. F. Donnelly, an 1860s champion of science education, as saying in an 1868-69 governmental report: "where science was spoken of, it was generally supposed to mean chemistry" (Bud and Roberts, 14). They also give corroborating statistical evidence: "Until 1867 [chemistry] was the principle subject of Science and Art Department classes, and it was the favoured subject for London BSCs throughout the rest of the century" (Bud and Roberts, 14). Count Fosco, as "one of the first experimental chemists living" (*The Woman in White*, 199), is an amateur scientist in the beginning of the nineteenth century. The events of *The Woman in White* take place in 1849-50, thus Fosco's studies of chemistry would be situated in the period preceding the 1840s, the decade which saw the professional organisation of chemistry with the foundation of the Chemical Society and the Pharmaceutical Society in 1841, and the Royal College of Chemistry in

1845 (Berridge and Edwards, 114; Gilmour [1993], 114; Bud and Roberts, 16). In the development of chemistry, the advancement of organic chemistry is particularly associated with the nineteenth century (as opposed to inorganic chemistry which advanced significantly during the eighteenth century) and, thus, Fosco's mastery of drugs may be related to the historical reality and advances in organic chemistry.

¹⁰ Mesmerism was named after an Austrian physician Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815). When mesmerism first crossed the Channel to Britain, it was considered, like Fosco, "a dubious, foreign import" (Kaplan, 10; *The Woman in White*, 133). Although it never won a thorough approval of the medical establishment, together with phrenology it gained some popularity towards the end of the 1830s (Kaplan, 13).

¹¹ As several critics have pointed out, *The Moonstone* was by no means the first English detective novel, and whether it is the best, remains, of course, a matter of individual judgment and taste. Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860) and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) are perhaps the most famous detective stories preceding *The Moonstone*. The 1860s produced many other detective novels now forgotten; for example, the anonymous *The Experiences of A Lady Detective* (1861), "Charles Felix's" *The Notting Hill Mystery* (1863) and Andrew Forrester Jr.'s *The Female Detective* (1864). Also several earlier novels display a significant detective interest, the most notable ones being, perhaps, Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853) and William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794). These are but a few examples identified as detective stories preceding *The Moonstone* (for more, see Murch as well as Benstock and Staley). In "Wilkie Collins and the Detective Story" (1963), Robert P. Ashley presents his version of Collins's achievements in the field of detective fiction: "the first dog detective, the first lady detective, the first application of epistolary narrative to detective fiction, the first humorous detective story, the first *British* detective story, and the first full-length detective novel in English. The very number and variety of these firsts prove the erroneousness of the prevailing notion that *The Moonstone* represents Collins's sole claim to fame in the history of detective fiction" (Ashley, 60).

¹² The original version of *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* went through a major revision in De Quincey's hands. It first appeared in two parts in *The London Magazine* in September and October 1821 and was printed in book form the following year. In 1853 De Quincey seized the opportunity to enlarge and rewrite the work for the Collective Edinburgh Edition of his writings. As a result the length of the *Confessions* more than doubled. This vastly extended and rewritten version was published as the fifth volume of the Collective Edition in 1856.

¹³ This is not the book by C. W. King which Collins is known to have used as a source of information for *The Moonstone*. According to Sue Lonoff, Collins used W. C. King's *The Natural History, Ancient and Modern, of Precious Stones and Gems and of the Precious Metals* (1865, second edition 1867) (Lonoff [1982b], 176, 251n23). Mark M. Hennelly relies on Davis's *The Life of Wilkie Collins* (1956) (Davis, 39) on the information that Collins used the 1867 revised edition of this work, which Hennelly calls *The Natural History of Precious Stones*, (Hennelly, 29). Among King's works there are two titles on the history of gems published in 1867: *The Natural History of Gems or Decorative Stones* (first edition in 1867) and the second edition of the work mentioned by Lonoff, now entitled *The Natural History of Precious Stones and of the Precious Metals* (both published by Bee and Daldy of London), the latter of which I presume to be the book meant by Hennelly.

From W. C. King, Lonoff deduces, Collins got information about shining diamonds as well as about the famous Koh-i-Noor, the Orloff and the Pitt diamonds (Lonoff [1982b], 176).

¹⁴ For information on the chemical structure of the diamond and its phosphorescence, see Section II, chapter I in Edwin W. Streeter's *Precious Stones and Gems: Their History, Sources and Characteristics* (1898).

¹⁵ For more information on Dr. Candy's scientific accuracy here, see Streeter, pp. 62-69.

3. IN THE OPIUM DEN: CHARLES DICKENS'S *THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD* (1870)

I

It is perhaps impossible to read Charles Dickens's (1812-1870) *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870) without becoming a detective. In its eternally incomplete state this detective story lures its reader, seduces and forces her, to search for clues in order to render a (re)solution to itself. Detection, in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, is compulsive, and the compulsion is assigned as much to the implied reader as to John Jasper, who declares that "I will fasten the crime of the murder of my dear dead boy, upon the murderer. And that I devote myself to his destruction" (*Edwin Drood*, 148). Jasper's declaration belongs to the Victorian tradition of determined detectives, but it would appear to be a red herring in a plot where Jasper (like Franklin Blake) devotes himself to the detection of his own crime. Here we are already seduced by the text and building a fiction of Jasper's guilt, which is only hinted at but never confirmed in Dickens's text.

Droodiana is a lasting and, it seems, expanding monument to this power of the novel to make us create further fictions about it. In April 1908 the editors of *The Dickensian* expressed their reluctance to publish any more pieces of plot speculation relating to *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, and attempted to extinguish the flow of Droodian writing with a compilation article by several Droodian authorities entitled

"Last Words on the Drood Mystery". A decade later, in October 1919, J. Cuming Walters described in the same periodical the inextinguishable addictive power of *Edwin Drood*:

When, for instance, the actual participants in the literary fray come on stage in Act five (or is it Act fifty?) and gravely announce as a new and portentous discovery that "Mr. Bazzard is off duty at present," and so the whole mystery is solved, . . . Thus do we go round in the old worn circle; the controverted arguments are one and all reproduced, and exploded bubbles are blown afresh, and every new-comer prides himself on having detected the secret which only his lynx-eyes have penetrated. (Walters, 179)

Considering Walters's cynical view of Droodiana, it is somewhat amusing to find Charles Forsyte (who can by no means be termed a "new-comer" in the game although he undoubtedly possesses the necessary "lynx-eyes") in *The Dickensian* of spring 1991 conducting a most minute reading of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* to show that Datchery is, indeed, Bazzard (Forsyte [1991]), thus completing another turn of the "old worn circle". In 1919 J. S. Squire remarked that Droodiana "is, of course, a great tribute to Dickens's hypnotic power over the simple-minded", but it is all nonsense (Squire, 195). In 1980 Lawrence Frank takes this critical view further by writing that "this thoroughly enjoyable preoccupation with *Edwin Drood* as whodunit, finally, ceases to be harmless. All this speculation obscures the integrity of the fragment as it stands" (Frank, 150). It appears that throughout the history of *Drood*-criticism, readers have either indulged in Droodiana or regarded this hobby as fit for "the simple-minded" (Squire, 195) or for "those who do not care for literature at all" (Cockshut [1962], 227). I believe that it is important to notice and to acknowledge that some of the power of Dickens's last novel lies specifically in this strange fascination it generates in its readers, in this immense compulsion to complete the reading of the story, whose end is forever denied. No solution is satisfactory because it will not have an authorial

confirmation. Instead, the text leaves its reader helpless, in a state of limbo or a suspension where she is compelled to provide a solution of her own. Various alternative fictions produced by such critics as Charles Forsyte, Ray Dubberke, Andrew Lang, M. R. James and others, as a solution to *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, testify to the effectiveness and strength of this text as engaging reading. This view is further emphasised by such "serious" critical readers of *Edwin Drood* as Audrey Peterson and James Wright, who are fully aware of the seductive futility of Droodiana and still succumb to its lure (Peterson, 99, Wright, 271). What is at stake is not simply the impossibility of a naive reading of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, but the way in which the text itself has a power to proliferate and generate further fictions about itself. In *The Textual Life of Dickens's Characters* (1989) James A. Davies utilises the power of the Droodian speculative tradition to shape his *re-reading* of the novel arguing that

The informed Re-reader of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, then, moves through the text with expectations conditioned by his extra-textual explorations, his knowledge of relevant documents and speculation. He is in a powerful position, not so much a character implied by the text as one forcing the text to confirm his new role and to conform to those expectations. That is, the text's mysterious narrative thrust is now dominated, for the Re-reader, by confirmatory repetitions. (Davies, 121)

In other words, Droodiana becomes part of the novel, affecting the reading of it. As Davies argues, our reading is influenced by our knowledge of such reports as John Forster's and Kate Perugini's about Dickens's intentions regarding the plot of the novel (Forster, ii, 263; for Perugini see Wright, 273), as well as by various published speculations about its intended ending. However, what I find even more interesting than the way in which the proliferating fictions of Droodiana have become part of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, is the way in which the text, as it stands, has generated this

multitude of fictions about itself. There is an inherent power in Dickens's narrative which invites its reader to participate in its fiction by becoming a story-teller herself. This strong fascinating power which *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* exercises upon its reader, needs to be considered. The novel's existence as an unfinished mystery story calls for completion, the reader is led by the text to invent an ingenious end to it, to produce further fictions, one wilder than the next, which continue Dickens's narrative and cause it to proliferate in numerous directions as new "solutions" are invented. G. K. Chesterton's *Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens* (1911) implies that this fascination and compelling force of the novel is specifically a result of its being an unfinished detective story: "He [Dickens] drops down dead as he is in the act of denouncing the assassin" (Chesterton [1911], 219). According to Chesterton, "Dickens wrote the book as a detective story" (*Ibid.*), and therefore, he maintains, its plot is the only thing that matters (Chesterton [1911], 220; see also Wright, 271). Chesterton's words point to the roots of Droodiana; *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* builds up a detective problem and manipulates its reader in order to encourage her to read for clues, to detect while reading. When this process is suddenly cut off, the reader is left to wander around in circles, searching not only for the solution for the mystery of Drood's disappearance but a conclusion to her reading process. As John Harmon in *Our Mutual Friend* is tracing his own steps to find his place among the living characters in that novel, the reader of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* may end up treading around the "old worn circle" of Droodiana, re-reading the fragment of the text to find her place in it, to find her path through the text to the end which is forever missing.

The Mystery of Edwin Drood is intoxicating and addictive, it is a self-generating text which achieves a textual immortality in its fragmented existence specifically because of the ways in which it stimulates its reader and generates a need for its own conclusion, for further fiction. It will be dangerous to read *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, because one will be constantly lured by the text into alternative fictions of one's own making. It is like a visit to an opium den; one can become intoxicated by its drug, lose one's sense of reality, and be trapped by the text and lost in the strange world of Droodiana.

II

Of Charles Dickens's novels *Bleak House* (1853) is the one most often mentioned in connection with detective fiction (for example, Ousby, 89; Peterson, 90). Inspector Bucket has been described as the first police detective in fiction (Murch, 100, Benstock and Staley, Peterson, 61) and a direct result of Dickens's "love affair with the Metropolitan Police" (Collins [1962], 201), especially with its Detective Department founded in 1842. In 1890 the anonymous writer of "Crime in Fiction" called Dickens "a Homer to celebrate their Ulysses-like exploits in prose epics" and mentions Bucket as "the ideal detective of the best fiction" ("Crime in Fiction", 185).¹ Dickens's fascination with detection and the police was accompanied by a life-long interest in or, according to Angus Wilson, an "obsession with murder" (A. Wilson, 292) and crime (see also Dubberke, 27). In *Dickens and Crime* (1962) Philip Collins characterises Dickens's attitude to crime as contradictory:

His concern with crime was, however, more persistent and more serious than most men's. Extraordinary in character as well as in literary skill, he had strong and conflicting feelings about criminals. He readily identified himself, in imagination, with their aggressive activities, but would also strongly repudiate this sympathy by extolling their adversaries, the police, and by demanding severe punishment for the offenders against the law. (Collins [1962], 1)

Dickens was both fascinated and appalled by crime. He would indulge in it by following closely all sensational murder cases reported in the papers and by attending trials. Throughout Dickens's career one can observe, as Collins does in *Dickens and Crime* (1962), a passion for both crime and its detection, with an exciting tension between these two sides of the "legal" coin, each gaining further shine and attractive lustre from its opposite.

In Dickens's fiction there are plenty of mysteries and murders requiring detection. However, his last two novels *Our Mutual Friend* (1865) and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870) may be seen to differ from his earlier works in their concentration on crime and mystery as a private matter as well as on the psychology of crime and detection. Harry Stone expresses this view in his *The Night Side of Dickens* (1994): "Dickens's last two novels, *Our Mutual Friend* and *Edwin Drood*, with their portraits of murderous passion, of passion totally out of control, are another matter" (Stone, 409). These novels make crime and murder a private, middle-class affair; professional criminals, such as Fagin and Magwitch, are replaced by Bradley Headstone and (it has been assumed) John Jasper. Crime is no longer seen as a social problem, and criminals as a distinct class haunting their own nightmarish sphere, such as Tom-all-Alone's in *Bleak House*. In *Our Mutual Friend* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* this world of crime spills over to the respectable Cloisterham and transgresses class boundaries into

the hard-working, self-improving (lower) middle class of Bradley Headstone and John Jasper.²

The fascination with the evil side of humanity and the dark atmosphere in *Our Mutual Friend* and *Edwin Drood* have been seen as signs of the author's undiminished, ever developing, creative powers as well as a sign of their decline (Gill, 11, 32). *Our Mutual Friend* received very mixed comments at its publication in 1865; E. S. Dallas called it "one of [Dickens's] finest works", while Henry James declared it "poor with the poverty not of momentary embarrassment, but of permanent exhaustion" (Collins [1971], 464, 469). A similar kind of unease or a sense of displacement is apparent in the reception of *Edwin Drood*, critics and reviewers have not been quite sure how to position it in Dickens's *oeuvre*; is it a late masterpiece cut off dramatically or, in Wilkie Collins's words, "Dickens's last laboured effort, the melancholy work of a worn-out brain" (Collins [1971], 588)? In his essay "Edwin Drood: Early and Late Dickens Reconciled" (1962), A. O. J. Cockshut identifies three causes of "uneasiness" in relation to *Edwin Drood*: the lack of Dickens's customary "use of the material of industrial civilisation", the way in which the unfinished mystery has attracted "the type of critical attention which is given by those who do not care for literature at all", and the way in which the novel "seems to be in some ways a regression to the author's more superficial early style" (Cockshut [1962], 227, 228). Cockshut refers not only to Droodiana, but his words describe both *Edwin Drood*'s difference from Dickens's earlier work, the lack of familiar urban themes, as well as its similarity to it, the "regression" in style, as equal causes of unease. The problem regarding the position of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* among Dickens's works is that it appears to be both "a happy return to the earlier manner of Dickens at the end of Dickens's life" (Chesterton

[1911], 207) and, at the same time, introduce something (a)new into his writing. The novel occupies a strangely displaced position, both repeating Dickensian themes within the continuum of the author's art, and being detached from this continuum.³ This critics' apparent reluctance to appreciate *Edwin Drood* as a literary text among Dickens's other novels has been enhanced by the aura of Droodiana, the proliferation of wild fictions, which has corrupted the novel, as it were, and caused a certain unease and anxiety surrounding it among Dickensians.

The Mystery of Edwin Drood is different from Dickens's earlier novels. The sweeping social landscape is replaced with a setting both geographically and socially more limited and closed, Cloisterham is a claustrophobic space shadowed by the overwhelming presence of the towering Cathedral, and the scenes set in London offer no outlet, but are also encased in stone, limited to the closed environments of Staple Inn and the East End opium den. Also the social variety of characters and settings has been narrowed down in this novel, and we are presented almost solely with characters of the middle classes (Princess Puffer and Deputy being exceptions). This narrowing down of the geographical and social setting emphasises the interest of this novel in a mysterious crime and its effects upon the main characters, rather than an interest in social commentary. Angus Wilson terms *Edwin Drood* "the greatest departure from his [Dickens's] usual course to be found in any of his novels" (A. Wilson, 290) and, provided that John Jasper was intended to be Drood's murderer, "an almost incredible shrinkage from his other work" (A. Wilson, 291). Wilson is disturbed by the apparent thematic poverty of the novel which seems to be a mere detective story in the fashion of Wilkie Collins (*Ibid.*).

Although, as Nicholas Rance points out, "Dickensians tend not to take kindly to the notion" (Rance, 133), a similarity between *Edwin Drood* and *The Moonstone* was noted already in 1870 by H. Lawrenny reviewing the novel in *The Academy* (Collins [1971]. 546), and later critics have continued to refer to it. Sue Lonoff, in "Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins" (1980), suggests that Dickens decided to write a mystery story as a response to Collins: "Not only did he criticize *The Moonstone*; he also resolved to improve on Collins by writing a mystery of his own" (Lonoff [1980], 163; see also Peterson, 98).⁴ According to Rance, *Edwin Drood* "seems to have been intended as a rebuff to *The Moonstone*" (Rance, 131). Rance emphasises Dickens's and Collins's different views on imperialism (*Ibid.*), and suggests that Dickens's use of opium in *Edwin Drood* is specifically a point where Dickens expresses his disagreement with Collins (Rance, 131-132). Also Sue Lonoff analyses the opium-question in these two novels: whereas, according to Lonoff, Collins takes a positive attitude towards opium use, "Dickens, in contrast, makes the taking of opium a sordid and destructive activity, associated with the evil side of Jasper, the squalid and criminal underside of London, and the hideousness of Princess Puffer" (Lonoff [1980], 164). While Lonoff and Rance have emphasised the personal relationship between Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins as the main influence in the writing of *Edwin Drood*, I would like to keep in mind the ways in which both novels are part of the popular fiction of the period and how they reflect the concerns and interests of the reading public at the time. So, instead of merely considering *Edwin Drood* as a response to *The Moonstone*, I wish to see it in the wider context of the 1860s detective fiction. As Margaret Cardwell observes in her Introduction to *Edwin Drood*, "Dickens's decision to write a mystery novel was not unnatural at this date", the detective theme in *Edwin*

Drood is in relation to the immense success of stories of detection in the 1860s (Cardwell, vii).

Although Dickens's fascination with detection was apparent in his work at least already in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844), his writing shows specific interest in and admiration for the police detectives in the 1850s. This is manifest in the character of Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House* (1853), as well as in Dickens's articles about the Detective Police published in *Household Words* in 1850 and 1851 (reprinted in *The Uncommercial Traveller and Reprinted Pieces* in 1958). The same interest in detection continues to display itself in *Our Mutual Friend* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. It is also worth noting that police detectives in Dickens's novels are supplemented by various amateurs. For example, *Bleak House*, as J. Hillis Miller notes in his Introduction to the novel, "is full of unsuccessful detectives" (J. H. Miller [1971], 20), and characters like Tulkinghorn and Mrs. Snagsby act as amateur detectives.

Detection in Dickens's fiction appears as a constant and long-term preoccupation developed throughout his career, although it is reasonable to assume that the popularity of detective stories in the 1860s, and especially Collins's novels, further inspired him to try his hand in this genre. However, it is quite intriguing that as Dickens turned his mind towards the writing of a mystery story, he should also introduce drugs into his work. I would like to suggest that the central theme and device of drug use in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* should also be seen within the wider context of the development of popular fiction, rather than as a direct result of the influence of Collins's *The Moonstone*. First of all, Dickens may have developed a personal interest in opium, because of his use of the drug during his final illness

(Hayter, 296; Jacobson, 1). More importantly, I believe, for Dickens, as for several other popular novelists, drugs and detection were linked, and the excitement of detection acquired drug-like qualities of intoxication and addiction. In Dickens's writing, too, this combination of drugs and detection provides a means to introduce and engage in questions concerning fiction and reading. Dickens was extremely aware of his reading audience and questions about the consumption of fiction and mass reading were important to him. Thus, it is no surprise that we should find him introducing these questions into his writing. More interesting are the ways in which he, too, should find drugs and detection, and detection-as-a-drug a vehicle for these themes.

Dickens had already associated drugs with detection in *Bleak House* and used this combination of themes in order to consider questions concerning reading. J. Hillis Miller's Introduction to the Penguin edition of *Bleak House* (1971) offers an extremely exciting analysis of the novel in terms of detection and reading. He describes the characters' compulsion to detect, to discover secrets about themselves and each other (J. H. Miller [1971], 19) and concludes further that "the novel is deliberately constructed by Dickens in a way calculated to make the reader a bad detective" (J. H. Miller [1971], 20). Miller thus builds a link between the detective activity within the novel and the act of reading, emphasising the significance of various circulating documents and fragments of narrative in the novel:

Bleak House is a document about the interpretation of documents. Like many great works of literature it raises questions about its own status as a text. The novel doubles back on itself or turns itself inside out. The situation of characters within the novel corresponds to the situation of its reader or author. (J. H. Miller [1971], 11)

This is an especially interesting argument in relation to the theme of drugs in the novel. Nemo's death in *Bleak House* reflects the all-pervading presence of opium in nineteenth-century Britain as well as the "traditional" pattern of opium use where medicinal and social use blend together, and where the line between an accidental and deliberate overdose can be equally undetectable. At the same time, his lethal overdose of opium sets the mystery in motion, and leads to the unravelling of Esther's parentage and Lady Dedlock's secret past. Furthermore, the Chancery suit, associated with a multitude of writing and documents, with its contagious and corruptive influence and its addictive power on characters like Miss Flite and Richard Carstone and the late Tom Jarndyce, can be seen in terms of drugs (see, especially, *Bleak House*, 52, 89, 462-463, 718). Richard Carstone's slow struggle and degeneration, effected by the power of the Chancery suit, is identical to a developing pattern of drug abuse proceeding from initial excitement to final disillusionment and decay. The example of *Bleak House* suggests that drugs were not introduced into Dickens's writing only in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, but were already in the 1850s associated by Dickens with detection and reading.

Another remarkable example of the connection made between drugs and detection is Dickens's extraordinary description of the nightly life of the police in "On Duty with Inspector Field" (1851). It portrays an alien nightmare landscape of crime, invoking images of De Quinceyan opium dreams, through which Inspector Field traverses like a king inspecting his kingdom ("On Duty", 518). The article opens with a description of Inspector Field guarding the treasures of the British Museum, immediately associating the celebrated detective with an exotic and strange

environment. When Field finally arrives to join the narrator for a nightly round of the London slums he

has come fast from the ores and metals of the deep mines of the earth, and from the Parrot Gods of the South Sea Islands, and from the birds and beetles of the tropics, and from the Arts of Greece and Rome, and from the Sculptures of Nineveh, and from the traces of an elder world, when these were not. ("On Duty", 514)

The detective rises from subterranean mines, arrives from a multitude of distant alien worlds, and prepares to guide the narrator on a trip to another equally alien sphere hidden beneath the surface of respectable London. In this alien environment, the very air is poisoned by a strange miasma. "How many, who amidst this compound of sickening smells, these heaps of filth, these tumbling houses, with all their vile contents, animate and inanimate, slimily overflowing into the black road, would believe that they breathe *this* air?" ("On Duty", 514). The text creates a sense of crime, filth and evil as a smell and a substance in the air physically existing in the world of Dickens's readers. It evokes an image of the body of the reader being invaded by the air circulating in the poisonous atmosphere of a night-time criminal slum. In this slum, amongst thieves and murderers and in their "alternative" world, Inspector Field commands and rules. They visit "Rat's Castle and the adjacent Fortresses" ("On Duty", 519), and the slum is transformed into a fantastical world ruled by the Police Detective, echoing the wondrous compilation of the exotic objects housed in the British Museum. The Oriental imagery becomes explicit when "Inspector Field stands in this den, the Sultan of the place", whose power is terrible and paralysing ("On Duty", 516). Further references to "the plagues of Egypt" and "The Ethiopian Party" ("On Duty", 518) enhance the sense of an opium nightmare in a narrative, whose viewpoint shifts unexpectedly from one consciousness to another, fragmenting the



Figure 3 "The Bull's-Eye Lantern", illustrating a visit to the East End with the police by Gustave Doré (Doré and Jerrold, 1872).

narrative. A most notable shift in focalisation is the sudden move from the guest accompanying the guiding police to the victimised criminal aroused from his sleep by the glowing bull's eye: "If it is the accursed glaring eye that fixes me, go where I will, I am helpless. Here! I sit to be looked at. Is it me you want?" ("On Duty", 520). The powerful description of the setting as an exotic, alien kingdom with its physically threatening poisonous air existing parallel to the day time world of Dickens's readers, the Oriental imagery linking it with the East of the opium fumes, and the shifting focalisation travelling from one consciousness to another, all make this short article an extremely evocative text, which creates a sense of the Detective Police inhabiting a De Quinceyan world of opium nightmares. "On Duty with Inspector Field" suggests that detection carries with it a sense of being-on-drugs. The world of crime where detection takes place is an alien sphere superimposed or existing parallel to the "everyday" world of the readers of *Household Words*. Not merely the image of breathing the same air, but also the fantastical transformation of the slum into an exotic landscape of castles and fortresses with Field as its Sultan, suggests that the world of detection is more a state of mind than a physical space separated from the reality of respectability.

In *Our Mutual Friend* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* Dickens returns to this sphere of opium nightmares, only now the "vile contents" of the criminal world have flowed out of their nightly context into Cloisterham and Boffin's Bower. Dickens's "Postscript" to *Our Mutual Friend* suggests that detection is a major concern also in this novel. Referring to John Harmon's "death" and the mystery of his "murder", Dickens writes: "To keep a long time unsuspected, yet always working itself out, another purpose originating in that leading incident, and turning it to a pleasant and useful account at last, was at once the most interesting and the most difficult part of

my design" (*Our Mutual Friend*, 893).⁵ He was criticised for this part of his design by the *London Review*, which wrote: "It is surprising that so experienced a romance-writer as Mr Dickens could not have devised some more artful means of revealing that portion of his design" (Collins [1971], 456), suggesting that at least this reviewer saw *Our Mutual Friend* in relation to the contemporary sensation and detective fiction. The object of criticism is here specifically John Harmon's internal monologue where his identity is revealed to the reader (*Our Mutual Friend*, Book 2, Chapter 13). This murder mystery, set up in the opening chapters of the novel, is but one of the instances necessitating detection in the novel, Wegg's plot against Boffin and Wrayburn's and Headstone's struggle over Lizzie Hexam being other such instances.

In *Dickens and the Grotesque* (1984) Michael Hollington notes that "It may not be frequently noted that in *Our Mutual Friend* continual reference is made to narcotics and opiates" (Hollington, 232). For Hollington, drugs in *Our Mutual Friend* are inescapably related to the central theme of money in the novel: "*Our Mutual Friend* explores the proposition . . . that money is the opium of the Victorian middle classes" (Hollington, 232).⁶ Drugs, then, are here "a persistent theme whose dimensions are primarily sociological rather than psychological" (Hollington, 232). Although Hollington's point is extremely interesting, he relates drugs to the social reality surrounding the characters in the novel and psychologises without taking into account the ways in which Dickens uses the theme of drugs to create specific effects in his text, and how this use of drugs in the novel affects its narrative form.

Chapters twelve and thirteen in Book Two of *Our Mutual Friend* are another example of Dickens using effectively the combination of detection and drugs to consider the problematics of fiction. The murder mystery of John Harmon, as the early

critic of the novel lamented, is “solved” in Harmon’s soliloquy during his nightly attempt to detect his own trail to the moment when he was drugged, robbed and thrown into The Thames. An unnamed man enters the Riderhoods’ residence and has an interview with Rogue Riderhood. He questions the Riderhoods like a detective, at the same time as Pleasant and Rogue Riderhood, both in their different ways, are trying to find out clues to his identity. Chapter twelve develops an intense struggle of detection, reviving the interest in the murder mystery set up in the beginning of the novel. The following chapter begins with the unnamed man peeling off his layers of disguise and the narrator bringing together three characters into one, identifying the man as Julius Handford, John Rokesmith and John Harmon. The narrative focuses on Harmon and describes his detection from his point of view. He describes how after his arrival in London, he is taken into a room by the river and offered coffee:

‘Now I pass to sick and deranged impressions; they are so strong, that I rely upon them; but there are spaces between them that I know nothing about, and they are not pervaded by any idea of time.

‘I had drunk some coffee, when to my sense of sight he began to swell immensely, and something urged me to rush at him. He got from me, through my not knowing where to strike, in the whirling round of the room, and the flashing of flames of fire between us. I dropped down. Lying helpless on the ground, I was turned over by a foot. I was dragged by the neck into a corner. I heard men speak together. I was turned over by other feet. I saw a figure like myself lying dressed in my clothes on a bed. What might have been, for anything I knew, a silence of days, weeks, months, years, was broken by a violent wrestling of men all over the room. . . . I could not have said that my name was John Harmon - I could not have thought it - I didn’t know it - . . .
(*Our Mutual Friend*, 425-426)

What is interesting in the drugged state of John Harmon is the way in which it is reflected in the narrative tone and viewpoint in the extract. The previous chapter has already set up a momentum of detection, and Harmon’s tracing of his steps leading to the attack is an instance of self-detection not unlike that of Franklin Blake in *The*

Moonstone a few years later. The dissolution and instability of Harmon's identity, manifest in the "figure like myself" who is both George Radfoot and suggests the strange out-of-the-body experience of Harmon, as well as his inability to associate his name with himself, are echoed throughout the novel in the various names Harmon adopts while his true identity remains unknown. Harmon's helplessness and paralysis, the way in which the narrative uses Harmon's viewpoint but describes his observations as if they were detached from his character, produces a further sense of an out-of-the-body experience. This mechanism of displacement and limbo is transferred into the narrative and the experience of reading. First of all, this drugged extract of Harmon's memory is the only explanation we are given of the events leading to his "death". Since the murder mystery is only one of the plots in Dickens's novel the reader is quite content and satisfied with the mere "drugged" solution, no further elaboration is needed. By the time Harmon finally discloses his "true" identity, an attentive reader has been aware of this truth for some time. Rokesmith's immense commitment to the Boffins has already revealed his personal interest in their welfare and their property. Thus, a split mind similar to that of the internal narrator in Harmon's drug-scene, is required of the reader; she must both know and not know at the same time that Rokesmith is John Harmon. This problem of reading the murder mystery, or the schizoid operation required of the reader to maintain its mysteriousness, is strongly contrasted with Neddy Boffin's sudden revelation that he is not truly a miser, but merely pretending to be one in order to test Bella's qualities as a wife, and that the Boffins have been fully aware of the true identity of Rokesmith. Here, the reader is taken by surprise, and the novel plays with the two "solutions". The reader who has laboriously been asked to suspend her knowledge of Harmon's identity (after initially

finding it out before the narrative discloses it) is surprised by the fact that what she presumed to be a mystery to the other characters in the novel and only revealed to her, has in fact been known by these characters, who in turn have kept this secret from the reader. This is one way in which *Our Mutual Friend* uses drugs and detection to engage in the problematics of reading, and associates a state of being-on-drugs with the activity of detection and relates it to the narrative elements of the novel.

I would like to suggest that the introduction of drugs in connection with detection in Dickens's fiction is not a coincidence. Whether this was a combination of themes adopted from Wilkie Collins, or whether Dickens was following a more general trend in popular fiction at the time, it is notable that drugs and detection go together in his writing. The use of drugs in the narratives of *Our Mutual Friend* and *Edwin Drood* can be reasonably related to the higher profile of drug use in the 1860s, the years leading up to the 1868 Pharmacy Act. And I would further doubt the hypothesis that Dickens was solely responding to Collins and the success of *The Moonstone* when he decided to use drugs in his last novel (a view strongly supported by Sue Lonoff in "Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins"), because of the interesting observation that, looking back on Dickens's "love-affair with the Detective Police" in the 1850s, we can see how even by then detection for Dickens goes together with drugs and creates its own drug-like atmosphere.

In *Edwin Drood* Dickens exploits a distinct cultural myth emerging in the 1860s, the image of the East End opium den. The setting of the opium den suggests that Dickens was aware of at least some aspects of the drugs discussion at the time, and seized this powerful image to take advantage of the fear and fascination associated with it among respectable Londoners. In their *Opium and the People*, Virginia

Berridge and Griffith Edwards describe the image of the East End opium den as a legacy of the 1860s anti-opium campaigns (Berridge and Edwards, 195). Although the cultural myth of the opium den grew stronger towards the end of the century, the growing Chinese minority in London's East End had begun to attract attention and create concern as early as in the 1860s. It appears that two events especially introduced the opium den into the public imagination. The first was the tour of the Prince of Wales to East End in the 1860s, during which he visited opium dens, the second was Dickens's description of the opium den in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.

Following the example of the Prince of Wales, gentlemen indulged in dangerous and thrilling nightly visits to this alien and criminal land at the heart of London. Safely surrounded by police officers, who would get their reward for escorting upper-class expeditions, West End citizens roamed the dark streets of East End for exotic excitement, and reported their experiences in various periodicals as "social observations" made in the name of scientific interest and philanthropy. The anonymous writer of "East London Opium Smokers", published in the *London Society* in July 1868, characterised the prevailing interest in the opium den:

Of all carnal delights that over which opium rules as the presiding genius is most shrouded in mystery. It is invested with a weird and fantastic interest (for which its Oriental origin is doubtless in some degree accountable), and there hovers about it a vague fascination, such as is felt towards ghostly legend and the lore of fairy land. ("East London Opium Smokers", 68)

This is the image associated with opium smoking and the opium den, which had developed during the agitation against opium use in the 1860s. As opposed to the medical and social tradition of opium eating, opium smoking, practised primarily by the Chinese minority in Britain, enhanced the Oriental exotism of the habit. It introduced a sense of threat and a fear of opium smoking spreading among the British working-class

inhabitants of East End (Berridge and Edwards, 199). Dickens availed himself effectively of this emerging myth in *Edwin Drood*, introducing, however, an English, middle-class opium smoker, John Jasper. This is a significant detail whose impact on contemporary readers of the novel may have been underestimated. In the articles reporting various expeditions to the East End opium dens, the visitors observe Chinese smokers, and do not encounter British ones (the one exception being “a few English blackguards” described in “In an Opium Den” in 1868), nor do they indulge in the drug themselves. For the image of a British opium smoker, we must wait until the 1890s for the Bohemian opium smoker of *fin-de-siècle* decadence. This indicates that John Jasper’s double-life as a respectable choir master of Cloisterham and an opium addict frequenting Princess Puffer’s den, is, indeed, a striking and powerful theme in the novel, not unlike the extreme duplicity of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Dickens himself visited the East End opium dens during the summer of 1869, at least once showing around his American friend J. T. Fields (Forster, ii, 291; Suddaby, 211; *The Dickensian* [April 1919], 60). Even earlier, in May 1866, *All the Year Round* published an article entitled “Lazarus, Lotus-Eating”, which John Suddaby identifies as having been written by Dickens himself (Suddaby, 211). This is (one of) the earliest report(s) of an expedition to an East End opium den and recalls strongly the fantastical atmosphere and style of “On Duty with Inspector Field” (1851) as well as points towards themes later used in *Edwin Drood*. It also well illustrates the concern of the period with the opium-smoking Chinese minority. The eponymous Lazarus “is one of the poor wretched Chinamen who shiver and cower and whine at our street-corners, and are mean and dirty, squalid and contemptible, even beyond beggars generally” (“Lazarus”, 421). But his life is a double-life, like that of John Jasper: “his existence is

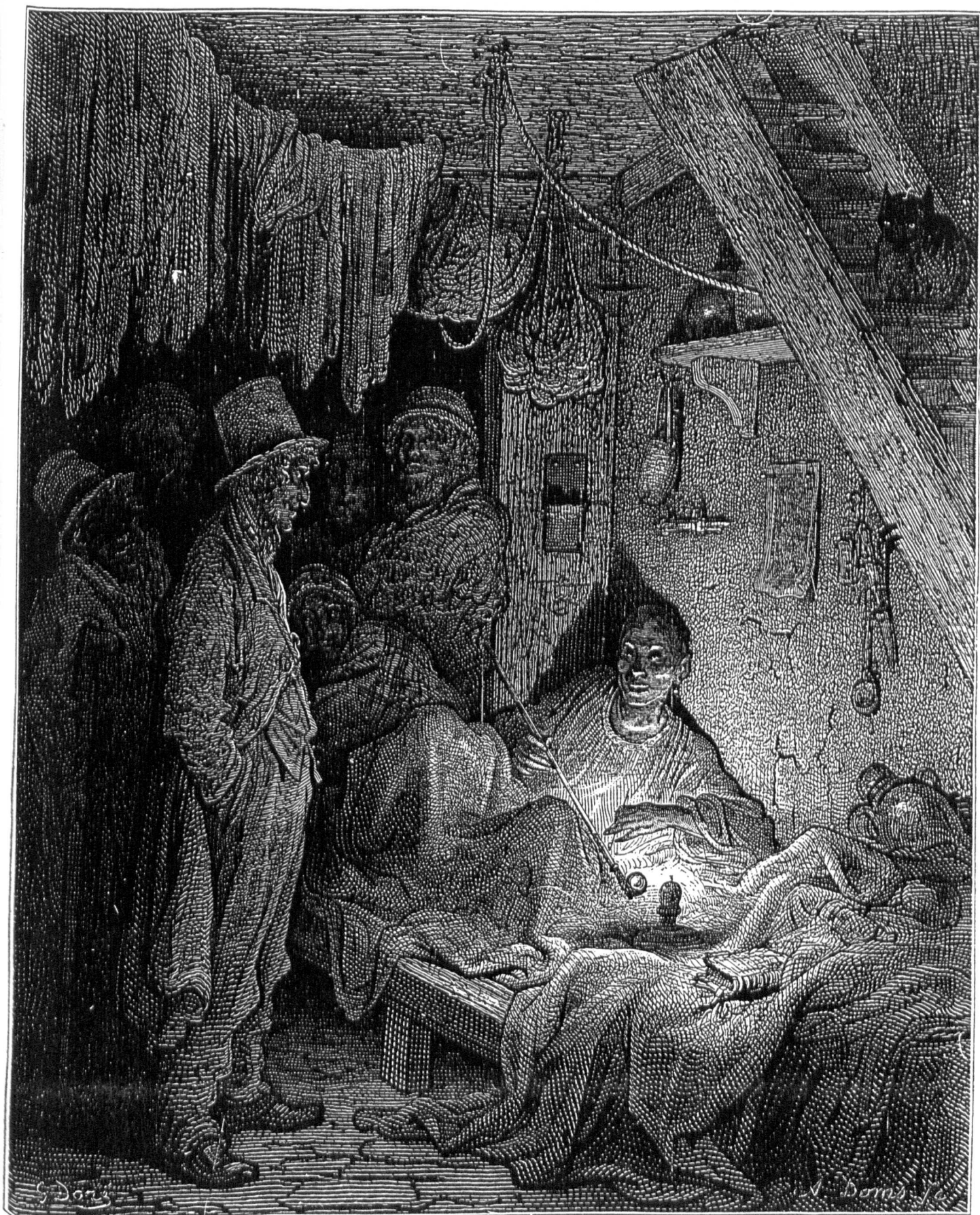


Figure 4 Dickens's opium den by Gustave Doré (Doré and Jerrold, 1872).

divided between a misery which is very real, and a happiness which is as fictitious, and evanescent as that of a moth killing itself at the candle's flame" ("Lazarus", 425). Already in this article of 1866, one can observe the theme of double-life later central to *Edwin Drood*. Also, the physical description of the opium den is significantly similar to the one in Dickens's last novel: it is "a sorry little apartment, which is almost filled by the French bedstead" ("Lazarus", 423). Finally, the narrator in the article, who has made four visits to the den by the time he is writing his article ("Lazarus", 424), gets almost carried away as he imagines the myriad opium dreams dreamt in that small, squalid space:

The visions this miserable hole has seen; the sweet and solemn strains of music; the mighty feasts; the terrible dramas; the weird romances; the fierce love; the strange fantastic worship; the mad dreams; the gorgeous processions; the brilliant crowds; the mystic shadows which have occupied it - would fill a volume. ("Lazarus", 425)

If these ingredients of opium dreams never came to fill a volume for Dickens, many of them went into his last unfinished novel; the music, the drama, the romance, the love and the shadows are all themes in *Edwin Drood*. "Lazarus, Lotus-Eating" shows that Dickens was aware of and sensitive to the question of East End opium smoking by 1866. Opium as a theme in *Edwin Drood* was a genuine interest for him (rather than a response to the popularity of Collins's *The Moonstone*) related to his more general fascination with the darker sides of human nature and of society.

Dickens's influence on the myth of the opium den becomes evident in the articles published later in the century by various "social explorers" to the dark haunts of East End. They tend to hark back to Dickens's description of the opium den in *Edwin Drood*. Gustave Doré's and Blanchard Jerrold's beautiful opus *London: A Pilgrimage* (1872) records their visit to East End opium dens where they "were

introduced into the same room in which “Edwin Drood” opens” (Doré and Jerrold, 147). What is characteristic of this particular den is its English hostess Mrs. Chi Ki. Also the writer of “East London Opium Smokers” (1868) visits a den with an English proprietress, and one might identify a tradition where one specific den has had a significant influence on the myth of the opium den. This is not surprising. Berridge and Edwards maintain that the myth was far more extensive and powerful than reality; the amount of opium dens in the East End was always less than presumed, “Nor was the reaction to the practice so universally hostile as the accepted image of the opium den might suggest” (Berridge and Edwards, 201). After the publication of *Edwin Drood* the East End explorers consciously followed in Dickens’s footsteps. James Platt in his “Chinese London and Its Opium Dens” (1895) mentions “the Dickens opium den” (Platt, 274), and suggests that even the pipe he sees is the same seen by Dickens and Fields (*Ibid.*). He also confirms that the den visited by the Prince of Wales and Dickens (during the summer of 1869), and thus also by Doré and Jerrold, is the same den he himself visits (Platt, 275). John Suddaby, in *The Dickensian* of August 1916, informs us that an American tourist actually bought *the* bedpost, which Jasper observes as a disturbing spike while coming out of his opium dream.⁷ These examples suggest the power of Dickens’s description of the opium den and his influence upon the emerging myth, which grew towards the end of the century and culminated during the turn-of-the-century decadent movement.

III

Michael Hollington, in *Dickens and the Grotesque* (1984), reads drugs in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* in terms of their escapist value; opium is a means of escape for Jasper who faces “the problem of the artist in the complacent, philistine, provincial society of England in the late 1860s - the world of Podsnappery, in fact” (Hollington, 242). Opium provides Jasper’s artist’s soul a means to escape the mundane, throttling world of Cloisterham: “So it’s enough, as it were, to make you smoke opium. In justified alienation from the society he is supposed to represent in glowing and flattering terms, the artist seeks compensatory visions in the world of narcotics” (Hollington, 243). Jasper’s desire to escape into the arms of Princess Puffer’s opium fumes is a good starting point for a reading of *Edwin Drood* in terms of drugs, because it immediately calls forth the escapist value of the novel itself, and of fiction in general. The two scenes set in the East End opium den play with this analogy between opium smoking and the reading of *Edwin Drood*, implying a proximity between these two activities and hinting that the text itself adopts qualities of an intoxicating drug and acquires opium-like powers.

The masterful, fantastical opening of the novel transports the reader into Jasper’s opium dream and with this gesture produces an immediate sense of disorientation and unreality for the reader:

An ancient English Cathedral Town? How can the ancient English Cathedral town be here! The well-known massive grey square tower of its old Cathedral? How can that be here! There is no spike of rusty iron in the air, between the eye and it, from any point of the real prospect. What IS the spike that intervenes, and who has set it up? Maybe, it is set up by the Sultan’s orders for the impaling of a horde Turkish robbers, one by one. It is so, for cymbals clash, and the Sultan goes by to his palace in long procession. Ten thousand dancing-girls strew flowers. Then, follow white elephants caparisoned in countless gorgeous colours, and infinite in number and attendants. Still, the Cathedral tower rises in the background, where it cannot be, and still no writhing figure is

on the grim spike. Stay! Is the spike so low a thing as the rusty spike on the top of a post of an old bedstead that has tumbled all awry? Some vague period of drowsy laughter must be devoted to the consideration of this possibility. (*Edwin Drood*, 1)

Dickens's language creates an extremely strong sense of dislocation and ambivalence, the paragraph shifts through three "worlds", those of the Cathedral, the Sultan and the spike, mingling images of each universe. The reader is initially disturbed by the introduction of the Cathedral tower in much the same way as Jasper. Whereas the Sultan and the exaggerated multitude of his dancing girls, elephants and attendants can be recognised by the reader as a dream sequence, and thus becomes "understandable", the Cathedral in its solidity and familiarity becomes the alien, disturbing image. The initial questions doubting the reality of the Cathedral first draw attention to the role of the Cathedral in the novel. What is it doing in the text? They further suggest that the Cathedral does not belong to the more "real" scene of the Sultan and his procession. The Cathedral is the unreal, alien vision penetrating the "normality" of the opium dream's "customary" Oriental world. The repeated questions also suggest from the beginning that the text poses a question to be answered, a mystery to be solved; Jasper in his opium dream is already trying to solve the mystery of the Cathedral and the rusty spike. Once the opening, with the vision of the Cathedral, is revealed to be a dream, the question, or the mystery it poses, becomes doubtful; is it wise or relevant at all to question the validity and significance of an image in a dream? Thus through questioning the place of the Cathedral in the dream, the opening of the novel alerts us to the question of the mystery and the significance and importance of the fictional (dreamed) mystery of Drood's disappearance and our own position as the dreamer, who dreams an answer to this mystery. The superimposition of the two distinctly,

mutually foreign scenes, of the Cathedral and the Sultan, produces a sense of suspension and uncertainty regarding the validity or “reality” of these images. Without any explanation, any assurance of a reliable viewpoint, the reader is invited to adopt Jasper’s position and experience his state of undecidability. From the beginning, then, the novel sets up the place of the reader in relation to an opium dream, invites the reader to enter the novel through the opium vision of its protagonist.

The fragment of the novel obtains a strange coherence and narrative closure by its envelopment in opium. Just as the first serial episode begins and ends with opium-smoking (*Edwin Drood*, 36), the first chapter entitled “Dawn” with its scene in the opium den is echoed in the last chapter “Dawn again” and the second opium scene. The latter opium scene reveals Jasper’s repeated dream (presumably) of his crime: “I always made the journey first, before the changes of colours and the great landscapes and the glittering processions begun” (*Edwin Drood*, 209). This description points back to the opening paragraph of the novel and the Oriental procession of the opium dream, suggesting that what precedes this opium vision is Jasper’s vision of the crime. The story of the opium dream, its narrative and its content, becomes the mystery of the novel, the object of detection in it. The detective element in the novel, as it has been published, and Edwin Drood’s disappearance, concentrate and crystallise in John Jasper’s opium vision. If we could only read correctly his fragmented answers to Princess Puffer’s interrogative questions, we would understand the novel and solve its mystery.

Jasper’s repeated experience of the “journey” during his dream, and his compulsion to repeat this experience, function as an ironic comment upon the reading of the novel. Jasper returns to the opium den in order to see the dream of the crime: “I

did it over and over again. I have done it hundreds of thousands of times in this room” (*Edwin Drood*, 208) Jasper declares; “I see now. You come o’ purpose to take the journey” (*Edwin Drood*, 209) concludes Princess Puffer. Like Jasper, the reader returns to re-read *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* in order to “have a better vision” (*Ibid.*), to see a better, more thrilling, more exciting and more satisfying picture of the mysterious crime at the heart of the novel, to see a better vision of Jasper’s opium dream.

What suggests the reality of the crime in the novel is the change in Jasper’s dream, his disappointment when (presumably) the dream follows reality and loses its fantastical greatness (*Edwin Drood*, 210). Thus, as long as Jasper’s dream is purely of his own making, it is a satisfying vision offering the relief and resolution he is searching. As soon as reality enters the dream and he starts dreaming of events circumscribed by the plot of the narrative, the dream becomes a disappointment. Jasper has the unquenchable desire to repeat his “journey”, but in order to give satisfaction, it must be a journey created by his imagination, not one dictated by reality. Perhaps *Edwin Drood* as a fragment is a far more exciting, thrilling and powerful text than it could ever be if detection in it could reach its conclusion. The openendedness of the plot leads the reader to dream her own opium dream, to create her own vision of the solution to the mystery. And as pointed out above, Droodiana is an impressive evidence of this power of the text to make its reader dream wild and fantastic dreams; of young ladies impersonating men, detectives hiding in tombs, young heroes’ decaying corpses and jewels in quicklime or his withering body impaled upon a rusty spike after having been thrown from the heights of a cathedral tower, which itself is a site of a terrible struggle between the powers of good and evil (see Dubberke and Forsythe

[1988]). Some of these conjectures are far more fantastical than anything Jasper appears to be dreaming of.

A further effect is created by the way in which Jasper appears to dream of an event which is planned to appear later in the “reality” of the novel, his dream describing a version of the events which the reader anticipates learning about later in the book (if it could have reached its completed form). In this way, Jasper dreaming of the events of the novel, and seeing a vision of these events in his drugged mind, further emphasises the analogy between the opium use in the novel and the reader’s reading of it.

The same envelope of opium fumes, suggested by the book’s opening and its premature end, is reflected in its original cover illustration, originally designed by Charles Collins (Wilkie Collins’s brother) and modified and completed by S. L. Fildes. In this picture, which has given so many clues to enthusiastic Droodians (see, for example, Beer, 154-155; Lehman-Haupt), the puffs of opium from the pipes of the figures at the bottom corners of the leaf rise, encircling the various events described above them, suggesting that the whole story of the novel is permeated with the drug and an opium dream. The gaping mouth of the Cathedral on the top centre of the picture, like “the throat of Old Time” “heav[ing] a mouldy sigh from tomb and arch and vault” (*Edwin Drood*, 73), is the culmination of the rising spiral of the staircase and boughs which carry the opium fumes through the plot events, enveloping the title of the novel positioned in an oval in the middle, up to the throat of the Cathedral. It is the other extremity of the opium fumes, and the opium smoking mouths are linked to the mouth of the Cathedral, fumigating the events in between.

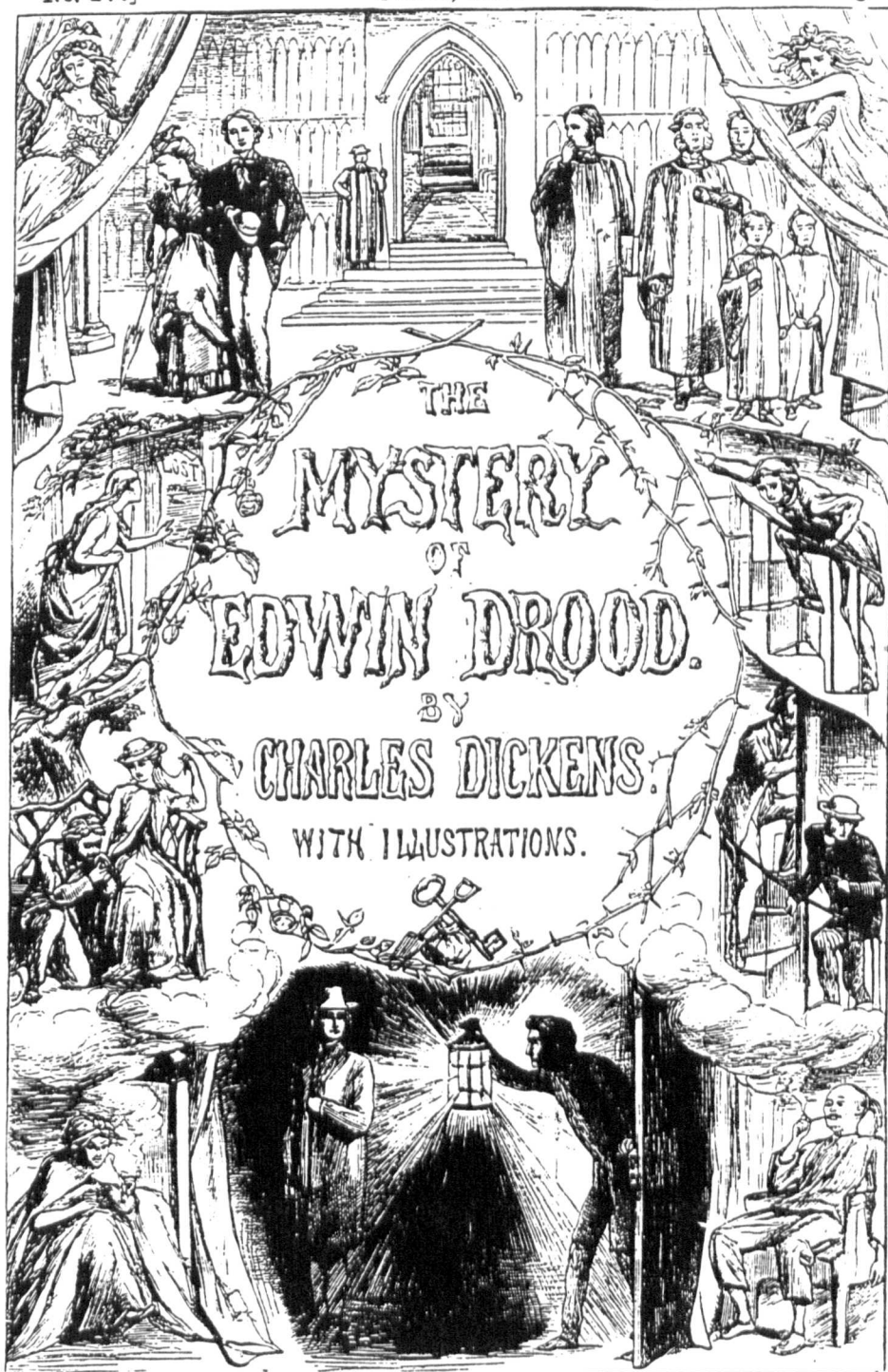


Figure 5 The frontispiece of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* by Charles Collins and S. L. Fildes (1870).

G. K. Chesterton remarks: "*Edwin Drood* begins amid the fumes of opium, and it never gets out of the fumes of opium. The darkness of that horrible smoke is deliberately rolled over the whole story" (Chesterton [1911], 211). The shift from the Cathedral in the dream to the "real" Cathedral leads us into the text suggesting that the all-pervading rule of its stony tower keeps the opium dream in the reader's mind through the novel, as it were. As the spike of the bedpost pins down the "reality" and the narrative appears to escape out of the drugged mind into Cloisterham, the opium vision of "the massive grey square tower" persists: "That same afternoon, the massive grey square tower of an old Cathedral rises before the sight of a jaded traveller" (*Edwin Drood*, 3). This "old cathedral with the square tower" (*Ibid.*) remains a presence dominating the landscape of the novel throughout, and keeps recalling Jasper's opium dream in the reader's mind through her whole reading of it. The omnipresence of the Cathedral has a strong influence in the text (see, for example, Forsyte [1988], 82), it figures almost as another character, a massive and monstrous monument towering over the novel's events. The significance of the Cathedral, a question introduced in the opening sentences of the story, and the way in which it keeps reminding us of its striking initial appearance in the text, are worth considering in detail.

Several scenes in the novel most closely associated with the Cathedral recall the opium-association of this spiritual construction; it is specifically in scenes taking place in and around the cathedral where the narrative reaches its most poetical and strange quality. In Chapter two, immediately following the shift from the opium dream to the presumed "reality" of Cloisterham, the Dean's company is leaving the Cathedral and locking it up. A most curious dialogue about John Jasper takes place:

"He has been took a little poorly."

"Say 'taken,' Tope - to the Dean," the younger rook interposes . . .

"And when and how has Mr. Jasper been taken - for, as Mr. Crisparkle has remarked, it is better to say taken - taken -" repeats the Dean; "when and how has Mr. Jasper been Taken -"

"taken, sir," Tope deferentially murmurs.

"- Poorly, Tope?"

"Why, sir, Mr. Jasper was that breathed -"

"I wouldn't say 'That breathed,' Tope," Mr. Crisparkle interposes, with the same touch as before. "Not English - to the Dean."

"Breathed to that extent would be preferable," the Dean (not unflattered by his indirect homage), condescendingly remarks; "would be preferable."

"Mr. Jasper's breathing was so remarkably short;" thus discreetly does Mr. Tope work his way around the sunken rock, "when he came in, that it distressed him mightily to get his notes out: which was perhaps the cause of his having a kind of fit on him after a little. His memory grew DAZED." Mr. Tope with his eyes on Reverend Mr. Crisparkle, shoots this word out, as defying him to improve upon it: "and a dimness and giddiness crept over him as strange as I ever saw: though he didn't seem to mind it particularly, himself. However, a little time and a little water brought him out of his DAZE." Mr. Tope repeats the word and its emphasis, with the air of saying: "As I *have* made a success, I'll make it again."

"And Mr. Jasper has gone home quite himself, has he? asks the Dean. (*Edwin Drood*, 4)

The dialogue is very amusing and contains satirical social commentary on the use of language. Its implications within the novel are also interesting. Tope describes Jasper's "fit" in the Cathedral, but his description is fragmented by the comments relating to his use of language. His attempted narrative is broken down by repetitions and interferences. The word "DAZE" comes across as Mr. Tope's own term to encapsulate Jasper's state in the Cathedral. The Cathedral's drug-association is transferred from the opium dream to Cloisterham when the text describes Jasper having a fit and suffering from opium-related withdrawal symptoms of "dimness, giddiness as strange as I ever saw" in this building. This scene draws attention to the language and the texture of the novel; it also suggests that the opium dream continues beyond the limits of the opium den and spreads its influence into the story. Jasper's

shortness of breath can be read as a withdrawal symptom after his opium use the previous night, but it is quite significant that this same shortness of breath appears to affect the narrative in this scene, sentences become “so remarkably short”, fragmented, left unfinished. The uncertainty as to the rightness of words and their repetition produces a slight sense of giddiness, and the reader is quite dazed by the language of the narrative. The Dean concludes the dialogue by making sure that Jasper “has gone home quite himself”, as if the preceding, fragmented narrative cannot be trusted to get him there safely and in his entirety.

In his depiction of Cloisterham, Dickens effectively emphasises the ways in which the Cathedral infiltrates the minds and bodies of the inhabitants of Cloisterham. The clerical past of Cloisterham and the Cathedral are described as near-chemical substances poisoning their food:

A monotonous, silent city, deriving an earthy flavour throughout, from its Cathedral crypt, and so abounding in vestiges of monastic graves, that the Cloisterham children grow small salad in the dust of abbots and abbesses, and make dirt-pies of nuns friars; while every ploughman in its outlying fields renders to once puissant Lord Treasurers, Archbishops, Bishops, and such-like, the attention which the Ogre in the story-book desired to render to his unbidden visitor, and grinds their bones to make his bread.

A drowsy city Cloisterham . . . (*Edwin Drood*, 13)

The flavour of Cloisterham, as if the whole atmosphere of the city was an edible substance, is the flavour of the dusty Cathedral crypt, the flavour of corpses and death. The timeless paralysis of the city, its monotony, silence and its strange drowsiness and stupor arises from the depths of the Cathedral. The ancient ecclesiastical buildings have been built into its inhabitants' houses “much as kindred jumbled notions have become incorporated into many of its citizens' minds” (*Ibid.*). The Cathedral is a presence in the minds of the inhabitants of Cloisterham, like a sedative. The images of children

playing with the remains of dead people and the farmer turning into an ogre of a fairy-tale further emphasise the strange, fantastical influence of the old, time-defying Cathedral.

The character in the novel which is most strongly linked to the Cathedral, is Durdles, the stonemason covered with stone dust (*Edwin Drood*, 28). He is also permanently intoxicated to a state of the near-comatose, and his familiarity with the Cathedral results from his habit of “sleep[ing] off the fumes of liquor” (*Ibid.*) within its walls. For Durdles, as well, the Cathedral is initially connected with a state of intoxicated sleep. The influence of the Cathedral would here appear to reach its culmination, where “Stony Durdles” (*Edwin Drood*, 31) suffering from “Tombatism”, spending his time among tombs and exploring the dark cavities of the Cathedral (*Edwin Drood*, 30) and getting his living out of stones, is constantly “stoned”, in a state of stupefaction, and even has to be stoned home (*Edwin Drood*, 32). The stonyness of the Cathedral encompasses Durdles’s entire existence, his mind and body; he is “the Stony (and stoned) One” (*Ibid.*). The characterisation of Durdles provides a strong metaphor linking intoxication with being “stoned” and thus evoking the power of the stony Cathedral commanding Cloisterham.

In the earlier scene taking place in front of the Cathedral, Tope informs us of Jasper’s fit in the Cathedral. The cause of this fit remains unknown; perhaps it is a result of his opium use, or it might be seen as an effect of the Cathedral. This ambiguity becomes more effective in the scene of Jasper’s nightly “unaccountable” adventure with Durdles, one of the most powerful scenes in the novel. It is implied that the bottle provided by Jasper contains drugged alcohol as “its contents enter freely into Mr. Durdles’s circulation” (*Edwin Drood*, 105), stupefying and intoxicating him. The

actual presence of a drug is not confirmed, and the reader is left in an undecidable position, whether Durdles falls asleep as a result of a sedative or because of the sedative influence of the Cathedral vault (*Edwin Drood*, 108-109). Durdles's dream "is not much of a dream, considering the vast extent of the domains of dreamland, and their wonderful productions" (*Edwin Drood*, 108), but this evocation suffices to recall the opening dream of the novel, hinting at a connection between Jasper's and Durdles's dreams, also because Durdles dreams about "real" events, as Jasper partially confirms (*Edwin Drood*, 108-109). Jasper's steps disappearing into the distance suggest, of course, that he has been conducting some secret preparations for the planned crime. So once again, we have the crime associated with a drugged dream and the Cathedral. The stony Cathedral with its overwhelming, mesmerising influence dominates the story and works like a magnetic force twisting and distorting not only the lives and actions of the characters inhabiting Cloisterham, but also the narrative. Dickens's text presents clues to its mystery in the form of a drugged dream; the reader is asked to interpret the dreams of Jasper and Durdles in order to move towards the solution of Drood's disappearance.

Jasper's double life and the contrast between Cloisterham and East End has been noted by several critics and analysed in terms of Jasper's schizoid psychology (for example, Frank, 160; Wright, 275). Hollington suggests that opium as a means of escape for Jasper is not satisfactory; the world of opium turns out to be a class society, and just as real and mundane as that of Cloisterham (Hollington, 243). Hollington concludes his reading by pointing out the symbolic unification of the various split worlds in the last scene and page of Dickens's novel: "The extremes that touch here - opium *madame*, holy sanctuary, grotesque demon, human form - are part of the same

system. They shape its indictment" (Hollington, 244). In this conclusion Hollington reduces the fantastical, alien nature of the opium world by bringing it into the "same system" with the world of Cloisterham: "The point . . . is that in the end opium, like the grotesque, is merely *real*" (Hollington, 243), and Jasper's attempt to escape the unbearable, suffocating life in Cloisterham into opium dreams is doomed to fail. Whereas Hollington is, as it were, reducing the world of opium to the level of the drudgery of reality, I find interesting the ways in which the reality in *Edwin Drood* is coloured by a drug through and through, how the text produces a sense that the world of Cloisterham is an opium world. For me, the emphasis must be on the alienating, uncanny power of opium in the text, rather than on the translation of opium into part of the mundane routine reality. The whole space where detection takes place in *Edwin Drood* is a world saturated with drugs, and the way in which the novel uses the drugged dreams, both Jasper's and Durdles's, in the narrative draws attention to the significance of imaginings, dreams, and visions in the novel. This in turn combines with the inherent power of the broken narrative to make its reader dream, to make her dream Jasper's and Durdles's dream about the mysterious crime and the preparations for it, in order to detect and solve the mystery.

John Jasper's apparent mesmeric powers add another drug element into the novel. In *Dickens and Mesmerism* (1975) Fred Kaplan distinguishes the mesmerising, intoxicating gaze from the eyes shrouded by opium: "Dickens knew the difference between the two; he had seen and experienced both. He had taken opium and administered it; . . . Dickens never confused the two. But he gave Jasper both" (Kaplan, 131-132). Kaplan produces a very good study of various mesmeric instances in the novel (especially Kaplan, 122-123, 153-155, 204). However, I would like to add

a phenomenon, which Kaplan does not discuss in relation to *Edwin Drood*, but which he reports as common in mesmeric experiments: "The mesmerists were surprised to discover that in many instances an individual who was not the subject of the mesmerists' exertions but who happened to be present in the same room was thrown into mesmeric trance, so great was the power" (Kaplan, 148). Dickens's novel offers us an example of this kind of diffusing mesmeric power. While Jasper attempts to master Rosa and other characters in the novel, the reader is mesmerised and entranced by the text. The scene at the sundial and Jasper's confession of his love for Rosa, is an extremely powerful scene and evokes a strong sense of his mesmeric powers:

The moment she [Rosa] sees him from the porch, leaning on the sun-dial, the old horrible feeling of being compelled by him, asserts its hold upon her. She feels that she would even then go back, but that he draws her feet towards him. She cannot resist, and sits down, with her head bent, on the garden seat beside the sun-dial. (*Edwin Drood*, 168-169)

Every move by Jasper, his touching her and her sensing his intentions (*Edwin Drood*, 169) is described in minute detail. She tries to leave, time after time, but Jasper's menacing face forces her to stay still, arrests her escape (*Edwin Drood*, 169, 170, 171). Jasper's passion carries him to a further confession: "had the ties between me and my dear lost boy been one silken thread less strong, I might have swept even him from your side when you favoured him", and immediately "A film comes over the eyes she raises for an instant, as though he had turned her faint" (*Edwin Drood*, 171). Significantly, Rosa's physical symptoms, her short breath and the "film" over her vision, are curiously similar to the symptoms exhibited by Jasper and associated with his opium use (*Edwin Drood*, 4, 9). Furthermore, while Rosa is detained by Jasper's mesmeric powers, to an extent that she is able to communicate only by small gestures of her hand (*Edwin Drood*, 175), she learns important clues about his character: "Rosa

puts her hands to her temples, and, pushing back her hair, looks wildly and abhorrently at him, as though she were trying to piece together what it is his deep purpose to present to her only in fragments" (*Edwin Drood*, 172). Clues to the detective mystery are once again presented through a device of a confused, intoxicated state of mind, only this time, the vehicle is not a drugged sleep but a similar state induced by Jasper's mesmeric power.

Another instance, where Dickens uses mesmeric effects to give his readers a clue to the mystery, is Mr. Crisparkle's "memorable night walk" (*Edwin Drood*, 144) to the river where he discovers Drood's pin and watch:

He walked to the Cloisterham Weir.

He often did so, and consequently there was nothing remarkable in his footsteps tending that way. But the preoccupation of his mind so hindered him from planning any walk, or taking heed of the objects he passed, that his first consciousness of being near the Weir, was derived from the sound of the falling water near at hand.

"How did I come here!" was his first thought, as he stopped.

"Why did I come here!" was his second.

Then, he stood intently listening to the water. A familiar passage in his reading, about airy tongues that syllable men's names, rose so unbidden to his ear, that he put it from him with his hand, as if it were tangible. (*Ibid.*)

Kaplan suggests that this is another instance of Jasper's mesmeric powers: "Though the method and time of the placement of suggestion in his mind are unclear, undoubtedly Jasper has put it there for his own ends" (Kaplan, 154). Indeed, the Biblical reference to airy tongues whispering in Crisparkle's ears, so that he has to brush the words away with his hand, suggests an alien influence in his mind. What is significant in this scene, as well as in the one at the sundial, is the way in which Dickens's novel insists on presenting clues to its central mystery in an atmosphere of mesmeric intoxication. As the text clearly emphasises, it is by no means extraordinary or remarkable that Crisparkle should walk to the Weir, since he is in the habit of doing

so. But specifically, this time when he does find a clue to Drood's disappearance, it occurs in a near-mesmeric trance.

This device in the text of presenting important pieces of information relating to the detective mystery at its heart and advancing its plot through stages of intoxicated trance or sleep, produces a sense of ambiguity, disorientation and uncertainty in the reader. She must read the drugged dreams of Jasper and Durdles; she is asked to participate in the mesmeric or drugged state of the characters in order to solve the mystery of Edwin Drood, which the story presents to her. The way in which Dickens's novel leads its reader towards a solution of the mystery through various drugged or mesmerised states and offers clues to its mystery through an intoxicating veil like that of opium fumes, is, I believe, a significant source of its fascinating and addictive power.

The reader's experience, her detection, forces her into a state of limbo and helplessness, the same kind of state of passive observation as Jasper's while he is dreaming of the crime. James A. Davies in *The Textual Life of Charles Dickens's Characters* (1989) explores this phenomenon

This text now has a Re-reader who knows more than it contains. But this is not simply to say that the Re-reader is identical with the author, for the latter had a choice. Indeed, in the case of the incomplete text that choice remained, in part, still to be exercised. The Re-reader knows the ending and how it will be reached and so watches in paradoxical helplessness as the characters take part in a preordained and often futile manoeuvres. He is helpless, possessing knowledge without power. (Davies, 129-130)

Although Davies is specifically referring to the reader's external knowledge of the intended ending of the novel, this "truthfulness" of the presumed ending is not important. What is important is the way in which the text leads the reader to surmise its ending, the way in which it generates Droodiana. The reader is trapped by the text;

like Jasper repeats his opium dream endlessly, so the reader's reading continues endlessly in a circle from which there is no escape, because the detective mystery will never be solved and the story will never end. The reader of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* cannot escape from the opium den, but lingers there reading.

Notes

¹ It is generally acknowledged that Dickens based the character of Inspector Bucket on Inspector Charles Frederick Field (Collins [1962], 206), featured in Dickens's Gothic description of the police detective, "On Duty with Inspector Field", first published in *Household Words* 14th June 1851 and later in *Reprinted Pieces* in 1858. Dickens's comradeship with the Detective Department is further manifest in a cluster of other articles published in *Household Words* in the 1850s; most notably "The Detective Police" and "Three 'Detective' Anecdotes". All three articles have been reprinted in *The Uncommercial Traveller and Reprinted Pieces* (1958).

² Already in 1871, an anonymous reviewer of *Edwin Drood* in the *Dublin Review* observed that this novel was "in some respects, a singular repetition of its immediate predecessor" (Collins [1971], 543), thus remarking on the similarity of these two works. In this century, in addition to Harry Stone, for example, Lawrence Frank has drawn attention to the themes of murder, passion and madness which run through these two novels linking them together. Frank points out that "Although *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is not simply a continuation of *Our Mutual Friend*, it does clearly emerge out of those recurring concerns revealed in [Dickens's] Memorandum Book and especially in the last completed novel" (Frank, 159).

³ This sense of ambiguity and displacement in relation to the position of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* among Dickens's works is, perhaps, further manifest in the various critical books on Dickens's fiction which entirely ignore his last, unfinished novel. For example, A. O. J. Cockshut in his *The Imagination of Charles Dickens* (1961) concludes his book with a reading of *Our Mutual Friend* and does not once refer to *Edwin Drood* in his index. John Lucas's *The Melancholy Man: A Study of Dickens's Novels* (1970) likewise concludes with a chapter entitled "In Conclusion: *Our Mutual Friend*", he mentions *Edwin Drood* once, quoting Grewgious on money to provide "a questioning epigraph for *Our Mutual Friend*" (Lucas, 317).

⁴ For other comparisons between *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* and *The Moonstone* see, for example, Cockshut [1962], 230; Cardwell, viii-ix; Beer, 149.

⁵ The anonymous reviewer of *Our Mutual Friend* in the *Westminster Review* in 1866, relates this sentence to Dickens's treatment of the Poor Law question in the characterisation of Betty Higden. I maintain that the issue of the Poor Law, which Dickens mentions in his "Postscript", is distinctly separated in the latter part of the text from the concern of the opening paragraphs, which is plot construction.

⁶ This view of the drug-like power of money is expressed slightly differently by Fred Kaplan in *Dickens and Mesmerism* (1975). He describes money in terms of mesmeric power writing that in Dickens's fiction "cash is a tool of control as powerful in some instances as mesmeric force" (Kaplan, 178). Hollington and Kaplan describe the same effects and power of money in Dickens's fiction, only using different imagery, one of drugs and one of mesmerism.

⁷ If the American tourist bought Mrs. Chi Ki's bedpost, he perhaps did not obtain the genuine article. The bedpost with its spike in *Edwin Drood* may well have originated in the den described in "Lazarus, Lotus-Eating" (1866), where "a sorry little apartment" is "almost filled by the French bedstead" ("Lazarus", 423). This den was kept by a Chinese Yahee.

4. A CITY IN A NIGHTMARE: ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON'S *THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL* *AND MR. HYDE* (1886)

I

The remarkable tale of Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) can be read as an allegory, a Gothic novella, a tale of the supernatural, and science-fiction. It is also a detective story, where the solution to a murder mystery is a drug. The plot of the novel, as well as its allegorical significance, hinges on Dr. Jekyll's transforming potion. The various readings of Stevenson's text have been largely dictated by its apparent allegorical nature, while its equally important qualities as a Victorian mystery and detective story have been somewhat ignored. Within the prevailing tradition of reading *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the crucial drug is passed by as a necessary "impurity" in the novel, as a means to expose and explore the two sides, the good and the evil, of man (there are no significant female characters in the novel). I would like to draw attention to this "impurity", this neglected and often ignored chemical ingredient which, I believe, plays a crucial role in the text.¹ I suggest that no other vehicle of transformation would do. Just as Jekyll needs the specific powder to make his potion succeed, so Stevenson's novel needs the drug to work its effects on the reader.

The opinions of those critical readers who have paid attention to this toxic plot device have been contradictory. Among contemporary critics of Stevenson, Henry James wrote: "I have some difficulty in accepting the business of the powders, which seems to me too explicit and explanatory" (James [1888], 157). He thought "that his uncanny process would be more conceivable . . . if the author had not made it so definite" (*Ibid.*; Elwin, 202; Elwin also reports other contradictory comments). On the other hand, such modern critics as Ian Campbell, have remarked that the power of the drug lies specifically in the vagueness with which it is described. Writing about the treatment of science in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Campbell points out that "the absence of explanation is what makes these fictions work today" (Campbell, 52; for a similar comment, see Jefford, 61). Both James and Campbell comment on the plausibility of the drug in a tale which sets itself up as a detective story and creates an expectation in its reader of a rational solution to the mystery (see also J. R. Hammond, 122). An unsigned review in *The Times* in January 1886 describes the experience of reading Stevenson's novel:

He [the reader] will read it the first time, passing from surprise to surprise, in a curiosity that keeps growing, because it is never satisfied. For the life of us, we cannot make out how such and such an incident can possible [*sic.*] be explained on grounds that intelligible or in any way plausible explanations are forthcoming. In our impatience we are hurried towards the denouement, which accounts for everything upon strictly scientific grounds, though the science be the science of problematical futurity. Then having drawn a sigh of relief at having found even a fantastically speculative issue from our embarrassments, we begin reflectively to call to mind how systematically the writer has been working towards it. (Maixner, 205-206)

This anonymous critic reads *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as distinctly a detective story, the mounting curiosity of the reader and the anticipation of a rational, plausible solution indicate that she (or he) has identified the novel as a detective story and the

established formula of this genre guides her reading. The drug is accepted as a plausible solution by this reader, although it “be the science of problematic futurity”.

The more established way to read Stevenson’s text is as an allegory. Here, too, the opinions concerning Stevenson’s use of the drug vary. Theodor Watts-Dunton, who found the whole tale “a great mistake” on Stevenson’s part, saw the use “of a dose of some supposed new drug” as one of the main reasons why this tale is “a horrible joke” and “an outrage upon the grand allegories of the same motive with which most literatures have been enriched” (Douglas, 107). G. K. Chesterton, in *Robert Louis Stevenson* (1906), takes the opposing view, referring to Mr. E. F. Benson who

has made the (to me) strange remark that the structure of the story breaks down when Jekyll discovers that his chemical combination was partly accidental and is therefore unrecoverable. The critic says scornfully that it would have done just as well if Jekyll has taken a blue pill. . . . That moment in which Jekyll finds his own formula fail him, through an accident he had never foreseen, is simply the supreme moment in every story of a man buying power from hell; the moment when he finds the flaw in the deed. Such a moment comes to Macbeth and Faustus. (Chesterton [1906], 74)

Chesterton was perhaps the first critic to note the ironic “impurity” in Jekyll’s potion and its significance in the tale. This impurity without which the drug is not effective, contributes, of course, to the main theme in the novel, the indivisibility of man’s multiple nature. For Chesterton, then, the drug and its specific composition enhance and add to the allegorical complexity and value of Stevenson’s text.

Whether *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is read as a detective story or as an allegory, since it can be seen as both, the drug remains a disturbing ingredient and critical opinions about its plausibility and usefulness as a plot element vary. In 1888 Stevenson remarked on the criticism he had received concerning the use of the drug, and insisted

that this specific detail came to him in the nightmare in which *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* found its origin: "For the business of the powders, which so many have censured, is, I am relieved to say, not mine at all but the Brownies" ("A Chapter on Dreams", 128).

In 1885, while living in Skerryvore in Bournemouth, Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) had a remarkable nightmare; he dreamt of "the scene at the window, and a scene afterward split in two, in which Hyde, pursued for some crime, took the powder and underwent the change in the presence of his pursuers" ("A Chapter on Dreams", 127). Stevenson was woken up by his wife Fanny Osbourne in the middle of the nightmare, and in three days he had completed the first draft of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.² Whether this nightmare was affected by opium remains a matter for speculation. In his recent biography *Robert Louis Stevenson: Dreams of Exile* (1992), Ian Bell confirms that Stevenson used laudanum "for years, though with no sign of addiction" (Bell, 190). In Skerryvore, while writing *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Stevenson was painfully ill. According to Fanny Osbourne,

That an invalid in my husband's condition of health should have been able to perform the manual labour alone, of putting sixty thousand words on paper in six days, seems almost incredible. He was suffering from continual haemorrhages, and was hardly allowed to speak, his conversation usually being carried on by means of slate and pencil. (Bell, 189; Elwin, 201)

This description of Stevenson's extremely weak health and his feverish, almost manic writing of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* suggest that artificial stimulants were used. Ian Bell makes a direct connection between the drug in the novel and Stevenson's own drug use, writing "The roots of the allegory can be traced. Louis, dosed on tinctures, potions and draughts, some of them disorientating, understood a little of the psychotropic effects of drugs. . . . In any case, his experiences of mood-altering substances helped to furnish the transformation symbolism in the story" (Bell, 190).

Malcolm Elwin, in his biography *The Strange Case of Robert Louis Stevenson* (1950), quotes a letter by Stevenson to Mrs. Sitwell, written from Mentone, France during the winter 1873-74:

The report to Mrs. Sitwell that 'all yesterday I was under the influence of opium' was palpably histrionic; he assured her that he felt no temptation to repeat the experiment, since 'some verses which I wrote turn out on inspection to be not quite equal to *Kubla Khan*'. (Elwin, 79)

This letter to Mrs. Sitwell indicates not only that Stevenson took opium, but also that he associated the drug jokingly, it seems, with literary inspiration, comparing himself to the famous opium addict Coleridge. It is necessary, however, to acknowledge that in the case of Stevenson, as in the case of Wilkie Collins, the possible drug-effect in the writing of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* must remain a fiction. Nevertheless, Bell's statement together with the suggestiveness of Fanny Osbourne's description of Stevenson's "superhuman" labours do make it an interesting and rather convincing fiction.

The origin of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as a nightmare is, then, well known and often repeated (for example, Gwynn, 128; Elwin 200; J. R. Hammond, 115; Bell, 188-189), and it is interesting to consider how it reflects Stevenson's method of writing in more general terms. That the conception of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* occurred in a dream appears not to have been exceptional for Stevenson, but rather an instance of an established pattern of his creative process. An anonymous writer in the *Critic* in 1894, wrote of Robert Louis Stevenson: "Did the bank-account run low, he set to and dreamt a new novel. There appears to have been little difference between his sleeping and his waking labours, except that in doing the former he was free from interruption" (Hammerton, 174). This rather curious view of Stevenson's "sleep-writing" is most

likely based on Stevenson's own earlier description of his working methods in the *American Scribner's Magazine* in January 1888. In an essay entitled "A Chapter on Dreams", he explains the significance of dreams for his writing and attributes his literary talent to "Brownies", mysterious fairies inhabiting his mind:³

For myself - what I call I, my conscious ego, the denizen of the pineal gland unless he has changed his residence since Descartes, the man with the conscience and the variable bank-account, the man with the hat and the boots, and the privilege of voting and not carrying his candidate at the general elections - I am sometimes tempted to suppose he is no story-teller at all, but a creature as matter of fact as any cheesemonger or any cheese, and a realist bemired up to the ears in actuality; so that by that account, the whole of my published fiction should be the single-handed product of some Brownie, some Familiar, some unseen collaborator, whom I keep locked in a back garret, while I get all the praise and he but a share (which I cannot prevent him from getting) of the pudding. ("A Chapter on Dreams", 127)

Stevenson attributes his fiction to "some Brownie, some Familiar . . . locked in a back garret" and thus metaphorically describes his writing process in terms of alternating personalities, in terms of two (and more) creatures inhabiting the same body and the same mind. He directly associates his own experience of the writing of fiction with a split state similar to Dr. Jekyll in his most famous fictional text. In *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Dr. Jekyll describes Hyde as "This familiar that I called out of my soul, and sent forth alone to do his good pleasure" (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 480), evoking a strange link between the process of creation and the characters created by it. Stevenson's Brownies, like Hyde, appear amoral, wild, passionate creatures with no concern for respectability: "somewhat fantastic, like their stories hot and hot, full of passion and the picturesque, alive with animating incident; and they have no prejudice against the supernatural" ("A Chapter on Dreams", 128).

Another interesting feature of Stevenson's nocturnal creativity is the way in which the Brownies make the dreaming author a spectator or a reader of his own

dreams. Stevenson describes how his Brownies “labor all night long, and all night long set before him truncheons of tales upon their lighted theatre” (“A Chapter on Dreams”, 125). As a spectator of these plays, Stevenson finds himself often thrilled and excited by the scenes these “little people” act before him. He emphasises the way in which the resolution of their tale can be surprising and unexpected for the dreaming author: “It was not his tale; it was the little people’s!” (“A Chapter on Dreams”, 126). Stevenson compares his experience of one such dream in an interesting way with the position of a reader:

In reading a plain tale, burthened with no psychology, and movingly and truthfully told, we are sometimes deceived for a moment and take the emotions of the hero for our own. It is our testimony to the spirit and truth of the performance. (*Ibid.*)

In his dream he has adopted the position of its hero in a similar fashion as the reader identifies with the hero/ine of a novel she reads. Stevenson here appears as a reader of and in his own dream created by the Brownies. Significantly, he also mentions that sometimes his dream is an act of reading: “he reads the most delightful books in his dreams” (“A Chapter on Dreams”, 124), “so incredibly vivid and moving that any printed book, than he has ever since been malcontent with literature” (“A Chapter on Dreams”, 123).

The essay, “A Chapter on Dreams”, written two years after the publication of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, provides us with some interesting suggestions for a reading of this novel. There is a curious parallel between Stevenson’s conception of his own writing process and Dr. Jekyll’s scientific project. The author’s mind is described as split, where one side, the conscious ego, is a spectator of a show by passionate and wild “Brownies”. In an article entitled “The Strange Voices in the Strange Case: Dr.

Jekyll, Mr. Hyde, and the Voices of Modern Fiction" (1988), Ronald R. Thomas relates Stevenson's "dream" technique to the theme of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* arguing that "Like the Hyde that is hidden in Jekyll's back garret, Stevenson's texts seem to spring from the dream of a split ego. They are the expression of a double life, belonging not to himself but some hidden "collaborator" who robs him of his own authority in the very act of writing" (Thomas [1988], 85). Following on from Thomas's observations, we may see how the way in which Stevenson locates himself in the place of the reader in relation to his own text, and the way in which he attributes the text to an other, creates an illusion that the reader, in reading *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, is experiencing Stevenson's nightmare. Stevenson removes the authorial power from himself to some strange "familiar", to the imaginary "Brownies" and attributes his fiction to fictional creatures. No one is left in control of the text; it has become a nightmare shared by the author and the reader.

The world of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, this city called London, is truly "some city in a nightmare" (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 453). It was first conceived in a nightmare, and it retains its nightmarish, surreal atmosphere and dreamlike narrowness of narrative scope throughout the text. Also, the text constantly hints at its own "status" and origin as a nightmare. The story begins with Enfield's description of his encounter with Hyde:

I was coming home from some place at the end of the world, about three o'clock of a black winter morning, and my way lay through a part of town where there was literally nothing to be seen but lamps. Street after street, and all the folks asleep - street after street, all lighted up as if for a procession, and all as empty as a church - till at last I got into that state of mind when a man listens and listens and begins to long for the sight of a policeman. All at once, I saw two figures: one a little man who was stumping along eastward at a good walk, and the other a girl of maybe eight or ten who was running as hard as she was able down a cross-street. (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 441)

The endless empty streets filled with lamps, which Enfield traverses, are as unreal as a dream-scape. Strangely enough, these two qualities, the lamps and emptiness are associated with the ideas of a procession and a church, thus recalling the opening of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870) and its opium dream. Enfield is on his way home from "some place in the end of the world" (see also note 4), and this vague idea of a journey towards safety through a seemingly infinite landscape further enhances the sense of a dream-like state. The familiar figure of a policeman, in this world, appears as an anticipated sign of reality and sanity as much as a sign of security; Enfield's safety is not threatened in the empty streets, but rather he feels an uncanny fear of their very emptiness.

Enfield witnesses the automaton-like figure of Hyde trample down a running girl. The sudden appearance of a group of people around the screaming child, as well as the strange psychological effect of Hyde on the other characters are further dream-like elements. The emotional response to Hyde, and the inability to describe his face in detail are, of course, important elements in the story, contributing to the undefinable evil in Hyde, but in these first pages of the novel, their effect is initially to create an unreal sense of nightmare, where the sleeper is not seeing detailed and logical pictures and sequences of events but rather experiencing changing impressions and emotions.

This same narrative technique is used throughout the novel in a series of climactic dream-like scenes; Carew's murder, Dr. Jekyll at his window, Lanyon witnessing Hyde's transformation into Jekyll, and Utterson's final entry into Jekyll's laboratory. In all of these scenes something is left unsaid, details are not narrated in full, there is a certain thinness or narrowness in the description of the scene, similar to the one of the running girl. J. R. Hammond notes this sense of stasis in the novel, the

way in which the action does not flow through the text, but the reader is presented with a chain of static images or scenes: "The effect of this deliberate exclusion of activity is to heighten the sinister undertones of the story and concentrate the reader's attention on its prevailing mood" (J. R. Hammond, 121). This specific narrative style employed in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, may be related to Stevenson's style in more general terms. G. K. Chesterton writes:

The real defect of Stevenson as a writer, so far from being a sort of silken trifling and superfluous embroidery, was that he simplified so much that he lost some of the comfortable complexity of real life. He treated everything with an economy of detail and a suppression of irrelevance which had at least something about it stark and unnatural. (Chesterton [1906], 186; see also Wheeler, 193-194)

This stylistic narrowness, so evident in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, which results in a "simplification" leading to a sense of unreality, may be seen as a result of his "dreaming" his stories, the work of his little mind-inhabiting brownies. Specifically, in a dark and horrific story like *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, it creates for the reader a sense of existence as a nightmare. And this idea of a nightmare becomes entwined with a detective interest when Enfield's story of his encounter with Hyde begins to haunt Utterson in the form of a bad dream:

Hitherto it had touched him on the intellectual side alone; but now his imagination also was engaged, or rather enslaved; and as he lay and tossed in the gross darkness of the night in the curtained room, Mr. Enfield's tale went by before his mind in a scroll of lighted pictures. He would be aware of the great field of lamps of a nocturnal city; then of the figure of a man walking swiftly; then of a child running from the doctor's; and then these met, and that human Juggernaut trod the child down and passed on regardless of her screams. Or else he would see a room in a rich house, where his friend lay asleep, dreaming and smiling at his dreams; and then the door of that room would be opened, the curtains of the bed plucked apart, the sleeper recalled, and, lo! there would stand by his side a figure to whom power was given, and even at that dead hour he must rise and do its bidding. The figure in these two phases haunted the lawyer all night; and if at any time he dozed over, it was but to see it glide more stealthily through sleeping houses, or move the more swiftly, and still more swiftly, even to dizziness, through wider labyrinths of



Second State.

Figure 6 Piranesi's Prison XIV: Carcere with a staircase ascending to the left. According to Mr. William Archer, Stevenson had two "Roman prints" by Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778) on the wall in Skerryvore at the time he was writing *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Hammerton, 76).

lamp-lighted city, and at every street corner crush a child and leave her screaming. And still the figure had no face by which he might know it; even in his dreams it had no face, or one that baffled him and melted before his eyes; and thus it was that there sprang up and grew apace in the lawyer's mind a singularly strong, almost an inordinate, curiosity to behold the features of the real Mr. Hyde. If he could but once set eyes on him, he thought the mystery would lighten and perhaps roll altogether away, as was the habit of mysterious things when well examined. (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 446)

Utterson spends his night thinking of Enfield's story of his encounter with Hyde, and the text describes his mind, too, as divided into the intellect and the imagination, now both stimulated by the mystery. The tale presents itself to him in the form "a scroll of lighted pictures", as if anticipating a cinematic experience, with "a scroll" referring to a written document and "lighted pictures" to a *laterna magica* or a staged play. Utterson's state here reminds us of Stevenson's description of his own state of literary creation while dreaming, and specifically of his nightmare of the two scenes which inspired the novel. A further *mise-en-abyme* effect is created by the fact that Utterson is dreaming of a dreamer "smiling at his dreams". Here, Utterson is creating his own hypothetical scene of the events taking place in Jekyll's house when Hyde produces the cheque presented to the girl's family in Enfield's narrative. This scene of Hyde waking up Jekyll from a smiling sleep, is both a red herring for the reader in the story of the mystery and a narrative detail which enhances the layered, or storied structure of the text and further emphasises the significance of dreams and dreaming in it. Enfield's story becomes Utterson's nightmare, the first narrative in a series of narratives by internal narrators is transformed into a nightmare which generates in Utterson an irresistible desire to detect, to solve the mystery set by Hyde and his inexplicable connection to Dr. Jekyll. The paragraph quoted above depicts a growing obsession in Utterson to see Hyde's face, to know him. The novel which sets itself up as a detective

story, with the mystery of the relation between Jekyll and Hyde at its heart, is from the beginning enveloped in the strange world of dreams.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde opens with a description of Mr. Utterson, suggesting that he will play an important part in the story. Utterson becomes the amateur detective and the recipient and reader of the various documents circulating in the narrative, including the two final narratives in the book, by Dr. Lanyon and Dr. Jekyll. As shown above, the first first-person narrative in the novel, "The Story of the Door" by Mr. Enfield, enters Utterson's dreams, haunts him as a nightmare and generates a desire and a compulsion in Utterson to detect and reveal the mystery of Mr. Hyde. The text develops this mystery of the relationship between the respectable, professional, upper middle-class Dr. Jekyll and the apparently low-class, criminal Mr. Hyde, through a series of extremely short chapters. This series of "incidents" ("Incident of the Letter", "Remarkable Incident of Doctor Lanyon", "Incident at the Window" among them) appear as a chain of loosely connected dreamy visions, separated by time lapses (curiously, every single chapter except the first one, begins with a sentence denoting a lapse of time), or as "a scroll of lighted pictures" like Utterson's nightmare (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 446). Thus Utterson's dream echoes through the very structure of the text.

When this mystery of Jekyll and Hyde deepens into a murder mystery and "the strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" becomes "the Carew murder case", the text keeps reminding us of its nightmarish origins. On the way to Hyde's Soho lodgings Utterson and Inspector Newcomen travel through a distinctly brown city: "A great chocolate-coloured pall lowered over heaven", occasionally with "a glow of a rich, lurid brown" and "as brown as umber" (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 453). It is

particularly this scenery with swirling brown fog which to Utterson seems “like a district of some city in a nightmare” (*Ibid.*). Brown was for Stevenson the colour of nightmares: “he would be haunted, for instance, by nothing more definite than a certain hue of brown, which he did not mind in the least while he was awake, but feared and loathed while he was dreaming” (“A Chapter on Dreams”, 123). This same hue of brown also recalls the imaginary “Brownies”, and the nightmarish scene in Soho reminds us further of these associations with the origins of the tale we are reading. The brown fog rolling over this scene of detective work, together with Utterson’s haunting dream of Hyde, suggest that detection in this novel takes place in a nightmare, in “some city in a nightmare.”

II

Sawbones, “the usual cut-and-dry apothecary, of no particular age and colour, with a strong Edinburgh accent” (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 442), who makes a fleeting appearance in the first chapter, evokes the presence of the Edinburgh medical profession in the tale. Although he is also referred to as a “doctor” (*Ibid.*), here Sawbones is described as an apothecary, a chemist who without medical education would provide poorer people with elementary medical services. An apothecary, however, is distinctly not a doctor, and Stevenson’s choice of this word in connection with Edinburgh may be seen as significant, linking specifically the name of the Scottish capital with both the medical profession and drugs.⁴

G. K. Chesterton, in his *Robert Louis Stevenson* (1906), was perhaps the first to remark that Stevenson's London bears a striking resemblance to his home town Edinburgh:

There is indeed one peculiarity about that grim grotesque which I have never seen noted anywhere, though I dare say it may have been noted more than once. . . . But it seems to me that the story of Jekyll and Hyde, which is presumably presented as happening in London, is all the time very unmistakably happening in Edinburgh. More than one of the characters seem to be pure Scots. (Chesterton [1906], 68)

This notion has since Chesterton's observation been repeated by several critics to an extent that it has become quite established (for example, Edwards [1980], 7; Campbell, 56; Bell, 192; R. Watson, 8). Irving S. Saposnik has noted, that "only London could serve as the *locus classicus* of Victorian behaviour" (Saposnik, 109), and so by calling his city London, Stevenson was able to bring the tale much closer and thus make it more appealing to his readers, and extend its allegorical value to encompass Victorian society on a wider scale than if he had set his tale in provincial Edinburgh. The city and the society in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is, however, so imbued with Calvinist values and ideology that the setting, regardless of its being called London, produces unavoidably echoes of Edinburgh.

G. K. Chesterton sees "that two-headed monster; the mystery of Jekyll and Hyde" as a creature rising from the "chasm of ugly division" between the sheltered home of Stevenson's childhood and the squalid, dirty, and dangerous reality of Edinburgh (Chesterton [1906], 65). Edinburgh is often painted as a double-town, with the Princes Street Gardens dividing the cultivated, light-filled New Town, from the dark poverty, misery and crime of the Old Town. Ian Bell echoes this view in *Dreams of Exile* (1992) writing:

Louis had had first-hand experience of Victorian hypocrisy in Edinburgh; he had grown up in a divided city; he had very often stepped out of the respectable New Town and into the disinhibited, amoral semi-underworld of the Old. He knew well enough that respectable 'burgesses' haunted the brothels. He understood the emblematic nature of a figure like Deacon Brodie in his own city, and he knew how Calvinism divided the world into the elect and the damned. (Bell, 191; see also Elwin 57-58)

Even the inhabitants of this city lead a double-life. Deacon Brodie is a respectable citizen by day, an infamous burglar by night, while the science of the anatomist Knox is provided for by the body snatchers Burke and Hare, all of them characters which inspired Stevenson.

There is no need to dwell upon this argument concerning the atmosphere of puritan gloom and the dichotomy of good and evil, characteristic of Edinburgh and prevalent in Stevenson's novel (for such a reading, see Chesterton [1906], Chapter 3). Instead, I shall consider a distinct "drug-connection" between the Scottish capital and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, which is alluded to in the character of Sawbones in the opening pages of Stevenson's novel. In his essay "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Holmes" (1980) Owen Dudley Edwards suggests a connection between Stevenson's tale and Scottish scientific and cultural life. He discusses the theme of the double in connection with the legend of Deacon Brodie, which was of great interest to young Stevenson,⁵ but maintains that "What Stevenson had in mind, I suspect, was something to which in point of chronology he was a great deal closer, to wit the Edinburgh scientific and medical mind of the later enlightenment and its afterglow" (Edwards [1988], 5). Edwards refers specifically to Stevenson's story "The Body-Snatcher" (1884), but argues that, although Stevenson in this story was using the legend of Burke and Hare, "It was much more the general Edinburgh medical mentality that Jekyll's ethics

portrayed", a mentality where science goes before all ethical considerations of good and evil (Edwards [1988], 5).

"The Body Snatcher" (written in 1881, published in 1884), a gruesome tale about medical students, shows not only Stevenson's evident familiarity with the Burke and Hare legend, but also his interest in and knowledge of the work of the Edinburgh medical establishment. In the story, two medical students, assisting a famous anatomist, experience a ghostly re-appearance of one of the corpses they had earlier exhumed for the dissecting room. A dream recounted by Stevenson in "A Chapter on Dreams" suggests that for a considerable period he was himself haunted by images of an operating theatre or a dissecting room (here Stevenson uses a third-person narration but later in the essay he identifies himself as the student in question):

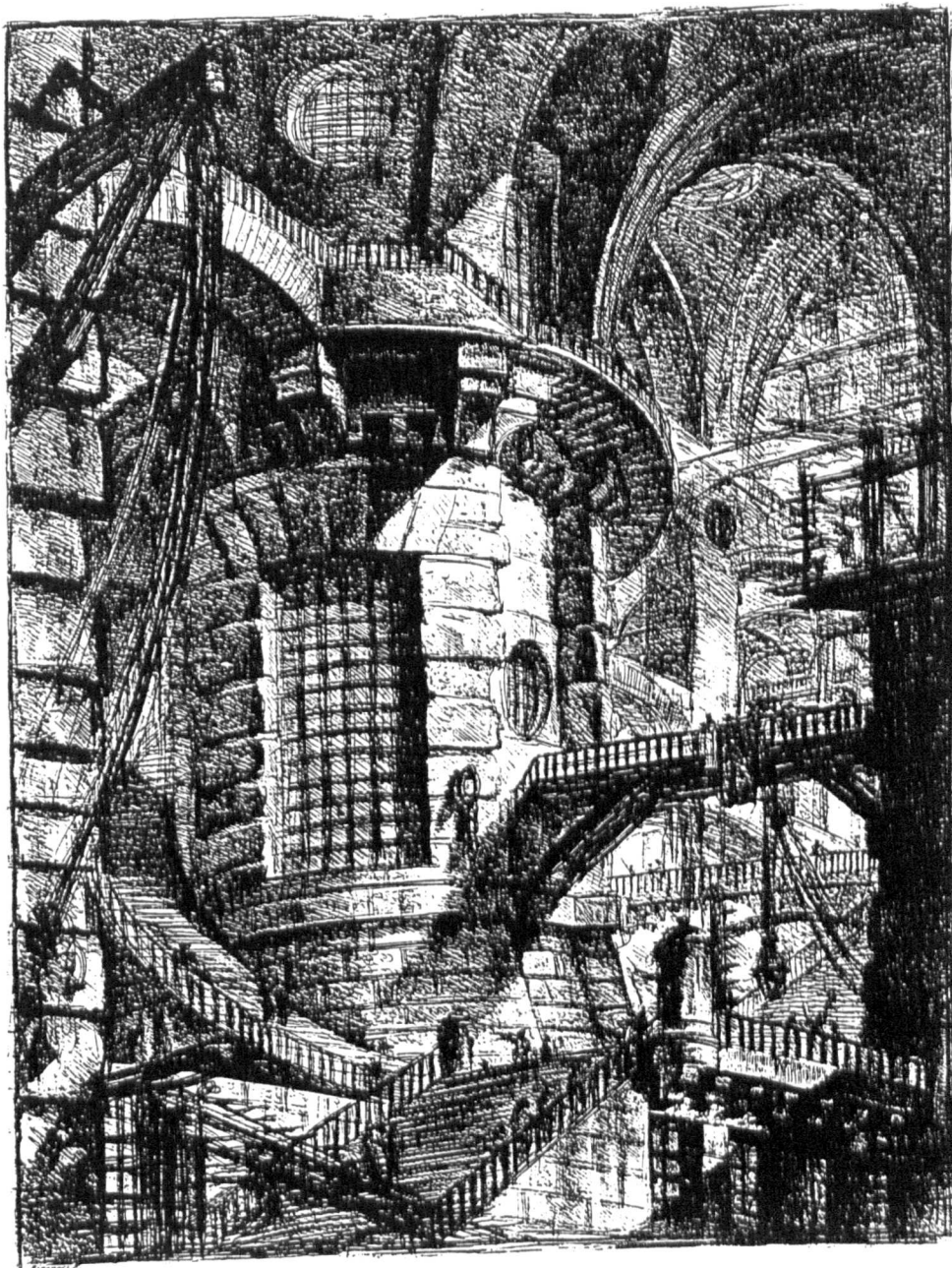
And then while he was yet a student, there came to him a dream-adventure which he has no anxiety to repeat; he began, that is to say, to dream in sequence and thus to lead a double life - one of the day, one of the night - one that he had every reason to believe as the true one, another that he had no means of proving false. I should have said he studies, or was by way of studying, at Edinburgh College, which (it may be supposed) was how I came to know him. Well, in this dream-life, he passed a long day in a surgical theatre, his heart in his mouth, his teeth on edge, seeing monstrous malformations and the abhorred dexterity of surgeons. In a heavy, rainy, foggy evening he came forth into the South Bridge, turned up the High Street, and entered the door of a tall *land*, at the top of which he supposed himself to lodge. All night long, in his wet clothes, he climbed the stairs, stair after stair in endless series, and at every second flight a flaring lamp with a reflector. . . . the gloom of these fancied experiences clouded the day, and he had not shaken off their shadow ere it was time to lie down and to renew them. I cannot tell how long he endured this discipline; but it was long enough to leave a great black blot upon his memory, long enough to send him, trembling for his reason, to the doors of a certain doctor; whereupon with a simple draught he was restored to the common lot of man. ("A Chapter on Dreams", 123-4)

The dream reveals an image of Edinburgh as a dark, gloomy city of endless stairs, but it is even more interesting to find that, in his dream, Stevenson has become a medical student, attending classes in anatomy. The nightmarish quality of the dream is

enhanced by the description of the dreamer's sensations: "heart in his mouth, his teeth on edge" as if the dreamer himself has become the object of "the abhorred dexterity of the surgeons". The "double-life" created by the recurring dream, and the "draught" necessary to restore the dreamer to reality and to "his right self" are, of course, themes repeated in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Though probably coincidental, it is nevertheless evocative that these themes should appear specifically in connection with a dream about Edinburgh and its medical establishment. The dream may well have been inspired by the legend of the body snatchers, but it is also likely that Stevenson had heard contemporary stories about the goings on in the halls and laboratories of the College of Surgeons and the University medical faculty.

In *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Dr. Jekyll has bought his laboratory "from the heirs of a celebrated surgeon", Dr. Denman. The building is still "indifferently known as the laboratory or the dissecting-rooms. . . . and his [Jekyll's] tastes being rather chemical than anatomical, [he] had changed the destination of the block at the bottom of the garden" (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 455). Despite these changes by Jekyll, the sense and identity of a dissecting room lingers in the building; its name is still sometimes "dissecting rooms", and the cellar is full of "crazy lumber" left behind by the surgeon (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 469). As Jekyll's science is literally built upon the foundations of past anatomical experiments, the ghost of Knox haunts his chemical laboratory, and the text evokes this legendary past of Edinburgh's medical establishment.

The trial of Burke and Hare took place in 1829. In this trial, the medical expert was Dr. (later Sir) Robert Christison, at the time Professor of Medical Jurisprudence at Edinburgh University. Christison became Professor of Materia Medica in 1832, retired



Second State.

Figure 7 Piranesi's Prison III: Carcere with a circular tower.

from the University in 1877 and died in 1882.⁶ After the widely reported case of the body snatchers, Christison “was engaged in every case of importance that occurred in Scotland, and his services were also frequently required in English cases of the same description”, including the sensational case of William Palmer in 1856 (*Report of Proceedings*, 13). Although his involvement in the trial of the body snatchers, as well as in other famous criminal cases, enhanced his fame and made his name known to the public, this criminal association is not as relevant here as his later chemical experiments.

In Oscar Wilde’s “Decay of Lying” (1889) Vivian complains of the lack of fanciful lying in modern literature and presents the reality and accuracy of Stevenson’s allegorical romance as an example of “this modern vice”: “There is such a thing as robbing a story of its reality by trying to make it too true: . . . the transformation of Jekyll reads dangerously like an experiment out of the *Lancet*” (“Decay of Lying”, 912). With a Wildean fondness of paradoxes Vivian’s criticism refers to the method of self-experimentation so central in the medical research of the time. Victorian toxicology was based on self-experimentation and the courage and (personal and sometimes non-scientific) motivations of such enthusiastic medical scientists as Dr. Jekyll. This is well illustrated by the numerous series of experiments conducted and reported by medical men during the late 1800s, when cocaine became an object of interest and dispute in British medicine.⁷ Sir Robert Christison became not only the most authoritative toxicologist of his time, but also an internationally famous self-experimenter, known especially for his experimentation with the coca-plant. In a commemorative speech to mark Christison’s fiftieth year as a professor in Edinburgh University, John Inglis, the Chancellor of the University, chose to emphasise

specifically Christison's fame as a self-experimenter: "our guest has experimented with poisons upon his own precious person in a way which you will scarcely believe, but of which you will perhaps allow me to give one or two examples" (*Report of Proceedings*, 11). Inglis's examples include experiments with arsenic and the root of the *Oenanthe crocata*, the latter almost killing Christison and giving rise to a famous anecdote of Christison saving his life by swallowing his shaving water (*Report of Proceedings*, 12). Towards the end of his career Christison became internationally famous for his self-experiments with the coca-leaf, exploring the stimulating and restorative effects of the drug in the 1870s.⁸ Christison, at the age of seventy-nine, would chew coca-leaves, give them to his students, and then set off climbing the Scottish hills. One of his successful experiments consisted of climbing and descending Ben Vorlich on Loch Earn in 1875 without food or drink (Mortimer, 208-209; Christison, ii, 242-243).⁹

Christison's eccentricity, his daring self-experimentation not only with coca but with other lethal drugs, and the fact that he involved his medical students in these experiments, were a source of many stories and anecdotes among his colleagues as well as the medical students of Edinburgh. Robert Louis Stevenson, "the well-known man about town" (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 440), the Velvet Coat, was there to hear them; Stevenson entered Edinburgh University at the age of sixteen and took his final exams for the Scottish bar in 1875, (the year of Christison's coca-experiments), and he retained his connections with Edinburgh, living there at least part of the year, until the early 1880s, when his health drove him to warmer climates.

I would like to suggest, then, that *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and the use Stevenson makes of the drug in this text, reflect not only the self-experimentation used

widely in Victorian toxicology, but the specific tradition of self-experimentation in Edinburgh University in the 1870s led by Dr. Christison. Whether Stevenson's "Brownies" got the idea of the powders from any specific anecdote or story relating to the work of Christison or other Edinburgh toxicologists, cannot here be determined, but the text does evoke this historical reality in a striking way.

III

The title of the novel, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, indicates both a criminal and a medical case, thus pointing towards the ways in which the novel sets itself up as a detective story and concludes as an allegorical confession and a document on a strange toxicological self-experiment. The appearance of the drug in the text marks a point of transition or transformation; Jekyll's potion does not only transform his body and mind but the very text which creates him. For Jekyll, the drug works as a segregating agent; it distils and separates the evil in him into the character of Edward Hyde. In the narrative, its effect appears quite the contrary; it dissolves boundaries and removes categorisations. On the level of the genre, the detective story becomes mixed with science fiction, the thriller with allegory. On the level of the narrative, rational linearity breaks down and the nightmare takes over, dissolving the realist text and its unified narrative voice into a multiple narration and a dislocated narrative voice. At the same time, we have a movement deeper into written documents, letters within letters producing a palimpsest-like vision of endless layered fictions. On the other hand, however, one may see the text becoming liberated from the constraints of the formula of the detective story, of realism, and of the univocal

narrative voice, escaping into an uninhibited pleasure in the fantastic, the magical and the supernatural. As Jekyll is apparently freed from his tight Victorian collar of respectability by a dose of his potion, so the same drug turns the text into a wild nightmare of fiction.

In his article "*Frankenstein*, Detective Fiction, and *Jekyll and Hyde*" (1988), Gordon Hirsch notes that "Throughout the book it is really Utterson who strives to penetrate the mystery represented by Mr. Hyde" (Hirsch, 231). Hirsch goes through a rather cumbersome exercise to "prove" that *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is, indeed, a detective story by applying John Cawelti's somewhat rigid genre formula to it (see also Cawelti, 80-90). However, Hirsch proceeds to make an interesting claim about the novel's "relation to the emergent nineteenth-century genre of detective fiction, to which it belongs, but which it also deconstructs" (Hirsch, 223). He argues that the text breaks the "traditional" formula of detective fiction and concludes that "There is a sense, in other words, of the corrosive presence of gothic passion in a narrative that might look to be organised as detective fiction" (Hirsch, 241). Hirsch is one of several modern (or postmodern) critics who have drawn attention to the "deconstructive power" of "writing, speech [and] language" in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Hirsch, 239). Whereas he attributes this "corrosive presence", leading to a deconstructive gesture, to "gothic passion", Ronald R. Thomas, in "The Strange Voices in the Strange Case: Dr. Jekyll, Mr. Hyde, and the Voices of Modern Fiction" (1988), relates the same phenomenon to an essentially modernist literary tradition.

Hirsch's and Thomas's views reflect a contemporary trend of reading Stevenson's novel, which tends to regard it as a typically post-modernist text where the author's voice is erased and fiction in its self-awareness transcends the limits of

classic realism and becomes metafictional. This trend was perhaps started as early as 1982 by Daniel V. Fraustino, who wrote that in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, “Stevenson clearly implies that words cannot satisfactorily communicate reality and this reality is not answerable to language” (Fraustino, 238). This distinctly post-structuralist approach to Stevenson’s text is repeated in several critical articles of the 1980s; in addition to Thomas and Hirsch, Peter K. Garrett, writes about “a complex weave of voices that resist conservative simplifications” (Garrett, 67). All three critics observe how the novel “breaks” the mold of detective fiction by raising more questions than it answers (Hirsch, 235; Thomas [1988], 77; Garrett, 61); how the identity of the protagonist becomes fragmented and voices in the narrative lose their singular sources and become unlocalisable and multiple (Hirsch, 240; Thomas [1988], 75; Garrett, 63); and how the characters’ as well as the author’s voices become alienated from the text (Thomas [1988], 74, 80; Garrett, 63). All of these developments can be pointed out in the text (and, indeed, the above mentioned critics do this in a most convincing way), but I would like to suggest that it is specifically the drug which makes all this possible. However one wishes to interpret the strange things going on in the narrative of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, they are made possible through Jekyll’s potion, the vehicle of transformation in the text.

While Hirsch maintains that *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* “deconstructs” the established formula of detective fiction (Hirsch, 223), and Thomas argues that Stevenson’s novel “prepares the way . . . for the modernist notion of the autonomy of the text independent of the intentions of its author” (Thomas [1988], 89), I would like to suggest that, like other detective stories discussed in this work, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* uses the themes of detection and drugs not only to create its thrilling and

intoxicating effects on the reader, but also to engage in questions concerning its own identity as a literary text and as popular fiction (this latter may be understood as self-deconstruction which, it may be argued, every literary text performs). In other words, I am not questioning the validity of the observations of such critics as Hirsch, Thomas and Garrett, but rather I wish to point out the specific, drug-related way in which the text achieves the effects experienced and described by these, and other, readers of Stevenson's novel.

When people think of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* they think of its solution, the effects of the transforming drug, and today it is perhaps as impossible to produce a naive reading of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as it is of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. The drug only appears in the second half of the novel, in the two last sections of the text, producing an immediate change in the narrative, which moves from third-person narration to internal first-person narration. The two last sections of the text also break the identity of the novel as a rational detective story and extend it into an effective social and psychological allegory. The change from a third-person narration into first-person internal narrators is also a movement deeper into fiction; Mr. Utterson becomes a reader of the two narratives by Doctors Lanyon and Jekyll and disappears in the text into these documents, without resurfacing (a detail noted also by Hirsch, 242). The significant change in the narrative method further creates a multiple narrative, similar to the technique used by Wilkie Collins in *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*, which in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, too, fragments the narrative and has the effect of disrupting its linear trajectory by disorientating the reader and asking her to piece together and reanalyse the different tellings and re-tellings of events in the tale. These shifts in the narrative form and voice, occurring at the moment when the drug enters

the text, are, I believe, suggestive of the ways in which Jekyll's drug transforms not only Jekyll, but the narrative of the novel.

The vague allusions to Jekyll's science gone wrong and the rift between him and his friend Dr. Lanyon are the first indications of some alien substance working underneath the surface of the text. The significance of a drug is first radically revealed in "The Last Night"; during Jekyll's self-imposed imprisonment and his desperate search for the (im)pure powder, the text establishes a strange exchange of drugs and writing:

We've had nothing else this week back; nothing but papers, and a closed door, and the very meals left there to be smuggled in when nobody was looking. Well, sir, every day, ay, and twice and thrice in the same day, there have been orders and complaints, and I have been sent flying to all the wholesale chemists in town. Every time I brought the stuff back, there would be another paper telling me to return it because it was not pure, and another order to a different firm. This drug is wanted bitter bad, sir, whatever for. (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 465)

The letters to the chemists introduce several interesting questions; the first is the fluent exchange of drugs and writing. According to Poole "Every time I brought the stuff back, there would be another paper telling me to return it because it was not pure". It would appear that he is asked to return the very drug which he has just brought to the door. In other words, there is an ambiguity relating to the "it" he is asked to return, and no drug can satisfy Jekyll's need but is sent away as soon as it is brought to him. Although the drug is wanted "bitter bad" and it is necessary, it can offer no solution or relief to Jekyll's problem, it merely creates a further need for more of itself. A second and more significant question is, who writes these notes which call forth the drugs? At this stage we have Poole's witness's statement that the man inside the cabinet is Hyde and we hear the voice of Hyde behind the closed door, but the notes are written in the

hand of Jekyll and we know that Dr. Jekyll is the chemical expert. Here is the first fundamental ambiguity in the text: who is in Jekyll's room? As we read on, this question gains metaphysical resonances, but at this point in the narrative, the reader has still been led to expect a rational solution including two distinct individuals, Jekyll and Hyde. However, I would like to suggest that the correspondence of writing and drugs through the closed door not only introduces the drug as an element of crucial importance in the plot, but draws attention to the relation between writing and drugs, and begins to draw the veil from the central mystery (or its solution), relating it specifically to questions of authorial identity, writing and chemicals.

The potent powder first appears in the narrative at the culmination of the mystery plot as "various measured heaps of some white salt being laid on glass saucers, as though for an experiment in which the unhappy man had been prevented" (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 469). As Utterson and Poole break down the door of Jekyll's cabinet (his cabinet of chemicals) they are confronted with

the quietest room, you would have said, and, but for the glazed presses full of chemicals, the most commonplace that night in London.

Right in the midst there lay the body of a man sorely contorted but still twitching. They drew near on tiptoe, turned it on its back, and beheld the face of Edward Hyde. He was dressed in clothes of the doctor's bigness; the cords of his face still moved with a semblance of life, but life was quite gone; and by the crushed phial in the hand and the strong smell of kernels that hung upon the air, Utterson knew that he was looking on the body of a self-destroyer. (*Dr.*

Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, 468)

The hidden space behind the closed door is revealed to be commonplace but for drugs, only "the glazed presses full of chemicals" distinguish this cabinet of horrors from other rooms in the city. The significance of the word "self-destroyer" is, of course, later ironically revealed, when it becomes apparent that Jekyll's scientific project has been specifically to dismantle a unified self. "The crushed phial" in the strangely

anonymous hand (the text refers to “his face”, but to “the hand”) announces a suicide and, in passing, the existence of another important, lethal chemical in the narrative. At the same time, the text again hints at the final solution; Hyde is found wearing “clothes of the doctor’s bigness”. The reader is immediately led to draw the conclusion that he is indeed wearing Jekyll’s clothes, and thus the narrative points to the common flesh of these men. Another curious detail in this extract is the “smell of kernels”; kernel is a grain, an inner part of a nut, the opposite of a shell, or metaphorically the central truth, the “kernel of truth”. This odour, apparently rising from the crushed phial, reveals to Utterson that the man before him is a “self-destroyer”, and the aroma of some unnamed poison leads him and the reader towards the hidden truth about Jekyll and Hyde.

The drug, then, appears in the story at a late stage. The events of “The Last Night” are followed by Doctor Lanyon’s and Doctor Jekyll’s posthumous narratives. These narratives are both addressed to Utterson. The first, by Doctor Lanyon is sent to Utterson inside two envelopes, the second is found in Jekyll’s cabinet next to Hyde’s body, also encased in two envelopes together with Jekyll’s will. Utterson, as the addressee of both narratives as well as a recipient of various other documents circulating in the narrative (most notably the letter Carew was carrying on the fatal night of his murder, and the notes from Jekyll and Hyde, which allow him to compare their hand writing), is a detective adopting the position of a reader. At the end of “The Last Night” Utterson “trudged back to his office to read the two narratives in which this mystery was now to be explained” (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 471). In other words, Utterson the amateur detective assumes the reader’s position; he disappears as an active character in the novel and recedes to his armchair as a recipient of narratives.

This disappearance of Utterson, the detective character who so far in the novel has provided the view-point of the narrative, removes a rational focus from the text and leaves the reader, which Utterson, too, now has become, to interpret the last two sections of the novel without guidance, and to solve the mystery of Jekyll and Hyde herself.

Since chemistry is the issue, one would expect Dr. Lanyon as a medical man to be able to explain and give an objective and reliable description of the phenomenon he witnesses. He describes the contents of Jekyll's drawer and the ingredients of the potion (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 472) as well as the "metamorphoses" taking place in the liquid when it is mixed by Hyde (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 474-475), but the actual story relating to the metamorphosis which is the effect of this drug, is beyond his narrative abilities. Instead, Lanyon succumbs to horror, refuses to speak and dies:

What he [Jekyll] told me in the next hour I cannot bring my mind to set on paper. I saw what I saw, I heard what I heard, and my soul sickened at it; and yet, now, when that sight has faded from my eyes I ask myself if I believe it, and I cannot answer. My life is shaken to its roots; sleep has left me; the deadliest terror sits by me at all hours of the day and night; I feel that my days are numbered, and that I must die; and yet I shall die incredulous. (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 475)

What is interesting here is Lanyon's inability to accept Hyde's transformation and Jekyll's story as real. It is not made clear, whether it is specifically the witnessed transformation, or the story by Jekyll which has so shattered Lanyon's mind, but whereas he describes the transformation (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 475), he does not repeat Jekyll's story. While his life has become a waking nightmare, Lanyon will die "incredulous", uncertain whether his experience and the story he heard were real or fiction. Lanyon's death, then, testifies to the lethal, poisonous power of Jekyll's story, the story of Jekyll and Hyde.



Figure 8 Hyde with the transforming drug by Mervyn Peake. Published in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, London: Folio Society, 1948, p. 110.

The technical reason why Lanyon cannot tell Jekyll's story, is, of course, because this revelatory narrative is reserved for Jekyll himself: Dr. Jekyll's "full statement of the case" concludes the novel. In this confessional document, Jekyll records the history of his drug-addiction. It is made clear that Jekyll had a tendency to lead a double-life long before he discovered the transforming drug: "I stood already committed to a profound duplicity of life" (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 476). What is described in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is not *doppelgangers*, nor a transformation of a man into a monster, not even alternating personalities, but rather a fragmentation of a personality due to drug-use. The drug, as Jekyll emphasises, makes no ethical distinctions: "The drug had no discriminating action; it was neither diabolical nor divine" (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 479). It is not supernatural but purely scientific.

Jekyll's progress follows the somewhat typical path of drug-addiction, from initial exhilaration and enjoyment accompanied by a sense of power, towards dependence and self-loathing. His addiction is both psychological and physical. Jekyll cannot resist the pleasures of being Hyde: "I began to be tortured with throes and longings, as of Hyde struggling after freedom; and at last, in an hour of moral weakness, I once again compounded and swallowed the transforming draught". He also compares himself to a more common addict, a drunkard (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 483). The physical dependence becomes manifest when the transformation occurs without the drug and Hyde begins to dominate the shared body of Jekyll and Hyde (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 481, 485, 486). Significantly, here too the novel returns to the haunting theme of nightmares, as when Jekyll's first involuntary transformation into Hyde takes place in sleep:

something still kept insisting that I was not where I was, that I had not wakened where I seemed to be , but in the little room in Soho where I was

accustomed to sleep in the body of Edward Hyde. I smiled to myself, and, in my psychological way, began lazily to inquire into the elements of this illusion, occasionally, even as I did so, dropping back into a comfortable morning doze. I was still so engaged when, in one of my more wakeful moments, my eye fell upon my hand. . . . It was the hand of Edward Hyde". (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 481)

For Jekyll, too, Hyde becomes a matter of nightmares. Here, Hyde does not stand outside the bed as in Utterson's dream, but lies in it. The text continues to evoke the memory of a nightmare and creates a sense of Hyde as a creature of nightmares. This is further emphasised later, when Jekyll describes his return home after the scene of transformation at Dr. Lanyon's house: "I received Lanyon's condemnation partly in a dream; it was partly in a dream that I came home to my own house and got into bed. . . . I awoke in the morning shaken, weakened, but refreshed. I still hated and feared the thought of the brute that slept within me" (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 486). Jekyll acts "partly in a dream" and Hyde is perceived as sleeping within him, just like Jekyll "sleep[s] in the body of Edward Hyde" (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 481), creating a nightmarish double-bind between Jekyll and Hyde.

These scenes, and even more pointedly the events narrated in Dr. Lanyon's document (and repeated in Jekyll's statement), show how the effect of the drug has become the opposite; it is now necessary for Jekyll in order to exist as Jekyll, as his "normal", compound self. Jekyll explains:

In short, from that day forth it seemed only by a great effort as of gymnastics, and only under the immediate stimulation of the drug, that I was able to wear the countenance of Jekyll. At all hours of the day and night I would be taken with the premonitory shudder; above all, if I slept, or even dozed for a moment in my chair, it was always as Hyde that I awakened. (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 486-487)

Not only is sleeping once again associated with the transformation into Hyde, but the paragraph explicitly shows how the drug is now needed to hold the personality and the

self together, when previously it was used to fragment it. Jekyll is losing a significant part of his self and being reduced to the “evil” side of it, Hyde. Alternatively, Jekyll can no longer be distinguished from Hyde, the two forms of a single personality escape beyond control into a continuing play of transformation, an unpredictable and unstoppable circle of change. And as the effects of the drug become uncontrollable, the narrative itself is propelled beyond the control of any univocal authorial narrative voice in Jekyll’s full statement. In this way, one might argue, the drug has a double effect in the text; in Jekyll’s case, it begins as a bold self-experiment, a force for fragmenting the self, and develops through addiction into a necessary substance to keep the self together. On the textual level this development is reflected, in the first instance, in the fragmented multiple narration, which asks the reader to try to piece together the order of events. It is further evident in the growing difficulty of deciding who is talking and who is in control of the narrative.

In Jekyll’s statement the narrator appears to be equally able to distance himself from, as well as to merge with both Jekyll and Hyde. The narrative voice becomes distinct from the alleged first person narrator and wavers not only between Jekyll and Hyde, but an unnamed third. This is well illustrated in Jekyll’s description of the early stages of the experimentation:

The pleasures which I made haste to seek in my disguise were, as I have said, undignified; I would scarce use a harder term. But in the hands of Edward Hyde they soon began to turn towards the monstrous. When I would come back from these excursions, I was often plunged into a kind of wonder at my vicarious depravity. This familiar that I called out of my own soul, and sent forth alone to do his good pleasure, was a being inherently malign and villainous; his every act and thought centred on self; drinking pleasure with bestial avidity from any degree of torture to another; relentless like a man of stone. Henry Jekyll stood aghast at times before the acts of Edward Hyde; but the situation was apart from ordinary laws, and insidiously relaxed the grasp of conscience. It was Hyde, after all, and Hyde alone, that was guilty. Jekyll was

no worse; he woke again to his good qualities seemingly unimpaired. (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 480)

The identity of the narrating Jekyll moves and shifts strangely throughout this paragraph, being lodged simultaneously in Hyde and the speaker, who nevertheless cannot be wholly identified with Jekyll. Jekyll is here fragmented into three, his identity simultaneously inhabiting three characters. To begin with, the "I" is using Hyde as a disguise; he goes forth as Hyde while remaining, at the moment of writing, conscious of not being merely and thoroughly Hyde. At the same time, the "I" becomes alienated from himself as he wonders at "my vicarious depravity". Finally, this alienation is confirmed by the use of the names "Edward Hyde" and "Henry Jekyll" in the latter part of the paragraph, suggesting that the speaker is equally distanced from both names and characters. Whose, then, is this "my own soul", who speaks of both Jekyll and Hyde in the third person? As Peter K. Garrett points out the "unnamed narrator who can speak for either Jekyll or Hyde is matched within the story by an indeterminate figure who is neither" (Garrett, 63). Here we witness in detail the phenomenon which has attracted the attention of many contemporary critics, including Garrett: the way in which Stevenson's text dislocates the narrative voice and detaches it from any univocal source. Initially, this effect is produced through the ambiguity between Jekyll and Hyde, and the impossibility of deciding who is talking.

Jekyll's description of Carew's murder is extremely passionate and brutal, and the scene provides another example of the way in which the narrative voice becomes unlocalisable as the internal narrator expresses emotions more characteristic of Hyde committing the crime than of Jekyll narrating it:

With a transport of glee, I mauled the unresisting body, tasting delight from every blow; and it was not till weariness had begun to succeed that I was suddenly, in the top fit of my delirium, struck through the heart by a cold thrill

of terror. A mist dispersed; I saw my life to be forfeit; and fled from the scene of these excesses, at once glorying and trembling, my lust of evil gratified and stimulated, my love of life screwed to the topmost peg. (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 483)

Jekyll here merges with Hyde, the distance which Jekyll-the-narrator has so carefully maintained so far breaks down and Hyde's feverish passions become his own. Jekyll is telling this story writing in his cabinet behind closed doors, abhorring and fearing the moment when he should again turn into Hyde, yet he is here writing as Hyde, describing the emotions of Hyde in a first person narration. Who is talking here, and ultimately, who is writing Dr. Jekyll's statement?

At the end of the book, the question who is writing or who is talking becomes intertwined with the question who kills whom. Dr. Jekyll concludes his narrative and the novel by saying "this is my true hour of death, and what is to follow concerns another than myself. Here, then, as I lay down the pen, and proceed to seal up my confession, I bring the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to an end" (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 488). Jekyll here abandons himself to Hyde, and as he refers to himself in the third person as "that unhappy Henry Jekyll", the narrative voice is once again distanced from the declared internal narrator (Jekyll's use of the word "that", instead of "this", enhances this sense of separation and distance). By now the narrative voice has become so mixed, Jekyll and Hyde so assimilated in one another and the narrative voice so detached from both, that the answer to the final murder mystery remains undecidable. This dilemma is well illustrated by the various stances adopted by critical readers of the novel. According to Chris Foss, Hyde commits suicide (Foss, 68, also Wheeler, 195), for J. R. Hammond the suicide is Jekyll (J. R. Hammond, 117). Masao Miyoshi considers Jekyll's death not only a suicide but Hyde's murder by Jekyll

(Miyoshi, 105), while Ian Campbell concludes that "The book . . . simply does not give us enough to decide" (Campbell, 61).

These ambiguities concerning the guilty party and the narrative voice are effects of the drug in the narrative. In the plot, the drug provides a device which allows a development of a transformation which is first apparently controllable, but which eventually transcends the limits set by the dispensing chemist, propelling him into an endless series of transformations and dissolving any sense of a unified self. This effect of the drug upon Jekyll is transferred into the text through his first-person narrative, where the pangs and convulsions generated by the drug are echoed throughout the shifting narrative voice and the disappearance of any external reliable narrative authority. Towards the end of his statement Jekyll writes: "About a week has passed, and I am now finishing this statement under the influence of the last of the old powders" (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 488). Jekyll's narrative is thus revealed to be a document produced under the influence of the transforming drug, which has now become a condition of writing. It has become a text-sustaining drug.

Thinking back in terms of drugs, through the narrative of Stevenson's text, we notice how the drug is used in the novel not only as a plot device, a vehicle of transformation from Jekyll to Hyde, but how the ambiguous power of the drug to first generate Hyde and then sustain Jekyll, is reflected on the level of the narrative form. The changes accompanying the appearance of the drug in the text are explicit in the shift from the third person narration to the internal first person narratives, first by an eye-witness, Lanyon, and then by Dr. Jekyll "himself" (the play with the concept of the self within the text dictates the quotation marks). The drug disperses the narrative into subjective multiple narrations convulsed by painful silences, most notably Dr. Lanyon's

inability to tell Jekyll's story, and the silence concerning the actual nature of Hyde's crimes. At the same time, the detective character Utterson disappears into the reading of the novel, becoming a reader of its two last sections. These developments, occurring at the moment of the discovery of the importance of the drug, effectively disrupt the rational linearity of the narrative and indicate a considerable degree of self-awareness in the text.

Jekyll's statement of the full case recounts his developing drug habit and his growing dependence on the drug for his self and identity. This crucial shift in the action of the drug, the way in which it becomes necessary for Jekyll, is a significant development in the novel as the statement is revealed to have been composed while on drugs. In this way, the curious shifts and ambiguities in the internal narrator's voice and identity, noted by several previous critical readers of the novel (Garrett, Thomas, Hirsch), become essentially connected to the effects of the drug upon the writing of the text we read. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is an extremely rich and puzzling story, which uses the detective theme in order to ask us to think of the unthinkable, to abandon logic and experience undecidable duplicities and co-existing irreconcilable oppositions. These effects are achieved through the administration of Jekyll's transforming drug.

Notes

¹ Harry M. Geduld, in his Introduction to *The Definitive Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde Companion* (1983), writes: "Notwithstanding De Quincey's *Opium Eater*, Dr. Jekyll was probably the first significant literary creation to dabble with personality-changing drugs" (Geduld, 3). This aspect of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, its significance as a drug-text, has not received any critical attention, it seems, until now.

² The first version of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, written in the aftermath of the nightmare, was destroyed by Stevenson, after his wife allegedly pointed out the allegorical potential of the tale, which Stevenson had at that point missed. Stevenson then proceeded to rewrite the tale entirely. This story of the origin of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* has been questioned by several critics. As Malcolm Elwin, in *The Strange Case of Robert Louis Stevenson* (1950), points out, "From Stevenson's own account in

"A Chapter on Dreams", it appears unlikely that he 'missed' the point of the allegory in writing the first draft. The allegory was the germ of the story, and he had in fact already attempted the theme in *The Travelling Companion*. Suspicion arises that Fanny's criticism was inspired by reasons which she preferred to conceal" (Elwin, 201-2). Elwin further suggests that "There seems reason to suspect that, in the first draft of *Jekyll and Hyde*, Stevenson drew upon his own experiences of the double life to describe more realistically the excesses indulged by Jekyll in the character of Hyde" (Elwin, 202). This suspicion has later been echoed by William Veeder in "The Texts in Question" (1988); he asks: "Did Robert Louis Stevenson, as Elwin suggests, present in the original pages of *Jekyll and Hyde* an adult view of sexuality, which Fanny perceived as potentially threatening to his public image as author of children's books?" (Veeder, 11). Whatever Fanny Osbourne's motivation was for her criticism which led Stevenson to rewrite his tale, in the published version, the silences in the novel concerning the exact nature of Hyde's excesses and crimes, function as an important narrative device which ignites the reader's imagination. The way in which the text gives the reader room to imagine these unutterable deeds engages the reader in the text far more effectively than a careful and/or detailed description of these deeds would manage to do. This view is also maintained by, for example, Ian Campbell in his "Jekyll, Hyde, Frankenstein and the Uncertain Self" (1994).

Another detail to note here, in relation to the story about the origin of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, is that despite Stevenson's decision to rewrite the tale entirely, it was produced extremely swiftly. If the first draft was produced in a feverish state still affected by the nightmare, the second version appears to have been written with an equally remarkable fluency. Eugene Limedorfer's examination of the remaining manuscript, published in *Bookman* in 1900, reports very few corrections, and he concludes: "When he [Stevenson] wrote it he hardly took time for his meals, he was very much excited and in a sort of frenzy. And still he made very few changes in the manuscript, and whatever changes he did make, they all practically amount only to substituting a better phrase for another one" (Geduld, 102). Thus, despite Stevenson's decision to rewrite the tale, he did not apparently lose his sense of feverish passion and urgency.

³ The word "brownie" is a Scottish name for a domestic fairy.

⁴ Another allusion to Edinburgh in the opening pages of the novel is Enfield returning "from some place at the end of the world" (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 5). World's End Close can be found leading off the Royal Mile in Edinburgh (approximately across the street from the famous John Knox House) marked today by a public house of the same name. It got its name supposedly because it was located near one of the city gates, far away from the city centre. It is also situated close to Chessels Court where Deacon Brodie committed his final burglary before fleeing to Holland.

⁵ Stevenson first wrote a melodrama about Deacon Brodie at the age of nineteen, apparently inspired by the stories told by his nanny as well as by a cabinet in his room made by Deacon Brodie (Hammerton, 85). This melodrama was then reworked by Stevenson and W. E. Henley in 1878 and, as "Deacon Brodie, or, The Double Life", became a modestly popular play.

⁶ All information concerning Dr. Christison's life, career and scientific experiments is derived from his autobiography, edited by his sons in 1885 and 1886, as well as from *Report of the Proceedings at the Public Dinner in Honour of Sir Robert Christison, Bart. . . . on Friday, February 23, 1872*, printed for private circulation in Edinburgh in 1872.

⁷ In addition to Sir Robert Christison, such experiments were conducted and reported, for example, by Paolo Mantegazza in 1859 in Italy, W. A. Hammond in 1886 in America, and by Frank W. Ring in 1887 and Andrew Fullerton in 1891 in Britain (for all of these, see bibliography). And more specifically, self-experiments were conducted by Sir James Young Simpson and Dr. Alexander Hughes Bennett in Edinburgh.

⁸ The fame of Christison's coca experiments is still echoed in William Golden Mortimer's extensive *Peru: History of Coca* (1901), where he writes: "The experience of Sir Robert Christison, of Edinburgh, with the use of coca upon himself and several of his students, is full of interest because of

his extended experiments and the high rank of the investigator" (Mortimer, 208). Mortimer then recounts these experiments in detail.

⁹ Christison first described his experiments in an address to the Botanical Society in Edinburgh in 1875. His work attracted so much attention that he later published a more detailed description in the *British Medical Journal* in 1876 (Vol. 1, p. 527) (Christison, ii, 182). The second volume of his autobiography contains an extract from this article (Christison, ii, 242-243).

5. COCAINE: SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE'S *A STUDY IN SCARLET* (1887) AND *THE SIGN OF FOUR* (1890)

I

Perhaps more than any other instance in the history of popular fiction, the lasting cult of Sherlock Holmes testifies to the intoxicating and addictive power of fiction. Although queues of eager readers lining up before newsagents' shops were a familiar phenomenon during the serialisation of several novels of mass popularity such as Charles Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* in 1836-37 and Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* in 1859-60, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's (1859-1930) Sherlock Holmes stories stand out as a unique literary cult. The fiction of Sherlock Holmes is unique, not only because it has defied time and space in its popularity, but because it has defied the division of fact and fiction. Even today people arrive from distant parts of the world to search for number 221b Baker Street, and letters addressed to Mr. Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson arrive at the office of the Abbey National Building Society occupying the place where 221b would stand, if such an address had ever existed. What is so strange about Sherlock Holmes is not his lasting, global popularity and the numerous reproductions of his adventures in print, and on stage or screen, but the insistent and overwhelming desire of readers to make him real, to transport Conan Doyle's hero from the world of fiction into the reader's reality.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's biographers narrate amusing occasions when the author himself was addressed as Mr. Sherlock Holmes (Carr, 285) or received letters addressed to Holmes (Carr, 250-1; Nordon, 204; Starrett, 94-5). Also, numerous readers approached him either to ask for Holmes's help in solving mysteries or to offer their services as housekeepers and bee-keepers (the hobby Holmes was known to have taken up after his retirement to the Sussex Downs) (Nordon, 205; Starrett, 95). The uproar caused by Holmes's untimely death in the arms of his arch-enemy Professor Moriarty in 1893, is perhaps the occasion which most clearly encapsulates the power of Holmes; men and women dressed for mourning in the streets of London, twenty-thousand readers cancelling their subscription to the *Strand Magazine*, where the Holmes stories had been published, and the office of the magazine flooded with angry letters from disappointed readers (Carr, 104-5; Nordon, 204; Roden, xvi; Higham, 114; Symons [1972], 77; Starrett, 27).¹ According to Charles Higham, "Not until the death of Queen Victoria seven years later was there such widespread mourning" (Higham, 114).

The British Sherlock Holmes Society was founded in 1934 (Symons [1979], 16; Nordon, 210) and today numerous clubs and societies, like the illustrious Baker Street Irregulars, jealously guard the sanctity of the Holmesian canon, and several Sherlockian newsletters, most notable of which are *The Baker Street Journal* published by Fordham University Press and the *Sherlock Holmes Journal* of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London, pour forth details about the life and times of the immortal detective and his faithful companion. Articles and books abound on questions from the university Sherlock Holmes went to (Nordon, 208; Brend) to the actual location of Dr.

Watson's wound by the now-famous jezail-bullet (Sovine).² According to Desmond McCarthy, writing in *The Sunday Times* in 1932,

In no department of research have so many high reputations been lost and won as in Sherlockology. The fierce light of investigation which has been directed upon No. 221B, Baker Street, during the present century, and upon the lives of the two friends inhabiting it, has revealed problems nigh insoluble [*sic.*], and of such intricacy as earlier readers of Dr. Watson's annals, even the most assiduous of them, never dreamt of. (McCarthy, 38)

Already in the 1890s, Conan Doyle was painfully aware of the way in which his fictional hero was escaping from his authorial control. His attempts to rid himself of the ominous power of Holmes are well documented, for example, throughout John Dickson Carr's biography *The Life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* (1949) (see also Pearson, 96; Symons [1979], 15). After the first six detective short stories written for the *Strand Magazine* in 1891, he decided to abandon Holmes (Carr, 65). After thirteen stories he tried again; in *Memories and Adventures* (1924, revised version in 1930) Conan Doyle writes: "At last, after I had done two series of them [Holmes stories] I saw that I was in danger of having my hand forced, and of being identified entirely with what I regarded as a lower stratum of literary achievement" (*Memories and Adventures*, 99). His serious work were his historical novels, most notably, *Micah Clarke* (1889), *The White Company* (1891) and *Sir Nigel* (1906).³ Throughout his career the reluctant author was pulled along in the wake of his successful creation and, in the process, became the best paid short story writer of the period (Carr, 323), perhaps even "the highest paid writer in history so far" (Hardwick, 122). From the 1890s until his death in 1930, Conan Doyle was haunted by Sherlock Holmes and suffered from both a desire and an inability to rid himself of his most successful creation.

However, this “lower stratum” of detective fiction, as Conan Doyle called it, has rid itself of its author to an extent that the name of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle has become a taboo among his most enthusiastic admirers. Rex Stout, a Baker Street Irregular and the author of the famous detective character Nero Wolfe, states that “you’re not allowed to mention the name of Arthur Conan Doyle in the Irregulars because there just wasn’t any such person” (Van Doren, 22).⁴ This illusion of the reversed reality of the fictional character and his creator illustrates in a powerful way the intoxicating and addictive force of the Holmes myth. As T. S. Eliot writes in his Review of *The Complete Sherlock Holmes Short Stories* (1930), “perhaps the greatest of the Sherlock Holmes mysteries is this: that when we talk of him we invariably fall into the fancy of his existence” (Eliot [1930], 17). Eliot is referring to the mystery of the power of fiction over its reader. There appears to be an inherent power in Conan Doyle’s detective fiction which seduces the reader into the fictional world of Holmes and Watson, and which creates an illusion of a dissolution of the boundary between fiction and reality. The Holmes stories persuade us to believe in the reality of the fictional characters and the fictionality of the author; there are thus certain signs of intoxication and addiction apparent in the cult of Sherlock Holmes. Christopher Morley declares in his Preface to *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes* (1930) that “The whole Sherlock Holmes saga is a triumphant illustration of art’s supremacy over life. . . . Holmes is pure anaesthesia. We read the stories again and again” (Morley, 5). Although Morley is here writing about the entertaining escapism offered by the Holmes stories, he is expressing a more exciting and perhaps darker truth; the drug-like power of Conan Doyle’s detective stories.

II

What has become the global phenomenon of Sherlockiana, began very modestly in two short novels written by an unsuccessful physician dreaming of literary fame. Only with the new magazine *The Strand*, where Holmes was reintroduced in short story form, did Conan Doyle's detective suddenly become a cult figure and a cultural myth. Holmes could be had in small monthly doses, like a pill, to fascinate the reader and keep her addiction going. It was specifically in these homeopathic doses that Holmes gained his power over the reading public. However, my study of the Holmes stories will concentrate on the first two novels, *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) and *The Sign of Four* (1890),⁵ because it seems to me that these texts, more than Conan Doyle's later works, address the problematics of reading and, specifically, the reading of detective fiction, in an interesting way, with the help of drugs.

In 1886 Conan Doyle was a newly married young doctor with no patients, but with plenty of literary aspirations. In an interview with *Tit-Bits* in 1900 Conan Doyle describes the creation of Sherlock Holmes:

At the time I first thought of a detective - it was about 1886 - I had been reading some detective stories, and it struck me what nonsense they were, to put it mildly, because for getting the solution of the mystery the authors always depended on some coincidence. . . . I read half-a-dozen or so detective stories, both in French and English, and they one and all filled me with dissatisfaction. ("A Gaudy Death", 189)

The detective stories he read and used as models for his own "improved" version of the genre, were those of Edgar Allan Poe and Émile Gaboriau (*Memories and Adventures*, 74; "The Truth about Sherlock Holmes", 30; "A Gaudy Death", 188, 191). This debt to Poe and Gaboriau is acknowledged in *A Study in Scarlet* when Watson compares Holmes to Poe's Dupin and Gaboriau's Lecoq, and Holmes

remarks, creating a self-reflexive, metafictional moment in the text: "Dupin was a very inferior fellow. . . . Lecoq was a miserable bungler", referring to the triumphs of these detectives in Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) and Gaboriau's *Monsieur Lecoq* (1869; English translation published in Britain 1887). *A Study in Scarlet*, published in 1887, was written as a pot-boiler, after a study of the most popular preceding detective stories. In a curious way, Holmes stories were intended to be a supplement and a substitute for drugs. In *Memories and Adventures* Conan Doyle writes:

I had obtained a fair consignment of drugs on tick from a wholesale house and these also were ranged round the sides of the back room. From the very beginning a few stray patients of the poorest class, some of them desirous of novelty, some disgruntled with their own doctors, the greater part owing bills and ashamed to face their creditor, came to consult me and consume a bottle of my medicine. I could pay for my food by the drugs I sold. It was as well, for I had no other way of paying for it. (*Memories and Adventures*, 65; Rodin and Key, 36)

A Study in Scarlet was intended to add to this source of income (Nordon 32; Starrett, 2; D. R. Cox [1985], 4-5). While Conan Doyle's words illustrate well the reality of Victorian medical practice and the way in which the administration of drugs was its central and crucial part, the extract also suggests that Conan Doyle's detective fiction was originally created to replace and supplement drugs as a source of income.

Arthur Conan Doyle was born in Edinburgh in 1859 and entered the Medical Faculty of Edinburgh University in 1875. He gained his B.M. and Master of Surgery in 1881 and an M.D. in 1885. Two men among the teachers at Edinburgh University have been identified as models for Sherlock Holmes. The surgeon Joseph Bell is the better-known of these, the other one being Sir Robert Christison. As in the case of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the Edinburgh medical establishment has contributed considerably to the emergence of a strong and lasting cultural myth, that of Sherlock Holmes and the

detective hero. In an essay entitled "The Truth about Sherlock Holmes", published in the *National Weekly* in 1923, Conan Doyle acknowledges the influence of Joseph Bell and his scientific method of analysis and diagnosis as a basis for the Holmesian method of detection. He writes: "I thought of my old teacher Joe Bell, of his eagle face, of his curious ways, of his eerie trick of spotting details. If he were a detective he would surely reduce this fascinating but unorganised business to something nearer to an exact science. I would try if I could get this effect" ("The Truth about Sherlock Holmes", 30; see also *Memories and Adventures*, 74-75). Bell was famous for his ability not only to identify the physical state of his patients but their station in life, through his observation of such minute details as cuffs, hats, boots and shape of their hands (for example, Starrett, 4-5; Accardo, 27-30). This is a skill he demonstrated in front of his students, including the young Conan Doyle. Joseph Bell himself did not appear to mind this identification of himself as the model for the famous detective. In *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, Starrett repeats Bell's statement of his methods: "From close observation and deduction, gentlemen, it is possible to make a diagnosis that will be correct in any and every case" (Starrett, 5; see also How, 188). In a similar vein, from the beginning of *A Study in Scarlet* throughout the canon, Sherlock Holmes demonstrates (plausibly or not) "how much an observant man might learn by an accurate and systematic examination of all that came in his way" (*A Study in Scarlet*, 18). It may well be that in his words Bell was echoing Holmes's method made public in *A Study in Scarlet* in 1887, as much as reiterating his own method adopted by Conan Doyle for his fictional hero. However, Conan Doyle did use his teacher as a model for Holmes. Robert Louis Stevenson, a fellow-Edinburghian, noted the similarity between the famous surgeon and the famous detective in a letter to Conan Doyle in 1893; he

remarked: "Only the one thing troubles me: can this be my old friend Joe Bell?" (Nordon, 25), thus also illustrating his own familiarity with the members of the medical faculty of Edinburgh University. This connection between Dr. Joseph Bell and Sherlock Holmes has since become an established view (for example, D. R. Cox [1985], 35; Starrett, 3; Rodin and Key, 199). Owen Dudley Edwards, in both his *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Holmes* (1980) and *The Quest for Sherlock Holmes* (1984), also makes a connection between the work and influence of Sir Robert Christison and the character of Sherlock Holmes (a connection he surprisingly fails to make in relation to Stevenson and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*), arguing that "in fact, Holmes was a product of the Edinburgh medical school" (Edwards [1980], 15) and "Christison is vital to the development of Holmes, but it is the legend rather than the man himself as Arthur might have seen him" (Edwards [1984], 197).

The influence of Conan Doyle's Edinburgh past is most explicit in the beginning of the Holmes saga, in the opening pages of the first novel, *A Study in Scarlet*. In its first chapter, Stamford introduces Watson to Holmes. On the way to meet Holmes, Stamford describes him to Watson and the text makes two direct allusions to Christison's work, both pointed out by Edwards in his notes to the novel (*A Study in Scarlet*, 143n8). Stamford tells Watson of Holmes's eccentricities, mentioning first the "beating [of] the subjects in the dissecting-rooms with a stick . . . to verify how far bruises may be produced after death" (*A Study in Scarlet*, 8-9). This, as Edwards points out (also Edwards [1984], 194; Rodin and Key, 275), is precisely what Christison did during the Burke and Hare trial in 1829 in order to verify the cause of death of the body-snatchers' last victim. Holmes, then, is explicitly assigned

characteristics of the great Scottish toxicologist. This connection is strengthened by another allusion to Christison; Stamford says of Holmes:

Holmes is a little too scientific for my tastes - it approaches to cold-bloodedness. I could imagine his giving a friend a little pinch of the latest vegetable alkaloid, not out of malevolence, you understand, but simply out of a spirit of inquiry in order to have an accurate idea of the effects. To do him justice, I think that he would take it himself with the same readiness. (*A Study in Scarlet*, 8)

Holmes's chemical daring echoes strongly the Edinburgh tradition of self-experimentation, the work of such men as Sir Robert Christison and Sir James Young Simpson.⁶ In the introductory scene in St. Bartholomew's laboratory, there is a further allusion to the work of Sir Robert Christison, apparently unnoticed by Edwards. Holmes is engaged in the development of a blood test, which would allow one to identify blood stains. Holmes, following the tradition of self-experimentation, bleeds himself to get blood for his intricate chemical experiment. Christison was also involved in experimentation with blood (Christison, ii, 189, 392). These allusions to the work of Christison suggest that Conan Doyle harnessed his experiences in Edinburgh not only by using Dr. Joseph Bell as a model for his detective, but also by referring explicitly and implicitly to the work of Sir Robert Christison. Whereas Edwards makes a further attempt to link Christison to Holmes by suggesting that "Christison's consultative capacity seems the direct origin of Sherlock Holmes's" (Edwards [1980], 15), I believe that the literary significance of Conan Doyle's allusions lies more in the way in which he emphasises a connection between his detective hero and toxicology, rather than in the possible links to a historical reality.

We first meet Holmes in a chemical laboratory in St. Bartholomew's hospital, "a lofty chamber, lined and littered with countless bottles. Broad, low tables were scattered about, which bristled with retorts, test-tubes, and little Bunsen lamps with

their flickering flames” (*A Study in Scarlet*, 9). Edwards, in his notes to *A Study in Scarlet*, wishes to identify this space as an Edinburgh scene, writing: that “the environment is certainly bleak enough for Edinburgh’s Old College or Royal Infirmary” (*A Study in Scarlet*, 142n8). Whether Conan Doyle was thinking of his studying days while writing this particular scene, is not as interesting here as the fact that the reader first meets Holmes in a chemical laboratory, surrounded by drugs and poisons, conducting a chemical experiment “bending over a distant table absorbed in his work” (*A Study in Scarlet*, 9). Although he is the only person working in the room, at “a distant table”, the plural of “the Bunsen lamps with their flickering flames” as well as “tables . . . scattered about” suggest a scene of both feverish activity and alchemistic passion. Holmes offers to shake hands with Watson:

sticking a small piece of plaster over the prick on his finger. ‘I have to be careful,’ he continued, turning to me with a smile, ‘for I dabble with poisons a good deal.’ He held out his hand as he spoke, and I noticed that it was all mottled over with similar pieces of plaster, and discoloured with strong acids. (*A Study in Scarlet*, 11)

Holmes’s hands testify to his continuing interest and expertise in the field of chemistry and drugs. At this very moment of introduction, in the first handshake, drugs are strongly present. In these opening pages of *A Study in Scarlet* Conan Doyle creates a strong association between his protagonist and the medical profession, specifically the fields of chemistry and toxicology. While the scene suggests that drugs are to play a significant role in the story of *A Study in Scarlet*, it also echoes Conan Doyle’s own experiences and interests in the field of *materia medica*.

In their book *Medical Casebook of Doctor Arthur Conan Doyle* (1984), Alvin E. Rodin and Jack D. Key recount the medical career of Conan Doyle, which only lasted for fifteen years, from 1876, when he entered Edinburgh University to study

medicine, until 1891, when he declared himself a professional writer. From Rodin and Key, we learn that Conan Doyle gained his best grades in subjects related to drugs; “he had two excellent grades of B - one in Chemical Testing and the other in Practice of Physic” (Rodin and Key, 13); he also received a B in Materia Medica (Rodin and Key, 366).⁷ These grades were apparently achieved with the help of poetry:

Slow Arsenic Poisoning

Vomiting - plenty of stools
Pain in the stomach & bowels
Pulse wiry. Forehead feels stuffy
Eyes are red and are puffy,
The last of the symptoms may seem a
Slight one, and that is eczema.

In his essay “Doyle’s Drug Doggerel” (1981), Donald C. Black reproduces and discusses remarks Conan Doyle wrote in the margins and fly-leaves of his *The Essentials of Materia Medica and Therapeutics* (1872), one of his textbooks at the university.⁸ These markings include the above mnemonic poem on the symptoms of arsenic poisoning, as well as the following poem on the effects of opium:

Opium

I’ll tell you a most serious fact,
That opium dries the mucous tract,
And constipates and causes thirst,
And stimulates the heart at first,
And then allows its strength to fall,
Relaxing the capillary wall.
The cerebrum is first affected,
On tetanus you mustn’t bet,
Secretions gone except the sweat.
Lungs and sexuals do not forget.

These cheerfully morbid poems, although not of high artistic value, nevertheless show, first of all, that Conan Doyle was naturally familiar with the effects of various drugs used in Victorian medicine, and, secondly, that he seemed to regard his studies in

toxicology and materia medica with a degree of playfulness. This attitude is further manifest in the picture he drew on the occasion of his gaining his diploma in 1881, entitled "Licensed to kill".

Among Conan Doyle's contributions to medical research, the more interesting ones are his M.D. dissertation, entitled "An Essay upon the Vasomotor Changes in Tabes Dorsalis" in 1885, and a letter "Gelsemium as a Poison" to the editor of the *British Medical Journal* in December 1879, during the third year of his studies.⁹ Both of these research projects involved self-experimentation with lethal drugs; his dissertation with nitro-glycerine (Rodin and Key, 93), the published letter with gelsemium. In the latter case, Conan Doyle continued to take increasing amounts of gelsemium to "ascertain how far one might go with the drug" ("Gelsemium as a Poison," 483), until diarrhoea and headache convinced him to stop. By this time he had reached a dose well above the necessary amount to kill an adult man (Rodin and Key, 83).¹⁰ Rodin and Key write about Conan Doyle's medical experimentation: "First, it is an apparent example of the selfless contribution of a medical student to the delineation of the side effects of a drug. Second, it suggests a curiosity and dedication to medical knowledge than Conan Doyle did not often exhibit" (Rodin and Key, 82). However, they continue by referring to Conan Doyle's fascination with danger; wars, sports and crime (Rodin and Key, 83-4). These examples, his "medical poetry" as well as his research and studies, suggest that Conan Doyle's medical zeal is coloured by a daring and exuberance as well as shadowed by a curiosity and desire to court danger, to "dabble with poisons" (*A Study in Scarlet*, 11).

Considering Conan Doyle's knowledge and interest in drugs, it is not surprising to find that his detective stories are riddled with them. In an appendix to *Medical*

Casebook of Doctor Arthur Conan Doyle (1984), Rodin and Key list thirty different drugs appearing in the sixty Sherlock Holmes stories. I would like to add tobacco, or nicotine, to their list to make the figure thirty-one. Of this abundance, a total of twelve, and if we count in tobacco thirteen, drugs are present in the first two novels *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) and *The Sign of Four* (1890). According to Rodin and Key these drugs include: alcohol, castor oil, cooling medicine, iodoform, morphine, opium, quinine, silver nitrate, strychnine, alkaloid, aqua tofana, a "strychnine-like" poison, and, in addition, tobacco (Rodin and Key, 381-2). This is quite an astonishing amount of intoxicating and dangerous substances for two short novels, and strongly suggest that drugs play an important role in the Sherlock Holmes stories. Surprisingly, however, the most important drug in the Holmes canon has been left out of Rodin and Key's extensive list; that is cocaine.

Sherlock Holmes uses cocaine explicitly only in *The Sign of Four*. In *A Study in Scarlet* Watson merely hints at the possible presence of drugs remarking: "I have seen such a dreamy, vacant expression in his eyes, that I might have suspected him of being addicted to the use of some narcotic, had not the temperance and cleanliness of his whole life forbidden such a notion" (*A Study in Scarlet*, 13). Although Watson here dismisses the possibility of narcotics, his observation, as we shall see later, is extremely suggestive. Holmes's drug habit is also referred to in some of the stories published in the first collection *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892). In the opening of the first Holmes short story written for the *Strand Magazine*, "A Scandal in Bohemia" (1891), Watson describes Holmes as "buried among his books, and alternating from week to week between cocaine and ambition, the drowsiness of the drug, and the fierce energy of his own keen nature" (*The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, 5).



Licensed to kill

Figure 9 “Licensed to kill” by Arthur Conan Doyle in 1881, reprinted in *Memories and Adventures*.

Holmes's drug habit appears well-established, in *The Sign of Four* Watson informs us that Holmes injects cocaine "three times a day for many months" (*The Sign of Four*, 3). Despite this apparently firm dependence, Holmes manages his drug addiction well and in "The Man with the Twisted Lip" (1891), meeting Watson in an East End opium den, remarks lightly: "I suppose, Watson, . . . that you imagine that I have added opium-smoking to cocaine injections and all the other little weaknesses on which you have favoured me with your medical views" (*The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, 127). In Conan Doyle's stories, these references to Holmes's cocaine use show Holmes's habit as established and enjoyed. The master detective appears in control of his own dangerous vice. As we look more closely at *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of Four*, both saturated with various drugs and poisons, we see how Holmes's drug use is related to detective work.

Although the drug habit appears in comparatively few of the sixty Holmes stories, this characteristic, together with his violin-playing, have remained important features reflecting the decadent artistic side of the master detective. Holmes's cocaine use has also been the inspiration for an amusing parody by Nicholas Meyer entitled *The Seven Per Cent Solution* (1974), involving in its cast Sigmund Freud, another famous cocaine user (see Thornton). This drug connection between the famous men has been described by David F. Musto in "A Study in Cocaine: Sherlock Holmes and Sigmund Freud" (1968) and Michael Shepherd in "Sherlock Holmes and the Case of Dr. Freud" (1985). However, generally very little attention has been paid to the detective's drug habit. An "occasional correspondent", who claims his "Was Sherlock Holmes a Drug Addict?" to be the first study on the topic, prudently concluded his essay in the *Lancet* in 1936 by declaring: "Holmes was pulling the good Watson's leg" ("Was Sherlock

Holmes a Drug Addict?", 1555) and was not using cocaine at all. Modern critics, like Erik Routley in *The Puritan Pleasures of the Detective Story* (1972), tend to dismiss it as "a barbarous detail which contributes to the atmosphere of mystery that surrounds him" (Routley, 28), or as an "idiosyncras[y] of genius" (Macdonald, 298), but as nothing more than that. Needless to say, I strongly disagree with this view and hope to show that cocaine is quite an important element in the structure of Holmes's character.

Holmes's cocaine use could, of course, be seen as another allusion to the work of Sir Robert Christison, whose cocaine experiments in 1875 (published in 1876) were world-famous. Holmes, however, does not eat cocaine but injects it. In the opening of *The Sign of Four*,

Sherlock Holmes took his bottle from the corner of the mantelpiece, and his hypodermic syringe from its neat morocco case. With his long, white, nervous fingers he adjusted the delicate needle, and rolled back his left shirt-cuff. For some little time his eyes rested thoughtfully upon the sinewy forearm and wrist all dotted and scarred with innumerable puncture marks. Finally, he thrust the sharp point home, pressed down the tiny piston, and sank back into the velvet-lined arm-chair with a long sigh of satisfaction. (*The Sign of Four*, 3)

Conan Doyle opens his detective story with this extremely sensuous description of the detective's drug use. The setting, "the velvet-lined arm-chair" and the "morocco case", as well as Holmes's "long, white, nervous fingers" and his "long sigh of satisfaction", suggest a luxurious, decadent and aesthetically satisfying act. However, Holmes is not enjoying anything as "traditionally" decadent as the "heavy opium-tainted cigarette[s] of Lord Henry Wotton in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 8), but a more scientific as well as a more novel way of taking drugs.

Cocaine was first extracted from coca leaves in 1860 by Albert Niemann (Berridge and Edwards, 217; Musto [1968], 27 gives the erroneous year 1859), and it became commercially available in 1884, only six years before the publication of *The*

Sign of Four. The 1870s and 1880s were decades of intensive research and debate on cocaine. As the experimentation moved from the eating of cocaine to subcutaneous injections of the drug, medical opinion moved from celebrating cocaine as a panacea to condemning it as a dangerous, addictive substance.¹¹ In "Why Did Sherlock Holmes Use Cocaine?" (1988) D. F. Musto suggests that "Holmes's use of cocaine was not reprehensible. Leading physicians much more prominent than the wise Dr. Watson recommended cocaine for the reasons Holmes used it" (Musto [1988], 216) as a stimulant, against depression. The disappearance of cocaine from the Holmes stories in the 1890s, according to Musto reflects the changing attitude to the drug (Musto, [1988], 216).¹² In a similar vein, Virginia Berridge and Griffith Edwards, in their *The Opium and the People* (1981), remark that "Conan Doyle's portrayal of his character's cocaine use was a good indication of changed medical attitudes to the drug; but it was no index of recreational cocaine use" (Berridge and Edwards, 224). Berridge and Edwards emphasise that "the cocaine 'scene' was almost non-existent" (*Ibid.*), and despite the various coca products available in the 1870s and 1880s the recreational use of cocaine was largely limited to the medical establishment and never reached the proportions of opium use. At the same time, they suggest that Holmes's drug habit and its disappearance reflect the changing attitude towards cocaine. However, it appears that by 1890 when Holmes emerges as a hero with a drug-habit (since it is only suspected by Watson in *A Study in Scarlet*), cocaine had already lost its position as a cure-all and had become a hotly disputed, controversial drug.

In 1886, in an essay entitled "Coca, Cocaine and Its Salts", William Martindale (who became the president of the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain in 1889) suggests that "As a beverage to substitute for tea or coffee, a decoction or an infusion

of Coca is worthy of attention at the present time” (Martindale, 43; see also, Musto [1968], 28). W. A. Hammond, also in 1886, “regarded [the cocaine habit] as similar to the tea or coffee habit, and unlike opium habit”, which was recognised as a detrimental vice (W. A. Hammond, 250). At the same time, Hammond and the New York Neurological Society with him, were aware of the dangers of cocaine in conjunction with morphine: whereas a “pure cocaine addiction was rare . . . that of the cocaine-morphine habit was not, and was a very destructive and pernicious habit” (W. A. Hammond, 252; see also Norman, 195). In the early 1880s, cocaine was used as a medicine to cure morphine addiction,¹³ and this close connection between morphine and cocaine caused further negative associations to be attached to cocaine (Berridge and Edwards, 222). In *The Sign of Four*, Watson, observing Holmes injecting cocaine, asks: “Which is it to-day . . . morphine or cocaine?” (*The Sign of Four*, 3). This is the only reference in Conan Doyle’s stories to Holmes’s morphine habit; however, the inclusion of this short question by Watson, suggests that Holmes’s drug habit was not meant to be as harmless and acceptable as Musto suggests, when he describes it as “not reprehensible” (Musto [1968], 216). Instead, Conan Doyle’s inclusion of morphine as a drug enjoyed by Holmes, gives a further culturally negative colouring to his drug-use.

Although cocaine was quite a phenomenon in the 1880s and 1890s, was declared a cure from cancer to hay-fever and impotence, and spread to products like coca-wine, sweets and, of course, Coca-Cola (from which it was left out in 1906), this celebration of cocaine as a panacea and a leisure substitute for tea or coffee, quickly began to turn sour towards the end of the 1880s when its addictive properties and long-term effects became known. Already in 1887 words of warning were heard in the

medical papers: "Surely it is high time to draw the line, to revoice a warning as to the use and abuse of this valued but at the same time toxic drug" (Mattison, 1024). In his article, "Cocaine Dosage and Cocaine Addiction" published in the *Lancet* 21 May 1887, Mattison quotes Erlenmeyer calling cocaine "the third scourge of humanity", alcohol and opium being the first two (Mattison, 1025). *The Consumers Union Report on drugs* (1972), in its short social history of narcotics, further confirms that "By 1890, the addicting and psychosis-producing nature of cocaine was well understood in medical circles" (Brecher, 353; see also Inglis, 126-127). Watson, too, in *The Sign of Four* warns Holmes about the detrimental effects of the drug: "Count the cost! Your brain may, as you say, be roused and excited, but it is a pathological and morbid process, which involves increased tissue-change and may at least leave a permanent weakness" (*The Sign of Four*, 4). This remark by Watson has made Rodin and Key conclude that "Conan Doyle's knowledge of cocaine and its addictive powers was well in advance of that of most practitioners of his time" and that he was "quite aware of the detrimental effects of cocaine well before the general recognition at the turn of the century" (Rodin and Key, 258). However, the medical writings show clearly that reaction against cocaine had already raised its head by the 1880s.

The subcutaneous injection of cocaine remained a distinctly medico-scientific method of administering the drug, and it was mostly used as a local anaesthetic in operations. Injections of cocaine by a hypodermic syringe were first conducted by William Halsted in America in 1884 in a series of self-experiments on the anaesthetic qualities of cocaine. In Europe, its value in anaesthesia was demonstrated by Dr. Carl Koller in 1884, and it was thereafter widely used in surgical operations (for Sigmund Freud's share in the discovery see, for example, Berridge and Edwards, 220).¹⁴

Although the psychological and physical effects of cocaine injections were explored by such enthusiastic self-experimenters as W. A. Hammond, who reported his findings to the New York Neurological Society in 1886, there was no notable recreational use of cocaine by injection (Berridge and Edwards, 223-4), and Sherlock Holmes seems to have been an exceptional case.

Already in 1890, when *The Sign of Four* was published, and increasingly in the following years, cocaine was a controversial drug, its advantages and dangers debated and argued within the medical establishment. I do not agree with Musto, that Holmes's drug habit would have been regarded as "not reprehensible" but acceptable (Musto [1988], 216) and is today to be read, at the most, as a bad habit and a Victorian quirk. Instead, I maintain that it is to be seen as a dangerous and transgressive habit suggestive of a morally ambiguous even self-destructive character. Furthermore, as I will show in the following pages, it plays a significant role in Conan Doyle's detective stories.

The quite overwhelming amount of drugs featured in *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of Four*, as listed by Rodin and Key in *Medical Casebook of Doctor Arthur Conan Doyle* (1984) and supplemented by tobacco and cocaine left out by these authors, clearly indicates that drugs play an important role in these two earliest Sherlock Holmes stories. In my reading of the novels, I hope to show that drugs are not featured merely as a convenient murder weapon and a hobby of the detective, but that they affect the very structure of the texts, suggesting an interesting link between the idea of a drug and the genre of detective fiction. In his article, "On the Aetiology of Drug-Addiction" (1932) in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Edward Glover points out that: "any substance can function as a drug" (Glover, 318), whether

it is a material product, like cocaine or chocolate, or a “psychic substance,” like violence, sex or reading. According to Glover: “The substitution of psychic ‘substances’ for concrete [ones] is not difficult to demonstrate. The activity of reading is perhaps the simplest example” (Glover, 317). Conan Doyle’s Holmes stories reveal two occasions which may be regarded as just such substitutions; first, I shall suggest that in Conan Doyle’s novels the work of detection is presented as a drug-like “psychic substance”, as a substitute to the material, or concrete, drug of cocaine. And second, I shall discuss “the simplest example” of fiction as a drug enjoyed by reading; in other words, how Conan Doyle’s texts offer themselves to us as drug-like substances and how they are received as a drug generating the intoxication and addiction so powerfully manifest in the passions of Sherlockiana.

III

A Study in Scarlet was published in *Beeton’s Christmas Annual* in 1887 and in book form in 1888. The second novel, *The Sign of Four* was written for the American *Lippincott’s Magazine* and published almost simultaneously as a book in 1890.¹⁵ Dorothy L. Sayers’s enthusiasm is entirely misplaced, when she writes: “In 1887 *A Study in Scarlet* was flung like a bombshell into the field of detective fiction” (Sayers, 69).¹⁶ In truth, both novels passed somewhat unnoticed in the flow of low brow detective literature. *A Study in Scarlet* was accepted by the publishers in September 1886 on the condition, that it would not be published until the following year, because the market was already flooded with such literature. Both novels were seen as typical

detective novels of the time, and they were sold as cheap yellow-back thrillers on railway bookstalls as doses of escapism for London commuters.

A Study in Scarlet and *The Sign of Four* are murder mysteries with the central murders committed with poison. In these novels, Conan Doyle uses drugs as a murder weapon initially to create a grotesque aura around the crimes and, thereby, drugs function as a source of suspense and horror. In *A Study in Scarlet* Watson describes the body of E. J. Drebber, the murder victim:

On his rigid face there stood an expression of horror, and as it seemed to me, of hatred, such as I have never seen upon human features. This malignant and terrible contortion, combined with the low forehead, blunt nose, and prognathous jaw, gave the dead man a singularly simious and ape-like appearance, which was increased by his writhing, unnatural posture. I have seen death in many forms, but never has it appeared to me in a more fearsome aspect than in that dark, grimy apartment, which looked out upon the main arteries of suburban London. (*A Study in Scarlet*, 28)

The dead body testifies to violence from the inside; poison working from within the living system. We may detect an echo of Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in the "simious and ape-like appearance" of the dehumanised features of the dead man.¹⁷ These ideas of inner violence and double-existence are enhanced by the image of London in this paragraph; the empty house which has been the stage of an abominable crime stands in the middle of "suburban London", a familiar setting for most readers of *A Study in Scarlet*. Conan Doyle is here employing a technique typical to sensational fiction effectively contrasting the realist setting with a highly sensational and exciting event, a technique used also, for example, in Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860). The blood which is found in the room, the "numerous gouts and splashes of blood which lay all around" (*A Study in Scarlet*, 29), as the culprit's excitement has caused him to have a nose-bleed, contrasted with the "main arteries of suburban London", produces an image of an haemorrhage in the body of the metropolis. In *A Study in*

Scarlet murder creates its own unique and grotesque space in life; enclosed within the busy London this “dark, grimy apartment” is like an ulcer, a wound within the urban life surrounding it.

Also in *The Sign of Four*, the dead Bartholomew Sholto loses his human qualities in death by poison: his “features were set, however, in a horrible smile, a fixed and unnatural grin, which in that still and moonlit room was more jarring to the nerves than any scowl or contortion. . . . not only his features, but all his limbs, were twisted and turned in the most fantastic fashion” (*The Sign of Four*, 37, 38). In addition, Sholto’s body is found in his chemical laboratory, amidst

Bunsen burners, test-tubes, and retorts. In the corners stood carboys of acid in wicker baskets. One of these appeared to leak or to have been broken, for a stream of dark-coloured liquid had trickled out from it, and the air was heavy with a peculiarly pungent, tar-like odour. (*The Sign of Four*, 37)

The odour is that of creosote, and on the floor the murderer’s footprint has been imprinted in the spilt chemical. This sets Holmes and Watson, together with Toby the bloodhound, off on a drug trail as they follow the creosote track across London (*The Sign of Four*, 54, 58). The mystery, “the pretty little intellectual problem” (*The Sign of Four*, 55), is a trail marked by a chemical substance, leading towards Tonga, the exotic and murderous native of the far-away Andaman Islands, who is “as venomous as a young snake” and whose poisonous darts had killed Sholto. The mystery is saturated with poisons.

The scene of the crime in *The Sign of Four* is a similar kind of a closed space as in *A Study in Scarlet*; the Sholtos’ house “was girt round with a very high stone wall topped with broken glass. A single narrow iron-clamped door formed the only means of entrance” (*The Sign of Four*, 32). Once within the wall, “The vast size of the building, with its gloom and its deathly silence, struck a chill to the heart” (*The Sign of*

Four, 33-34), and Holmes, Watson and Miss Mary Morstan see a strange upturned field, every bit of the land within the walls having been dug up by the Sholto brothers in search of their father's treasure (*The Sign of Four*, 35). The Sholtos' place, like the poisoned corpses themselves, implies inner violence, chaos and destruction within closed walls.

The effects of the poison in the victims' bodies are repeated in the description of the scenes of the crimes. This would suggest an analogous relation between the poison in the human system and the crime in the society. In each case the murders create their own space; the crime generates its own enclave, which is contrasted with the "ordinary" or "normal" life going on outside its walls. The description of the murders invites us to think about an alien substance working deep within the natural living system, whether it is a human body, a city or a text. In this poisonous world it is Sherlock Holmes's task to administer a solution to the diseased state of affairs by reading and interpreting clues, and by producing a convincing, harmonious narrative of the crime.

In the introductory scene at St. Bartholomew's Hospital in *A Study in Scarlet*, Conan Doyle indicates a curious connection between crime, drugs and texts. Holmes lists criminal cases where his newly-developed blood test "would have been decisive" (*A Study in Scarlet*, 11). Stamford addresses Holmes:

"You seem to be a walking calendar of crime," said Stamford with a laugh. "You might start a paper on those lines. Call it the 'Police News of the Past.'" "Very interesting reading it might be made, too," remarked Sherlock Holmes, sticking a small piece of plaster over the prick on his finger. "I have to be careful," he continued, turning to me with a smile, "for I dabble with poisons a good deal." He held out his hand as he spoke, and I noticed that it was mottled over with similar pieces of plaster, and discoloured with strong acids. (*A Study in Scarlet*, 11)

Stamford's remark is foreshadowing Watson's task as the narrator of various stories of Holmes's adventures, which would provide interesting reading as well as a kind of "calendar of crime". It also connects with the 'calendar of poisons' on Holmes's hand marked by small pieces of plaster. Crime, reading and drugs are all brought together in this short exchange of words. Crime literature, together with drugs are the two areas of Holmes's expertise. When Watson produces a list of Holmes's accomplishments trying to solve the enigma of his flatmate's occupation, it reads:

Sherlock Holmes - his limits

. . . Well up in belladonna, opium, and poisons generally. . . . Knowledge of Chemistry - Profound. . . . Knowledge of sensational literature - Immense. He appears to know every detail of every horror perpetrated in the century. (*A Study in Scarlet*, 16)

In all other fields Holmes's knowledge is "feeble," "variable," "unsystematic," or simply "Nil." (*Ibid.*) From the beginning of *A Study in Scarlet*, then, there exists a connection between crime, drugs and popular literature; all three are presented as important fields of expertise for a detective. At the same time, Holmes's relation to popular fiction, as it appears in the early pages of *A Study in Scarlet*, tends to position him in an interesting way somewhere between fact and fiction. "Sensational Literature", for Watson, appears to refer to both fiction and fact; whereas the term refers distinctly to the genre of sensation fiction and the proliferating shilling-shockers related to it (one of which *A Study in Scarlet* is), the qualifying sentence concluding "every horror perpetrated in the century" appears to refer to crimes committed in historical reality. This line where "Sensational Literature" is associated with "real" crime draws a careful reader to think about the relation of Conan Doyle's text to the surrounding reality. Conan Doyle also makes a clear distinction between "Literature", in which Holmes's knowledge is "Nil", as opposed to "Sensational Literature" (*A*

Study in Scarlet, 16), which Holmes knows well, as he soon afterwards demonstrates in a discussion about Gaboriau and Poe (*A Study in Scarlet*, 21). This discussion further enhances the note of self-reflexivity in the text.

Watson discovers Holmes's occupation as a detective through an exercise of literary criticism; he reads and criticises an article in the newspaper, and it turns out to have been written by Holmes. In this article Holmes sets down the scientific principles of his detective method, which Watson initially declares "ineffable twaddle" (*A Study in Scarlet*, 18). Conan Doyle's text is presented as Watson's narrative, which directly quotes an article by Holmes, published in an unnamed magazine. This text within a text, with the interchanging roles of the various authors and readers is also an effective way of making the reader of *A Study in Scarlet* aware of questions concerning reading and writing.

The reading of the article leads into a discussion about detection, and Watson remarks: "You remind me of Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin. I had no idea that such individuals did exist outside stories" (*A Study in Scarlet*, 21). This remark distances Holmes from Dupin as a "more real" character at the same time, however, reminding us of Holmes's fictionality in an ironic way. Holmes responds by severely criticising first Dupin and then also Gaboriau's Lecoq. According to Holmes, Gabouriau's work "might be made a text-book for detectives to teach them what to avoid" (*Ibid.*). Holmes's apparent earnestness in his criticism, his "sardonic" sniffing and "angry voice" suggest a proximity to Dupin and Lecoq, setting all three detectives as rivals and undoing the distance created by Watson's remark about Holmes existing "outside of stories" as opposed to his two predecessors. Again, Holmes is strangely located somewhere between fact and fiction, on the borderlines of stories and reality. Watson

is upset "at having two characters whom I had admired treated in this cavalier style" (*Ibid.*); the character of Holmes has not yet gained his admiration. This final remark concludes a scene which demonstrates how Conan Doyle was engaged in questions concerning the role and functions of popular fiction, and introduced these questions into his writing.

The opening pages of *The Sign of Four* repeat these themes and also present a scene where reading is brought together with drugs and a meta-fictional element within the text. As Watson observes Holmes inject cocaine in the opening scene of the novel and criticises him for his vice, the detective "raised his eyes languidly from the old black-letter volume which he had opened" (*The Sign of Four*, 3). Holmes has moved straight from cocaine to reading, he is reading under the influence of the drug.

Holmes and Watson's debate on the detective's drug habit turns into a question about popular fiction; more specifically, into a discussion on Watson's "small brochure with the somewhat fantastic title of 'A Study in Scarlet'" (*The Sign of Four*, 5). While this discussion lets Conan Doyle advertise his earlier novel, it also draws attention, once again, to the problematics of fiction. Holmes accuses Watson of making 'A Study in Scarlet' too romantic and too sensational, Watson responds:

'But the romance was there,' I remonstrated. 'I could not tamper with the facts.'

'Some facts should be suppressed, or, at least, a just sense of proportion should be observed in treating them. The only point in the case which deserved mention was the curious analytical reasoning from effects to causes, by which I succeeded in unravelling it'. (*Ibid.*)

This exercise in literary criticism plays with the ideas of fiction and fact; Watson claims his romantic, unrealistic narrative adheres to the facts, while Holmes suggests that a more unrealistic treatment would have been less fictional and more truthful. Both novels, *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of Four*, open with scenes introducing drugs

as a significant element in the text, and continue by immediately moving to consider questions of reading and fiction. I would like to suggest, once again, that drugs provide a means to explore these questions concerning the nature of reading, a means to consider, more specifically, the reading of these very novels. In these novels, drugs in the text are a vehicle for their self-exploration and self-awareness, even self-detection; through drugs the texts discuss their own effects upon the reader and their own functioning as a detective story. They achieve this by presenting detection as a kind of drug.

In *A Study in Scarlet*, unlike in *The Sign of Four*, Watson merely suspects Holmes of drug use. He diagnoses Holmes's changing moods as something typical of a drug addict:

Nothing could exceed his energy when the working fit was upon him; but now and again a reaction would seize him, and for days on end he would lie upon the sofa in the sitting-room, hardly uttering a word or moving a muscle from morning to night. On these occasions I have noticed such a dreamy, vacant expression in his eyes, that I might have suspected him of being addicted to the use of some narcotic, had not the temperance and cleanliness of his whole life forbidden such a notion. (*A Study in Scarlet*, 13)

The fits of energy alternating with states of stuporous passivity, which Watson, as a medical doctor, associates with the life of a drug addict, are revealed to be the rhythm of life for a detective. Holmes explains that he is the only "consulting detective" in the world (*A Study in Scarlet*, 19) and solves many of his cases without leaving his room, only "Now and again a case turns up which is a little more complex. Then I have to bustle about and see things with my own eyes" (*A Study in Scarlet*, 20). The vacant eyes are but a sign of intensive brain work, and return while he is examining the body of the murdered man in *A Study in Scarlet*: "his eyes wore the same faraway expression which I have already remarked upon" (*A Study in Scarlet*, 29). The

occupation of a “consulting detective” initially results in a life style and behaviour which a medical doctor would associate with drug addiction.

Just as Holmes’s expertise in drugs is linked with his expertise in crime, so is his cocaine habit essentially linked to his detective work. The drug is an alternative to detection. When Watson warns Holmes of the deteriorating effects of cocaine in *The Sign of Four*, the great detective responds:

‘My mind,’ he said, ‘rebels at stagnation. Give me a problem, give me work, give me the most abstruse cryptogram, or the most intricate analysis, and I am in my proper atmosphere. I can dispense then with artificial stimulants. But I abhor the dull routine of existence. I crave for mental exaltation. That is why I have chosen my own particular profession, or rather created it, for I am the only one in the world’. (*The Sign of Four*, 4)

Cocaine is the artificial stimulant which provides the “mental exaltation” when no detective work is available. Even the small experiment of deduction offered by Watson in the form of his brother’s watch is welcomed by Holmes because “it would prevent me from taking a second dose of cocaine” (*The Sign of Four*, 8). Holmes is presented as suffering from a severe attack of *maladie du fin du siècle*, which can only be relieved by the excitement of detection or by cocaine. Neither in *A Study in Scarlet* nor in *The Sign of Four* does Holmes get any profit, or even credit, for his ingenious mental manoeuvres in solving the crimes. His only motive for the great detective game appears to be his craving for “mental exaltation” and a desire to escape the dreariness of life. At the end of *The Sign of Four*, Watson sums up the case:

‘The division seems rather unfair,’ I remarked. ‘You have done all the work in this business. I get a wife out of it, Jones gets the credit, pray what remains for you?’

‘For me,’ said Sherlock Holmes, ‘there still remains the cocaine-bottle.’ And he stretched his long white hand up for it. (*The Sign of Four*, 119)

The Sign of Four is framed by and enveloped in the drug; it opens with cocaine, it closes with cocaine, and the mystery of the Agra treasure and Sholto’s murder has

brought but a short break in the flow of the drug, substituting it for the length of the narrative.

Detection and cocaine can replace each other as a stimulating drug. However, whereas cocaine merely fills in the empty moments of no detection, detective work appears as such an enticing activity that Holmes has created his own occupation to satisfy his desire for it. In *A Study in Scarlet*, Holmes remarks: "I have a trade of my own. I suppose I am the only one in the world. I'm a consulting detective, if you can understand what it is" (*A Study in Scarlet*, 19-20). And again, in *The Sign of Four*, he declares: "I crave for mental exaltation. That is why I have chosen my own particular profession, or rather created it, for I am the only one in the world" (*The Sign of Four*, 4; for a fuller quotation see above). Conan Doyle does not only present detection as a stimulating drug comparable to cocaine, but his texts suggest that the entire existence and the *raison d'être* of the detective hero is due to the drug-like effects of detection.

The intoxicating effects of detective work are manifest in Holmes's behaviour during his process of detection. When they arrive at the scene of the crime in *A Study in Scarlet*, Watson observes Holmes at work:

He whipped a tape measure and a large magnifying glass from his pocket. With these he trotted noiselessly about the room, sometimes stopping, occasionally kneeling, and once lying flat upon his face. So engrossed was he with his occupation that he appeared to have forgotten our presence, for he chattered away to himself under his breath the whole time, keeping up a running fire of exclamations, groans, whistles, and little cries suggestive of encouragement and of hope. As I watched him I was irresistibly reminded of a pure-blooded, well-trained foxhound, as it dashes backwards and forwards through the covert, whining in its eagerness, until it comes across the lost scent. For twenty minutes or more he continued his researches, measuring with the most exact care the distance between marks which were entirely invisible to me, and occasionally applying his tape to the walls in an equally incomprehensible manner. (*A Study in Scarlet*, 32)

While this scene offers a practical demonstration of the principles of detection laid down in Holmes and Watson's discussion in the preceding chapter, it also strips the detective of his rational, cold-blooded approach to mystery. Instead, Holmes is excited, feverish and passionate. The marks invisible to Watson, as well as Holmes's incomprehensible measurements, show the detective's magical superiority of observation, but at the same time present his activities as verging on insanity. The description of Holmes, then, on the one hand asks us to trust his method and, on the other, portrays Holmes as a maniac, intoxicated by the mystery before him. Furthermore, Holmes does not only appear intoxicated and excited; he loses his human qualities, reminding Watson of a foxhound. He becomes dehumanised like the "baboon-like", poisoned murder-victim, as if there was some powerful drug working within him as well.

Detection is compulsive behaviour, and Holmes is extremely restless while he is obsessed with a case. In *The Sign of Four*, Holmes and Watson are forced to pause and ~~wait for~~ information on the movements of the culprits. This pause in detective action is almost unbearable for Holmes. Mrs. Hudson worries about him and addresses Watson:

After you was gone he walked and he walked, up and down, and up and down, until I was weary of the sound of his footstep. Then I heard him talking to himself and muttering, . . . And now he has slammed off to his room, but I can hear him walking away the same as ever. I hope he's not going to be ill, sir. I ventured to say something to him about cooling medicine, but he turned on me, sir, with such a look that I don't know how I got out of the room. (*The Sign of Four*, 71)

Holmes's aggressive and restless state of excitement continues, and through the night Watson hears "the dull sound of his tread, and knew how his keen spirit was chafing against this involuntary inaction" (*The Sign of Four*, 72). The following morning

Holmes declares: "This infernal problem is consuming me" (*Ibid.*). He cannot rest while the mystery of the crime is on his mind: "I am not tired. I have a curious constitution. I never remember feeling tired by work, though idleness exhausts me completely" (*The Sign of Four*, 67). This lack of rest turns into manic hyperactivity, as his sleepless night testifies. Finally, Holmes finds temporary relief only in his hobby of chemistry and a malodorous chemical experiment (*The Sign of Four*, 73, 81). The experience of detection for Holmes is both stimulating and intoxicating as well as compulsive and addictive.

Sherlock Holmes is not the only character in Conan Doyle's stories who experiences the mental and psychosomatic effects of detection. The police and even Watson feel the intoxicating effect of "being on the scent". In *A Study in Scarlet* Inspector Gregson describes the effects of detection: "You know that feeling, Mr Sherlock Holmes, when you come upon the right scent - a kind of thrill in your nerves" (*A Study in Scarlet*, 52). Watson, as a medical man, consistently records and analyses the effects of detection on his own body and mind. "His head is in a whirl" (*A Study in Scarlet*, 35). He cannot sleep while his "mind had been too excited by all that had occurred, and the strangest fancies and surmises crowded into it", and he is plagued by the vision of a poisoned, contorted corpse (*A Study in Scarlet*, 41; for sleeplessness see also 46; *The Sign of Four*, 47). Watson feels "a creeping of the flesh, and a presentiment of horror", his nerves "tingle" (*A Study in Scarlet*, 59) and are "shaken . . . completely" (*The Sign of Four*, 47). In *The Sign of Four*, the psychosomatic effects develop from Watson's initial excitement and confusion, as they are plunged into another adventure (*The Sign of Four*, 20), to a deepening disorientation, when Holmes hears Watson "caution him [Thaddeus Sholto] against the great danger of

taking more than two drops of castor-oil, while I [Watson] recommended strychnine in large doses as a sedative" (*The Sign of Four*, 31-32). During the spectacular chase down The Thames, Watson confirms that: "never did sport give me such a wild thrill as this mad, flying man-hunt" (*The Sign of Four*, 86).

The medical writings in the late nineteenth-century, describing the effects of cocaine, are strangely similar to the effects of detection observed by Dr .Watson. Both Holmes and Watson appear to display some of the symptoms of cocaine use. These, as recorded in medical papers in the late nineteenth century,¹⁸ include sleeplessness, general excitement, hallucinations of small animals under the skin, paranoia or a feeling of an approaching disaster, as well as an impression of having a messianic mission to reveal the great truth to the world (usually this truth is about the wonderful effects of the drug).¹⁹ Both sleeplessness, overall excitement and a premonition of horror are experienced by Conan Doyle's protagonists (*A Study in Scarlet*, 59). The sense of knowing the truth and the desire to make it public, are, ironically, the driving force of Watson's narrative.

The most important effect of cocaine appears to be the feeling of "intense life" and enhanced intellect: Paolo Mantegazza described his coca-experience in 1859:

Little by little, one starts to feel that the nervous powers are increasing; life is becoming more active and intense; . . . The intelligence becomes more active, speech more vigorous; in short one feels that the intellectual functions are more active. (Mantegazza, 38-39)

An anonymous addict in this century talks about "that almost magical intensity of mental functioning", and continues: "Every cocaine user I have ever met experienced to some degree expanded mental powers and increased physical energy" (Andrews and Solomon, 4). This mentally and physically stimulating effect of cocaine appears identical to the exciting effects of detection as they are depicted in Conan Doyle's



"I FOUND SHERLOCK HOLMES HALF ASLEEP."

Figure 10 Holmes and test tubes by Sydney Paget, illustrating "A Case of Identity" (*Strand*, September 1891, 255).

stories. Holmes, who describes himself as "the most incurable lazy devil" (*A Study in Scarlet*, 25) and so languidly reclines in his armchair in the opening of *The Sign of Four*, is dramatically transformed into an energetic, eager "fox-hound" by detection. Life during detection becomes intense and fast-moving, intelligence becomes "active" and mental faculties are excited by the puzzle of the mystery. The stimulating effects of cocaine, as recorded by both Mantegazza and the anonymous addict, appear to describe the typical state of the detective while she is on the case. I would like to suggest that it is also a state induced in the reader of these detective stories. Conan Doyle's texts (as most, if not all, detective stories) invite their readers to experience the thrill of detection, to feel the excitement and stimulation, to enjoy the drug of detection. An important means by which they administer this drug to their readers is through their narrative technique.

Watson is a medical man recording the effects of detection as much as a companion recording the process of detection. His value as an internal narrator has most often been seen in relation to his commonplace, down-to-earth, middle-class nature, which is contrasted with Sherlock Holmes's artistic and eccentric intellectual superiority. Stephen Knight, in his *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (1980), firmly views Watson as "the high-priest of commonplace" (Knight, 83), "who represents the public" (Knight, 77) and "personifies the virtues of middle-class manhood" (Knight, 84). Although Knight considers Watson too "foolish" for the reader to identify with (Knight, 84), most critics have seen Watson as "essential" (Eyles, 7) specifically because his character provides a crucial interface between the text and the reader. In *Portrait of an Artist* (1979), Julian Symons writes: "The choice of Watson as narrator . . . was masterly. For those early readers the doctor was reassuringly like themselves"

(Symons [1979], 25). Watson, according to the majority of critical readers of Conan Doyle's stories, is a representative of the middle-class values of Conan Doyle's Victorian (and modern?) readers. In H. R. F. Keating's words: "Watson was the very embodiment of all these values that Holmes, it is not too much to say, existed to defend" (Keating [1979], 28). Although it might be doubtful whether Watson does indeed represent middle-class values, or what these values are exactly, it is significant that the function of Watson within the narrative has been predominantly seen as that of a reader surrogate. This function is inescapably created by his role as an internal narrator and the sole point of focalisation in the narrative; he is the access point for the reader, and the view of Holmes's adventures is coloured by Watson. The extreme view is expressed by Ronald A. Knox, in his essay "Studies in the Literature of Sherlock Holmes" (1928): "Any studies in Sherlock Holmes must be, first and foremost, studies in Dr. Watson" (Knox, 90).

The examples above show Watson as being severely affected by the mystery he is narrating. On the one hand, his apparent commonplace rationality and transparency as a character invite the reader to trust his narrative as well as to experience the adventure through him. Watson's character, as a literary device, aims to transmit the effects of detection into the reader. On the other hand, at the same time as we witness his intoxication by detection, we become aware of his unreliability as a narrator. The occasions where he recommends strychnine as a sedative (*The Sign of Four*, 32), or confuses a musket with a tiger cub (*The Sign of Four*, 20) because of his excitement, reveal how we are presented with a distinctly subjective narrative, and, by no means, with a rational case book in detection. It is implied that the literal choice of words in the texts we are reading is affected by Watson's experience of detection, and thus we

are invited to consider how the psychosomatic effects of detection may be reflected within the narrative of Conan Doyle's detective stories.

A Study in Scarlet and *The Sign of Four* contain many sensational features, which appear alien to the twentieth-century detective story and have been criticised for this reason. The most commented on of these features is the "Gaboriau-gap" dividing both texts, apparently copied from the works of Émile Gaboriau. In *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of Four*, immediately after the culprit has been caught, his own story breaks the Watsonian narrative and robs the detective of the final dénouement. In *Bloody Murder* (1972), Julian Symons calls the interrupting non-detective narratives "an embarrassment to Doyle" (Symons [1972], 64). According to John G. Cawelti, they are "an elaborate and frustrating digression from the main center of interest" (Cawelti, 110). I disagree with both Symons and Cawelti and maintain that the central sections in the novels contribute significantly to the effectiveness of the narrative first by providing a strange diversion or a trip within the narrative and, secondly by carefully developing a drug-relation between the murderer and the detective. This relation or parallelism produces a strong sense of a drugged world, a world where moral values are dissolved and where you can no longer tell the good detective from the bad criminal.

When Holmes's detection reaches its climax, as when Jefferson Hope in *A Study in Scarlet* is in hand-cuffs and Jonathan Small in *The Sign of Four* is caught on the bank of the Thames, Conan Doyle suddenly whirls his reader to another time and another world. The sudden break in the narrative has a striking effect on the reader; it is confusing and disorientating. What we thought was a straight-forward detective story, an apparently realist narrative with a linear trajectory set in Victorian London,

turns into something quite different. It becomes the story of a murderer. The divide between the detective's work, which culminates in the capture of the culprit, and the middle sections, which reveal a whole hidden world of passion and violence, is quite curious, since Holmes's success by no means requires these middle sections; instead they are an extra, a strange, dream-like diversion in the narrative.

In both novels the murder is rooted in a distant, alien world. In *A Study in Scarlet* we are taken to "the great alkali plain" in North America, "an arid and repulsive desert . . . a region of desolation and silence" (*A Study in Scarlet*, 69). Alkali itself is a form of a poisonous drug used as medicine;²⁰ and even before the reader is confronted with the oppressive Mormon community, she is warned of the poisonous ground of this "land of despair" with no inhabitants (*Ibid.*). Jefferson Hope's murder grows out of this ground. When his beloved Lucy dies in the hands of the Mormons and her violent husband Enoch J. Drebber (a story very similar to the one in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Dynamiter* published in 1885), Hope becomes obsessed with revenge: "the predominant idea of revenge had taken such complete possession of it [his mind] that there was no room for any other emotion" (*A Study in Scarlet*, 108). First he lives like an animal in the mountains losing his human qualities and becoming "the weird figure . . . which haunted the lonely mountain gorges" (*Ibid.*), "the human bloodhound, with his mind wholly set upon the one object to which he had devoted his life" (*A Study in Scarlet*, 109). The section set in North America tells the tale of a sensational and tragic love affair and creates a powerful portrait of an obsessed murderer.

This animalistic passion of the murderer and his absolute obsession with murder echoes Holmes's detective fever; both men are intoxicated by and addicted to the same

crime, both are described as losing their human features in their passionate pursuit of the act of murder; as Jefferson Hope is described as a “bloodhound” and “a dog” (*A Study in Scarlet*, 108, 109), Holmes, too, is a “foxhound” (*A Study in Scarlet*, 32). The murderer and the detective become mirror images, each other’s doubles. And this sense of fraternity is enhanced by both men’s involvement with drugs.

Hope describes himself as “a fairly good dispenser” (*A Study in Scarlet*, 117) as he tells how he stole some “alkaloid . . . extracted from some South American arrow poison” (*Ibid.*) to make two pills for the planned murder, one poisonous and one harmless. He prepares for a Russian roulette with poison pills, never giving a thought to the possibility that he might destroy himself. Hope finds his method of murder “quite as deadly and a good deal less noisy than firing across a handkerchief” (*Ibid.*). This rather unreliable method serves a moral purpose; it exculpates Hope from all moral responsibility for a cold-blooded murder (*A Study in Scarlet*, 117, 119) and shows his crime as an act of justice, even divine Justice, as Hope pronounces to Drebber: “Let the high God judge between us” (*A Study in Scarlet*, 119).

Blood is the final link between the detective and the murderer. As the name of the novel hints, *A Study in Scarlet* is also a study in blood. Our first view of Holmes showed him bleeding himself in a laboratory while developing a test to identify blood stains. Although this test is never applied to the blood found at the scene of the crime in the novel, it is recalled when the murderer bleeds at the moment of his crucial test or, even, his self-experiment of murder with poison.

In *The Sign of Four* the crimes of Jonathan Small originate in an India plunged into chaos: “torture and murder and outrage” (*The Sign of Four*, 99) by sepoy rebels all “drunk with opium and with bang.” (*The Sign of Four*, 100).²¹ In the old,

abandoned Agra Fortress, “full of deserted halls, and winding passages, and long corridors twisting in and out” (*The Sign of Four*, 99-100), a murder is committed to gain possession of a magnificent treasure of jewels. Jonathan Small and the other murderers are caught and sent to a convict settlement on the exotic Andaman Islands inhabited by a fierce race of cannibals. On the island, Small learns “to dispense drugs for the surgeon, and pick[s] up a smattering of his knowledge” (*The Sign of Four*, 110). This knowledge allows him to save the life of the native Tonga, who becomes his inseparable companion. The dwarfish Andaman native brings further exotic flavour into the mystery and functions as a venomous extension of Jonathan Small.²² There is another echo of Jekyll and Hyde here, the culprit is divided in two; Small, who nurtures the desire for vengeance, and Tonga, “that little hell-hound” (*The Sign of Four*, 89) “as venomous as a young snake” (*The Sign of Four*, 114), whose poisoned thorns are the murderous outlet of Small’s passions. Tonga is described in terms of animal characteristics; he is like a poisonous snake, but he is also a “hound,” like Holmes.

In the exotic Andaman climate Small’s obsession with revenge grows into immense proportions; this one desire governs his life as “an overpowering, absorbing passion”: “To escape, to track down Sholto, to have my hand upon his throat - that was my one thought. Even the Agra treasure had come to be a smaller thing in my mind than the slaying of Sholto” (*The Sign of Four*, 114). Small is intoxicated by his desire to kill. Once again, we have a similar strange and overpowering fixation on the crime, as is manifest in the work of detection. Committing and detecting murder begin to resemble each other, as the murderer’s passion is repeated, mirrored or simulated by Holmes’s obsession in solving the crime.

My reading of *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of Four* shows, first, that drugs play an important part in these texts. Most importantly detection is presented as a drug, even as a drug so powerful that it has produced the profession of the “consulting detective” celebrated in the Holmes stories and other detective fiction. The texts present an internal narrator, with a medical training, who observes and records the outward effects of detection in the detective as well as his own psychosomatic sensations produced by detective activity, thus introducing the question of the effects of detection-as-a-drug within the narrative structure of the texts. Such effects may be seen in the strange diversion of the middle sections in each novel. In these sections, the narrative changes dramatically as the violent, passionate story of the murderer, set in fantastical, alien lands, replaces the narrative of detection, which has been offered to the reader as a realist and transparent text. The stories of the murderers show the chemical expertise of the detective being repeated in the chemical expertise of the murderers, and create a sense of a universe saturated with drugs. The murderers and Holmes are described in similar terms; as “hounds,” as experts in poisons, as intoxicated monomaniacs. These parallels, between the detective and the murderers, ultimately, leave the reader in a moral ambiguity. Conan Doyle plays with two worlds, two universes, one fantastic and strange, another familiar to his readers. In this duplicity lies the beauty and the power of these novels; it becomes impossible for the reader to condemn the criminal and to separate the good detective from the evil murderer. The reader is left between these two stories. In this way, by presenting detection as a drug-like force, even a disease-like addiction and an uncontrollable craving, and by drawing disturbing parallels between the detective and the culprits, Conan Doyle’s detective stories question the formula of the genre: is a detective story

a subversive stimulant or a reassuring sedative? Does it provide its reader with a moment of transgressive escapism or with the pleasure of an anaesthetic reconfirmation of an existing ideology of law and order?

IV

Carolyn Wells begins her guide book for aspiring detective story writers, *The Technique of the Mystery Story* (1913), by defining the purpose of the genre: "It has no deeper intent, no more subtle *raison d'être* than to give pleasure to its readers. . . . They [mystery stories] keep the brain alert, stimulate the imagination and develop reasoning faculties" (Wells, 1-2). Wells continues by introducing the metaphor of the Biblical apple to describe the relation between the reader and the detective story in a strangely evocative and sensuous paragraph in her otherwise matter-of-fact textbook:

It is the natural desire for the weird and the wonderful - that hunger for the knowledge of the unknown which began with the forbidden apple; and the practiser of the art in question merely grows for those who hunger, a fruit that is goodly to the eye, agreeable to the taste, and one that should, if he - or she - be worthy of the honored name of author, contain in its seeds only a sufficiency of hydrocyanic poison to make it piquant in savor. It is no forbidden fruit that he should offer, merely an apple that is hard to pick - a fruit whose first bite excites fresh desire, whose taste brings forth an intense longing for more, and of which the choicest and most enticing morsel is cleverly held back to the very end. (Wells, 5)

According to Wells, the detective story is a poisonous fruit which, like a drug, satisfies no hunger but creates a desire for itself; it is addictive (Wells also gives an example of a member of Parliament severely addicted to detective fiction [Wells, 18]). The detective story is addressed to readers who "crave for mental exaltation" (*The Sign of Four*, 4), who desire detection, and its purpose is to give pleasure by intensifying this

desire, by stimulating the mental faculties. Wells's view of the effects and function of the detective story is strikingly similar to the effects of detection as they are described in Victorian detective novels.

The stimulating effect of the detective story emerges from the way in which these novels engage the reader in the work of detection. This is not to say that the reader's mental processes during the reading emulate those of the imaginary detective and that she is trying to solve the mystery as an intellectual puzzle. Rather, I believe, the stimulant value of detective fiction lies in the experience of the world of detection and of a certain sense of dislocation, paranoia, even hallucination, generated by the text. While detection proceeds, the world is infested with strange meanings, and every detail of the text may be a crucial clue, any character (including the detective) may be the culprit. This reading of clues within the narrative, where every word carries potential additional significance within the structure of the plot, produces a sense of mild paranoia.²³ This paranoia has been repeated and developed in the field of Sherlockiana, where the minutest detail in the canon has become an object of intense study and proliferating commentary. As Pasquale Accardo remarks in his *Diagnosis and Detection* (1987), the Sherlockian enthusiasts "apply Holmes's rules for detection to unsolved and artifactual pseudoproblems inherent in the narrative" (Accardo, 14). In Sherlockiana the intoxicating qualities of detection, its excitement and fascination, has resulted in an ever widening multitude of texts. Readers affected by the power of Conan Doyle's stories have responded to them by producing their own detective stories, in the form of critical analyses of the texts, turning every word and silence in the texts into clues to the mystery of the canon's fascinating power.

A related feature of this drug-like power of Victorian detective stories, in its stimulating capacity, is the apparent transparency of the narratives, their setting in contemporary England (mostly London and its suburbs). In Conan Doyle's stories, for example, Holmes and Watson walk the same streets and read the same newspapers and books, visit the same theatres and use the same telegraph offices as Conan Doyle's readers. This realism has encouraged the perverse desire to make these fictional characters real. The abundance of period detail together with the historically verifiable events and places within the narratives, have not only enhanced the feverish activity of Sherlockian scholars in their investigation, but has produced a hallucinatory effect where the fictional characters are more real than the author who created them.

Simultaneously with the reader's reality, the detectives inhabit an alien world of crime and mystery. Conan Doyle's effective use of superimposed worlds, one familiar the other alien and strange, a technique used in most sensation and detective fiction, creates a double vision. The world of detection is a world slightly out of joint; it is familiar in time and space, but at the same defamiliarised. Detection takes place in an uncanny topos. I am using the word uncanny here in its Freudian sense. Freud, in his 1919 essay "The Uncanny" defines the uncanny as a form of fear generated by something familiar which has become a source of terror (Freud, 220). To link this phenomenon to his psychoanalytic framework, Freud further describes it as a fear produced by something which should have remained hidden but has come to light (Freud, 225). "An uncanny effect", according to Freud, "is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced" (Freud, 244). As already noted in the Introduction of this work, H. L. Mansel observed this literary device already in 1862, while writing about sensation fiction. He termed it "proximity":

Proximity is, indeed, one great element of sensation. . . . we are thrilled with horror, even in fiction, by the thought that such things may be going on around us and among us. The man who shook our hand with a hearty English grasp half an hour ago - the woman whose beauty and grace were the charm of last night, and whose gentle words sent us home better pleased with the world and with ourselves - how exciting to think that under these pleasing outsides may be concealed some demon in human shape. (Mansel, 488-489)

This element of proximity, with its uncanny effects, contributes to a sense of paranoia and suspicion in detective fiction. The detective story uses this mechanism to suggest that there exists an alien, dangerous world of crime underneath or parallel to the apparently normal, familiar world of the reader. Like a palimpsest, the detective story lets an underlying hidden text of violence and passion shine through its apparently rational, controlled narrative.

In his essay "The Typology of the Detective Story" (1966), Tzvetan Todorov explores this double-text of the detective story. He writes:

At the base of the whodunit we find a duality, and it is this duality which will guide our description. This novel contains not one but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation. In their purest form these two stories have no point in common. (Todorov, 44)

Todorov describes these two stories of crime and detection with the terminology of Russian formalism; the crime provides the *fable*, the chronological story of events, while detection is the *subject*, the plot and the order in which the events are narrated. These two terms, fable and subject, can, of course, be used to describe the structure of any literary text. However, what is remarkable about detective fiction as a genre, is the necessary absence of the fable:

the first [story], that of the crime, is in fact the story of an absence: its most accurate characteristic is that it cannot be immediately present in the book. . . . The status of the second story is, as we have seen, just as excessive; it is a story which has no importance in itself, which serves only as a mediator between the reader and the story of the crime. (Todorov, 46)

This is another way of describing the double-vision, or double-reading required by detective fiction. The detective story, as a genre, presents a strange play of presence and absence or a displacement, where the absent original deed is (re-)constructed through the exciting and thrilling activity of detection. In this way, the original crime, or mysterious deed, is present in the narrative always just outside the threshold of the narrative, hovering like a chimera, or a hallucination on the borderlines of the text. Detective fiction becomes also a strangely liminal form of literature, where the object of pursuit, the truth about the crime, is ever present in its very absence. Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of Four*, in their middle sections, reveal this dynamic of two stories. If these sections can be deemed unsuccessful (as Symons and Cawelti do), it is because they bring to light this significant element of detective fiction revealing the structure of the texts, and thus invite the reader to consider its validity and effects.

Not only Conan Doyle's novels, but all detective stories discussed in the present work have in common these methods of thrilling and exciting their readers, which are inherent in the genre formula of detective fiction. The puzzle element provides "mental exaltation", stimulation of the mental faculties. However, more significant than this alertness of the brain, is the experience of the world of detection. This world is an uncanny topos, where every detail is invested with potentially crucial meaning, nothing is what it seems, and most importantly, the apparently normal world of the reader is presented as strangely changed, harbouring dark secrets and passions. This duplicity of the reader's perception and the displacement or dislocation of "the truth" or "reality", are fundamental to the genre of detective fiction. The genre fascinates its readers

through the necessary absence of the detected deed. Truth and reality are always just out of reach.

In *The Technique of the Mystery Story*, Carolyn Wells describes the detective story as a deliciously and desirably poisonous apple with highly stimulating and addictive qualities. She was writing in 1913, when there were still fourteen new Sherlock Holmes short stories to be published, as well as the last Holmes novel *The Valley of Fear* (serialised in 1914-15). Later critics, however, observing Conan Doyle's stories from the perspective of the twentieth century, after the "golden age" of detective fiction in the 1920s, have come to view the detective story as a sedative rather than as a stimulant, and they have assigned a healing and therapeutic value to the detective story, rather than a dangerous and corrupting one.

In his essay "Detective Story as a Historical Source" (1976), William O. Aydelotte terms detective stories "wish-fulfilment fantasies designed to produce certain agreeable sensations in the reader, to foist upon him illusions he wants to entertain and which he goes to this literature to find" (Aydelotte, 307). Again, the detective story is designed to satisfy a defined need in the reader, and it is used by the reader to produce certain, anticipated effects. According to Aydelotte, these effects are sedating; the detective story "persuades the reader that the world it describes is simple and understandable, that it is meaningful, and that it is secure" (Aydelotte, 309). And, he observes, quite correctly, I believe, that:

the detective story is hokum, a means of arousing in the reader a belief in contrary-to-fact conditions, an opiate and a drug, which protects the reader from the facts of life by covering him with veils upon veils of illusions. The historical value of the detective story is that it describes day-dreams. (Aydelotte, 321)

In passing, Aydelotte describes the effects of detective fiction in terms of drugs, without stopping to consider the implications of the connection he has made. In the second half of this century, distanced from the Victorian experience of detective fiction, critics have predominantly come to view the detective story as an essentially “reassuring” genre (Ousby, 162; Aydelotte, 308; Hilfer, 7), which reconfirms the middle-class values of law and order as well as those of the scientific method and rationality, by inevitably concluding with the capture of the criminal and the triumph of the intellectually superior detective (see, for example, Symons [1972], 18; Clausen, 112; Thomas [1991], 252; Porter, 125; Grella, 102; Jann, 685, Thomson, 38).²⁴

Erik Routley, in *The Puritan Pleasures of the Detective Story* (1972), maintains that the “reader’s satisfaction in what he calls a good detective story has much more to do with his need for moral and psychological security than with his superficial pleasure in solving puzzles” (Routley, 214). A similar view is taken by Stephen Knight, who argues in his *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (1980),

that major examples of crime fiction not only create an idea (or a hope, or a dream) about controlling crime, but both realise and validate a whole view of the world, one shared by the people who became the central audience to buy, read and find comfort in a particular variety of crime fiction. (Knight, 2)

Knight and other critics who adopt a similar view, assign a kind of medicinal value to the detective hero; “he gives us security, certainty and protection” (Aydelotte, 315), “healing that insecurity” experienced by the readers in their reality (Rexroth, 43). The detective is “a wish-fulfilment fantasy” (Gilbert [1976], 23), a sedative. As the detective “heals” the community disturbed and wounded by crime within the novel, he also “heals” the reader of the novel, offering a moment of pleasurable oblivion in a safe and secure world, where the outcome of a crisis is always inevitably reassuring and comforting.

In *Modus Operandi: An Excursion into Detective Fiction* (1982), Robin W. Winks offers a slightly different view: "Perhaps this is why the detective story is often said to be therapeutic: it provides the nightmares of morality that we cannot otherwise meet directly" (Winks [1982], 80). Winks considers detective fiction medicinal, because of its stimulating, rather than sedative effects. A similar view is maintained by Lord Balfour, whose words open H. Douglas Thomson's book *Masters of Mystery* (1931):

Overwork means undue congestion of certain lobes of the brain. In order to draw the blood from these lobes, other contiguous lobes must be stimulated. A week in the country only means that you brood on your work. Detective novels act like iodine on a gum and serve as a counter-irritant. (Thomson)

Readers' opinions, as they are reflected by the various critics referred to above, clearly assign certain psychosomatic effects to the detective story. Whether it is seen as exciting, stimulating and even corrupting (see the Introduction of this work) or reassuring, sedative and therapeutic (or some combination of these two), the detective story is read for its effects upon the reader. It is used by the reader to reach a certain mental state, in short, the detective story is a kind of drug.

Notes

¹ For further instances and occasions where Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson have been treated as historical persons, see Nordon pp. 204-211 and Conan Doyle's "Some Personalities about Sherlock Holmes", published originally in the *Strand Magazine* in December 1917 and reprinted in *The Sherlock Holmes Scrapbook* (1986) edited by Peter Haining as well as in *The Final Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1993) by Conan Doyle. There are also two collections of letters written to Sherlock Holmes; *Letters to Sherlock Holmes* (1985) and *The Sherlock Holmes Letters* (1986), both edited by Richard Lancelyn Green.

² For an amusing biography of Sherlock Holmes, see, for example, *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (1961) by Vincent Starrett or, for a shorter biography, see S. C. Roberts's "A Biographical Sketch of Sherlock Holmes" in *The Baker Street Reader: Cornerstone Writings about Sherlock Holmes* (1984), which also contains other essays on the details of Holmes's life and world.

³ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was an extremely industrious and versatile writer. While he is known today predominantly for his detective fiction, and he himself considered his historical novels his most

important work, Conan Doyle's writing covers a wide field both in variety and volume. He wrote science fiction, horror and ghost stories, as well as historical adventures, military history (most notably, *The Great Boer War*, 1900), poems and, towards the end of his life, *The History of Spiritualism* (1926), to mention but some areas of his interests. For a more thorough picture of the scope of Conan Doyle's work, see *A Bibliography of A. Conan Doyle* (1983), edited by Richard Lancelyn Green and John Michael Gibson. Although in the pages of the present chapter, the attention will concentrate solely on the Sherlock Holmes stories, the rest of Conan Doyle's literary legacy should not be ignored and Holmes stories are to be seen as a small, although significant, part of a wider literary production.

⁴ A slightly more accommodating viewpoint is taken by John Ball Jr, another Baker Street Irregular, who writes: "Of the many mysteries of the Canon, perhaps the most perplexing is the role played by the literary Agent in making Watson's priceless manuscripts available to a profoundly grateful posterity. That his role was in many respects unusual one is clear; the very fact that his name is prominently mentioned in connection with Dr. Watson's work is, in itself, a distinct departure from normal procedure in such cases" (Ball, 129). Also Andy and Bill Paton's *The Sherlock Holmes ABC Book* (1985) informs us that "It is generally agreed by Sherlockians that he [Conan Doyle] wrote 'The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone' and the flash-back narratives in *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Valley of Fear*; he possibly also wrote 'His Last Bow'" (Paton, 19).

This "grand game" of Sherlockiana is an overwhelming fiction, where a further ambiguity arises occasionally from the fact that it becomes impossible to determine whether Sherlockians are just pretending, or whether they believe in their own fictions.

⁵ After the first publication of *The Sign of the Four* its name was shortened to *The Sign of Four*. I have here used the more familiar short version, despite the fact that in the Oxford edition of the Sherlock Holmes stories (1993) editor Owen Dudley Edwards has chosen the original longer name for the title.

⁶ Sir James Young Simpson (1811-1870) was the Professor of Midwifery, who introduced chloroform to ease childbirth, after an extensive experimentation with the drug upon himself and his friends. Simpson, according to Edwards (*A Study in Scarlet*, 143,n8) was also the man called to help when Christison saved himself from death by the poisonous Calabar bean by drinking his shaving water.

⁷ Rodin and Key include all of Conan Doyle's university grades in an appendix to their book *Medical Casebook of Doctor Arthur Conan Doyle* (1984) (Rodin and Key, appendix C, 366).

⁸ The title page of the book, reproduced in Black's article, bears the inscription "Arthur Conan Doyle, Edinburgh University. 1878-79-". Sir Robert Christison had retired from the Chair of Materia Medica two years earlier, thus Conan Doyle narrowly missed receiving his lectures in drugs and poisons from the famous toxicologist.

⁹ For a more thorough description on Conan Doyle's medical writings, see Rodin and Key, pp.79-116.

¹⁰ For more information on the medical use of nitro-glycerine and gelsemium and their effects see, for example Blyth's *Poisons: Their Effects and Detection* (1884).

¹¹ In addition to W. A. Hammond and Sir Robert Christison, Sigmund Freud was a proponent of and a self-experimenter with cocaine. According to Thornton, Freud began experimentation with cocaine in 1883, and published his "Uber Coca" the following year, to advocate the beneficial, stimulating effects of the drug (E. M. Thornton, 38-9). Freud's "love-affair" with cocaine is told in E.M. Thornton's *Freud and Cocaine: the Freudian Fallacy* (1983; see also Berridge and Edwards, 219 Inglis, 126-127, Brecher, 349-352), and it is quite interesting how this story almost touches upon Conan Doyle. Cocaine made its most important contribution to medicine in 1884, when Freud's friend Dr. Carl

Koller demonstrated its usefulness as a local anaesthesia in ophthalmology in Vienna. These were the years when enthusiasm about cocaine was at its height. When Conan Doyle arrived in Vienna in 1891 to specialise in ophthalmology the fiercest dispute on the effects of cocaine was already over, and Freud, although developing his psychoanalytic theories in the same city, had moved from advocating cocaine to the therapeutic methods of hypnotism and dream analysis.

¹² Various reasons have been offered for this withdrawal of Holmes's cocaine addiction. Owen Dudley Edwards relies on the information received from Conan Doyle's daughter and maintains that Conan Doyle was persuaded to relieve his hero of this vice as Holmes's popularity grew, because it was feared among the Doyle family that Holmes would give a bad example to his admirers (personal communication with Mr. Edwards). Indeed, this fear may have been justified; in an essay "On the Aetiology of Drug-Addiction" (1932), Edward Glover recounts the following case:

In one case of cocaine-addiction the final determinant of the habit was without any doubt a fascinated interest in Sherlock Holmes, the publication of whose "Adventures" coincided with the addict's pubertal phase of masturbation. Incidentally the patient modified the Sherlock Holmes technique in so far as he injected the drug into the root of the penis. (Glover, 307)

Another possible explanation for Conan Doyle's decision to free Holmes from cocaine may have been the institutionalisation of his father and later his death in 1893, of alcoholism. This coincidence of timing, suggesting a reaction by Conan Doyle against recreational use of all intoxicating substances, was pointed out to me by Mr. Mike Dzanko.

¹³ Perhaps the most famous and best-remembered of these cases today is Sigmund Freud's attempt to cure Ernst von Fleischl-Marxow of his morphine-addiction by recommending cocaine. The result was Fleischl-Marxow's addiction to both of these substances. The case is described, for example in E. M. Thornton's *Freud and Cocaine: The Freudian Fallacy* (1983).

¹⁴ In *Medical Casebook of Doctor Arthur Conan Doyle* (1984) Rodin and Key maintain that cocaine was only introduced into European medicine in 1891 by "Schleich of Berlin" (Rodin and Key, 257). And they conclude that "Conan Doyle's first reference to cocaine injected by a hypodermic syringe, one year before Schleich's publication, suggests a knowledge of such prior use in America" (Rodin and Key, 257). This conclusion must be deemed erroneous, although it is reasonable to conclude that Conan Doyle was aware of the subcutaneous use of cocaine at an early stage.

¹⁵ Lippincott invited both Arthur Conan Doyle and Oscar Wilde to a meeting where he commissioned both to write novels for *Lippincott's Magazine*. As a result, Wilde produced his only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Conan Doyle was impressed by Wilde in their meeting, writing in *Memories and Adventures* (1926) that Wilde's "conversation left an indelible impression upon my mind. He towered above us all" (*Memories and Adventures*, 78). Whether for this recent impression or because of a wider cultural awareness, Conan Doyle coloured his *The Sign of Four* with a certain aesthetic tint. The character of Thaddeus Sholto bears some similarity to Oscar Wilde in his hypochondriacal attention to the detail of dress, as well as the rich decoration of his room. More specifically, Thaddeus's features and gestures, such as the hand he keeps in front of his mouth, echo Wilde. Holmes himself, in this novel, has some Wildean characteristics. For example, Watson describes a dinner at Baker Street with Holmes and Inspector Gregson:

Holmes could talk exceedingly well when he chose, and that night he did choose. He spoke on a quick succession of subjects - on miracle plays, on medieval pottery, on Stradivarius violins, on the Buddhism of Ceylon, and on the warships of the future - handling each as though he had made a special study of it. (*The Sign of Four*, 79)

This conversational brilliance of Holmes makes one wonder what may have been the subjects Wilde so impressively pursued as "he towered" over his fellow author. A further Wildean feature in Holmes in this novel, are his frequent aphoristic statements emulating Wilde's famous wit. Holmes declares,

for example, "I cannot live without brain-work. What else is there to live for?" (*The Sign of Four*, 11) and "I never guess. It is a shocking habit" (*The Sign of Four*, 10). These witticisms, although reflecting Holmes's own scientific being, strangely echo Wilde's discourse. For another aesthetic echo see the very opening paragraph of *The Sign of Four*, also quoted above.

¹⁶ In *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Holmes* (1980), Owen Dudley Edwards quotes two reviews of *A Study in Scarlet* in Scottish newspapers remarking that these were the only papers to notice the publication of Conan Doyle's novel (Edwards [1980], 25).

¹⁷ In Sholto's case the theme of the double is repeated in the twin brothers, Thaddeus and Bartholomew: Watson has to glance back at Thaddeus to make sure *he* is still alive (*The Sign of Four*, 37), and Inspector Jones arrests Thaddeus Sholto for the murder of his identical twin (*The Sign of Four*, 46).

¹⁸ I draw my list of the effects of cocaine from the following papers: Conolly Norman's "A Note on Cocainism" in *Journal of Mental Science* April 1892, J. B. Mattison's "Cocaine Dosage and Cocaine Addiction" in *Lancet* May 21 1887, Andrew Fullerton's "Toxic Effects of Cocaine and Their Treatment" in *Lancet* September 19 1891, and W. A. Hammond's "Cocaine and the So-Called Cocaine Habit" delivered at the New York Neurological Society in 1886.

¹⁹ Aversion to sex and sexual frustration are among the long-term effects of cocaine use: "If the drug is abused or overused during a specific period of time, the strong sexually stimulative nature of the drug changes to one of sexual frustration, where erections and orgasms become almost impossible" (Andrews and Solomon, 6). Holmes's dislike of women is, of course, famous. It is explicitly described by Watson in "A Scandal in Bohemia" and it is equally present in later stories of the canon. In *The Sign of Four*, when Watson proudly tells him of his engagement to Miss Morstan, Holmes lets out "a most dismal groan" (*The Sign of Four*, 118; see also 70).

²⁰ Alkali is the opposite of acid and, for example potassium and sodium nitrates, both used as medicines in the nineteenth century, are listed as poisonous drugs, of which 30 gr is enough to kill an adult woman (Blyth, 107). Wilkie Collins used potassium nitrate for his gout (C. Peters, 258). Alkalis were also used for extracting cocaine from coca leaves (Andrews and Solomon, 12).

²¹ "Bang" or "bhang" is hashish, which, of course, has an etymological connection to "assassins." For example, Théophile Gautier in his "The Club of Assassins" (1846) recounts the legend about the Old Man of the Mountains in India, whose murderous henchmen used hashish to give them courage and thus gave us the term "assassin", derived from their drug-habit.

²² Small uses Tonga's canoe to escape the islands as well as Tonga's climbing skills to enter Sholto's house. Immediately after Tonga is shot by Sherlock Holmes, Small's wooden-leg becomes an insurmountable obstacle and gets stuck in the mud on the side of The Thames, preventing his escape. With Tonga, Small has been able to climb up and down walls without the leg hindering him in any way. Also, while with Tonga he has been able to kill a man with this extraordinary weapon (*The Sign of Four*, 115). As soon as Tonga is lost, this mighty instrument becomes a hindrance.

²³ For the connections between detection and semiotics, see Eco and Sebeok.

²⁴ Catherine Belsey, in her reading of Conan Doyle's detective stories in *Critical Practice* (1980), as well as Jasmine Yong Hall in her "Ordering the Sensational: Sherlock Holmes and the Female Gothic" (1991), have shown how the detective story can be seen to maintain and reconfirm specifically a patriarchal, phallogocentric ideology.

6. CONCLUSION: OSCAR WILDE'S *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY* (1891)

I

In the previous chapters, I have shown how drugs are used in Victorian detective stories in interesting ways to introduce questions concerning reading and to explore the dynamics of the reading experience. I have related this phenomenon within the detective genre to the wider literary field of the Victorian period by suggesting that drugs provided popular authors with terminology and imagery suitable for considering the issues of mass readership and consumption of fiction. I shall conclude by widening the scope of the present work and consider a model of reading developed in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890),¹ arguing that the activity of reading fiction, in Wilde's novel, entails intoxication and addiction. In *Dorian Gray* and other writings of the years 1890-91, Wilde develops a theorisation of reading, where the emphasis is laid specifically on the effects, corrupting or otherwise, of the text upon its reader. Such a model of reading is, of course, firmly linked to the British Decadent movement of the 1890s,² its search for new sensations and its glorification of the artificial and the decorative. The Decadent ideology emphasises the aesthetic and emotional experience of the individual as well as the transformational power of Art and Beauty. While *Dorian Gray* adheres to the ideology of Decadence, it also explores the drug-like qualities of fiction. It outlines a model of reading built upon this ideology,

where the poisonous and the perfect are inextricably linked, and a drugged state of intoxication and addiction is both desired and sought for.

In 1890 the publication of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in *Lippincott's Magazine*,³ was followed by sharp criticism and moral condemnation of this decadent novel in the press, and equally sharp defensive statements by the author. Characteristic of the criticism of the novel was the vocabulary used to describe its corrupting influence upon the reader; whereas the reviewer in the *Scots Observer* declared the novel "false art - for its interest is medico-legal" (Beckson, 75), other critics themselves used more sensuous, even decadent vocabulary to pass their sentence. *Theatre* wrote in 1891, after the publication of the second version of the novel, that "It is the very genius of affectation crystallised in a syrup of words. Reading it we move in a heavy atmosphere of warm incense and slumbering artificial light" (Beckson, 81). The criticism of the novel introduces metaphors of sensory perception and it is described as having almost hallucinatory effects. *Punch* described it in July 1890, as "the loathly 'leperous distilment' [which] taints and spoils" (Beckson, 77), referring, by its allusion to *Hamlet*, to its lethally poisonous quality. A month earlier a reviewer in the *Daily Chronicle* wrote: "It is a tale spawned from the leprous literature of the French *Décadents* - a poisonous book, the atmosphere of which is heavy with the mephitic odours of moral and spiritual putrefaction - a gloating study of the mental and physical corruption of a fresh, fair and golden youth" (*Dorian Gray*, 342-343). *Dorian Gray* is described in terms of a diseased and drugged atmosphere, it is declared corrupting and dangerous. It is "a poisonous book".

Wilde welcomed this concept of poisonous art and concluded his published response to the *Daily Chronicle*: "It is poisonous, if you like, but you cannot deny

that it is also perfect, and perfection is what we artists aim at" (*Dorian Gray*, 345).⁴ The combination of poison and perfection was present as an ideal in Wilde's writing already in 1886, when he wrote to Harry Marillier about "an unknown land full of strange flowers and subtle perfumes, a land of which it is joy of all joys to dream, a land where all things are perfect and poisonous" (Ellmann [1987], 254). Toxicity, for Wilde, is associated with perfection in art, because it denotes, specifically, the sensuous and delicious intoxicating power of art over its spectator or reader.

In Chapter ten of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, when Dorian has had his magical portrait removed to an unused school room, he returns to the library finding "a book bound in yellow paper, the cover slightly torn and the edges soiled" (*Dorian Gray*, 96). This book, whose torn cover and soiled edges point to some passionate past use and render it an alien object in Dorian's carefully constructed, sophisticated environment, remains unnamed in the narrative. While Wilde himself admitted during his trial, that the book could be identified as J.-K. Huysmans's *À Rebours* (1884) (*Dorian Gray*, 359; Huysmans, 5; Ellmann [1987], 298), the French decadent novel *par excellence*; later critical readers have associated it also with Walter Pater's *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1888), especially its chapter on Leonardo da Vinci (*Dorian Gray*, 286-7; Ellmann [1987], 299; E. Smith, 29; for other suggested sources and influences, see also Ellmann [1987], 293-4; Murray). In Wilde's text, it is described as a "novel without a plot, and with only one character, being, indeed, simply a psychological study of a certain young Parisian" (*Dorian Gray*, 97). This description echoes Huysmans's *À Rebours*, but literally it informs us that the mysterious book is a work of fiction and its theme is not unlike that of *Dorian Gray*, which, too, is "a

psychological study of a certain young" man. Dorian immediately finds this book both fascinating and addictive:

Taking up the volume, [he] flung himself into an arm-chair, and began to turn over the leaves. After a few moments he became absorbed. It was the strangest book he had ever read. It seemed to him that in exquisite raiment, and to the delicate sound of flutes, the sins of the world were passing in dumb show before him. Things that he had dimly dreamed of were suddenly made real to him. Things of which he had never dreamed were gradually revealed. (*Dorian Gray*, 97)

Dorian's experience of the fiction is described in sensuous terms, "exquisite raiment", "delicate sound of flutes" and the "dumb show" of sins passing like a vision before the reading man, refer to sensory, almost hallucinatory effects of the text. The novel also makes Dorian's dreams "real" and introduces so far inconceivable ideas to him, creating exciting visions in his mind. This description of Dorian's infatuation with the unnamed fiction and the revelatory nature of his reading experience, emphasise the book's effects upon its reader. Dorian is lost in the fiction, intoxicated and poisoned by it:

It was a poisonous book. The heavy odour of incense seemed to cling about its pages, and to trouble the brain. The mere cadence of the sentences, the subtle monotony of their music, so full as it was of complex refrains and movements elaborately repeated, produced in the mind of the lad, as he passed from chapter to chapter, a form of reverie, a malady of dreaming, that made him unconscious of the falling day and creeping shadows. (*Dorian Gray*, 98)

Dorian loses a sense of time and space, he is transported by the music of the text into a state of diseased dreaming. The effects of the novel are not only drug-like in their intoxicating quality, but Dorian also becomes dependent upon this fiction, addicted to it: "For years, Dorian Gray could not free himself from the influence of this book. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he never sought to free himself from it" (*Dorian Gray*, 98).

Dorian Gray employs the textual device of synaesthesia to describe the reading experience. Synaesthesia is defined by *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1991) as “the mixing of sensations; the concurrent appeal to more than one sense; the response through several senses to the stimulation of one” (Cuddon, 943). The same dictionary continues to observe that this particular device was frequently used by such writers as Huysmans and Baudelaire (*Ibid.*), and associated with French Decadence of the nineteenth century. Considering the influence of French writers upon Wilde and his work, his use of synaesthesia in *Dorian Gray* can be seen as a distinctly decadent characteristic. However, it is interesting to find, on the one hand, that both *Dorian Gray* and its critics choose to describe a novel specifically in terms of odours, and, on the other hand, that the emergence of synaesthesia as a popular literary device may be related to the French decadents’ enthusiasm for hashish as a source for literary inspiration. In his Introduction to *Hashish, Wine, Opium*, (1972), Derek Stanford writes about “This psychedelic occurrence, known as synaesthesia” and maintains that it “is one of the gifts which artificial stimulants can claim to have bequeathed to the armoury of artistic expression” (Stanford, 15). Synaesthesia, as a literary device, existed long before the hashish experiments of the French decadent artists in the 1840s,⁵ but its frequency in their work suggests that Stanford’s claim is to some extent valid. *Dorian Gray* uses synaesthesia, “this psychedelic occurrence” caused by drugs like hashish and opium, to describe the experience of reading fiction. Dorian reads a novel experiencing music, “the delicate sound of flutes” (*Dorian Gray*, 97), and smells, “the heavy odour of incense” (*Dorian Gray*, 98).

The drug-like qualities of the unnamed yellow book are unmistakable. At the same time, its existence in Wilde's text and the parallels between it and the surrounding narrative suggest an aspiration in Wilde's text to be as poisonous as this unnamed fiction. The "heavy odour of incense" clinging to the pages of the yellow novel is repeated in the "heavy atmosphere of warm incense" (Beckson, 81) and "the atmosphere . . . which is heavy with the mephitic odours of moral and spiritual putrefaction" (*Dorian Gray*, 343) experienced by the reviewers of *Dorian Gray*. The critics of the novel repeat in the vocabulary of their criticism the synaesthetic effects of the novel within the text, suggesting that *Dorian Gray* possesses some of the intoxicating qualities of the mysterious French novel.

The episode of the yellow book in *Dorian Gray*, draws attention to the novel's central theme; the interaction between the text and the reader (or a work of art and its audience) and, more specifically, to the fascinating power exercised by fiction. By using the stylistic device of synaesthesia, which can be directly associated with a drugged state of mind, to describe the experience of reading, *Dorian Gray* further suggests that fiction may affect us like a drug.

In my thesis I have explored the strange process of reading fiction by considering ways in which drugs are featured in Victorian detective stories. I have shown how drugs do not appear in these texts merely as plot elements or as spices to add the colour and scent of the mysterious within the narratives, but in addition, in each chosen text, drugs can be seen to affect the narrative structure of the novel and to work through the narratives, affecting the experience of the reader. In this concluding chapter, my reading of Oscar Wilde's (1854-1900) *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) attempts to explore ways in which the concept of the drug could be seen as relevant to

our understanding of fiction and reading outside the narrow scope of Victorian detective fiction, within the wider framework of Victorian fiction and the experience of reading itself.

II

In his book *Oscar Wilde* (1988), Peter Raby remarks: "Dorian Gray himself confesses that he has been 'poisoned' by a book. It would be hard to avoid a certain amount of moral inference" (Raby, 67). What kind of "moral inference", Raby does not go on to describe. Raby's comment points out two important aspects of *Dorian Gray*; the role and the significance of the unnamed "book wrapped in yellow paper" as well as the morally corrupting influence of this book being repeated in *Dorian Gray* itself. A connection which is drawn between the book within the novel and its effects upon the protagonist, extends to encompass the question of the effects of *Dorian Gray* upon its reader.

The significance of the "yellow book" within Wilde's novel has been disputed. According to Peter Raby, "For Dorian, however, the poison book is less a formative influence than a distraction once he has committed his self-defining act of objective cruelty towards Sibyl Vane, . . . The book confirms Dorian in evil" (Raby, 75). Also William E. Buckler, in "*The Picture of Dorian Gray: An Essay in Aesthetic Exploration*" (1990), maintains that the corrupting force of the book emerges from Dorian's response to it, rather than from the fiction's inherent power of evil: "The fact is, however, that Dorian Gray is particularly susceptible to the contents and effects of this imaginary "yellow book" because its message is one he is eager to hear" (Buckler,

158). Both Raby and Buckler, in their own ways and for their own purposes, maintain that the source of the corrupting and dangerous influence of the poisonous book is not a quality of the text but of the reader's response. The power of fiction, of the yellow book as well as of *Dorian Gray*, is created in the act of reading, in the interaction of the text with the reader.

Both the suggested parallels between the yellow book and *Dorian Gray*, as well as the model of reading outlined by the text, are further emphasised by Dorian's experience of the book as an image of himself: the hero of the novel "became to him a kind of prefiguring type of himself. And, indeed, the whole book seemed to him to contain the story of his own life, written before he had lived it" (*Dorian Gray*, 98-99). This decadent image of life imitating art suggests a degree of self-awareness in Wilde's text and its engagement in questions concerning reading. It also expresses Wilde's theoretical maxim: "It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors" (The Preface to *Dorian Gray*).

These themes expressed in the significant episode of the poisonous book in *Dorian Gray*, suggest a specific theorisation of reading present in Wilde's writings in 1890-91. The Preface to *Dorian Gray* was published in the *Fortnightly Review* some months before the publication of the second, enlarged version of the novel in 1891. It followed a heated debate between Wilde and his critics in the pages of *St. James's Gazette* and thus responds to the criticism received by the first version of his novel, when it was published in *Lippincott's Magazine* in 1890. In the Preface, Wilde declares: "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all" (Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*). In an essay "Pen, Pencil, Poison" (1889, reprinted in *Intentions* in 1891), he further states:

The fact of a man being a poisoner is nothing against his prose. The domestic virtues are not the true basis of art, though they may serve as an excellent advertisement for second rate artists. ("Pen, Pencil and Poison," 946)

These sentences state Wilde's own aesthetic principle of art criticism: art has nothing to do with morals, aesthetics nothing to do with ethics. Books are amoral, and, as works of art, they must be judged solely on aesthetic grounds based on the effects they have upon the reader. The life of the author, even if he be a multiple poisoner like Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, whom "Pen, Pencil and Poison" commemorates, bears no relevance to the artistic merit of his or her work. The scales upon which this merit of a literary work is to be weighed, are the impressions it makes and the effects it has upon the reader, the sensations it allows the "critic" to experience. Ironically, the statements made in the Preface are strongly contradicted by the very existence of the Preface; if the merits of a work of art, such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, are indeed to be judged according to the impressions it makes upon its critics, Wilde's vehement defence of his work and his debate with the critics, suggest that he could not follow his own principles and abandon his work into the hands of its audience.

"The critic", according to Wilde, "is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things" (Preface to *Dorian Gray*). The essay "The Critic as Artist", published in 1890, outlines this view of the creative role of the critic. In the essay, Gilbert declares to Ernest:

I would say that the highest Criticism, being the purest form of personal impression, is in its way more creative than creation, as it has least reference to any standard external to itself, and is, in fact, its own reason for existing, and, as the Greeks would put it, in itself, and to itself, an end. ("The Critic as Artist", 966)

This characterisation of criticism proposes a distinctly reader-centred model of reading; the text produces impressions upon the reader, but is in itself of no value except as an

igniter of the reader's sensations. Reading, or "criticism" for Wilde, becomes "the record of one's own soul" ("The Critic as Artist", 966), or as he writes in the Preface to *Dorian Gray*: "It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors" (Preface to *Dorian Gray*). Furthermore, "The Critic as Artist" defines reading as a detached and solitary exercise with "least reference to any standard external to itself"; reading is an event where the text and the reader interact as the only agents present in the process.

The model of reading developed in Wilde's writings in 1890-91, during the period marked by the writing and publication of the two versions of *Dorian Gray*, is a model which we can recognise as essentially post-structuralist; the meaning of the text becomes dependent on the effect it has upon the reader, how the reader "translate[s] into another manner or a new material his [her] impression of" the text. In the Preface, Wilde further suggests that these impressions, these translations, are, of necessity, multiple. He writes: "When critics disagree the artist is in accord with himself" (Preface to *Dorian Gray*). It is only when readers discover a multitude of contradictory meanings in the text, that the artist has succeeded in her task, producing a literary work of art which truly affects her readers and ignites their individual response; then she is "in accord" with herself as an artist.

Together with this aesthetically necessary multiplicity of meanings in a successful piece of art, Wilde's emphasis on the value of sensation in the experience of art, produces an interesting theorisation of reading as a dynamic process. Reading is characterised as a process where the text affects its reader making impressions upon her, impressions which generate new sensations in the reader and new meanings in the text. When Dorian reads the unnamed yellow book, what occurs is not simply a process where the book corrupts its reader, rather it is a process of interaction between

the text and the reader. The book specifically affects Dorian by reflecting him. The fiction presents to Dorian a version of himself, produces a double-vision whereby the reading man is both himself and, simultaneously, the fictional image he reads. This interaction between a work of art and its audience is further explored in the relation between Dorian and his portrait. Whereas critical readers of the novel have, so far, seen the role and the influence of the yellow book as corrupting, the book having a bad influence upon its reader, the portrait has been consistently seen as a pictorial conscience. No consideration, it appears, has been given to the enhancing effects of the painting upon Dorian's apparent moral decay. Significantly, I believe, the interaction between Dorian and the book is repeated and further explored in the relation of the protagonist and his picture.

Dorian Gray's evil and immoral deeds are inscribed upon the surface of the portrait, and he retains the beauty of an innocent. The painting carries the burden of his sins, thus truly reflecting its only spectator, as it lies hidden in the old school room. By his deeds Dorian corrupts the surface of his portrait. However, the painting, just as much as Lord Henry Wotton's dangerously seductive discourse, has a corrupting effect upon Dorian through its very ability to reflect the self of the spectator.

In 1891 Stéphane Mallarmé wrote to Wilde, describing his experience of reading *Dorian Gray* and concluding: "This disturbing, full-length portrait of a Dorian Gray will haunt me, as writing, having become the book itself" (Buckler, 144). As Buckler remarks in his essay "*The Picture of Dorian Gray: An Essay in Aesthetic Exploration*" (1990), Mallarmé makes "a crucial critical observation" (Buckler, 145), because, Buckler proceeds to explain:

the picture in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, more than anything else, is, as the title suggests, what the novel is about; the picture is the book's controlling

symbol, the central source of the unity of its effect, the ultimate test of how well one has identified with and understood the basis for the artist's pleasure in creating it. (Buckler, 145)

After an extremely valuable recognition of the significance of Mallarmé's comment, it seems to me, that Buckler fails to follow up its implications, merely pointing out the symbolic significance of the painting in the novel. The evocative "it" concluding his sentence would simultaneously appear to refer to both the picture within the novel and the novel itself, thus in a suggestive way blurring the distinction between these two works of art. For Mallarmé, the portrait has become the text. In other words, the text itself is a portrait of Dorian Gray; not only is Basil Hallward's painting created in and exists as Wilde's words, but the novel builds a "full-length portrait" of its protagonist. The picture of Dorian Gray, then, is "the book's controlling symbol" in the sense that it is both a symbol within the book as well as a symbol of the book. The structural connection between the text and the picture is, I believe, a central feature of Wilde's novel and contributes considerably to the power of the text.

Dominic Manganiello, in his essay "Ethics and Aesthetics in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*" (1983), writes that "Lord Henry engages in a linguistic narcissism, and his word-painting becomes as much as Basil Hallward's portrait a magical mirror of Dorian's soul" (Manganiello, 28). As Manganiello observes, Lord Henry's verbal manipulation of Dorian Gray builds another (subjective) portrait of the eponymous protagonist. Dorian Gray, "this wonderful young man" (*Dorian Gray*, 16), whose beauty and appearance of innocence are monumentalised in his unchanging youth, is a central work of art within the text. Basil Hallward declares: "He is all my art to me now. . . . It is not merely that I paint from him, draw from him, sketch from him. Of course I have done all that. But he is much more to me than a model or a sitter"

(*Dorian Gray*, 14). Dorian Gray has become the source and soul of Hallward's artistic inspiration and expression, "his personality has suggested to me an entirely new manner in art" (*Ibid.*). For Basil Hallward, Dorian Gray is his art. Lord Henry Wotton, who takes a characteristically cynical view of the artist's relationship with his model, warns Basil: "Some day you will look at your friend, and he will seem to you to be a little out of drawing, or you won't like his tone of colour, or something" (*Dorian Gray*, 16), talking of Dorian as a fading piece of art, when later he compliments the young man's "rose-red youth" and "rose-white boyhood" (*Dorian Gray*, 20), painting Dorian with flowery colours. Hallward's portrait already depicts a Dorian changed by Lord Henry's influence: "I don't know what Harry has been saying to you, but he has certainly made you have the most wonderful expression" (*Dorian Gray*, 21). Basil repeats in his painting an expression drawn on Dorian's face by Lord Henry's words. This portrayal of Dorian-as-art is, of course, highlighted in the supernatural interaction between the man and the painting. Dorian, in the artificiality of his unchanging youth and beauty, becomes a work of art as his portrait carries all the signs of age and conscience.

In her essay "Blushings and Palings: The Body as a Text in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*" (1993) Amanda Witt draws attention to the use of colour-coding throughout the novel, arguing that its use of colours traces Dorian's psychic development towards evil: "Dorian, like the picture, reveals his moral changes through his physical changes - usually his colour" (Witt, 85). Witt, too, observes how Dorian Gray is a work of art in the hands of his friends: "Lord Henry frequently produces bodily changes in Dorian: he 'paints', just as Basil Hallward does, but Lord Henry paints Dorian's living body instead of canvas" (Witt, 92). She interprets all the

colourings, blushings and palings, as strokes of Lord Henry's verbal paintbrush. These colours of moral decay spread from Dorian's character, as Witt shows, onto the pages of Wilde's book, colouring the whole narrative, and she concludes:

The spreading colors in the picture and in the world surrounding Dorian demonstrate the contagion of his evil; for these colors echo the colors of Dorian's body, which in turn reveal his true moral state. Far from being static art, Dorian Gray's body dynamically lives art. Thus, the body of Dorian Gray influences the body of the text, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* refers to a living body as well as to a painting. (Witt, 95)

Witt's essay draws attention to the way in which Dorian Gray's character in the novel is a work of art subject to the masterful strokes of both Basil and Lord Henry, as well as those of Oscar Wilde. At the same time, although Witt does not mention or imply this, Lord Henry's and Basil's influence upon Dorian, their painting of a portrait by paint and by words, draws attention to the very process of creation and thereby, to Dorian Gray as a fictional construction of words. *Dorian Gray* produces a cubist portrait of the protagonist, where different views of his character as well as different means of conveying it, mingle in a strange and fascinating way. This dizzying play of the portraits of Dorian Gray; the painting, Lord Henry's verbal portrait, Dorian's body, and the text which creates him, produces a kaleidoscopic vision of Dorian, where each picture of the young man reflects the character who produces that picture and interprets Dorian in his or her own way ("her" also because Sibyl Vane's limited view of her "Prince Charming", emphasising Dorian's fictional nature, can be seen as another picture of the protagonist). The text itself becomes a portrait similar to the ones created within it, it becomes one image among an ever-changing play of pictures of Dorian Gray, where the reader finds herself lost in a maze of mirrors, all reflecting Dorian Gray and, as works of art, their spectator, the reader herself.

Basil's painting follows Wilde's maxim of the function of art as a mirror of its critic. Basil explains to Lord Henry: "it is rather the painter who, on the coloured canvas, reveals himself. The reason I will not exhibit this picture is that I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my own soul" (*Dorian Gray*, 10). In his portrait of Dorian, Basil sees "too much of" himself (*Dorian Gray*, 8, 10), the art reflects the artist as a spectator of his own art. It is only Basil, who can read this secret into the painting, Lord Henry finds it difficult to believe him even when he confesses his fear (*Dorian Gray*, 8-9). Dorian Gray, also, is blind to Basil's secret passion embedded in the painting, and becomes rather relieved when he discovers that this secret is not the same one he knows the painting to contain (*Dorian Gray*, 233).

For Dorian, the experience of the poisonous book is repeated on a more extensive scale in his experience of Basil Hallward's painting. When Dorian sees the finished portrait for the first time, it is "as if he had recognised himself for the first time" (*Dorian Gray*, 25), and declares "It is part of myself. I feel that" (*Dorian Gray*, 27). This metaphysical union of man and art foreshadows the later interaction between Dorian and his portrait, it also repeats the way in which Dorian sees the hero of the unnamed novel as an image of himself. Like the yellow book, also the painting has a crucial influence upon his mental development. The portrait does not passively reflect him or his "soul", but this reflection of the spectator affects Dorian and contributes to his "moral decay".

The moment Dorian observes "the lines of cruelty round the mouth" (*Dorian Gray*, 73) appearing in the portrait after his abandonment of Sibyl Vane, he recalls his half-haphazard wish to burden the painting with all signs of age and waste and to remain young himself. Dorian's initial suspicion of his own senses is quickly dismissed

and he accepts the transformations in the painting as reflecting his own mental states (*Dorian Gray*, 76, 83). The painting becomes a temptation for Dorian. Initially he decides to use it as a moral conscience: it “would be a guide to him through life, would be what holiness is to some, and conscience to others, and the fear of God to us all” (*Dorian Gray*, 76). The painting is to be used by Dorian as a warning sign to encourage a morally good life. Soon, following another discussion with Lord Henry, Dorian succumbs to the lure of the painting and, feeling an initial pang of pity for the work of art (*Dorian Gray*, 83), launches upon a series of “medico-legal” (Beckson, 81) or “ethico-aesthetic” self-experiments. Dorian feels not only liberated from the confines of his ageing humanity, but also inspired to improvise upon the painting. For Dorian, “there would be a real pleasure in watching it. He would be able to follow his mind into its secret places” (*Dorian Gray*, 84). The fascination of the painting lies in its ability to reflect its spectator, and Dorian’s pleasure stems from his ability to observe himself in the painting, and to observe the effects of the painting upon himself. In “Self-Reflexive Art and Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*” (1989), Douglas Robillard, Jr. writes:

Like DesEsseintes, the central character in Huysmans’s novel, Dorian embarks on a life of sensuality marked by scientific detachment. Like DesEsseintes, Dorian explores exotic perfumes, fabrics, and music, taking careful note of their effects on his nervous system. The aim of this exploration is the same as his purpose in observing the changes that take place in the painting: he wishes to come to know himself by testing his responses to the extremes of sensation. (Robillard, 35)

Dorian’s fascination with the immoral and evil, is enhanced by his fascination with the painting, and he experiments with deeds in order to produce changes in the picture:

Often, on returning home from one of those mysterious and prolonged absences that gave rise to such strange conjecture among those who were his friends, or though that they were so, he himself would creep upstairs to the locked room, open the door with the key that never left him now, and stand,

with a mirror, in front of the portrait that Basil Hallward had painted of him, looking now at the evil and ageing face on the canvas, and now at the fair young face that laughed back at him from the polished glass. The very sharpness of the contrast used to quicken his sense of pleasure. He grew more and more enamoured of his own beauty, more and more interested in the corruption of his own soul. He would examine with minute care, and sometimes with a monstrous and terrible delight, the hideous lines that seared the wrinkling forehead or crawled around the heavy sensual mouth, wondering sometimes which were the more horrible, the signs of sin or the signs of age. (*Dorian Gray*, 99)

The painting corrupts Dorian as much as it reflects his corruption. In the minute comparison between the decaying portrait and its ever youthful spectator, the evil and the immoral become, indeed, merely the artist's colours. As Wilde observed in his response to the editor of the *Scots Observer* in 1890, "An artist, sir, has no ethical sympathies at all. Virtue and wickedness are to him simply what the colours on his palette are to the painter. They are no more and they are no less. He sees that by their means a certain artistic effect can be produced and he produces it" (*Dorian Gray*, 347).

Dorian's experience of the influence of the yellow book and the painting confirm this idea or ideology of vice and crime as a mere means of aesthetic expression and experience. Chapter eleven of *Dorian Gray* describes how Dorian includes the study of poisons in his long list of interests and feels "a horrible fascination in them all." (*Dorian Gray*, 114). The chapter concludes: "Dorian Gray had been poisoned by a book. There were moments when he looked on evil simply as a mode through which he could realise his conception of the beautiful" (*Dorian Gray*, 115). The narrative mentions the "horrible fascination" of poisons, moving directly to refer once more to the unnamed novel, confirming its corrupting effects upon Dorian. And the painting is the medium in which these effects are played out, experimented upon, enhanced and

crystallised. Upon the canvas, Dorian's crimes and vices become colours with which he modifies and re-paints the image of his own self.

The Picture of Dorian Gray outlines an interesting and rather a dangerous model of reading. It suggests that art, like the yellow novel, the portrait and *Dorian Gray* itself, has a corrupting influence, specifically because of the way it reflects its audience and constructs its meaning through this process of reflection, instead of harbouring some absolute, unified meaning built into the text. This process of reflection encompasses a simultaneous "corruption" by the text and an observation of this effect. The image of Dorian Gray experiencing pleasure at the moment he compares his beautiful, smooth hand to that of the portrait, is extremely powerful and evocative. Dorian experiences, at the same moment, his unity with and separateness from the picture.

As Manganiello, in his essay, quite correctly I believe, identifies Wilde's book as "the full portrait" of its protagonist (Manganiello, 31), he continues by acknowledging the role of the reader within the text:

It [the text] becomes, of course, the medium through which artist and spectator see themselves, too. Everyone, Wilde said, sees his own sin in Dorian Gray. In being temporarily attracted to Lord Henry, Dorian acts as a double for the reader who is thereby reminded of his own corruption. (Manganiello, 31)

The ethical dimension Manganiello insists upon is quite frustrating; the reading of *Dorian Gray* is not a simple matter of identifying oneself with the protagonist. His sins, which are vaguely described or hinted at, do not simply reflect one's own sins and shameful deeds, and the novel does not merely remind the reader "of his own corruption". Instead, *Dorian Gray* engages in a more complex consideration of the interaction and the mechanics of the corrupting or unethical influence of art and fiction.

The disputed ethical message or value of *Dorian Gray* is but a reflection of the reader, the reader reading her own morals into the text. This, I believe, is what Wilde suggested when he wrote in his Preface that "The nineteenth century dislike of Realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass. The nineteenth century dislike of Romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass" (Preface to *Dorian Gray*). *Dorian Gray*'s portrait does not stand for absolute moral values, but shows morals as subjective and relative.

Dorian Gray outlines a scenario where reading is a process of self-exploration. What is significant about this process is the simultaneous transformation of self and observation of this transformation, a view of the self as other and an awareness of this otherness. Wilde's text presents reading as a dynamic process between the reader and the text. Like Georges Poulet's description of reading, discussed in the Introduction, *Dorian Gray*, too, suggests that reading is a transformational experience which dissolves the divide between the reading subject and the read object and at the same time maintains this divide, allowing the subject to observe and analyse this process of losing herself in fiction. Reading is an experience of the impossible or, in Wilde's words, "A truth in art is that whose contradictory is also true" ("The Truth of Masks", 1017).

IV

In my readings of Victorian detective stories, I have shown that drugs play an important role in the genre and, more specifically, in conjunction with the theme of detection, that they are used as a textual element to explore questions concerning

reading and the interaction between the reader and the text. These fictional texts translate the experience of drugs, described within their narratives, into the experience of the reader.

Victorian popular fiction features a large quantity and variety of drugs and reflects the different sides of Victorian drug-culture. It is not surprising that often topical and contemporary popular fiction, especially genres such as the sensation novel and the detective story, should feature drugs, which were commonplace, even omnipresent in Victorian Britain. The authors examined in this work were all familiar with drugs. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was a medical doctor, Wilkie Collins a chronic patient with a severe opium addiction. Both Charles Dickens and Robert Louis Stevenson resorted to opiates during their illnesses. This familiarity with drugs was by no means exceptional; all Victorians took opiates at some stage of their lives, whether for headache, toothache, gout, insomnia or more serious diseases and problems.

Drugs had, of course, been used through the ages, but in the nineteenth-century and especially in Britain, the nature of drug-taking changed. The development of large-scale capitalism and the industrial revolution led to mass importation of opium and a flourishing market in various patent medicines. At the same time, the significant advances in the fields of chemistry and toxicology resulted in such new drugs as morphine and cocaine. Drug use became more visible: the wide working-class use alerted the attention of philanthropists, the developing medical profession problematised drug-use and enveloped it in their own medical domain introducing the new concept of drug addiction as a disease, rather than as a vice. Overall, in the second half of the nineteenth century, drugs emerged as a social problem on a national scale.

The texts discussed in this work highlight various aspects of Victorian drug-culture, Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* depicts the common medicinal use of laudanum, while *The Woman in White* creates in Count Fosco a fascinating amateur chemist and a master criminal with alchemistic associations. Charles Dickens's *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* takes advantage of the cultural myth of the East End opium den and the new view of opium use as a detrimental, despicable vice. Both Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of Four* refer to the developing science of toxicology in their depiction of drugs. What is significant about these works, is the way in which they use drugs in conjunction with the theme of detection to explore the experience of reading, how they use drugs as devices to affect their readers and to investigate their own position and status as popular fiction. These texts address the question of the possible drug-like effects of popular fiction, thus engaging in issues concerning their own impact upon their readers. Drugs and detection in each of these novels marks a degree of textual self-awareness and self-reflexivity.

The socio-historical reason for this phenomenon, I believe, is the simultaneous emergence of drugs and mass reading as nation-wide "social problems". In the second half of the nineteenth century, the national fascination with popular fiction took on alarming proportions. The growth of literacy (especially after the 1870 Education Act), increasing leisure time among the middle classes, proliferation of weekly and monthly magazines, advances in printing techniques and the book trade, all contributed to an expanding market for popular fiction. Suddenly, authors were aware of a vastly expanding audience yearning to be catered for with light romances and thrilling crime stories. As Victorians' craving for fiction and their wide-spread addiction to

sensational stories of crime, love and intrigue, coincided with a debate over drugs, especially opiates, the terminology and imagery of narcotics appeared relevant and applicable to popular fiction. This is well illustrated in the various literary reviews and criticism in the Introduction of this work. Ultimately, this prevalence of drugs in Victorian stories of detection and their criticism, suggests that drugs may have had a far more significant impact on the history of European literature, especially in the nineteenth century, than has been acknowledged so far.

All of the novels discussed in this work, while taking advantage of different aspects of drug-use in Victorian society, present detection and reading in a similar way. In all of them, detection takes on the characteristics of intoxication and addiction. Their detectives are portrayed as obsessed with the mystery, unable to stop detecting. They all suffer from "detective fever", whose symptoms include, in addition to monomania, a sense of fragmentation, dislocation and disorientation of both sensory perceptions and the detective's sense of self. These drug-like elements of the detective's experience are transported into the experience of reading. Despite the apparently linear trajectory of a detective story and its transparent, realist narrative, these texts repeat for the reader the sense of intoxication and addiction. Wilkie Collins and Robert Louis Stevenson use multiple narratives, breaking into fragments of drugged text, leaving the reader in a state of ambiguity and uncertainty. The reader, despite her best efforts at detection is unable to solve the final mystery of who is telling the story, who is talking and what is the meaning of the text. Collins's narratives fragment into a myriad of narrative pieces with no authorial control, Stevenson's novel produces its solution in a "drugged" text where the identities of the narrator, the murderer and the victim become indistinguishable and undecidable. Charles Dickens's

The Mystery of Edwin Drood and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of Four* present a state of intoxication as necessary for detection. *Edwin Drood* insists on giving its clues to the mystery through a drugged or mesmerised state, seducing the reader, in its incomplete form, into a similar state of mesmerised obsession and feverish dreaming. Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories present the very activity of detection as a drug, and the detective as a drug-addict, dependent upon the stimulating effects of detection.

Reading, in these texts, is an experience of narcotic schizophrenia. In each text, the reader experiences a sense of fragmentation and uncertainty, and detects this effect of the text upon her. The model of reading developed by Oscar Wilde in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is repeated in all the texts discussed in this work. The reader, like Dorian in front of his portrait, is both merged with and separate from the text. She lives the text and experiences all the excitement, suspense and drug-like disorientation of the text, while at the same time observing this phenomena, appreciating the power of the texts to affect her.

Théophile Gautier's reports of his hashish experiments in Paris in the 1840s depict strangely similar effects of hashish: "By a strange prodigy, after a few minutes of contemplation, I would melt into the object gazed at and was myself transformed into the object" ("The Club of Assassins", 48). At the same time, the existence of this report shows a simultaneous observation and admiration of this process by Gautier. According to Charles Baudelaire, with hashish, "From time to time your personality vanishes" but "You retain, in fact, the power of self-observation" ("Wine and Hashish", 85, 86). This split mind, this impossible experience of losing oneself and observing oneself getting lost in wild fictions, is the one that Victorian stories of

detection assign to their reader. Reading, as it is presented in these detective stories, is a self-experiment with fiction. It is an exciting process of self-investigation, experimenting with and observing the effects of the text upon one's self. Ultimately, it is a form of self-detection, where the central mystery is the otherness of the self observed through the text.

Notes

¹ *Dorian Gray* defines itself in relation to detective fiction. The last scene in the novel, following Dorian's suicide, where a policeman is brought to his house and horrified servants break down the door to find his dead body, marks the beginning of detection. This scene opens a detective story, which, however, lies outside the narrative of Wilde's text. *Dorian Gray*, with its three suicides, an accidental death and a murder, is a story of crime, always necessarily absent from the detective story. It could be seen as the other of a detective story, and in this otherness constantly suggesting and approaching, almost becoming a detective story. Dorian's disposal of Basil's body and his bag and coat (*Dorian Gray*, 124, 134) and his desire to confess his crime to Lord Henry (*Dorian Gray*, 162) create, within the narrative, suspense characteristic of detective fiction.

² The Decadent movement in France was much stronger than the one in Britain and lasted for a considerably longer time, before it transformed itself into Symbolism. R. K. R. Thornton, in "'Decadence' in Later Nineteenth-Century England" (1979), dates the emergence of French Decadence as a cultural movement from the 1860s (R. K. R. Thornton, 18), at the same time acknowledging that "There are those who question whether there was a Decadent Movement in England at all" (R. K. R. Thornton, 15).

³ *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was first published in *Lippincott's Magazine* in 1890. The second, enlarged and revised version was published by Ward, Lock and Company in the following year. All my references are to this latter version, which is more generally available and better-known than the first one.

⁴ An unsigned review in *Punch* in July 1890 seized Wilde's claim of the poisonous perfection of his novel, declaring: "Poisonous! Yes. But the loathly 'leperous distilment' taints and spoils, without in any way subserving 'perfection', artistic or otherwise" (Beckson, 77).

⁵ For a description of these experiments see Théophile Gautier's essays "The Opium Pipe" (1938), "Hashish" (1843) and "The Club of Assassins" (1846), all published in English in *Hashish, Wine, Opium*, (1972).

THE VICTIM OF FICTION.

Being passages from the Diary of a young Gentleman in the Law, who is a confirmed reader of Novels, and nothing else.

Monday Night.—"I shall not return." Such were my words as I closed the street door behind me this morning. "Are they ominous? I meant only that I should not return until night, but what if some fatal event should fulfil them, and they should be evidence on the coroner's inquest!" So I pondered, as I went to the omnibus. But I am home again. Next me sat a well-dressed man, with white hair. He murmured at the slowness of the vehicle. His smile was kindly, but that was probably hypocritical. He was doubtless eager to take up some bill he had forged, and thus prevent the crime from being detected. To the office of MR. ASPHODEL, the Governor. How wearisome and pettifogging were the daily details of a lawyer's clerk's life until I learned to look at them in the lurid light shed by knowledge of the world! Now the Governor's Attendance-Book is one long romance. He gave me instructions to draw a certain marriage settlement. I will note no name save in cipher. I believe that Miss KLEBBING hates CAPTAIN GRIPPLING, and has a concealed passion for her guardian, LORD ARRWGGBNX, who brought her to our place. I saw a look which spoke volumes. When I witness her signature, I will try to test this. MR. JOLLIFIELD brought his father's will for us to get it proved. The water-mark betrays nothing, and the whole looks fair, but there was a furtive expression about his eye as he told the Governor to lock it up. *Note.* The latter asked for the key of our strong room, and did not return it. Will he be there to-night—is he there now, when all of us are gone—and why? I was last to leave. I wish I had tied a thread across the door. Reading in bed till 2 A.M.

Tuesday Night.—MRS. SMILER, who with her husband are fellow-boarders here, was most attentive to her husband this morning, insisted on arranging his neck-scarf before he went out, and took out a pin which she declared was ugly, putting in another. But she did not kiss him—only laughed a merry Good-bye. *Was that pin to be a signal to some one whom he would meet?* Such things are common. Office. ASPHODEL returned the key, and said he forgot to do so overnight. He is not one who commonly forgets, especially any trumpery blunder in detail which you may make when your mind is excited with sensations of which his cold heart knows nothing. My friend and companion in my room, BOB CHOWPER, very grave to-day. Would not talk, declaring that he had a heavy case to master. This idle excuse did not serve with me; but I said nothing. Has he committed some crime? He has refused more than once to go to the theatre with me. I must look at the playbills, and see whether the pieces I proposed to see were of a kind to act upon his conscience. Watched him writing a letter, which he locked up. Why did he not put it into our box, to be called for, like other letters? But I will never betray him. Reading as usual till nearly 3.

Wednesday Night.—Called to-day, in Half Moon Street, to read the proposed marriage settlement to the parties. Miss KLEBBING was very amusing, chatted gaily with her fiancé, and even made fun of some of our law terms. This must be assumed—is it natural to a young girl within a fortnight of so awful a step as matrimony? His Lordship was not there. Probably he has not her power of self-command, and could not bear to see his rival's apparent happiness. The REVEREND MR. CLIPPER came, and got the Governor to give him a cheque for £200. Yet MR. C. is rich, and his bankers are in the next street but two. I have heard that before his marriage he was much admired by ladies—is there some dark mystery, and Mrs. CLIPPER not to see the entry in the banker's book? MR. SPRIGGINS called, and the Governor managed to go out without seeing him. Why was this? There are three boxes of deeds in the strong room, marked with S.'s name. *I will offer to index the contents.* MRS. BRELIVERT called, and the porter said that she went away in tears. ASPHODEL can be very brutal when he likes—he has said coarse things to me when I have forgotten to write what he called important letters. Read till 3:35, when I fell asleep, and the candle burnt out in socket. No harm done, except tallow all over the bolster. Gave ANNE a shilling to manage that her mistress should not know. She promised to put my bolster on some one else's bed, and give me his. This girl makes me shudder. In what region of crime could she have been taught such subtle craft? Has she ever had part in a murder? I will watch her.

Thursday Night.—A letter for MRS. SMILER, at breakfast. He asked whom it was from. She laughed, and told him to mind his own business. And that could throw him off the scent—that assumption of innocent fun! I will never wed—I know women too well. She told him that she was going to her dressmaker's. The fool pretended to fasten up his purse, determinately, as if warning her against extravagance. And then she laughed again. Well she might. My eye was on her, and she looked foolish. But it is no business of mine. The office. DR. SPIDERWORT called, and I, having to go in to speak to the Governor, heard them talking about life-assurance. They stopped when I entered, and the doctor put something into his pocket. We have heard of medical men hastening the payment of sums assured—and how it

has been done. What was in that packet, or whatever DR. S. pocketed? I had a suspicion flash across me to-night that this diary is seen by other eyes than my own. ANNE gave a strange glance when she handed me my candlestick: a grin I should have understood, but this was more mysterious. I have taken means to ascertain whether my lock is tampered with. Whoever you are, who are clandestinely reading this, you are betrayed! Could not read to-night for thinking of my stratagem.

Friday Night.—A most unpleasant circumstance. SMILER came down early, and finding me alone, said he had wanted to speak to me. I prepared myself to be his confidant, when he intimated that if I stared any more, in an offensive manner, at his wife, he would pull my nose off. I smiled sarcastically, knowing what I knew; but no more passed. Walked into town. A Frenchman accosted me, and in his own language asked me the way to the French Embassy. I had forgotten where it was, and expressed my regret. He smiled in a melancholy way, and said that he had suddenly arrived, and was without English money, but it did not matter—and he was sure, as I spoke French so beautifully, I should understand his feelings. I begged him, with apologies, to accept half-a-crown for a cab. He took it. But I felt it my duty to write a full and exact account of what I had done (describing the person), and send it to the French Embassy, as this man may be dangerous. Office. Asked the Governor whether I should index SPRIGGINS's papers. *He abruptly told me to get on with the work I had already in hand.* This confirms my suspicions. I forgot my precautions about this diary, and cannot tell to-night whether it has been touched. But I will take it away, and keep it at the office. Casually asked ANNE what she thought of BLOGES, who is now being tried, and she said she hoped he would be hung. A female heart hardened against mercy, and a female hypocrite, affecting indignation against crime! I now believe that she took my new and unused ivory toothbrush. Read till 1:45.

Saturday Night.—Write at the office, all the clerks gone. Our house disgusting this day. MRS. SMILER has a baby, and SMILER rampaging about the premises in ecstasy—would shake hands with me, and make me take wine—was sure I had meant nothing rude, but ladies require extra humouring at times—invited me to the christening—a joyous beast. The old gentleman with white hair, whom I saw in the omnibus, and suspected of forgery, came, and turns out to be MRS. SMILER's uncle, as rich as CRESSUS—godfather, of course. Got away from their sentimentalities, and to the office. Large letter from the French Embassy, stating that the man I had relieved was a notorious street beggar, who plundered foolish persons by complimenting them on their French. BOB CHOWPER radiant; slapped my back in a coarse manner, and told me that he was a father, that he had been uneasy about Mrs. C. all the week, but that now all was glorious, and I should come to the christening. I answered rather coldly, on which he roared, and told me to marry, and see how I liked it. I marry! I have read too much for that. But a further astonishment awaited me. DR. SPIDERWORT came in, and not finding the Governor, looked into my room, and told me I should be happy to hear that Mrs. ASPHODEL had got a fine boy, and was going on capitally. And as I looked, he said, a judge of pretty things, he showed me a Dagmar brooch which he was going to present to her, because ASPHODEL, like a pertinacious fellow, had insisted on paying him a fee. *It was the very packet I had seen him hide!* Presently in came the Governor, as pleased as Punch, and sends me off to Mrs. B.—, bother, no use in ciphers now, MRS. WEEPINGWILL, to say, with his love, that he had got both her boys into the War Office; and when I told her she cried, and said he was the best man in the world, and that she should never forget his kindness last Wednesday. Seems I took a wrong view. Have to hurry up my entries, as that brute the porter wants to shut up. Ask him why he is in such a hurry. Says his missis has been confined to-day, and he naturally wants to be at home. I should have thought the reverse, but these creatures have no sensitiveness. So close in a hurry.

The remaining entry is in the handwriting of MR. ASPHODEL.

"The donkey who wrote the above has left me some months, and I find this stuck in an unfinished document that was discovered in his drawer, amid a detestable litter. For his further information, if he receives this by post, I may state that the marriage he mentions was a love-match, and most happy, and Miss KLEBBING, now Mrs. GRIPPLING, has just had a beautiful baby, who is called after LORD ARRWGGBNX. That MR. JOLLIFIELD was the most dutiful of sons to the kindest of fathers, and that the will, though perfectly regular, has not yet consoled him for the loss of his parent. That I, who was so unfortunate as to incur my clerk's suspicions, by wanting the key of my own safe, merely wished to stow away £200 in notes, which my client, the REV. MR. CLIPPER, had received from his wife, who had saved the money for a purpose which does not concern my clerk, but there was no wickedness in it. That I did see MR. SPRIGGINS on the Wednesday, for, as arranged, he came round and met me at the front door, and we lunched at the Gray's Inn Coffee-house. And lastly, that if he had imitated the conduct of MR. CHOWPER, or even of poor, honest EDWARD the porter, I should not have had to tell ANNE (evidently a

7. SOME DETECTIVE STORIES CONTAINING DRUGS:

A CHRONOLOGICAL LIST 1860-1900

- 1 1860 "Tom Fox" [John Burnett]. *The Revelations of a Detective* (alcohol)
- 2 1861 Mrs. Gordon Smythies. *Alone in the World* (opium)
- 3 1862 Wilkie Collins. *No Name* (opium)
- 4 1862 Mary Elizabeth Braddon. *Lady Audley's Secret* (sal-volatile, opium)
- 5 1862 "Charles Felix". *The Notting Hill Mystery* (prussic acid?)
- 6 1863 Mary Elizabeth Braddon. *Aurora Floyd* (alcohol)
- 7 1863 Mary Elizabeth Braddon. *Eleanor's Victory* (opium)
- 8 1864 Gaboriau, Émile. *Madame Lerouge*
- 9 1865 Charles Dickens. *Our Mutual Friend* (opium)
- 10 1866 Wilkie Collins. *Armada* (opium)
- 11 1867 Mary Elizabeth Braddon. *Birds of Prey* (poison)
- 12 1868 Mary Elizabeth Braddon. *Charlotte's Inheritance* (arsenic)
- 13 1872 Sheridan Le Fanu. "The Room in the Dragon Volant" ("Mortis imago")
- 14 1875 Wilkie Collins. *The Law and the Lady* (arsenic)
- 15 1878 Anna Katharine Green. *The Leavenworth Case* (strychnine?)
- 16 1880 Wilkie Collins. *Jezebel's Daughter*
- 17 1885 Émile Gaboriau. *The Intrigues of a Poisoner*
- 18 1888 Anna Katharine Green. *Behind Closed Doors* (opium, morphine, digitaline)
- 19 1888 Julian Hawthorne. *Section 558, or, The Fatal Letter* (tobacco)

20 1888 Fergus W. Hume. *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (chloroform)

21 1888 Wilkie Collins. *The Legacy of Cain* (opium)

22 1890 Anna Katharine Green. *Matter of Millions* (poison)

23 1890 Fergus W. Hume. *The Gentleman Who Vanished* (alcohol, poison)

24 1891 Israel Zangwill. *The Big Bow Mystery* (opium)

25 1892 Rober Louis Stevenson and Lloyd Osbourne. *The Wrecker* (opium)

26 1894 Mrs. J. H. Riddell. "Dr. Varvill's Prescription" (strychnine)

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