

SPECIAL ISSUE

Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions* at 200 Editors' Introduction

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THIS SPECIAL ISSUE OF *THE COLERIDGE BULLETIN*, dedicated to the bicentennial of Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater: Being an Extract from the Life of a Scholar*, arose from a conference we organised in May of 2022. Originally intended for 2021, commemorating the initial publication of the *Confessions* in *The London Magazine*, the conference was deferred to 2022 due to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic. In a way, such delays are appropriate when considering a writer who often tested his editors with his procrastinations; more prosaically, the *Confessions* were first collected into a book in 1822 (and later revised in 1856), preserving some of the bicentennial thrust that was first intended. The conference, still titled *Thomas De Quincey's Confessions at 200*, was held at The Wordsworth Trust in Grasmere, and received organisational support from the Trust and the Friends of Coleridge, which we gratefully acknowledge. The contributors to this special issue were among the speakers who presented papers; Robert Morrison and Margaret Russett gave keynote lectures.

De Quincey has occupied a position of continuing fascination in Romantic Studies. He has not been as inevitably pivotal as members of the Lake, Edinburgh, and London circles in which he was at various points an ever-complicated participant, but he has remained irrepressibly present as a key reference: so prominent, indeed, as to permit a well-attended conference dedicated to only one of the texts in his considerable output, even if by far the most famous. Once proverbially minor, De Quincey has re-emerged as central, or, at the very least, centring. As Morrison notes in his foreword to this issue, this critical position is a phenomenon of recent decades, aided in no small part by De Quincey's curious alignments with emerging academic paradigms, and further enhanced by the modern edition of his works published in the early 2000s under the general editorship of Grevel Lindop. An edition of De Quincey's letters, to be edited by Morrison, is now also forthcoming.

Following a long period of relative indifference and a brief but meteoric rise to renewed significance as psychoanalysis and deconstruction invited a reconsideration of texts previously considered too difficult, idiosyncratic, or marginal, De Quincey has been repeatedly reinvented as new perspectives have generated inroads into a body of work that has proven remarkably prescient and internally coherent, albeit dispersed over many essays on many topics published in different journals and newspapers over a period of more than forty years. Recent critics have noted how well De Quincey's work responds to a range of frames, many of which have only recently emerged in Romantic Studies as keys to understanding the period and its uniquely powerful rethinking of the meanings of literature. These frames range from Translation

Studies to Medical Humanities, and from media-theoretical approaches to genre studies.

The six essays and foreword collected in this special issue are evidence of the rude health of De Quincey studies, demonstrating the range of readings his works continue to provoke. Over two hundred years after his flamboyant emergence onto the wide stage of literature with the *Confessions*, there are still numerous novel nuances to be plumbed in his fascinating bricolage of performances.