

De Quincey's Co-Ontological Sleep: Electra's Kindness as a Way beyond 'Dog Sleep' and Nightmare

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THIS ARTICLE OFFERS A PHENOMENOLOGICAL reading of De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* and focuses upon instances of co-ontological sleep in De Quincey's narrative. These episodes represent someone sleeping who depends on a wakeful other in order to sleep well. I argue that these moments underline the co-dependency that the human need for sleep entails. In so doing, they contribute to a co-ontological counternarrative in De Quincey's text which, unlike the main narrative's portrait of a sensitive, solitary philosopher and aesthete, privileges the domestic over the exotic, the servant over the aristocrat, and the ethical over the aesthetic. The *Confessions'* co-ontological subplot extends the scope of the text's conception of philosophy. The main narrative establishes the philosopher as a connoisseur of experience who sacrifices some of his autonomy in order to ally his subjectivity to opium's potent agency. The result of this alliance is a brilliant revelation of the creativity and aesthetic responsiveness of the individual human imagination. However, the co-ontological subplot teaches a different lesson. What is revealed here is how an ethical recognition of human interdependency can alleviate the vulnerability and suffering that are the inevitable consequences of human finitude. Rather than celebrating sleep as the occasion for sublime visions, the subplot insists that the human need for sleep entails a mutual duty of care, which, if honoured with hospitable generosity, allows weakness and infirmity to serve as the basis of positive social ties rather than as causes of shame.

Co-Ontological Sleep

My conception of co-ontological sleep arises from a recognition that sleep and the need for sleep undermine and undo an individual subject's autonomy. Intensifying weariness bedims and confuses consciousness and weakens the will. Sleep suspends the will almost entirely and, when dreamless, entails a near-complete loss of consciousness. Our being-from-and-towards sleep is a being-from-and-towards a condition of recurrent helpless blankness.

My argument finds encouragement in Nancy Yousef's interrogation of the Romantic reception of atomistic theories of the self. Such theories are founded upon a belief that autonomy originally defined natural man. Yousef focuses particularly upon the writing of John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, William Wordsworth and Mary Shelley. These writers all variously evince a faith in personal identity as the expressive achievement of the subject, understood as a self-conscious being with self-defining powers of agency. However, Yousef argues that they are all made uneasy when reflecting upon infancy as a condition of helpless dependency and upon the human need to participate in a community:

It is a well-established fact of intellectual history that a range of philosophies identified as ‘enlightenment’ strove to define the human being as independent, free-standing, and irreducibly individual. The fraught but powerful ideal of autonomy stands among the key inventions that received opinion attributes to the enlightenment [. . .] Yet it is obvious that human individuals are born and develop in intimate and constant contact with others, that dependence is our inescapable first condition and interaction with others necessary for our survival and formation.¹

Every human life begins in a state of dependency. Moreover, we can never be entirely clear of this original dependency on the care of others. Regardless of whether our adult consciousness seems to be suffused with autonomy, a continued, meaningful, secure existence depends upon a social bond. I seek here to provide a supplement to Yousef’s discussion by arguing that humanity imagined in some original state of nature must still succumb to the need for sleep.² Moreover, the collective preparation for meeting the need to sleep and a tolerant, watchful respect for others as they grow weary and fall asleep are necessary to any ordinary code of hospitality.

Jean-Luc Nancy’s work informs my understanding of co-ontology. Nancy’s essay ‘Identity and Trembling’ emphasises that Hegelian spirit is untouched by Thanatos, Genesis, and Hypnos: ‘Immortal, unengendered, and insomniac: this is the triple negation over which the life of the spirit rises, imperturbably adult and awake’.³ To go beyond Hegel’s insistence on the eternal, uninterrupted wakefulness of an always fully grown spirit, Nancy proposes his idea of co-ontology. In Nancy’s view, being arises between beings: any entity that exists, exists in contact with other entities. This conception of co-ontology underpins what he calls ‘being singular plural’. Any individual derives its singularity from its many-surfaced contact with other beings. All being is co-ontological; all being is being-with. Nancy’s co-ontology comes into clearest focus when thought of in relation to the ‘triple negation’ from which Hegel’s conception of spirit arises. Nancy understands being born, sleeping, and dying as primordial forms of a being’s exposure to the being of other beings. We are born, we sleep, and we die ‘to’ and ‘with’ each other.

¹ Nancy Yousef, *Isolated Cases: The Anxieties of Autonomy in Enlightenment Philosophy and Romantic Literature* (New York, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 1.

² Indeed, Rousseau supposes that a man in a state of nature would spend much of his time sleeping. See ‘Discourse on Inequality’, in *Rousseau’s Political Writings*, ed. A. Ritter and J. C. Bondanella (New York, NY: Norton, 1988), 15.

³ Prenatal being or early infancy, sleep, and death recur as a trinity of unrememberable states that constitute important reference points in the phenomenological literature. They are discussed in relation to each other by Nancy: Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 12. Simon Critchley writes that a pressing need to revise Heidegger’s *Being and Time* informs Nancy’s *Being Singular Plural*. Critchley suggests Nancy sought to ‘recover’ a Heideggerian ‘phenomenology of everyday life’ from ‘the wreckage of Heidegger’s political commitment’. Nancy, in Critchley’s words, believes ‘*Being and Time* must be rewritten as a “social” ontology’ because ‘[f]or Nancy, to say “we” is for existence to reclaim its due or to find its condition in co-existence’. See Simon Critchley, ‘With being-with? Notes on Jean-Luc Nancy’s rewriting of *Being and Time*’, *Studies in Practical Philosophy* 1 (1999): 54, 55 (53–67).

Thinking of sleep as co-ontological sets a limit to how far we can view the individual subject as an autonomous agent. Sleep as the temporary fading out of consciousness is a state of withdrawal from the world into a sealed inwardness of self. But the approach of sleep as weariness and sleep itself are also necessarily ways of being with and towards the world and towards, most crucially, other singular plural beings with whom we co-exist. Thinking of sleep co-ontologically brings into focus the centrality of the trusting forbearance of the wakeful watcher to the life of any sleep-governed community.

Nightmare and the Philosopher as Dreamer

Towards the close of the *Confessions*, De Quincey raises the question of agency directly. He implies a conventional understanding of narrative as the story of a hero, but displaces the agentive power of the hero onto opium itself:

Not the opium-eater, but the opium, is the true hero of the tale; and the legitimate centre on which the interest revolves. The object was to display the marvellous agency of opium, whether for pleasure or for pain.⁴

However, De Quincey's claim to be a 'philosopher' and his claim that 'from my birth I was made an intellectual creature' complicate this picture of the opium-eater as passive victim (*Works* II 10). In opium-induced nightmares, the dreamer is a tragic hero of the spirit, who demonstrates his heroism by enduring a fatal alienation from the possibility of peaceful, restorative sleep, like Macbeth he comes to wish that he might 'sleep no more' (*Works* II 74). Indeed, the final section of his *Confessions* draws its power from serving as a revelation of De Quincey's inner life. De Quincey makes his dreams the climax of his self-representation as an opium-eater. They demonstrate his distinctiveness even as they dramatize the precarity of his individuality. They are the remarkable fruit of his singular subjectivity and, at least partially, ally him with opium's heroic power. In other words, De Quincey demonstrates his aesthetic responsiveness with an account of the brilliance of his dreams. He structures his *Confessions* so that they culminate with his dreams, and sublime power suffuses his dreams of Piranesi-like self-reproducing architecture, of faces on the ocean, of a horrifying nightmare-composite realm he calls China, of an Easter reunion with a resurrected Ann, and of the incomprehensible confusion of a huge battle.

Turning his dreams into writing serves as a way of turning the passive terrors of his innermost experience into an active achievement of his imagination. De Quincey's self-representation as a writer serves as a gambit that allows him to claim an intellectual power which is in league with opium rather than being entirely enslaved by it. Menglu Gao and Barry Milligan argue that De Quincey is a Brunonian who viewed health as the result of keeping

⁴ Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, in *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*, gen. ed. Grevel Lindop, 21 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003) II 74. Further references to *Confessions* are to this edition and are cited by page number in the text.

one's constitutional excitability in balance with life's varying levels of excitement.⁵ Brown regarded opium as an exciting stimulant rather than as a pacifying narcotic, and Brown's thinking of opium as a source of irresistible excitement provides a way of understanding De Quincey's dreams as testament to his admirable excitability.⁶

De Quincey suggests a philosopher has a rich dreamlife, whereas dull dreams or dreamless sleep are typical of anyone preoccupied with life's mundane practicalities. He is proud of his capacity to dream, and believes it distinguishes him from the man 'whose talk is of oxen' (*Works* II 12). This reference to the conversational preoccupations of a lowly agricultural worker is a (misquoted) allusion to *Ecclesiasticus* 38. This chapter makes a hierarchical distinction between the 'learned man' whose 'wisdom' 'cometh by opportunity of leisure' (38.24) and the farmer, carpenter, workmaster, smith, and potter who are denied wisdom because each of these 'laboureth night and day' (38.27). De Quincey enlists biblical support for his social prejudice. He is following the example of Edmund Burke, who alludes to the same chapter of *Ecclesiasticus* when he argues that 'the state suffers oppression' if lowborn workers, such as 'an hair-dresser' or 'a working tallow-chandler', 'are permitted to rule'.⁷

De Quincey, in other words, conforms to a prevailing conservative prejudice that presumes that the acquisition of wisdom depends upon a life of leisure. Tellingly, given De Quincey's association of the philosopher with a power to dream, *Ecclesiasticus* emphasises that the labouring craftsmen lives a life of watching. The 'diligence' of manual labour comes at the expense of sleep: the 'carpenter and workmaster, that laboureth night and day' must 'watch to finish a work' (*Ecclesiasticus* 38.27) and the smith 'setteth his mind to finish his work, and watcheth to polish it perfectly' (38.28). This unresting 'diligence' is essential, however, to human living together: 'Without these cannot a city be inhabited' (38.32). Although, as Burke stresses in his allusion to this passage, 'They shall not be sought for public counsel' (38.33) since they cannot 'understand the sentence of judgment', nonetheless these humble workers 'maintain the state of the world' (38.34). The judge acquires wisdom from a life of leisure, whilst the worker fulfils his duty through applied effort, and a watchful eschewal of repose.

De Quincey's dream descriptions have divided implications: the opium-eater is both a hero of abundantly excitable spirit, but also an abject victim of forces and thoughts that are out of his control. In order to maintain the impression of his excitability, De Quincey represents his sleep as 'tumultuous',

⁵ Menglu Gao, "'Founding Its Empire on Spells of Pleasure': Brunonian Excitability, the Invigorated English Opium-Eater, and De Quincey's 'China Question'", *Literature and Medicine* 38.1 (2020): 1–25; Barry Milligan, 'Brunonianism, Radicalism and "The Pleasures of Opium"', in *Thomas De Quincey: New Theoretical and Critical Directions*, ed. Robert Morrison and Daniel Sanjiv Roberts (London: Routledge, 2008), 45–62.

⁶ See Milligan, 'Brunonianism, Radicalism and "The Pleasures of Opium"', especially 51–53, for a closely illustrated discussion of Brown's claims that opium is a stimulant.

⁷ Edmund Burke, *Revolutionary Writings: Reflections on the Revolution in France and the First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, ed. Iain Hampsher-Monk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 50.

but the sublime experience of his dreams arises from a condition of helplessness, which underlines the opium-eater's weakened will:

The opium-eater loses none of his moral sensibilities, or aspirations: he wishes and longs, as earnestly as ever, to realize what he believes possible, and feels to be exacted by duty; but his intellectual apprehension of what is possible infinitely outruns his power, not of execution only, but even of power to attempt. He lies under the weight of incubus and night-mare: he lies in sight of all that he would fain perform, just as a man forcibly confined to his bed by the mortal languor of a relaxing disease, who is compelled to witness injury or outrage offered to some object of his tenderest love:—he curses the spells which chain him down from motion:—he would lay down his life if he might but get up and walk; but he is powerless as an infant, and cannot even attempt to rise. (*Works* II 65)

De Quincey here offers a self-portrait in the third person, and this rhetorical detachment reinforces the sense of his failing powers of agency. The description characterises the 'opium-eater' as capable of wishing but not of acting and reduces him to a baby-like state. He participates in his dreams as a helpless observer, brilliantly receptive but terrifyingly paralysed. De Quincey's receptive sensibility compensates for the shameful incapacity which takes hold of him when he dreams. Brunonian conceptions of excitement and excitability dignify opium-induced torpidity. His opium use might make him its debilitated victim, but he rises above the shameful abjection of his incapacity as he becomes the heroic source of a phantasmagoric dream-life.

Dog Sleep

Eric Lindstrom casts De Quincey's self-representation in a different light by focussing not on the sublimity of De Quincey's dream-life, but on the creaturely abjection evident in the condition De Quincey refers to as 'dog sleep'.⁸ Lindstrom argues that the *Confessions* takes much of its interest from De Quincey's creative engagement with Wordsworth's poetry and his advocacy of Wordsworth's greatness. In Lindstrom's view, De Quincey offers us two Wordsworths. One is the principal representative of the Romantic poet as 'regulative ideal'.⁹ The other is an uncanny, creaturely Wordsworth. These two Wordsworths produce different kinds of poetry. One Wordsworth is the poet of a sovereign lyricism, the self-expression of a powerful, self-controlled, imaginatively autonomous individual. The other Wordsworth writes a poetry that is attentive to the self's creaturely limitations, recording states of passivity and abjection. For Lindstrom, the *Confessions* represent, particularly in De Quincey's early narrative of living in temporary poverty, a state of abjection that demonstrates consciousness's dependence upon an anonymous, potentially uncontrollable, creaturely life.

⁸ Eric Lindstrom, "'Dog Sleep': Creaturely Exposure in De Quincey and Wordsworth", *Criticism* 55 (2013): 391–422.

⁹ Lindstrom, "'Dog Sleep'": 393.

‘Dog sleep’ serves as primary instance of a Wordsworthian state of abjection. Lindstrom’s close reading of De Quincey’s description of ‘dog sleep’ focuses on the animality of De Quincey’s condition and, in particular, the way De Quincey’s ‘restless leg syndrome’ makes him feel his own body is alien to him. For Lindstrom, ‘dog sleep’ marks the limits of De Quincey’s self-possession.

In advancing my claims about the importance of co-ontological sleep in the *Confessions*, I want to steer a path away from the heroic characterisation of De Quincey’s imagination as the source of a phantasmagoric sublime, but also resist making creaturely abjection the text’s defining note. Instead, I want to think about the implications of the several instances of protected sleep which punctuate De Quincey’s account of his relationship, abject or heroic, with opium.

The ‘dog sleep’ episode constitutes the first of these instances of protected sleep. What Lindstrom leaves out of his rich account of this episode is any meditation on the significance of De Quincey’s relationship with the unnamed orphan girl. The context allows us to understand that dog sleep as a mode of half-sleep arises from De Quincey’s protective concern for the unnamed girl as much as it does from the merely physiological results of his restless leg. He remains in a state of partial vigilance so that she can sleep peacefully.

The poor child crept close to me for warmth, and for security against her ghostly enemies. When I was not more than usually ill, I took her into my arms, so that, in general, she was tolerably warm, and often slept when I could not. (*Works* II 22)

He sacrifices the quality of his sleep to ensure the restfulness of hers. And by this sacrifice he tries to offer some comfort to his companion. De Quincey’s watchful generosity towards the sleeping child is an attempt to remedy the unoccupied house’s comfortless state. The house’s emptiness has two aspects:

Unoccupied, I call it, for there was no household or establishment in it; nor any furniture. (*Works* II 22)

In other words, there is nothing to make the house comfortable: neither beds, nor any ‘establishment’; that is, presumably, no domestic functionaries whose purpose it is to make this cavernous house a home. De Quincey and the orphan girl have to make good both these deficiencies. The lack of furniture means they have to improvise a bed:

We upon the floor, with a bundle of cursed law papers for a pillow: but with no other covering than a sort of large horseman’s cloak. (*Works* II 22)

But they also have to make good the lack of a 'household'. They live as servants to one another, and the orphan girl lives as an unremunerated 'menial servant' to the master of the house.

How is Co-Ontological Sleep Represented in the Confessions?

This episode provides the first of several scenes of protected sleep in *Confessions*. Each scene couples a sleeper with a watcher. The watcher protects the sleeper and serves as his or her nurse and guardian. The sleeper is a passive figure, exhausted but also, in the *Confessions*' final section, oppressed by nightmare. The protected sleeper recurs as a recipient of the ethical other's generous care. The orphan girl sleeps in De Quincey's arms, and despite his suffering he protects her. De Quincey himself sleeps in the protective embrace of his fellow passenger when precariously perched on the outside of the mail coach. And later De Quincey casts himself as a latter-day Orestes, ministered to as he awakens from nightmare by M., his own solicitous Electra.

De Quincey's account of falling asleep on top of the coach confirms that a sleeper's safety can depend upon the protective, watching care of a wakeful other and draws attention to central concerns of the *Confessions*' co-ontological counterplot. As the coach begins its journey, De Quincey inadvertently falls asleep. His exhaustion makes him incapable of meeting the most basic social expectations. He cannot control his body and, as a result, he reports that he 'annoyed my fellow passenger by occasionally falling against him' (*Works* II 31). De Quincey attempts to preserve a modicum of self-respect by assuming his fellow passenger is 'a surly and almost brutal fellow' (31). However, the man's selfless care for a stranger undermines De Quincey's elitist prejudice. De Quincey's first impressions lead him to suppose that his fellow passenger is a 'gentleman's butler—or person of that rank' (32). But this man's spontaneous generosity calls into question De Quincey's preference for the philosopher over the lowly man of labour.

This incident variously emphasises how the need for sleep limits the agentive power of the self. First, De Quincey suggests that his body is overmastered by rhythms that are beyond his control: the rocking of the coach lulls him to sleep. But when, in response to his fellow passenger's morose complaint, De Quincey reveals his exhaustion is the result of his weakness and sickness, the other man takes it upon himself, without a word, to serve as De Quincey's guardian. He holds the sleeping De Quincey and shows 'the gentleness of a woman' so that De Quincey 'almost lay in his arms' (*Works* II 31). This act of silent generosity has exemplary force for De Quincey.

The co-ontological counterplot of the *Confessions* establishes the ethical character of human being-together. The philosopher is the hero of the main plot, which contrasts the pleasures and pains of opium. The final sequence of opium nightmares serves as exquisite testimony to the sublime sensibility of the opium eater. Opium perfects the opium-eater's sublime pain and beautiful pleasure, and the opium-eater is a connoisseur whose responsiveness to music and the tranquillity of the sea gives way to increasingly tragic and apocalyptic

visions. Rather than responsiveness to life's aesthetic possibilities, what shows up in the counterplot is an ethical interdependency which the limitations of human nature make inescapable. The generosity of the passenger on the coach—holding De Quincey with a protective arm as he lapses into the irresistible helplessness of sleep—reveals 'the possible goodness of the human heart' (*Works* II 31). Such knowledge, De Quincey avers, like knowledge of the heart's 'possible vileness', only comes to someone who has been in 'great distress' (31). Helpless suffering has the potential to cut through the 'thick' 'curtain of *manners* [. . .] drawn over the features and expressions of men's *natures*' (31).

This reference to a torn curtain reworks the Burkean metaphor that De Quincey had deployed at the opening of the *Confessions*. Initially, De Quincey invokes Burke's image of the 'decent drapery' of life (*Works* II 9) when he is discussing the impropriety of autobiographical confession as a narrative form. Here, the drapery is something that culture manufactures and secures in order to prevent 'moral ulcers and scars' from 'obtruding on our notice' (9). De Quincey positions himself as a judicious writer weighing up the philosophical benefits that he might provide the reader by describing in detail the opium-eater's '[i]nfirmary and misery' (10). When De Quincey returns to the metaphor of the curtain in his account of his protected sleep on the outside of the coach, it has strikingly different force. Now, the curtain, rather than concealing 'infirmary and misery', had kept the true extremes of human nature hidden. Moreover, keeping the curtain intact depends upon good fortune, and freedom from 'great distress' (31). Human suffering itself tears the curtain and, with existential force, changes De Quincey's sense of human possibility 'in his own person' (31). Exhaustion proves to be one form of distress, which sets a limit on the extent to which we can hide the fact of human finitude from ourselves. The encounter between the exhausted young man and his irritated fellow passenger leads to a rare glimpse beyond the curtain of manners to reveal something profound about human nature. Initially the man's annoyance fits entirely within the range of socially predictable 'features and expressions'. However, De Quincey's pleading his own weakness and sickness as the cause of his exhaustion, and his pitiful attempts to remain awake, win over the previously hostile passenger. The terms of De Quincey's relationship with his subject have changed. The point here is not to sensationalize the scandal of drug-induced abjection. Instead, the generosity of the unnamed stranger on the outside of the coach, who protectively watches over De Quincey's helpless lapse into sleep, extends what the *Confessions* admits as philosophy as it establishes the possibility that human beings may live in a spirit of ethical care towards one another.

The central interest of the main narrative of the *Confessions* is an aesthetic grandeur. The pleasures and pains of opium are drug-induced experiences of the beautiful and the sublime. They are testimony to the philosopher's brilliant imagination. But the co-ontological counternarrative draws its interest from the fragility occasioned by the finitude of our easily wearied, sleep-dependent

condition. The maintenance of tolerable human relations arises from the lowly watcher's readiness to care for the helpless sleeper. The reference to the generous man as showing the 'gentleness of a woman' suggests something of De Quincey's veneration for 'domestic affection'. Perhaps, so does his reference to a 'curtain' of manners that typically conceals the heart's goodness and vileness. This veneration of domestic care and the protected retreat from the world that it makes possible recurs when De Quincey deploys the model of Orestes to shed light on the story of his life.

Who is Electra and How is She Kind?

De Quincey discusses Euripides' *Orestes* when the narrative shifts in his *Confessions* from the account of his early life to the account of his opium addiction. This moment of transition focuses upon the significance of the two authors whose books De Quincey carried with him as he ran away from school in his youth: Euripides and Wordsworth. De Quincey reflects on his escape from London and describes how the hopes he invested in the Lake District proved illusory. Wordsworth's home, instead of offering refuge, becomes the scene of 'the second birth of my sufferings':

There it was, that for years I was persecuted by visions as ugly, and as ghastly phantoms that ever haunted the couch of an Orestes: and in this unhappier than he, that sleep, which comes to all as a respite and a restoration, and to him especially, as a blessed balm for his wounded heart and his haunted brain, visited me as my bitterest scourge. (*Works* II 40)

Sleep's ghastliness is external and internal: it is a 'ghastliness' that haunts the sleeper's couch and it wounds and haunts his heart. This sleep recalls the self-alienating physiological confusion of 'dog sleep' and anticipates the irresistible sublimity of the elaborate nightmares that provide the climax of the *Confessions*' main narrative. De Quincey offers a tribute to the restorative power of sleep even as he emphasises its absence from his life.

This unrestful sleep marks the opium-eater out as a tragic hero. His case is even more tragic than Orestes, since De Quincey's 'haunted brain' transforms the potential blessings of sleep into a bitter scourge. De Quincey likens himself to Orestes because he, like the Greek hero, was tormented by punishing visions or furies. The difference between the two of them, however, was that De Quincey did not enjoy sleep as an escape from his torment. When he reflects on the pain of his opium visions, De Quincey also associates his agony with the terrible sense of self-alienation that Macbeth undergoes after he has killed Duncan. De Quincey too wishes to 'sleep no more' (*Works* II 74).

However, although the opium-eater's haunted sleep affirms the aesthetic power of his dreams, De Quincey enjoys a crucial consolation in the midst of his tragic suffering. De Quincey singles out the early scenes of *Orestes* as 'one of the most beautiful exhibitions of the domestic affections which even the dramas of Euripides can furnish'. Just as Electra served as the beneficent

watcher over Orestes' couch, so M.—De Quincey's wife Margaret—performed the same office during his opium-tormented nights in the Lake District.

I, therefore, who participated, as it were, in the troubles of Orestes (excepting only in his agitated conscience), participated no less in all his supports: my Eumenides, like his, were at my bed-feet, and stared in upon me through the curtains: but, watching by my pillow, or defrauding herself of sleep to bear me company through the heavy watches of the night, sate my Electra. (*Works* II 40)

The willingness to sacrifice one's own sleep in order to perform the protective watcher's 'heavy' duty constitutes a beautiful expression of 'domestic affection'. De Quincey deploys the metaphor of infection to underline M.'s bodily devotion:

even when thy own peaceful slumbers had by long sympathy become infected with the spectacle of my dread contest with phantoms and shadowy enemies that oftentimes bade me 'sleep no more!'—not even then, didst thou utter a complaint or any murmur, nor withdraw thy angelic smiles, nor shrink from thy service of love more than Electra did of old. (*Works* II 41)

Like the 'dog sleep' episode, and the moment of protected sleep on top of the coach, this tribute to M. as selfless, sleepless watcher contributes to the co-ontological subplot. This co-ontological sleep, the sleeping-with which De Quincey describes as central to his relationship with the unnamed orphan girl, and in his account of the stranger's kindness on his coach journey, comes into clearest focus in his elevation of Margaret to the role of a real, latter-day, English Electra, and adds what one might call a domestic interest to De Quincey's narrative.

In 1840 De Quincey published an essay in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* entitled 'Theory of Greek Tragedy'. Towards the end of this essay, he makes a case for Euripides being the most 'Wordsworthian' of the Greek tragic poets. He writes:

[Euripides] felt that the Athenian tragedy had two functions—1. to impress awe, and religious terror; 2. to impress pity. This last he adopted as his own peculiar function; and with it a corresponding diction—less grand (it is true) and stately, but counterbalancing this loss by a far greater power of pure (sometimes we may say, of holy) household pathos. Such was also the change wrought by Wordsworth.¹⁰

¹⁰ *Works* II 712–13. The quotation comes from a footnote that De Quincey added to the revised version of his 1840 *Blackwood's Magazine* essay 'Theory of Greek Tragedy', published in volume nine of his *Selections Grave and Gay* (Edinburgh: Hogg, 1858), 73 (54–75).

In order to appeal to the audience's sense of pity, Euripides forgoes 'grand' and 'stately' diction. Like Wordsworth, what Euripides gains from this self-constraint is a power to express 'pure (sometimes we may say, [. . .] holy) household pathos'. In line with this interpretation, M. intervenes between De Quincey, his nightmares, and the abjection of creaturely exposure. Her willingness to watch over De Quincey's sleep counterbalances the impressive awe inspired by his nightmares with a 'pure' and 'holy' household pathos. In the light of these remarks, I read M.'s presence in the *Confessions* as affirming the necessity of a trusting sleeper-watcher relationship in order to, as *Ecclesiasticus* has it, maintain the state of the world.

De Quincey's *Confessions*, in its main narrative, characterises the opium-eater as a solitary aristocrat of the spirit who allies himself with the agency of opium. His drug-enhanced dream life leads him into tragic suffering but is also the source of irresistibly powerful, refined, and complex aesthetic experiences. However, there is a counternarrative in the *Confessions* in which sleep, far from being a mode of entry into exquisite aesthetic intensity, is a condition of helplessness. Sleep is a way of being towards and with others that ensures that a recurrent condition of unguarded, co-dependent helplessness characterises our living together. The counternarrative's accounts of protected sleep extend the range of the text's conception of philosophy: they privilege the domestic over the exotic, the servant over the aristocrat, and the ethical over the aesthetic and, in so doing, draw attention to inescapable co-ontological determinants of human existence. A body's susceptibility to weariness and weakness—the intensifying and ultimately inescapable need for sleep—is an important aspect of the sleep-dependent subject's finitude. The household pathos so prized by De Quincey for its power to offset human misery and infirmity has the lowly watching care for the sleeping other as one of its most important expressions.