Title of Paper: The Novel Ingestion of Opium and Orientalism in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*
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Abstract:

Dickens’s novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* was crucial to the reordering of opium in the Victorian public’s imagination. In the novel opium is rendered the agent of Edwin Drood’s uncle John Jasper’s derangement, with the portrait of his opium use contributing significantly to the change in perception which takes opium, in the English imagination from an everyday, familiar and effective medicine to a drug that can take over the body and the mind, producing social deviants who are enslaved to it without conscience. This awareness of opium was far different from what his readers would have been familiar with because the drug, which had been popularly associated with reverie and romance through De Quincey’s writings, in Dickens’s narrative was made to take on new characteristics, both hazardous and menacing. Dickens distances opium use from its mundane use in Victorian life, by tracking a fascination with Otherness to an underlying threat wherein opium, like the Oriental, has a hidden and other nature. Through the novel he requires his readers to acknowledge the creation of a new English identity shaped by opium culture and at a more significant level, the East’s unrestrained influence on its tastes and desires.

Keywords: Dickens, Migration, Empire, Opium, Colonialism and Imperialism, Nationalism, Sexuality, Orientalism, Race, Ethnicity and Nationality

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In what would be the final year of his life, Dickens turns his literary attention to documenting the growing influence of the East on everyday British life. Dickens’s increasingly strident critique of the wistful contemplation of distant countries in this novel, as well as its predecessors, *Our Mutual Friend* and *Great Expectations*, coincides with Britain’s progressively more forceful imperial posture in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It is not the titular character of Edwin Drood who anticipates this turn to aggression toward the Other both at home and abroad, but rather the mysterious character of his uncle, John Jasper. Through this character, Dickens is able to imagine nefarious allegiances forming that directly threaten an unwitting home front. Whilst on the surface Jasper is a kindly parochial choirmaster, underneath he is ‘a Thug-a worshipper of Kali, the goddess of destruction – who has at least attempted to murder his nephew in a ritualistic garrotting.’ That strangulation is selected here as the means of demise for his nephew Edwin Drood, touches upon another suffocating quality in the novel: the sumptuous and overwhelming imagery of the over-determined Orient, which threatens at every moment to choke off any local identity for Cloisterham, save for its Cathedral. The market town of Cloisterham, which serves as the fictional setting of the novel, is based closely on the real life English market town of Rochester. Its tower is an English placeholder of day-to-day existence, amidst the endless consumption of the East, taking place everywhere in the town. From Rosa’s taste in Turkish sweets to Mrs. Crisparkle’s medicinal herb closet of Chinese curiosities, (which is periodically and erotically opened and closed up), much is made of the avid commerce between Oriental and English private spaces throughout the novel.

What is English and what is not is a concern for Dickens. Even the smallest foreign acquisitions, for him, become a signifier of the danger to come. Indeed, Jasper’s illicit commerce in London, i.e. his ingestion of opium there, becomes the gateway to other troubling preoccupations having to do with social transgression. That Dickens himself made frequent recourse to laudanum in the course of the novel’s writing suggests that opiates have some role to play in revealing the promise of exteriority that is tied to the promiscuity characteristic of colonial fantasy. Martin Booth in his book *A History of Opium* notes that:

> For Dickens opium was a symbol of degeneracy, a surrender of basic human values, a corruption of decency. A man of double-standards, - Dickens proclaimed a healthy Christian morality but maintained a secret mistress and a bastard child – it is not remarkable he wrote so powerfully and critically about an aspect of society of which, like infidelity, he had some insider’s knowledge. In the last years of his life when he was writing the story of Edwin Drood, he frequently took laudanum and not just to relieve pain.”

Opium was increasingly considered a drug that was ‘potentially a ruinous element in otherwise good and productive lives’.” It had begun to be seen as ‘a symbol of inherent evil’ that must be at once controlled and suppressed. In 1868 new legislation was passed with the Pharmacy Act, prohibiting the sale and distribution of opiates outside of pharmacies, this coincided with the emergence of the Society for
the Suppression of the Opium Trade that made the case against opium based on the ills it had caused in societies abroad, such as China and India. Despite the fact that opium was associated with the world of excess and degradation in Dickens’s novels, it is known that he, like many others, continued to imbibe the drug, taking ‘laudanum to sleep when on his reading tour of America’ from 1867-1868.

It is not known if Dickens imbibed the substance prior to that period, but it is certainly known that The Mystery of Edwin Drood is far from the first time Dickens writes about opium and its relationship to societal degeneration. Louise Foxcroft, in her book Making of Addiction: The Use and Abuse of Opium in Nineteenth-Century Britain, asserts that ‘the senses of alienation, of disruptive transformation and a mirror like view of respectable society are ideas and circumstances exploited by Charles Dickens throughout his fictional works’ which on several occasions explicitly touch upon opium use. It Foxcroft goes on to provide examples draw from his novels, which made the world of recreational opium use appear both decadent and prosaic, referring to “‘a worn down underclass of opium-eating proletariat inhabits the fictional Coketown of Hard Times (1854): the chemist and the druggist, ‘with other tabular statements, showing that when they didn’t get drunk, they took opium.’”

This example is followed up by a far more detailed account of opium’s appearance in Bleak House (1853), wherein “‘the lawyer, Mr. Tulkinghorn, discovers the cadaver of a solitary forsaken man, known only as Nemo, who has died of an opium overdose.’” It is in this second account that the effects of the drug become viscerally menacing and tied to the functions of the state. Authorities are made to gather in the aftermath of this sordid death to project upon the body one singular identity: opium addict. Though strangers to each other and to the dead man, the lawyer, the landlord, the surgeon and the coroner are nonetheless united there together to conspire upon a verdict of accidental death, eliminating the possibly of further doubt and thus adequately discharging their gentlemanly duties. It is assumed from his end that Nemo lead a mean and pitiful existence, who’s final act was ‘sown in corruption’ and final resting place rightfully a ‘hemmed-in churchyard, pestiferous and obscene.’ We will only learn later that he too, though now disgraced, had once been a respectable gentleman, and that Captain James Hawdon, alias Nemo, was once a former officer in the British Army, and former fiancé to Miss Honoria Dedlock nee Barbary.

What separates out this Dickensian account from that of Edwin Drood, is an explicit connection with the East and indeed Eastern people in the obtainment of the drug and its attendant course of corruption. That such obtainment exists in close proximity to Cloisterham, in a London opium den, collapses a material barrier between East and West. Whereas Nemo has no identity beyond that of opium addict, Jasper comes at the problem from the standpoint of considerable local veneration. His abuse of the drug and indeed his double life as an addict comes from the fact that he consumes it at both a licit and illicit level. When he consumes laudanum for pain its use is seen as benign, something so innocent as to be procured from Mrs. Crisparkle and when he smokes it as opium for pleasure, its use is seen as nefarious, something
so corrupt as to be procured from Princess Puffer. The procurement of one
appears, which is clean and genuine, the other an appearance,
which is unclean and imitational. What separates them is a matter of both degree and
intensity, but also territory. The John Jasper that attends the shabby opium den is alien
to the figure that the inhabitants of Cloisterham would readily identify. Jasper’s virtue
is so publicly lauded that Edwin has cause to remark: ‘your being so much respected
as Lay Precentor, or Lay Clerk, or whatever you call it, of this Cathedral; your
enjoying the reputation of having done such wonders with the choir; your choosing
your society, and holding such an independent position…’ Privately he thus attends
to his a society not of his choosing, and a dependent position not at all respectable.
That Jasper fails to keep these identities separate is on the surface a motive for
murder, but beneath speaks to a large hidden trial to maintain the bounds of such a
duality within his person at the level of race, sexuality, class and even national
identification.

What emerges out of such trial is not merely evident through the merger of
Oriental culture and British culture within his person. It requires acknowledgement of
something of far deeper significance: the creation of a new British identity shaped by
opium culture. Indeed, use of opium for recreational purposes allowed other forms of
perception to become normative. The exotic Other is portrayed as source of both
interest and absorption. Increasingly, the Other becomes wholly manifest in the way a
society recognised itself; not as Oriental per se, but as wholly and profoundly
interdependent with the Orient, along the lines of a number of crucial exchanges
which unite India, China and Britain.

Opium was of crucial importance to both European and Asian capitalism. Carl
Trocki, author of Opium, Empire and the Global Political Economy: A Study of the
Asian Opium Trade 1750-1950, stresses that

For the European merchants in Asia, the opium trade created their first major
accumulations of capital – without which none of the rest that followed would
have been possible. The great British merchant houses, banks and insurance
companies that had their roots in the Asian trade, all had a start in opium. The
drug was an important element in the process of commercialization. It was one
of the first fully commercialized products in the trade of Asia, and it was, like
other drugs, a commodity that created other commodities. Land, labor, fiscal
relations, and even the state itself were commercialized by opium.”

Trocki concludes that without opium there may not have been an Empire at all,
because it not only provided essential revenues, but also the infrastructure of trade
itself, as capitalism matured into its global derivation. It created an international
merchant class that not only shook the British class system to its foundations, but also
allowed for the rise of not just working class Englishmen, but a set of counterparts to
come in India, Southeast Asia and China to compliment their endeavours. It seems
that capitalism was always intimately tied to drug economies, and that moreover such
The Victorian economies had quickly become indispensable, at home and abroad, when it came to the interdependencies of the Empire and the multifarious wants of its peoples.

The most paramount of these exchanges were opiates. Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy, in his book *Opium: Uncovering the Politics of the Poppy*, explains that the nature of that interdependence took place on both a financial as well as aspirational level from the British perspective. ‘Opium was efficiently produced and traded by colonial monopolies to ensure profitability of their colonies, and at least for the British, to balance their trade deficit with China. Fearing that payment for Chinese imported goods (tea consumption was growing fast in Britain when only China produced the leaves), would deplete their silver reserves, the British resorted to Opium, a product of their India colony, as a means of payment: “a triangle traffic developed in which opium smuggling yielded the silver later used to buy tea legally, which was then shipped to London…The first shipment of India Opium arrived in Canton in 1773, eventually leading to mass addiction in China.”’

The nature of the addiction in Britain differed from that of the Chinese because they ingested a far more potent concentration of opium as compared with their British counterparts who ingested a just a tiny fraction of it (typically no more than 10%) mixed with alcohol and other solvents. Therefore the allure of the drug for Britons had to manifest itself at a different level. Chouvy asserts that desire for the drug seldom came from a place of acknowledged physical addiction, but rather as an affect of class-consciousness. ‘Beyond its strictly financial dimension – the fact that it was deeply integrated into global colonial trading together with tea, sugar, silver and cotton – the opium trade entered a system in which British capitalism transformed certain substances from “upper-class luxuries to working class necessities.”’ Indeed opiates, “like coffee, chocolate, or tea […] provide stimulus to greater effort without providing nutrition […].”

This finding, decoupling exhilaration from sustenance, would seem to correspond with the initial framing of opium smoking, in popular periodical accounts from 1868 to 1875, which made the association of such a practice synonymous with society’s elite. In one establishment owned by a Chinaman called Johnson it was said that ‘The Prince of Wales himself once smoked there.’ Whilst visitors such as the Prince could be seen as quintessentially British in their experimentation with opium smoking, those who became habituated to the drug were often observed to have crossed a crucial a line in journalistic accounts, as was the case with Johnson’s British wife. Barry Milligan, in his article “The Opium Den in Victorian London,” describes another common element noted among journalist accounts. That was the den’s mixed population comprised of Asian men and English women, which suggests that somewhere within the transformative quality of opium smoke lies the potential to intermingle British racial characteristics with Oriental ones:

Several female regulars have acquired oriental nicknames such as ‘Mother Addallah’, ‘Mrs. Mohammed’, ‘China Emma’, ‘Calcutta Louisa’ and ‘Lascar Sally.’ The opium master’s wife, who ‘is being gradually smoked-dried, and by and by will present the appearance of an Egyptian mummy’, has a marvellous grafting of Chinese about her …Her skin is dusky yellow…and
evidently she has since her marriage take such a thoroughly Chinese view of life that her organs of vision were fast losing their European shape.\textsuperscript{xvii}

The drug itself here is credited with being a portal to first physical and then racial alteration. The opium master’s wife is both acting in the inhalation of the drug and acted upon, in that the drug itself is ‘smoking’ her. In the process her previous life is being sucked out of her, taking her initially backward to an ancient imperial form and then forward to a present imperial perspective with her Chinese counterpart. During that journey, it is evident that such a transformation is chemical rather than biological in nature. This suggests that continuous exposure to the Orient in all its forms returned its dividend at compounded interest. The woman in question is not just becoming Chinese, rather she is becoming a combination of the Orient and the Occident and as such could no longer be said to maintain a discreet cultural or indeed reliable viewpoint. As her skin yellows, the outside is literally penetrating inward and the degree to which this transformation will continue remains ambiguous to the reader.

Milligan finds that the most engrossing of all these hybridized women is the English proprietress of a den across the court from Johnson’s, who is commonly referred to as Lascar Sal. She became a celebrity in her own right after Dickens used her den as a model for the initial setting of \textit{The Mystery of Edwin Drood}. Her fictionalised appearance predates her actual one in the public’s imagination. It was only after Dickens’s death that she gained notoriety in her own right. An article published shortly after the novelist’s death in 1870, made her a fixture in subsequent sensationalised accounts of opium smoking thereafter. Milligan notes that

Although she is often represented alone, she apparently had a Lascar husband and spoke Hindi and Hindustani. It is the connection to Asian culture she blames for her seduction into opium smoking, claiming she ‘used to be with those that smoke them, and one would say to her “Have a whiff”, and another would say have a “Have a whiff” and she knew no better, and so she got into the habit, and now she cannot leave it off.’\textsuperscript{xviii}

For Lascar Sal, opium tellingly is not the conduit for her orientalisation, but rather it is the other way around: her ability to form intimate connection with her husband and to communicate with him in his native tongue, creates the space for a logical progression into opiate dependency, i.e., one form of foreign capitulation lead onto another and so forth. The fact that her husband in no way features explicitly in Dickens’s account is telling in its own right, insofar as he gives power to Oriental or orientalised women throughout his novel to the subversion of male power. The subtle gender confusion about who runs the opium den, Sal or her Lascar husband, ‘accords with “traveller’s accounts such as that of Charles Dilke, who discovered Ceylon, to be site where pre-existing gender assumptions were challenged. In the record of his 1866 trip to Ceylon (published in 1869) Dilke observed that wives were “far more roughly and manly then their husbands” and resolved ‘to set down everyone who was womanly as a man and everyone who was manly as a woman.’\textsuperscript{xix}
Lascar Sal’s inability to leave in the company of other smokers suggests promiscuity and a would-be ‘oriental’ approach to gender relations. Therefore it is the real life Lascar Sal who is the natural companion to the fictional John Jasper because moulded in her image, he is seen to be ‘embracing the “unclean spirit of imitation” lodged in the opium’ and consequently ‘succumbs to the degraded ways of the Chinese, Turks, and Lascars. These ways, of which opium is the signifier, encompass a whole spectrum of “oriental” “vices” among them effeminacy, homosexuality and thuggee.’

Jasper’s outward look already lends itself to such foreign tendencies, as ‘a dark man of some six and twenty, with thick, lustrous, well-arranged black hair and whiskers,’ who wears ‘a long black [silk] scarf’ which is then used as a purported murder weapon against Edwin Drood. Dickens’s final novel becomes a staging ground wherein the understanding of the British empire as something that loops around itself, with the metropolis of London at the centre, and the colonies and other supplementary economies at its the periphery, is most vigorously challenged. Rather, the British Empire has had created an uneven and unsustainable hierarchical asymmetry within itself. This structural failure eventually permits the danger of orientalism to creep into its interior, through the dark figure of an opium-soaked Jasper. ‘Once Edwin Drood introduced the opium den as the portal between the halves of a middle-class Victorian’s double existence it became a stock motif of the burgeoning secret life drama.’

The material for such a drama was everywhere in the public’s imagination as evidenced by their increasingly insatiable desire for narratives linking western decadence to oriental corruption.

Dickens is the first to examine the relationship between addiction and criminal deviancy in this setting but certainly not the last, as a whole genre of such fiction would emerge as the latter decades of the century progressed, inspired by the pivotal opium den scene in Edwin Drood. Charles Rzepka makes an argument for Jasper’s intimate connection to a number of the Victorian era’s greatest crime fiction characters that frequented the opium dens of London’s East End and possessed morbidly split personalities. Included amongst them were Robert Louis Stevenson’s Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Oscar Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Grey, and Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes. Rzepka argues that, ‘Drood’s reach extends to Dr. Watson’s discovery of Holmes working undercover in an East End opium den in ‘The Man with the Twisted Lip’ In the novel, Sherlock Holmes shares in common a respectable professional identity with two other characters of the novel, Isa Whitney and Neville St. Clair. Revealing, they too are discovered to be leading secret lives in the smoke-filled basements of Limehouse. Rzepka maintains that their fictional appearance is clearly indebted to the respectable daylight appearance of choirmaster John Jasper of Cloisterham and his nocturnal forays to Princess Puffer’s East London establishment. Holmes’s explains to Watson, that his opium habit is that it is a release from ‘the dull routine of existence’ whose ‘commonplace events’ he finds dreary and dismal, the product of an ‘unprofitable world.’ Drug use provides him with a necessary distraction from that world, whenever there is no other worthwhile endeavour, such as detective work, to engage his interest. Holmes expression of intense boredom with modern life, ‘reaches our ears like an eerie fin de siècle echo...
The rebound from the rafters of Jasper’s gloomy apartment in the Gate House of Cathedral Close: “I have been taking opium for a pain, he tells his nephew, “an agony that sometimes come over me,” arising from “the cramped monotony of my existence.””

What at a distance was seen as a vice practiced by Orientals, on a local level was perceived as both a physical and emotional curative. Whilst opium was considered a recreational drug in China, throughout England opium and its derivatives were sold over the counter as medication, usually in the form of laudanum. It was not just the middle class and aristocracy who partook in opium usage. People of every class and age routinely consumed opium for self medication in the same way aspirin is used today. Robert Morris credits its popularity not only to the fact that, ‘it was cheap: people who could not afford ale or spirits could afford the drug, but also to its wide range of applications: ‘it was used to treat all manner of major and minor ailments: cancer, cholera, depression, diabetes, gout, pneumonia, tetanus, ulcers, and much else. It was available everywhere: chemists, and pharmacists sold it, as did grocers, tailors, rent collectors, and street vendors.’

Opium was a key ingredient in numerous household remedies, including many administered to children. ‘Among the best known of these was Godfrey's Cordial, which was commonly administered to children and infants as a sleeping draught.’

Where it crossed the line, was when the lower and labouring classes started to ingest it for the relief associated with opium smoking; that is to say as a relief from the painful drudgery of mass industrialisation. On the other end of the scale the upper classes, which also indulged in opiates for their social relief properties, were seldom considered to be engaging in vice, or to hold the propensity for addiction, unless and until their activities were carried out to extreme excess. There was a class divide between members of high society and middle-class professionals who had access to the new hypodermic method of ingesting their drug and their poorer counterparts who still had to take the drug orally and cope with its attendant gastric side-effects (it was a laxative) therein making the prospect of smoking the drug an enticing alternative that remained within easy economic reach. Whatever means with which it came into the body of individuals, in the medical community it was widely understood that use of opiates ‘tended to materially shorten life.’

Nonetheless, opium was considered by many to be a harmless pain reliever, its negative effect largely confined to its abuse by the working classes, which were characterised as indolent, dishonest and even criminal. No connection, however, was drawn between those behaviours and the use of opium. These characteristics in the working class population were popularly viewed as inherent and even biological in origin. The fact that the Chinese, whose use of opium was far more concentrated than their English counterparts, were viewed similarly, as categorically lacking in character, was seldom linked to their common drug use. It was only when those same characteristics started to appear more prevalently in the middle and upper classes of users, that it became evident that desire for the drug’s euphoric properties started to outweigh its medical necessity, and thus it became the gateway to a variety of social
deviancies. In the end what had changed was a notion of personal agency and the necessity of self-policing when applied to the use of opium.

This transition occurred simultaneous to a rise in the smoking, as opposed to oral or hypodermic injection, of the drug. ‘Some factions in England, such as the Society for the Suppression of Opium Trade, warned that Britain could expect retribution for thus fuelling an epidemic of opium smoking, which they claimed was enslaving China’s economic lower classes.’\textsuperscript{xxix} As a result of such rhetoric, ‘when the first reports of opium smoking in the very heart of the British Empire appeared in the 1860s…they were culturally positioned to excite both titillation and anxiety.’\textsuperscript{xxx} In England, ‘all of the common forms of opium were taken orally; in the mid-nineteen century, even the hypodermic injection of morphine (opium’s most significant alkaloid) was a cutting-edge medical technology. Opium smoking would have been known to the average Briton only as an outré habit of characters in oriental tales, or, with greater resonance, as the vice of Chinese peasants, which was invoked in debates over the so-called Opium Wars or 1839-42 and 1856 to 1860, which were fought over the sale of Indian Opium to China.’\textsuperscript{xxxi} Many Britons remained politically ignorant of these events, and thus the first accounts of opium dens in London, which appeared in popular periodicals, appealed to a broad readership on a number of levels, mainly because naturalising the opium habits of the Chinese obscured any direct reference to Britain’s part in the opium trade. The portrayal of degrading conditions surrounding its consumption would never be coupled in the reader’s imagination, with British imperial practices that created an expansion into Asia, nor the attendant trade routes, which furnished the appearance of Asians in Britain in the first place. Nor would it be understood that their habituated practice of smoking opium, was a direct product of Britain’s flooding of opium into the Asian market creating a mass culture of addiction.

Naïve to these facts, opium smoking was considered at the time to be so culturally removed from Britain that journalists approached it through the literary convention of cultural anthropology, and ‘given the exotic nature of opium smoking, reporters focused a good deal on the process itself.’\textsuperscript{xxxii} In order for them to blend in with the ‘native population’ the early journalists who documented this scene dared only to visit ‘the most sordid parts of the East End in shabby disguise with a police escort.’\textsuperscript{xxxiii} It is clear that there is an air of excitement about entering into this part of London, which offers as much enticement to witness the lowlife scene as to see the drug use itself. Infamous for its ‘row of dance halls and gin palaces,’ Bluegate Fields was also known as ‘“Tiger Bay” after its ruthless denizens.’\textsuperscript{xxxiv} The assumed risk this area posed to these visitors was of course part of the thrill of the venture. ‘Many of the reports dwell on the details of donning seedy costume and joining the guide at the police station before journeying to the den, whose location is precisely the same in almost every account that specifies it: in a cramped court off a street known as Bluegate Fields, just north of the former Ratcliff Highway in Shadwell.’\textsuperscript{xxxv}

It is widely known that for the relevant scenes of\textit{Edwin Drood}, Dickens himself made accompanied forays to Shadwell between 1863-1866. The Hon.
Frederick Wellesley recorded that Dickens followed the current fashion of “doing the slums” and went on nocturnal visits to the city’s opium dens in and around Shadwell as a kind of research for the book. ‘Dickens’s small group consisted of a policeman, Charley Field, who was nominated by the Chief Commissioner of Police, and was the original of Inspector Bucket in Bleak House, his friends George Dolby, Sol Eytinge, and J.T. Fields.’ Fields, Dickens’s illustrator for the eventual novel, recalled that, ‘in a miserable court at night they came across a haggard old woman blowing at a kind of pipe made of an old ink bottle. Fields recounted that ‘the identical words which Dickens put into the mouth of this wretched creature in “Edwin Drood” we heard her croon as we leaned over the tattered bed in which she was lying. There was something hideous in the way this woman kept repeating, “Ye’ll pay up accordingly, deary, won’t ye?” and the Chinamen and Lascars made never-to-be-forgotten pictures in the scene’. Louise Foxcroft asserts that ‘the haggard woman makes fictitious parodied appearances in the novel as “Er Royal Highness the Princess Puffer” and “Hopeum Puffer”, …was probably one “Lascar Sal”, or “Sally the opium-eater” who was well known to the Metropolitan Police and the slumming swells. According to Wellesley who met her during the years 1863-1866 she was in her mid-twenties but, in his opinion, appeared physically to be a much older woman, worn down by her opium habit and other deprivations. What is truly remarkable about the account that would eventually surface based on Dickens’s and Field’s observations, as well as other opium den accounts such as ‘Thomas Archer’s The Pauper, the Thief and the Convict, (1865), or Gustave Doré and Blanchard Jerold’s London: A Pilgrimage, (1872) that are contemporaneous to his, is that they deploy ‘the opium den as a figure of British Asia while generally avoiding any direct reference to British interests in the opium trade. This elision is particularly striking in the context of…widespread discussion of the Anglo-India opium monopoly. The literature does not just ignore British responsibility for the opium trade but actively disavows it,’ and its culpable relationship to Britain’s ruling elite.

Dickens as an author was crucial to this reordering of the drug in the Victorian public’s imagination through his participation in such disavowal. Curtis Marez argues that ‘of all of the English opium den narratives, The Mystery of Edwin Drood (1870) Dickens’s last unfinished novel, remains the most influential atlas of British South Asia. After 1870, both fictional and non-fictional opium den writings elaborate generic conventions established by Edwin Drood.’ As Terry M. Parssinen maintains, the emergence of the novel Edwin Drood, ‘marked a new departure in the literary treatment of Opium smoking. The filthy but harmless opium den described by Victorian reporters, was superseded by the depiction of the opium den as a palace of evil.’ The harmless image of casual and carefree opium experimentation, put forth in De Quincey’s Confessions, gave way to lurid accounts of opium addiction in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Increasingly the opium user was portrayed as ‘a secret degenerate’… an individual ‘who sought and found in the dark opium den a refuge from the company of respectable’ society. Not only does Edwin Drood distance opium use from its everyday place in Victorian life, it channels a fascination with Otherness to an underlying threat wherein opium, like the Oriental, has a hidden and other nature.
This version of Orientalism was different from what Dickens’s readership would have been familiar with, because the drug, formerly associated with pain relief and pleasure, suddenly took on new characteristics, which were both hazardous and menacing. ‘Opium has the potential to even take as English a town as Cloisterham and turn it into the site of Oriental tyranny and crime. Opium is rendered the agent of John Jasper’s transformation, with the portrait of his opium use coming at a point in the long transformation of opium’s image in the popular consciousness and contributing significantly to the change which takes opium, in the English imagination from an everyday, familiar and effective medicine to a drug that can take over the body and the mind, producing in every case the social deviants who are enslaved to it without conscience.’\textsuperscript{xliv} What makes \textit{Edwin Drood} remarkable is its “proposition that psychological dependence could arise not because the drug physiologically problematizes will, but because its hallucinogenic property can render reality utterly intolerable.”\textsuperscript{xlv}

The possibilities of acting under the influence of opium, in ways restricted in ordinary life, not only constitute for John Jasper, relief from an otherwise unbearable existence, but also allow him to unleash his illicit appetites into the realm of ordinary life. The dire consequences of this are clearly signposted in the novel as dangerous, when Jasper becomes convinced that his dream life of a marriage to Rosa Bud has the potential to become a reality, through his manipulation of the mysterious circumstances surrounding Edwin Drood’s disappearance to suit his own ends. Here it is not opium itself, which is incriminated by association, but rather the immoral actions of its user.

From the very first lines of the novel, Dickens creates a heady association between opium and criminality by setting its opening action in an illicit drug den. By situating its use outside the domestic sphere, and indeed in the (black) market place of the East End of London, a radical new representation of the drug is cast, wherein its corrupting influence is necessarily tied to forbidden activity and thus similarly poses a palpable risk to class and moral status. This connection would be a new and frightening one for Victorian readers of the novel. Moreover, the plot’s correlation of criminality to the abuse of opium would motivate the reader to seek out a solution to the crime of Edwin Drood’s disappearance, as a way to distance themselves from any damning association to John Jasper’s presumably immoral conduct. Indeed most readers would continue their routine journeys to the chemist to obtain supplies of laudanum. In order to provide the necessary social distinction in their minds, Dickens has to install the centrality of the opium den, as a means of localising Jasper’s addiction firmly in the space of abject poverty and alterity: the East End and the Far East. Nonetheless they would recognise that he, himself is not of that space, but rather an unsavoury dabbler in its midst. In including him there, Dickens’s intimation is that the opium problem was coming home to roost in the middle and upper classes of English society. Whilst this would surely evoke alarm on many levels of that society, at the same time and for the time being, it could be separated from these classes at the level of race. It was widely believed that what made opium so detrimental to the Chinese as compared with the English, was their “natural” proclivity towards stagnation, cunningness and ruthless when it came to acquiring what they desired.\textsuperscript{xlvi}
These characteristics make the Oriental more animal than human, and in this way, more instinctual and unpredictable in their behaviour. Jasper in ‘going native’ through consumption of the drug in the traditional Chinese fashion; i.e. through smoking it, takes on such characteristics, making him at least temporarily capable of acts of physical aggression in the attempted strangulation of the Chinaman in the opium den, successful strangulation in the case of Edwin, and sexual aggression in the case of Rosa Bud.

In the end what distinguishes opium use for the average Englishmen from his nefarious Chinese counterpart, is not so much the mode of ingestion, but the character of it. Opium used beyond its medicinal purpose, for the sake of pleasure, quickly and commonly became understood as a socially unacceptable vice. Opium intake of this sort was not only considered physically harmful, but irreparably damaging from a moral point of view. Opium gave the Orient access to the user, and in so doing loosened some of his social moorings, allowing long held frustrations inherent to English society to emerge. Jasper in this way is not behaving as a true English gentleman, but instead is allowing himself to pursue his baser instincts, down a wayward path that can only end in violence and irrationality, and ultimately a betrayal of one’s own kind.

In 1868, one of Dickens’s closest friends Wilkie Collins, ‘succumbed to a painful rheumatic illness, and reduced to complete prostration by the death of his mother, came to rely heavily on the physical and mental analgesic effects of opium.’xlvii Dickens’s break with Collins shortly thereafter relied on the assumption that his usage, unlike Dickens’s own, had in some way crossed the line making Collins forever after unworthy of Dickens’s confidence both on a literary and personal level. As time worn on, Collins continued to imbibe larger and larger amounts of laudanum and insisted on making opiate use a common trait amongst the characters in many of his successful novels.

Dickens was not alone in his moral condemnation of Collins. By mid-century addiction was seen by many as a source of ‘voluntary or involuntary personal decay, either being a cause for alarm, and its narration fed into cultural conceptualisations of decadence and degeneration in post-Darwinist Victorian society.’xlvi Whereas Collins was a product of the petit-bourgeoisie, Dickens’s background was barely middle class. His transgressions into adultery and drugs would be far less tolerated that Collins’s. However, Dickens’s attempt to distance his public reputation from Collins did little to distinguish their mutual and underlying base dependencies on laudanum by the end of the 1860s.

Despite his advanced gout and heart disease, Dickens had a sudden recovery of strength in the beginning of 1869, whilst he was writing Edwin Drood. Such a recovery may have been due to an uptake in his dosage of laudanum. This would not have cured in any way the various afflictions his body carried, but it would have been a way to relieve them, at least temporarily. An overdose of laudanum would have provided eternal relief of such symptoms.xlix In the final year of his life his physical symptoms were worsening. His foot had swelled to agonising proportions, and he
could scarcely feel the left side of his body. Conjectural evidence suggests that Dickens may have been using significant quantities of laudanum to deal with his condition: on April 17 and 18, “he had been extremely giddy and extremely uncertain of his footing.” Dickens would continue to rely on laudanum until the last day of his life, and it is possible that an overdose of laudanum, rather than a massive stroke, was the cause of his death. If this was indeed the case, it would not have been reported by his physician, because “under the law of this time, suicide was both illegal and immoral,” and would have brought scandal on the family as well.” Dickens was able to speak and walk during the final moments of his life, something that was at odds with a sudden stroke. Dickens was well aware of the poisonous potential of laudanum and indeed made it the course of ambiguous demise for more than one of his characters. For an increasingly desperate and morose Dickens, it cannot be reasonably ruled out that he took this course of action to end his own difficulties – which by that point were physical as well as financial as his deteriorating private and professional body simply could no longer be called on as the source of support for his extensive and dependent family. After Dickens had separated from his wife, garnering considerable public and private ridicule as a result, Dickens could not risk another scandal that would further damage his reputation or compromise his family’s well being. His secret affair with Ellen Ternan weighed heavily on him from a moral perspective and added to his suffering on a psychological level, causing him considerable grief as he attempted to police the fact of that transgression, preventing it from entering into public display.

Ellen Ternan became pregnant with Dickens’s child and the child died shortly after birth. Whilst this caused Dickens a great deal of personal grief, it also saved him from the spectre of irreparable public condemnation. It may be conjectured that in order to cope with his losses, Dickens constructs another illicit type of family romance in *Edwin Drood*, whereby the elder uncle Jasper plays would-be corrupter to the younger Rosa Bud, and through such pairing reveal the progressive debasement of moral values through the incursion of cosmopolitan attractions. It is their progeny who are bound to reckon with the outcomes of this generation’s newly acquired, promiscuous tastes, which more often than not circumvent tradition, but also conventional modes of intimate communion.

In *Edwin Drood*, it is the choirmaster of the cathedral John Jasper, who becomes the figure Dickens is most determined to morally incriminate; a figure who is secretly being consumed by a foreign agent; Chinese opium. Jasper is being diminished throughout the novel as his dependency on this foreign commodity grows. His presence in the novel is increasingly cast in shadow. Indeed he is seemingly degenerating through mere proximity to this evil substance and when he breaks down entirely in the final written chapter it is clear that he is now wholly incapable of resisting ingesting it fully. Jasper occupies a peripheral place in the novel, a place of frustrated social confinement.

In the opening scenes of the novel set in an East End opium den, Dickens employs opium as a conduit to reproduction, which is able to circumnavigate more
traditional biological pathways. Instead of coupling John Jasper with his English counterpart Princess Puffer, the opium den’s proprietor, Dickens installs a level of ambiguity wherein two other smokers, a Chinese man, and a South-east Asian sailor, may compete for her services. When he wakes up, in bed with her and these supplementary suitors, all remaining dressed, Jasper realises another form of impropriety has taken place; that is to say he ‘notices that the woman has opium smoked herself into a strange likeness of the Chinaman. His form of cheek, eye, and temple, and his colour, are repeated in her. Said Chinaman convulsively wrestles with one of his many Gods, or Devils, perhaps, and snarls horribly. The Lascar laughs and dribbles at the mouth. The hostess is still. What unites her with the other bedfellows and apart from Jasper, is her class background and indeed witnessing her smoking, Jasper can only conclude that her visions have to do with ‘butchers shops, and public-houses, and much credit.’

Jasper, a choirmaster, by trade should have a discerning ear, and as such ‘he bends down his ear, to listen to her mutterings, which he declares ‘Unintelligible!’ What he finds intelligible by contrast, are ‘the spasmodic shoots and darts that break out of her face and limbs, like fitful lightning out of a dark sky, some contagion in them seizes upon him: insomuch that he has to withdraw himself to a lean arm-chair by the hearth-placed there, perhaps, for such emergencies— and to sit in it, holding tight, until he has got the better of this unclean spirit of imitation.’ Very quickly Jasper is able to lend form to this spirit, and to launch a come back. Jasper then ‘pounces on the Chinaman, and seizing him with both hands by the throat, turns him violently on the bed. The Chinaman clutches the aggressive hands, resists, gasps, and protests. “What do you say?”

A watchful pause.

“What unintelligible!”

His work here is not done, determined as he is to root out the source of imitation, next he ‘turns to the Lascar and fairly drags him forth upon the floor. As he falls, the Lascar starts into a half-risen attitude, glares with his eyes, lashes about him fiercely with his arms, and draws a phantom knife.’ It seem the knife too fail at materiality in the hands of this Other. It only appears to concretise when it ‘becomes apparent that the woman has taken possession of this knife, for safety’s sake,…’ She however provides little assurance of its remaining out of bounds in terms of harm ‘for, she too starting up, and restraining and expostulating with him, the knife is visible in her dress, not in his, when they drowsily drop back, side by side.’ Little is produced by this reconciliation to a more propitious bedroom arrangement. There has been chattering and clattering enough between them, but to no purpose. What remains between them persists as “unintelligible”.

What is unintelligible for Jasper is how this ‘Chinese’ habit has figuratively transformed Princess Puffer into a Chinese person, whereas for him the effects have been somehow more literally and lastingly, though perhaps less visibly, apparent on
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his person than hers. This subtly, this incomprehensible scenario demonstrates how the opium threat in its most sinister aspect is able to power the ‘break down racial boundaries and to reverse racial dynamics in Britain by putting white women in the power of Chinese men, by placing wealth and property in Chinese hands, or by affecting the slow moral and psychological transformation of white Britons to Chinese.’ Remaining at a loss on how to reconcile this possibility, Jasper pays her for her services and returns to the old Cathedral, to perform his. That his congregants intone the words, “WHEN THE WICKED MAN” - so that they ‘rise among groins of arches and beams of roof, awakening muttered thunder,’ underlines the fact that he is a nefarious character. At the same time however, it obscures what motivates his malice: the truth of his of ‘ethnic descent, and the effacement of his own English identity by the Orient.’

The remainder of Dickens’s novel explores the threat of reverse colonialism and the danger inherent to imagining it to be a problem of geographical distances, when in reality it is one of intimate proportion. The global British commodity trade literally brings the Other into the domestic urban sphere, disrupting it on the level of both public and private space. The effect is transformative insofar as the metropole and the cosmopole have become to some degree interchangeable, or at very least exchangeable spaces. In the novel, London becomes ‘China in miniature,’ at approximately the same time as Egypt becomes ‘England in miniature’ at once counter-posing the stability of place, and allowing for ‘a space of artifice and excess to open up.’

This opening allows foreign difference to interfere with any sort of resolution back into a previous world order in which Britain can be said to unproblematically prevail.

Helena and Neville Landless, two orphans from Ceylon taken in by the Church of England to safeguard their education, embody the presence of the Other in British domesticity in the novel. Their appearance allows Dickens to create amongst the remaining characters of the novel, an enduring conversation with regards to national character that mirrors the reality of those dialogues taking place concurrently in middle England at mid-century. As subjects and not objects to be traded, the commerce of Helena and Neville in the fictional cathedral town of Cloisterham reveals the tensions that emerge when it is people and not objects that are variously acquired into English society. These twin siblings are depicted as extremely outspoken, strong willed and hot-tempered when compared to their affable and mild British counterparts in Edwin Drood and Rosa Bud. Their presence by turns is infuriating in the case of Neville, and intoxicating in the case of Helena, as difference takes on clearly defined gender stereotypes as their characters are drawn out. The narrative seems to take on a hallucinatory mobility from the time the two appear on the scene; so much so that Edwin’s disappearance matches exactly to that of Neville’s on one fateful night. In the case of Edwin’s disappearance, Neville’s malevolence is widely assumed by his fellow characters, to be based on his being foreign and male. What had first been thrilling about his foreignness to inhabitants of this small town now becomes the stuff of punitive exploration. Neville is literally shut up with his law books, until such time as a charge can be formally rendered against him. As his case
mounts, ‘the members of the cosseted Cloisterham community are carried away with xenophobia in their attempts to conflate criminality with racial difference.’

This crisis of apprehension began with the arrival of the Landless twins, their surname already having plainly announced their culturally dispossessed state for one and all to hear. It is also widely understood that are transported to Britain at the behest of the Church of England to remove as it were ‘the “taint” of their colonial outpost[ing],’ restoring them thusly to their ‘prevailing British constitution.’ Neville confides in Reverend Crisparkle that he may have “contracted some affinity” with “the abject and servile dependents, of an inferior race” among whom he was brought up, adding “sometimes I don’t know but that it may be something tigerish in their blood.” Neville’s ‘un-English complexion, is shared by John Jasper, another curiously dark looking male. In setting Neville’s appearance against John Jasper’s, Dickens is able to put forth his own supposition that, ‘Englishness may be lost, not only in faraway lands abroad, but closer to home in the geographical space of the nation itself.’

The struggle Jasper faces is an internal one insofar as he himself is biracial British and Egyptian, as well as half-brother to Edwin Drood. He shares this biracial status with Neville Landless, who is also of mixed heritage and also of ambiguous parentage. What unites their cause and locks them in a tension towards one another is that they are both considered to be improper suitors for the hand of Rosa Bud, when compared to Edwin Drood. His bright-eyed fairness is routinely cast against their darker complexions, as the picture of health, as compared with their redoubtable, swarthy appearance. Thus the two share in common a sphere of spatial and sexual perversion, which threatens at all times to compromise both fair man and fair maiden - the former through competitive violence and the latter through sexual conquest.

This situation both multiplies the marriage bed and compromises its arrangement insofar as it must accommodate, or at the very least acknowledge such a contest is possible. Edwin Drood fails to seal the pact of his engagement, at Rosa’s behest. Prior to his disappearance, she pleaded with him love her as sister, as opposed to a wife. Drood’s agreed forfeiture of their marital rites requires the intervention of certain types of social policing so that English virility may be restored. Dickens allows England to prevail through the figure of ‘Reverend Crisparkle, the rosy-check minister, boxer, and Edwin Drood’’s general representation of the best of English manhood.’ It is Crisparkle who is repeatedly shown to be getting a handle on things and keeping the narrative progression reasonably under control. What he manages, that the other males in the series fail to do, is to restore civil order through education. As the almost absurdly perfect picture of good health and innocence, it is
only natural that Crisparkle should be the main civilising force on a dispirited Neville Landless.

   The latter undertakes a course of study meant to reverse the ill effects of his upbringing in Ceylon and adapt him to the culture to which he has been transplanted. ‘The civilizing process however takes its toll and Neville pales and withers away under the strain.’ At the same time, ‘Crisparkle’s goodness is no match for the terror and darkness, embodied in the darker, more savage Jasper. That he is rather a lightweight and faintly ridiculous is hinted at by his name,’ and as a consequence we will find he is ultimately ‘unable to Police the English body.’ Dickens at novel’s end remains profoundly troubled by the subversion of racial and spatial boundaries that are threatening to compromise any stable notion of contemporary Englishness. The savage conduct he associates with the East is now penetrating into the mores of the civilised world, introducing into it new forms of desire and impulses that cannot be readily contained. They remain as evidence of the intertwining trajectories of metropole and cosmopole that cannot be expected to in anyway easily reconciled themselves to one another. Edwin Drood is destined therefore to remain, ‘unfinished and ideologically unfinishable, we may perhaps take the atmosphere of inexplicable restlessness the novel evokes so well as its last word, for it reflects the nagging feeling borne of knowledge of different worlds, and of an appetite that has been piqued by the taste of the foreign, neither of which ever again can be effectively quelled.’ This creates an ambivalent atmosphere where the intensification of desire appears to intersect with capitalism, imperialism and industrialisation in a way that not only interferes with the subjectification of the British subject, but equally, if not more so his colonial counterpart. The volatile tensions that is produced as a result eventually ‘become expressed in mutinies (both in China and India), migration, and an ever expanding network of secret societies.’

    Dickens spent the last day of his life writing Chapter 23 of Edwin Drood, leaving the story exactly at the halfway point of his contractual obligation to his publishers. What occupies him to the end is the growing threat of the Orient and its commodities to the integrity of the British self. The spectre of his untimely death speaks at once of their being placed in a position of ‘unregulated authority’ where a new kind of policing must in turn become necessary. Dickens died prematurely, at aged 58, before he was able to fully signpost this foreign threat to his reading public, nor to explicitly spell out the need for its further investigation. That Edwin Drood is and remains a mystery, allows us to sustain and restructure Dickens’s plot into a series of indictments, compelling his avid readers to perpetually generation new evidence and uncover new secrets. The last words in the novel are ones shared amongst Dickens’s prescient female interlocutors of the book, Helena Landless and Rosa Bud:

    “What is this imagined threatening, pretty one? What is threatened?”
    “I don't know. I have never even dared to think or wonder what it is.”
The threat to come remains largely unknown, because Dickens died just on the eve of the most aggressive period of British colonial expansion. Channelling the spirit of Rosa, he is nonetheless able ‘to anticipate the feverish pursuit of imperial territories that characterised imperial policy in the final decades of the nineteenth century.’ The love triangle he cast between Rosa Bud, John Jasper and Edwin Drood prepares the ground for a new understanding of imperial rivalry to emerge in British society based on the new racial sciences that are emerging at century’s end. The unfinished ending of *Edwin Drood*, then in some sense, signifies an unknown ending in this pioneering context for global dominance.

At the same time as this discourse of racial hierarchy was taking hold of the Victorian imagination the notion of Britain’s rightful cultural pre-eminence was receding. There was ‘a growing awareness that the British empire could no longer be viewed as an entity in which the home culture of England simply overwrote the Oriental culture of the colonies, as nor could “British Culture” or even “British identity” be taken for granted as stable objective essences. Instead, they begun to realize, the British Empire must be viewed as an unpredictable multinational entity at every level from nation to individual and from the outposts in the colonies to the hearth sides of London.’ This realisation is anticipated in Dickens’s choice to centre his novel ostensibly on the mislaid body of Edwin Drood, the would-be coloniser of the East whose plans to enter as conquered are compromised, his course corrupted, as it were, by the ever-collapsing boundaries of Englishness. Through his ambiguous disappearance the plot of *Edwin Drood* ultimately becomes about Dickens’s larger ideological project to find a solution to this problem. That John Jasper’s illegitimate story so easily takes over interest in Drood’s disappearance, speaks to a greater anxiety revealed by the novel over the meaning of Englishness, and its apprehension amidst an imperial landscape that is constantly reiterating its boundaries, along lines that are blurred, drawn, and redrawn, compromising with each hand stroke what constitutes the national space.

Dickens’s convoluted, palimpsestic plot, anticipates a mounting concern over the meaning of Englishness. Behind each character and setting, lurks the question of how the English might reproduce and continue the national and racial blood line in late Victorian society, given the ambiguous legacy of imperial intercourse thus far. Jasper’s vision in the destitute opium den, with its broken down bedstead, which instantaneously dissolves into a provincial cathedral spire and exotic scene of a Sultan’s procession, reveals contemporary England as a violate material world, speaks to an England that now fears it is vulnerable to psychic distortions as well as upheavals of space, time and identity as its imperial campaigns intrude into more faraway lands. Moreover, in the final decades of the nineteenth century, it is now possible for the socialised self to collapse into the racialised other, as a consequence of the radical breakdown of social and racial boundaries taking place throughout England at this time. Dickens witnesses the rise of both trends with great apprehension. In his reading of *Edwin Drood*, Tim Dolin observes that ‘the Orient has found its way to England most obviously in the persons of Helena and Neville (hell and the devil to the natives of Cloisterham), in Jasper’s association with the Hindu
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Thuggee cult, and in the related prehistories of the main protagonists and their families in Egypt. That said, England had not simply become orientalised through the importation of the beliefs and temperament carried amongst these individual’s during the course of their migration, rather, on a more profound level, this transformation had taken place as a consequence England’s own culture of imperialism, which relied upon a combination of societal complacency, racial superiority, predatory commercial practices and violent incursion into unfamiliar lands to maintain its authority, which has become progressively more autocratic in style. It is against these quite malevolent, abstract forces that the fortunes of would-be English gentleman like Edwin Drood, Neville Landless and John Jasper are cast.

Dolin intimates that such a culture has political origin, in the Tory policies of the previous twenty years, which were “determined to reduce to a smashed condition all other islands but this island.” The xenophobic character of Sapsea, is Cloisterham’s representative example of... “the true Tory spirit” that “would have made a China of England, if it could.” Cloisterham harbours this Tory spirit like an Oriental enclave within England’s growing expansionist ambitions: “A drowsy city, Choisterham, whose inhabitants seem to suppose, with an inconsistency more strange than rare, that all its changes lie behind it, and that there are no more to come.” It is understandable, this backward place of extreme xenophobia, should come to mingle with anachronistic Enlightenment ideals of the noble savage,” in such a way that for Dickens it becomes a staging post for the misrecognition of the imperial threat, as something coming from without, when in fact it had always already been a threat coming from within.

This was based on a liberal commercial ideology compelled to apply its expansionist logic eventually back on itself, reversing political economy, and turning England into a place of arrested development, wherein Cloisterham’s static fortunes can scarcely separate themselves from the Orient, sharing in common a subdued population drawn in by foreign goods. That Cloisterham is scarcely able to recall itself as a site of former conquest over the course of centuries, by various parties including the Druids, Romans, Saxons and Normans, nor its inhabitants to conceive of themselves as invaders to foreign lands in a contemporary sense, makes it possible for the people of Cloisterham to be oblivious to the small and frequent ways in which such invasions are taking place daily within their midst and indeed within their persons. Sapsea regales Jasper of an evening with his tales not of his provincial political power as Cloisterham’s mayor, but rather of his expansive commercial ‘conquest,’ as an auctioneer:

If I have not gone to foreign countries, young man, foreign countries have come to me. They have come to me in the way of business, and I have improved upon my opportunities. Put it that I take an inventory, or make a catalogue. I see a French clock. I never saw him before, in my life, but I instantly lay my finger on him and say “Paris!” I see some cups and saucers of Chinese make, equally strangers to me personally: I put my finger on them, then and there, and I say “Pekin, Nankin, and Canton.” It is the same with
Japan, with Egypt, and with bamboo and sandalwood from the East Indies; I put my finger on them all. I have put my finger on the North Pole before now, and said “Spear of Esquimaux make, for half a pint of pale sherry!”

‘Really? A very remarkable way, Mr. Sapsea, of acquiring a knowledge of men and things.’

‘I mention it, sir,’ Mr. Sapsea rejoins, with unspeakable complacency, ‘because, as I say, it don’t do to boast of what you are; but show how you came to be it, and then you prove it.’

Sapsea in this instance provides a vivid catalogue to Jasper of how he became foreign, not by announcing that fact to others, but demonstrating to them how this in fact came to be, through corroborating evidence of his complacent acquisition of the accoutrements of other’s belonging. In the course of the novel, we see numerous examples of how various parties, not just John Jasper, have become slave to their foreign appetites, both erotic and sensuous. Rosa with her sumptuous Turkish Lumps of Delight, her later infatuation with Tartar spurred on by his ready supply of exotic foodstuffs, Mrs. Crisparkle’s stimulating stash of foreign condiments, all point to the intimate ways in which a catalogue of tastes are within tactical reach of Cloisterham’s inhabitants for the pleasure of their intake. The cost of such acquisition seem a mere trifle to them, nonetheless putting a finger on such goods, also implies an aggression involved in their apprehension. In the act of acquisition they fail to consider that the trade relationship is in any way mutual. Finally, they fail to appreciate that the violence that subtends ‘improving upon one’s opportunities’ has a hidden cost both at home and abroad, as working class populations are forced to conform to historically unprecedented patterns of regular, disciplined, and intensive labour, which disrupt traditional labour practices and therein transform whole societal apparatuses in aid of the making of something of transferrable value for that “half a pint of pale sherry!” It is not just the Esquimaux who have to answer to this pointed demand, but the whole of the English working classes, as well as the poor who might fail to meet the demands of this constantly solicited system of output.

On one level, then Edwin Drood is a novel about consumption in a world where ‘empire has become synonymous with emporium and England’s taste for foreign products has permeated all segments of society.’ On another level Edwin Drood suggests that England’s decline may be a punishment for imperial crimes that are in fact capitalistic in nature bringing forth ‘a queer mix of the benign and the insidious’ that has thus captured its people unwittingly through ‘the prodigious expansion of its tastes.’ In order for this decline to be reconciled back into the Victorian world view successfully, Dickens must undermine the distinction between the English working classes and the colonial population, and in so doing, locate a scapegoat where the threat of foreign invasion can be contained within England’s known hierarchical structures of class. Whilst on one hand Dickens is able to argue the ‘English, however poor, prove superior to the dirty, ignorant, and unruly primitives,’ on the other he must contend that there is an imperial mechanism by
which England’s most poor might forfeit their claims to being members of the English race.\textsuperscript{xlv} This decline would take place not only culturally, but racially as well, insofar as contact with imperial lifestyles at home would tip the balance such that their atavistic, pre-cultural instincts would come to the fore.

According to Lillian Nayder, Dickens’s ‘concern that imperial decline could originate in the English slums, dates back to the 1850s, when he began to publish articles on the subject in his periodicals and it remained a recurring theme.\textsuperscript{xlvii} In \textit{Edwin Drood} such decline is observed ‘among those that live in the wilderness of East London and degenerate into members of a pack or tribe.\textsuperscript{xlviii} Dickens, as a would-be urban anthropologist, charts the devolution of England beginning with this class of Briton, whom he asserts will be judged not on the level of national belonging, but of species characterisation. In “On an Amateur Beat...” he imagines the geologists of the future age discovering and interpreting the marks left in the mud by “wretched” and “wolfish” slum children, the offspring of an imperial nation whose people would have become extinct.\textsuperscript{xlix} The vestiges of class demonisation are never very far from Dickens’s account, when London itself devolves into ‘a mud-desert, chiefly inhabited by a tribe from whom employment has departed”, yet who propagate “their wretched race.” Developing his sense of these “labourers” as racial others, Dickens speaks of their degeneration into English Bushmen, the wife of an unemployed boilermaker is “toning down towards the Bosjesman colour, as is the wife of a coal porter,” whom Dickens also sees as “degenerating to the Bosjesman complexion.”’\textsuperscript{lxx} Through this account it is possible to conceive of a future in which the working class has become one with the natives, adopting not only their appearance, but also their manner, in their irredeemable lassitude.

In Dickens’s projected future, such racial degeneration will make its way across Britain through the wombs of its labouring female poor. The only defence that can be mounted is to ensure that figures like Rosa Bud, who represent purity and virtue in England, reproduce healthy, hearty, fair complected babies to preserve the English race. Female primitives such as Princess Puffer are a threat to this future insofar as their unions to foreign men guarantee a corruption of English stock. They also threaten the greater population with the loss of England’s treasured racial legacy, as their presumed offspring will receive it in diluted form. As figures like Princess Puffer, continue to model themselves on their opium-smoking inferiors, so their appearance signifies racial degeneration and downward mobility. Men like Edwin Drood, who would ‘rather go engineering in the East’, than take firm hold of their marital duties, pose another threat to English society, insofar as they leave open the possibility that their wives may fill in their husband’s deficit of desire, with men of a lesser class, foreign or domestic. Drood’s desire to ‘wake up Egypt a little’ similarly confides a desire to partake in sensual encounters that are incompatible with Victorian middle class codes of marriage and reproduction. Finally this leaves the reconciliation of the racially and culturally ambiguous characters Jasper, and the Landlesses into Dickens’s anthropological schematic, as figures destined to radically revise the countenance of England over time so that it will be unrecognisable to itself as such. For Dickens the \textit{Mystery of Edwin Drood} could be solved only in finding alternatives.
to such an ending to safeguard the further deterioration of English civilisation on the home front.


3 Foxcroft, Louise, Making of Addiction: The Use and Abuse of Opium in Nineteenth-Century Britain, Brookfield: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2007,

4 Ibid. 53.

5 Foxcroft, 53.

6 Ibid. 52.

7 Ibid. 52.

8 Ibid. 52.

9 Ibid 52.


14 Chouvy, 6.

15 Ibid. 6.


17 Milligan, 121.

18 Ibid. 121.


20 Ibid. ixi.
xxxvi Dickens, 8.

xxxvii Milligan 122.


xxxix Ibid. 215.


xxxxii Ibid.

xxxxiii Mulligan, 118.

xxxxiv Ibid. 118-119.

xxxxv Milligan, 118.

xxxxvi Ibid. 119.

xxxxvii Ibid. 119.

xxxxviii Ibid. 119.

xxxxix Ibid. 119.


xxxxxiii Foxcroft, 53.


xiii 66.


Ibid. 69.

Ibid. 77.

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