

## NARCO-TRAVELOGUES AND CAPITAL'S APPETITES

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Since the mid 1990s, there has been a growing academic interest in the history and anthropology of drug consumption, seeded by anthologies such as Jordan Goodman, Paul E. Lovejoy and Andrew Sherratt's *Consuming Habits: Drugs in History and Anthropology* and Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich's *Drugs and Narcotics in History* -- both published in 1995. The present article, distilled from a larger project, suggests the outlines of an argument about the representational contribution of travellers' tales to this history and anthropology.

Writing on drugs and travel is extensive enough to constitute a literary kind: the narco-travelogue. Set in motion by Samuel Taylor Coleridge's mental excursion in "Kubla Khan" (written in 1797, published in 1816) and Thomas De Quincey's urban explorations in the *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821-2), this travelling subgenre has turned many corners; encompassing narratives in which drugs play a subsidiary but important part, and those in which the pursuit of exotic sensory derangements is a central theme -- from the American travel writer Bayard Taylor's hunt for hashish in *The Land of the Saracens* (1855), through the Beat Generation godfather William S. Burroughs' *Yage Letters* (begun in 1953), to the British screenwriter and social activist Jeremy Sandford's Mexican sojourn in *Search of the Magic Mushroom* (1973). As Sandford's title suggested, quest-mythology is often stamped upon the factional narco-travelogue: geographic and psychic objectives join in limit-experience adventures; sublime stories of hallucinating heroes who simultaneously trip across material and mental frontiers. Crucially, however, the travelling literary encounter with drugs has also legitimated and celebrated the western possession of precious sense-altering substances.

The 'modern' discourse on drugs emerged from English Romanticism, which set the tone for subsequent glamourisations of the drug experience's heroic self-dosings and psychic expansions. But the travelling contact with drugs -- preceding Romanticism, then readily absorbed by it -- supplied the basis of another mythology: the image of the western drugtaker as super-consumer, whose sensual saturations had a radical yet often concealed proximity to the core business of the commodity-trading nation-state.

Coleridge's extraordinary tolerance for opium was a subject of both scandalous gossip and personal myth-making. In the early 1790s, he bragged that he could imbibe "rather a strong Dose of Opium", taken recreationally. But Coleridge's friend and biographer, Joseph Cottle, recorded that the ageing poet morally trembled from opium-taking, regretting his own profligate tastes: "my wretchedness and its guilty cause". As Barry Milligan has valuably pointed out, Coleridge's multivalent fascination with 'imbibing'

-- of laudanum ("the milk of paradise") and tea (a "pernicious beverage") -- had an economic subtext elaborated in public lectures from 1795. Coleridge the wanton drugtaker, boastful of his prowess, was also a stern critic of Britain's exploitative tea trade with the East Indies; and, Milligan suggests, the guilt that burdened Coleridge because of this awful "commercial intercourse" was unconsciously transferred to his drug-taking. The stylish aesthetic desire for drugs in ever-increasing doses was modulated by an implicit recognition that opium, like tea, moved on the imbalanced east-west axis of commodity traffic. But the legend Coleridge wove around "Kubla Khan" -- that opium's destiny was to supercharge the British Romantic imagination -- obscured this recognition, inspiring envy in others. Charles Lamb, for example, longed for Coleridgean vistas and Oriental scenes, knowing opium *only* as commercial property. Lamb bemoaned his plight as an East India Company clerk: "Accursed [by] damn desks, trade, commerce, business"; writing in ledgers of "tea and drugs, and price goods". He was jealous of Coleridge, who conjured "pleasure houses ... and Abyssinian maids ... when my stretch of imaginative activity can hardly ... raise up the ghost of a fish-wife".<sup>1</sup> As Lamb's comments indicated, the Romantic repossession of opium from the damned desks of commerce value-added to drugs as intellectual property, expansionist agency and super-habit.

Coleridge's disciple De Quincey also observed the subtle imbrications of opium-eating and the marketplace. From adolescence, the delinquent De Quincey decried a British society in which "trade is the religion, and money is the god ... detestable commerce ... dissipates [my] romantic visions"; and he took refuge from its spiritual squalor in opium. Nevertheless, one of his strangest self-provocations under opium's spell was to flag a homage to David Ricardo. De Quincey drew an explicit analogy between the action of opium and the theory of political economy. In 1819, he read Ricardo's revelatory *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817) -- a book of "English" genius, he thought, written by a man who like himself lived outside "academic bowers ... oppressed by mercantile ... cares". De Quincey immediately planned his own *Prolegomena to all future Systems of Political Economy*: which, he hoped, "will not be found redolent of opium; though ... to most people, the subject itself is a sufficient opiate". He associated this with opium's "physical economy", which had the ambiguous power to exalt, and then to plunge the user into an underworld of "darkness" and "phantoms". More importantly, De Quincey's *Confessions* saw him urban travelling into the twilight zone of underclass commerce. If ordinary working people observed the weekend rite of spending their meagre wages, the drug-addled De Quincey reserved the right to scopically prey on them. He cruised their archipelagoes "after I had taken opium"; landing in "the markets, and other parts of London, to which the poor resort on a Saturday night, for laying out their wages". He moved amongst them, on drugs: "joined their parties" and found them to be "far more philosophic than the rich";<sup>2</sup> for like himself -- the spendthrift opium-addict philosopher -- the poor instantly turned every penny earned in the nocturnal

marketplace. Drugs allowed De Quincey a vicarious enjoyment of the world of labour and commodity culture he was too unwilling to join. Consequently, the Opium Eater became a travelling eye, surveying capital's society of the spectacle as the first English flâneur – but never ensnared in its quotidian demands. Like the Coleridge of "Kubla Khan", De Quincey mostly elided the relation – which he well understood – between drugtaking and capital's consuming practices. For the purpose of sensational self-promotion, both writers portrayed opium-drinking and eating as a form of super-consumption, somehow outside the detestable orbit of "money" and "trade" but always-allusively proximate to it.

Théophile Gautier's drugtaking – so influenced by De Quincey – was a scopic régime in which drugs and other marvellous possessions were vitally combined. Gautier's essay on "The Hashish-Eaters' Club" (1868) recalled the milieu of the Hôtel Pimodan in 1845, where Parisian bohemians and celebrities gathered for ritualised self-indulgences. Sumptuously decorated interiors were essential to the Club's enjoyment of hashish; and Gautier's sense of the rarity of hashish was matched by his appreciation of an array of precious things. The phantasmagoric clubrooms were furnished with oriental rugs and drapes, "walls ... panelled [and] half-covered with darkened canvases ... a sideboard on which stood a tray full of little saucers of Japanese porcelain"; and hashish was served on plates from "China, Japan, Saxony ... in exquisite taste". Consequently, the environment of the Hashish Club was not quite an alternative theatre of consumption. Contemporaneous with the rise of commodity culture in France in the 1840s, the Club was a perverse parallel to bourgeois habit and taste, where exotic objects (hashish, Japanese porcelains) found their proper habitation and meaning in one of those "distinctive rituals of consumption, through style" which apparently distinguish subcultures from over-ground society.<sup>3</sup> But as mimicry, rather than mockery, the Hashish Club's drug use was a both a celebration of bohemia's Rabelaisian appetites and a period norm – taking middle-class consuming practice to a logical, if aesthetic, extreme.

Real travel abroad stood behind Gautier's hashish experiences. The major supplier of the Hashish Club's candy was Jacques-Joseph Moreau: pupil of the proto-psychologist Jean-Etienne-Dominique Esquirol at Bicêtre hospital. Moreau was a founder of modern psychopharmacology, and an Oriental sojourner. His stunning *Hashish and Mental Illness* (1845) took immediate inspiration from trips overseas. From travels in the Near East, Moreau concluded that in regions where hashish provided social "pleasures impossible to interpret [or] describe", there "appear to be fewer mentally ill than in Europe".<sup>4</sup> Returning to France, Moreau began to advocate hashish as a palliative for European modernity's mental stresses and imaginative limitations, finding willing guinea-pigs at the Hôtel Pimodan. Moreau fed Gautier hashish-paste as well as exotic yarns and near-eastern drug lore, in the belief that the highest function of hashish was to create a new topography for the western mind; and he was thrilled by the prospect that a poet like Gautier could withstand enormous quantities of the drug. The alien associations

of hashish did not impede Gautier's delight in it – indeed, hashish became an emblem of his exceptional, voracious character and mobile imagination. Drugtaking was thus a limit-experiment which, Gautier acknowledged, had its first full articulation in De Quincey's hypnagogic pages.

De Quincey's germinal *Confessions* also carried the baggage of an earlier library of travellers' tales; never leaving behind the underscorings of an ideologically-policed ethnology and teleology of consumption. The *Confessions* galvanised, yet continued, a type of writing on drugs that brought together narratives of psychological, territorial and economic expansion.

In one aspect, the linkage of travelling and drug-taking – or of drug-taking as an hallucinatory analogue to real travel – is popularly encoded in the colloquialism 'tripping'. Related metaphors, of drugs expanding 'mental horizons' and opening previously unexperienced 'head spaces', also imply the principles of exploration and cartography. In his sequel to the best-selling *Doors of Perception, Heaven and Hell* (1956), Aldous Huxley raised this metaphoric chain to a heroic pitch in his praise of the new psychedelic drugs of the mid twentieth century. "Like the earth of a hundred years ago," he wrote, "our mind still has its darkest Africas, its unmapped Borneos and Amazonian basins." As taxonomic naïves, in "relation to the fauna of these regions we are not yet zoologists, we are mere naturalists and collectors of specimens",<sup>5</sup> Huxley thought. He continued:

If I have made use of geographical and zoological metaphors, it is not wantonly, out of a mere addiction to picturesque language. It is because such metaphors express very forcibly the essential otherness of the mind's far continents ... A man consists of ... an Old World of personal consciousness and, beyond a dividing sea, a series of New Worlds – the not too distant Virginias and Carolinas of the personal subconscious ... the Far West of the collective unconscious, with its flora of symbols, its tribes of aboriginal archetypes; and across another, vaster ocean, at the antipodes of everyday consciousness, the world of Visionary Experience ... For the naturalist of the mind ... the soul is transported to its far-off destination by the aid of a chemical – either mescaline or lysergic acid ... the drug ... takes its passengers further into the *terra incognita*.<sup>6</sup>

Thus Huxley cast himself as the Darwin of drugs, sailing away on a psychedelic Beagle to map the mind's uncharted terrain and to classify its imaginary inhabitants and thought-species. This adventuring, globe-conquering language register dates to and echoes the Romantics: Coleridge, the laudanum-fuelled pilgrim to Xanadu; De Quincey's *Confessions*, where the streetwalking Opium Eater roamed the nether regions of nocturnal London, and travelled "the great Mediterranean of Oxford-street"<sup>7</sup> – a vision of the cityscape in which the high sea-road to the poppy-producing East (Turkey and

Persia, Britain's main suppliers) suddenly flowed through the heart of empire. Drugs propelled De Quincey into a vagrant journey, which was nonetheless rhetoricised as purposefully contiguous to the maritime and map-making obsessions of his age:

Some of these rambles led me to great distances: for an opium eater is too happy to observe the motion of time. And sometimes in my attempts to steer homewards, upon nautical principles, by fixing my eye on the pole-star, and seeking ambitiously for a north-west passage, instead of circumnavigating all the capes and headlands I had doubled in my outward voyage, I came suddenly upon such knotty problems of alleys [that] I could almost have believed, at times, that I must be the first discoverer of these *terrae incognitæ*, and doubted, whether they had yet been laid down in the modern charts of London.<sup>8</sup>

Drugs, then, can be a travelling re-enchantment of the world. And drugs are surrogate travel: psychological extra-territorialism; a transient contact with the substance (and substances) of exotic Othernesses and strangely imagined landscapes -- often expressed as a version of pastoral.

Since Coleridge, drugtaking mythology has mobilised the fantasy-resources of pastoral, in reaction to the nervous exhaustions of industrial modernity and mass metropolitanism. De Quincey did so in his biography of Coleridge, explaining that his erstwhile mentor's addiction to opium was over-determined by Coleridge's sensitivity to everyday "insipidities" and "the habits of luxurious city life". Thomas Carlyle believed this too. He wrote satirically, but sympathetically, that Coleridge's ruinous drugtaking and retreat to the "Dodona oak-grove" of Highgate was understandable as a reaction to the age's "smoke-tumult" and "black materialisms". Pastoral's idealised flights -- journeys always *away* -- were ubiquitous in nineteenth-century drug texts: in that pioneering American work, Fitz Hugh Ludlow's *The Hasheesh Eater* (1857), for example, when the young author withdrew from the crowded, commercial chaos of New York to rural America. In a Whitmanesque paean to the nation's open roads and fields, Ludlow set out "upon a journey ... through heavenly territories ... My friend, we shall travel together, linked soul to soul ... gaining ecstasy by impartition."<sup>9</sup> These pastoral chords sounded well into the twentieth century: in Burroughs' *Junky* and *Yage Letters* -- narco-travelogues documenting an escape from social control mechanisms.

In another travelling aspect, drugs have frequently been associated with disruptive travels of a different kind: enmassed population movements. This began with the arrival of Chinese coolie labour on the goldfields of California and Australia in the 1850s. At a time when vials of opium or bottles of laudanum sat on western bedside-tables, the distinctive practice of opium-smoking became emblematic of Oriental debauchery and 'dirt'. Along with diseases such as typhus, the plague of opium-smoking was associated

with foreign subversion: the opium-pipe was its weapon, and the opium den -- with its grubbiness and fabled miscegenation -- was its principal site. A century later, after World War Two, a diminished, decolonising Britain similarly imagined itself inundated by a drug-diaspora which breached national borders; in effect, repeating the demonisation directed at the nineteenth-century Chinese. The shock impact of 'new arrivals' or 'illegals' was neatly summed-up by the picture of non-white migrancy in John Gosling and Douglas Warner's alarmist survey of English 'vice' in the 1950s, *The Shame of a City* (1960). In their invasionist panorama, Gosling and Warner saw the drug trade as both a return of the colonially repressed and a sign of Britain's inability to defend its coasts: "with the influx of thousands of coloureds from the West Indies and Asians from India, Pakistan and elsewhere ... the marijuana came with them ... It came in ships ... It was carried ashore by individuals ... Boxes containing the drugs were tossed over quayside walls ... or were dropped overboard and picked up on the flow of the tide."<sup>10</sup>

This variant of the drugs-travel nexus has produced the commonly repeated idea that drugs always come parcelled with the spectre of Otherness -- New World indigeneity, the Yellow Peril, low nativism or Orientalism. Even Milligan, in his subtly crafted and argued *Pleasures and Pains: Opium and the Orient in Nineteenth-Century British Culture*, re-iterated the point that "Opium itself carried strong associations with the Orient in British culture by the beginning of the nineteenth century, partly as a result of the fantastic Oriental travellers' tales of the previous centuries."<sup>11</sup>

In fact, this is somewhat misleading; and it is crucial to note that the back-log of travellers' tales referred to by Milligan hinged not so much on 'drugs in themselves' -- 'opium itself', 'tobacco itself' and so on -- as it did on cultural practice: how drugs were used in different places, by different races. This small distinction signposts a bigger issue: that the luxurious mood-, mind- and sense-altering substance has, more often than not, been easily appropriated to western systems of economy and social ritual. Introducing the *Consuming Habits* collection, Andrew Sherratt argued that plant substances "with mood-altering properties ... are particularly likely to cross cultural boundaries and become indigenous items of trade; and indeed ... to be promoted to patent formulae in the context of international industrial capitalism".<sup>12</sup> As Sherratt suggested, in the history and anthropology of drug consumption the investiture of alienness or menace in the sense-changing substance was not the shape of the overall pattern. It was the exception, rather than the rule; appearing at particular moments, for specific reasons, in skirmishes over the meaning and function of certain marvellous plant possessions from the New World or the amorphous East.

Sporadic outbreaks of resistance to tobacco and coffee in the seventeenth century, for instance, signally failed to demonise these precious commodities by association with detestable Others. In sixteenth-century England, tobacco was largely a style-statement for "sailors and a few raffish novelty-mongers about court". By 1600, it was emplaced in

commodity trade and, imminently, the taxation system; and it was becoming a popular relaxant with the emergent mercantile class. That class was often critical of the Stuart administration: contemptuous of its moral austerity, and disappointed that the dynamic commerce and colonial consolidation which flourished under Elizabeth I had badly stalled. So, when James I fought his doomed rearguard against the drug, his association of tobacco with low natives was an implicit attack on a barbarised, disrespectful bourgeoisie. The king's "Counter-blaste to Tobacco" (1604) -- "one of the earliest examples of racist arguments used to vilify exotic substances" -- asked "what honour or policie can moove us to imitate the barbarous and beastly maners of the wilde, godlesse, and slavish *Indians*"; and his question was directed at that consuming bourgeoisie -- frequently hostile to the monarchy -- amongst which "publike use [of tobacco] at all times, and in all places, hath now so farre prevailed ... that a man cannot heartily welcome his friend ... but straight they must bee in hand with *Tobacco* ... it is become in place of a cure, a point of good fellowship". But James himself admitted that tobacco had legitimate applications -- as a "Preservative, or Antidot against the Pockes" -- and racialised opposition to it was soon overcome by the persuasive power of tracts such as William Barclay's *Nepenthes Or; the Vertues of Tobacco* (1614), which averred that "When temperately used [by Europeans] there is not in all the world a medicine comparable to tobacco".<sup>13</sup>

Likewise, anti-coffee pamphlets such as *The Maidens Complaint Against Coffee* (1663) portrayed the beverage as the tipples of the vile, lustful Grand Turk; and *The Women's Petition Against Coffee* (1674) warned Englishmen of "a very great [racial and sexual] decay" because of "this pitiful [imported] drink".<sup>14</sup> These appeals to national pride, and the up-raised spectres of the degenerate Indian and Turk, neither stemmed the lucrative trades in tobacco and coffee nor blocked their eventual adoption into the workaday routine of an increasingly sedentary, bureaucratised economy. The historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch concluded that for the ascendant desk-bound worker of the early to mid-eighteenth century, "who was to function as uniformly and regularly as a clock", coffee especially became a "historically significant drug":

It spread through the body and achieved chemically ... what rationalism and the Protestant ethic sought to fulfil spiritually and ideologically. With coffee, the principle of rationality entered human physiology, transforming it to conform with its own requirements. The result was a body which functioned in accord with the new demands -- a rationalistic, middle-class, forward-looking body.<sup>15</sup>

Like tobacco smoking -- popularly termed "dry drinking", with all the moral vigour that "dry" connoted -- coffee was programmatically redefined and integrated into an 'indigenous' European conceptual scheme. The "Wine of Islam" unproblematically became the life-blood of the western office.

Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) was one of the earliest texts in English to feature a compendium of consuming habits. Burton collated an archive of travellers' tales to explain the cultural relativities of consumption, and his second-hand ethnography was a sounding that later became a refrain in the travelling account of drugtaking. He bracketed 'exotics', such as the little-known coffee (the first major shipment of Turkish coffee to Europe landed in Venice three years after his *Anatomy*), with other recreational drugs, in the context of the Turks' racial predilection for idle intoxications:

The Turks have a drink called coffa (for they use no wine) ... they spend much time in those coffa-houses, which are somewhat like our alehouses or taverns, and there they sit chatting and drinking to drive away the time and be merry together ... Some of them take opium to this purpose [and] an herb called datura, "which if it be eaten for twenty-four hours following, takes away all sense of grief, makes them incline to laughter and mirth": and another called bang, like in effect to opium, "which puts them for a time into a kind of ecstasis".<sup>16</sup>

Yet Burton commended opium preparations to his readers as a sophisticated, scientific adjunct to the folkloric practices of herbal healing. "*Laudanum Paracelsi* ... prescribed in two or three grains, with a dram of diascordium", he wrote, was a remarkable medicine -- though opium, he noted again, was "so taken by the Turks ... for a cordial" and massively abused "at Goa, in the Indies" in doses of "forty or fifty grains".<sup>17</sup> But in Britain, opium compounds were indispensable "patent formulae".

Burton's *Anatomy* contained an embryonic cultural relativism for conceptualising drug preparations and consuming habits. And as Andreas-Holger Maehle pointed out in his survey of "Pharmacological Experimentation With Opium in the Eighteenth Century", this idea was greatly expanded in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. "The phenomenon of habitual, non-medicinal taking of opium", Maehle observed, "was well known through descriptions by travellers who had visited the Near, Middle and Far East, but it was generally seen as a specific Oriental problem, as an equivalent ... to the [excessive] consumption of alcohol in the Occident."<sup>18</sup> As an implicit justification for bringing exotics under systematic regulation -- in the emergent jurisdictions of professional medicine, licensed trading and economic property-rights -- the depiction of cultures where sense-altering substances originated as abusive, excessive and careless was a valuable discursive prop. Rare and magical plants, commodified and claimed by the rising capitalist world-market in the Renaissance and Enlightenment, travelled into Europe with the certainty that here was their proper local habitation; and that they were culturally purified, redesignated, by the rational character of western appetite and learning. In the European laboratory, apothecary shop and trading house, the functions and meanings of 'foreign' substances were finally and finely realised.

The ready adoption of opium into British consuming-culture, and its emergence as a pillar of the national economy, was abetted by ethnic demarcations. In contrast to abusive Orientals, British opium-users were uplifted by the drug. So, John Aubrey could write in *Brief Lives of Isaac Barrow* – Isaac Newton's predecessor as Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge – who learned the delights of opium on a trip to Turkey. But the drug's only effect was that it "was wont to doe him good".<sup>19</sup> Opium thus travelled to its logical historical terminus in Britain, enhancing the expansive intellectual character of men like Barrow.

On their voyages around the Asia-Pacific region, Captain James Cook and his crew sometimes found the occasion to deplore cultures they encountered as chronically intoxicated. In Tahiti, with no appreciation of the multiple local significances of kava, Cook's Lieutenant, James King, deemed kava a "pernicious drug"; and Cook himself wrote that "the dreadful havock it had made was beyond belief". As Nancy J. Pollock concluded, this began a representational tradition in which kava-using societies were seen as racially inclined to drunkenness. In the same vein, it was Cook who first introduced the image of "running amok" as a personality trait of drugged Asiatics to English readers. Watching Bataavian Malays, Cook remarked in his journal: "It is well known that to 'run amok', in the original sense of the word, is to get intoxicated with opium, and then to rush into the street with a drawn weapon, and kill whoever comes in the way". According to the *OED*, the phrase "running amuck" appeared in English as early as 1672, but Cook was innovative in linking it to opium use. His assertion of this linkage as "well known" was, possibly, a committing to print of oral maritime folklore. More certainly, it was rhetorical cajoling to enforce an original point: that the co-related tastes for murder and drugs were merely exaggerations of "the jealousy ... desperation" and capacity for "outrage" in the racial make-up of Malays – "these unhappy wretches".<sup>20</sup>

Whilst Cook and his companions condemned race-based substance abuse, their number included the eminent botanist Sir Joseph Banks. As a member of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, Banks had a visionary "concern for the imperial uses of botany" and the commodification of plants.<sup>21</sup> His task was to pluck out any potentially useful blossoms from the vegetable other-worlds where Cook dropped anchor; to 'culture' them in Kew Gardens, then to dispense them amongst physicians and entrepreneurs who could expand their commercial viability. However subconscious it might have been, the stereotyping of indigenous cultures as dissipated and undeserving of their marvellous possessions went hand-in-hand with the uprootings and replantings of Banks' commercial-botanical mission.

There was nothing subconscious about the ethno-rhetoric of Samuel Crumpe's *Inquiry into the Nature and Properties of Opium* (1793): published at the historical moment when opium had finally become the single most important article in Britain's international commodity trade. Around 1790, the basis of the nation's wealth shifted dramatically from

manufacturing to sea-borne commerce, and the East India Company's opium trafficking was the principal financial contributor. Crumpe's *Inquiry* praised opium as having a culmination in the English mind; as an excitant which enhanced mental application. He approvingly recounted his own and others' heroic self-experiments with "doses above the usual standard" and observed the drug's salubrious impact: on a Dr Ramsay, for example, who "took immediately thirty drops [which] produced such enlivening effects" that it helped him to concentrate and "prosecute the study in which I was then engaged". After a top-up, Ramsay reported "I soon found myself so exhilarated ... to indulge in an excess of gaiety [but] my mind still remained ... perfect". This cast opium as kin to that important Enlightenment soft drug, coffee, in its ability to stimulate without unsteading the intellect: indeed, like coffee, opium focussed and refined it. From travellers' tales, Crumpe drew contrasting lessons. Unlike the professional Englishman, he discovered, eastern habitués of opium "decoctions" – such as the denizens of Constantinople's "Market of opium-eaters" – were "Destined to live agreeably only when in a sort of drunkenness"; "they come into the decoction-house [for] extravagancies of mirth and laughter ... it would be more proper to give it the name of the mad-house, than the decoction-shop." Similarly in Persia there were devotees of opium and vinegar brews, which threw the drinker into "every extravagancy of mirth, which terminates in death". Opium only corrupted or killed in the alcohol-free Orient, where "like wines and spiritous liquors in civilized Europe", Crumpe intoned, the drug was "the support of the cowardly, the solace of the wretched, and the daily source of intoxication to the debauchee".<sup>22</sup> For Crumpe, as for many before him, this was at once a moral, medical, and economic rationalisation for the European – and specifically British – right to possess the fabulously functional poppy.

De Quincey's *Confessions* continued this dialogue with travellers' tales, bringing the long-standing travelling account of drugtaking's social and racial differentials into the orbit of Romanticism. In his opening address "To the Reader", De Quincey announced that he could "not altogether concur" with the opinion that a full knowledge and experience of opium would "make it more in request with us than the Turks themselves". De Quincey was given to his own fetishisation of opium itself – "Not the opium-eater, but the opium, is the true hero of the tale" – but he was shrewd enough to off-set this with an anglocentric appeal to the well-established discernment of culturally-relative consuming habits. Any travel writer who considered opium *itself* a problem, De Quincey averred, testified to the fact that "all that has been hitherto written on the subject of opium ... by travellers in Turkey (who may plead their privilege of lying as an old immemorial right)" was rubbish; and that "the great herd of travellers" who spoke against the drug "show sufficiently by their stupidity that they never held any intercourse with opium".<sup>23</sup> Cannily, and carefully, invoking the thematics of travellers' tales in a different light, De Quincey took to his clinching argument in opium's defence:

Turkish opium-eaters, it seems, are absurd enough to sit, like so many equestrian statues, on logs of wood as stupid as themselves. But that the reader may judge of the degree in which opium is likely to stupify the faculties of an Englishman, I shall ... describe the way in which I myself often passed an opium evening in London ... opium did not move me to seek solitude, and much less to seek inactivity, or the torpid state of self-involvement ascribed to the Turks. I give this account at the risk of being pronounced a crazy enthusiast or visionary ... I question whether any Turk, of all that ever entered the paradise of opium-eaters, can have had half the pleasure I had. But ... I honour the Barbarians too much by supposing them capable of any pleasures approaching to the intellectual ones of an Englishman.<sup>24</sup>

Crazy, enthusiastic visions were De Quincey's aesthetic prerogative. After all, he was the nineteenth-century 'pope of dope' – "This is the doctrine of the true church on the subject of opium: of which church I acknowledge myself to be the only member – the alpha and the omega". He was also a beautifully sanctified consuming monster, whose unbordered appetite ran riot in an opiated underworld of "distances", "nautical principles", and north-west passages – in fantasies of navigation and expansion which, Nigel Leask has argued, were linked to the enlarged processes of capital. Leask considered opium's addictiveness as a parallel to the anxious British imperial dependence on the oriental Other, reading the "spasmodic effect of opium on the psyche [as] analogous to the effect of the critical boom-and-recession cycles of capitalism upon the nation".<sup>25</sup> Less anxiously, De Quincey heroised his own consumption – he was an 8,000 drops-a-day man – and as a proud 'English' opium eater he lauded opium as the drug of travel and of wonderfully expanded horizons; the hero-drug which fitted the desires, intellectual pleasures and place in the world order of the Englishman.

Far from being an affrighted experience of dangerous derangements and destabilising Others, the travelling encounter with drugs has long been coloured by a discourse of uneven cultural practice, based on claims to a true understanding, responsible use and rightful ownership of the sense-altering substance. And this, of course, is part of the larger ideological architecture of imperial-capital: the idea that indigenous Others simply do not know what to do with precious things, which legitimates capital's historic mission to consume the world and to expand its own appetitive range.

Throughout the nineteenth century, this idea was catalysed by the chemistry of empire and national aspiration. In the 1840s, William O'Shaughnessy investigated cannabis in India, hoping it could be adopted in England to treat a range of diseases; and The Indian Hemp Drugs Commission of 1893-4 followed suit. Travelling German pharmacologists – Ernst von Bibra, Louis Lewin – harboured the same desires. Their global studies of

drugs – Bibra's *Plant Intoxicants* (1855), Lewin's *Phantastica* (researched from 1874, published in full 1924) – both aimed to harness exotic substances to an organised national programme of industrial pharmaceuticals. In fact, they laid the foundations for pharmaceuticals to become a cornerstone of Germany's post-unification economy. British and German researchers were highly aware of the enormous benefits to be had by capitalising drugs.

When the United States bowed on the world stage after the Spanish-American War in 1898, the drug trade was high on the list of national priorities. The US exploited the drug trade in a peculiar way: it began to question the ethics of opium, to discredit Britain in East Asia, curry favour with China, and gain access to sought-after Chinese markets. After World War One, the US pursued the need for international laws on drugs through a series of conventions; and high-profile drug 'reformers' like John Palmer Gavit stressed Britain's continuing culpability in opium trafficking and Germany's disgraceful production of cocaine and heroin. Gavit's *Opium* (1925) even blamed the unchecked infrastructure of postwar travel for the problem: "Whether ... at a railroad station in France or Sweden, a chemist's shop in London or Tokio; in China, India, Macao, Java, or on a ship from Marseilles or Bushire in the Persian Gulf ... drugs [move] like a man with cholera or bubonic plague".<sup>26</sup>

There was an underlying chauvinism in this. Only the United States, it was implied, could find a path through the moral jungle of drugs. As the twentieth century's newest imperial-commercial state, only the US had the vision and expertise to regulate narcotics and legislate their appropriate use for the world – or indeed, as Gavit argued, to manufacture them responsibly. Gavit had no intention of banning valuable pharmaceuticals *per se*; rather, he wanted them under US hegemony.

A final example – a brief case-study – illustrates the structural durability of this, and its inscription in surprising textual places. In the early writings of William Burroughs, from the 1950s, travelogue elements terminated in an unlikely, chauvinistic affirmation of the United States' consuming destiny: an entrenched position on occidental rights to the boon of sense-altering substances. Beat Burroughs, for all his barking at mechanisms of 'Control', inherited the ideological faith that his personal quest for exotic drugs was the extension of a kind of national *droit de seigneur*. Burroughs' planned defloration of South America's virgin forests – the search for yage – was shadily backed by a belief in his own culture's moral and economic pre-eminence.

At this point, it is worth remarking that the contemporary currency of the speech-figures 'tripping' and 'drug trip' – or 'trip drug' – began with the United States' Central Intelligence Agency in the 1950s. The CIA coined the terms in the context of psychoactive drug tests on unconsenting subjects. These extensive sessions were designed to examine the possible uses of various mind-altering drugs to derange the personality on individual and mass scales; to determine the effectiveness of certain psychoactives (mescaline,

LSD, concentrated cannabis extracts) for tripping the switches of logic and everyday consciousness, and to trip-up the normal psychological workings of unknowing stooges. But the CIA had another drug-trip operation, as Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain discovered in the course of researching their absorbing *Acid Dreams*. The Agency despatched missions to distant locales, "to procure samples of rare herbs and botanicals [and] the results of one such trip were recorded in a heavily deleted document", benignly titled "Exploration of Potential Plant Resources in the Caribbean Region." This report enigmatically mentioned two psychogenic shrubs, labelled "the stupid bush" and "the information bush" -- though it was not specified what kind of information the latter might provide, or "whether the 'information bush' could be ... an antidote to the 'stupid bush' in brainwashing or interrogation."<sup>27</sup>

With all the anticipation and exhilaration of Joseph Banks, or of Renaissance spice-seekers, the CIA's field-botanists set out to find and functionalise any flower, leaf, branch, stem or root that could potentially drive an enemy of the state to distraction. And like their forebears -- the freebooting, franchised navigators, conquistadores and privateers -- these CIA-funded scientists were entrusted with the task of discovering drugs which might be turned to profit in America's national-security interests.

At the same time, and with a remarkably similar sense of profitability, William Burroughs the 'literary outlaw' was slipping-off the cuffs of America's criminal justice system and moving south with the "Refugee hipsters [who] trickled down into Mexico" and beyond.<sup>28</sup> But on his subsequent quest for yage, 'the vine of the soul', in South America's jungles, Burroughs' self-portraiture fused elements of the heroic narco-frontiersman and the unashamed Yankee imperialist consumer.

Burroughs was versed in the literature of drugs, and De Quincey was one of the stars in the galaxy of drug writers he carried in his head. Burroughs' first book, *Junky*, published in 1953, was heavily marked by De Quincey's *Confessions*: the fall through a hole in the fabric of social respectability; the metropolitan transmigrations; mapping the unknown landmarks of New York's underworld; the sleazily heroic cultivation of a bigger and bigger habit. Leaving New York, Burroughs travelled through the southern US, New Orleans and Texas, then over the border to Mexico City. From there, he planned "to go down to Colombia and score for yage", in the adventuring hope that "Yage may be the final fix"<sup>29</sup> -- signposting the narco-travelogue that eventuated in *The Yage Letters*.

The narrative alignments of *The Yage Letters* with travelling drug-lore were impressive; as was the image of Burroughs the inveterate traveller-snob, for whom 'elsewhere' was never good enough. In transit, passing through the Canal Zone, Burroughs judged "The Panamanians ... about the crummiest people in the Hemisphere [but] I understand the Venezuelans offer competition"; and Bogota was "horrible as ever". Colombia was populated by "people [who] do not have even the concept of responsibility" and by Indians who chewed on drug-plants "because they are too lazy to

eat." The shamans who held the secrets of yage were utterly unworthy, and Burroughs was serially "conned by medicine men (the most inveterate drunk, liar and loafer in the village is invariably the medicine man)". Trapped by rain in Pucallpa, in Peru, Burroughs experienced the final insult: "When they said that American literature did not exist and English literature was very poor, I lost my temper ... I was shaking with rage and realized how the place was dragging me". But travel also had its conventional liberties: in Burroughs' case, a full menu of exotic drugs, and the fact that:

South America does not force people to be deviants. You can be queer or a drug addict and still maintain position. Especially if you are educated and well-mannered.<sup>30</sup>

Burroughs' quest for yage was fortuitously fulfilled. Visiting a German plantation owner, he casually found that "My Indians all use it. A half hour later I had 20 pounds of yage vine. No trek through virgin jungle" -- a neat colonial arrangement: care-free native attitudes to the sought-after substance facilitated and authorised the drug-seeker's possession of it. He was contemptuous, too, of the ritual circumstance in which he took the drug on his "dirt floor thatch shack ... Yage appointment". Impatiently by-passing local consuming habits, Burroughs "wanted straight Yage kicks". Skip the stupid ceremony, he decided: "I drank it straight down ... I sat there waiting for results and almost immediately had the impulse to say, 'That wasn't enough. I need more.'<sup>31</sup>

This needing "more" pointed to the other narrative interwoven with the tale of Burroughs as intrepid hurdler of the traveller's traditional obstacles -- poor food, health crises, dingy places, recalcitrant thieving natives. *The Yage Letters* contained a running commentary on upper South American economic history and consuming habits. Burroughs ruminated on Italian, Spanish and English incursions in the region, observing that for South Americans to "realize the potential form" of their own locality they "need white blood as they know". The English, he concluded, would have known best how to colonise a place like this for profit -- "Never would have gotten the English out of here". Burroughs scouted the workings of the rubber and cocoa trades -- "The rubber business is shot, the cocoa is eaten up with broom rot" -- and comically exploited the local idolization of the Texas Oil Company in Bogota: "I was treated like visiting royalty under the misapprehension I was a representative of the Texas Oil Company travelling incognito". Another landfall on Burroughs' tour of the economic frontier was "a U.S. Point Four Experimental Agriculture Station", established to assess the jungle's commodity potential -- and operating, in all likelihood, as a CIA botanical mission. The Point Four station, Burroughs was told by a jaded fellow American, enlivened hostility to the US. The natives' inability to commercialise the jungle, Burroughs learned, bred hatred of the "foreigners" who tried to help them and brought out the fabled ingratitude of the colonial

subject -- "the more you give the bastards the nastier they get". Still, this was open territory where anything could be got: even young boys, like the one Burroughs met in Puerto Assis who "wanted \$30 evidently figuring he was a rare commodity in the Upper Amazon. I beat him down to \$10 ... Somehow he managed to roll me for \$20 and my underwear".<sup>32</sup> Just as De Quincey came to acknowledge the potential toxic shocks, infections and returns of the repressed in extravagant consumption -- in Asiatic dreams, in the figure of the Malay -- so Burroughs discovered the dangers of the unpredictable human 'commodity'. This, however, was a temporary set-back in the co-related economic survey of the abundantly consumable South America and the compulsive quest for yage.

Yage was the most marvellous possession of all, the magic drug, and the book's first section ("In Search of Yage") culminated in a splendid spectacle. Usually, in a tribal context, anthropologists and ethnobotanists have remarked that ritual pre-conditioning created yage-visions of snakes, jaguars, "visions of hunting and fishing [or] of heaven".<sup>33</sup> For Burroughs, the heavenly experience of yage had a strikingly different emphasis. It was a moment of near-spiritual clarity, ethnologically and teleologically framed, in which the consuming western body and mind were sensorially saturated; and the narco-traveller's imperious, panoramic gaze delighted in a global fantasy of consumption without limits:

Last night I took last of yage mixture ... This morning, still high. This is what occurred to me. Yage is space time travel. The room seems to shake and vibrate with motion. The blood and substance of many races, Negro, Polynesian, Mountain Mongol, Desert Nomad, Polyglot Near East, Indian -- new races as yet unconceived and unborn, combinations not yet realized passes through your body. Migrations, incredible journeys through deserts and jungles and mountains ... across the Pacific in an outrigger canoe to Easter Island. The Composite City where all human potentials are spread out in a vast silent market.<sup>34</sup>

In this brilliantly cynical hallucination of the whole world arrayed in a market waiting to be taken -- or, having been taken, phenomenally expanding the consumer's visionary power -- Burroughs was perhaps taking a tentative step on the theoretical journey that led to *The Naked Lunch* (1959). In that novel, he famously conceived of narcotic drugs as the arch commodity -- materially and metaphorically -- which exposed the dominative inner dynamism of capital:

there are many junk pyramids feeding on peoples of the world and all built on basic principles of monopoly ... Junk is the mold of monopoly and possession ... I have heard that there was once a beneficent non-habit-forming junk in India. It was called *soma* and is pictured as a beautiful blue tide. If *soma* ever existed the

Pusher was there to bottle it and monopolize it and sell it ... Junk is the ideal product ... the ultimate merchandise.<sup>35</sup>

In the epistolary narco-travelogue of *The Yage Letters*, however, Burroughs was far less ambivalent -- or critical -- on the matter. Sitting in a long representational line, preceding Romanticism yet set on a new direction by Coleridge and De Quincey, travel's quest mythology was seamlessly conjoined in *The Yage Letters* with the belief in a triumphalist ethnology and teleology of consumption. Like so many narco-travelogues before and after it, *The Yage Letters* paid homage to *homo occidentalis* as a visionary, all-consuming species.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: LOCALS AND TOURISTS CROSS OVER THE SKYE BRIDGE

**Peter Bishop**

Dear Sir,

...Would Skye landladies and others please consider, if improved tourism is the aim, that while the bridge may improve things for a few years, the ease of access will inevitably remove from the minds of many overseas visitors the desire to go there. After all, it will then just be part of mainland Scotland. Are they prepared to remove the mysticism of the Isle of Skye from the minds of future generations for the sake of a very unlikely "improved economy"?<sup>1</sup>

This letter from Australia to the *West Highland Free Press (WHFP)*, and many others like it from around the world, gives a rare opportunity to hear a tourist critically commenting on the proposal for a major, controversial piece of travel infrastructure, in this case a bridge linking the Isle of Skye to the mainland. These letters to the editor of the *West Highland Free Press* in the years leading up to the eventual opening of the bridge in October 1995 were part of an intense public forum about the merits or otherwise of the proposal. The letters also provided an unusual opportunity for locals not only to contribute their perspective on the bridge proposal, but also publicly to criticise tourists and their vision of the island:

Dear Sir,

... it is interesting to note that the vast majority of anti-bridge correspondence ... emanates from places such as "London", "Texas", "Alice Springs", etc. If I had a nasty suspicious mind, I might think that this is significant (25 December 1987, p.3).

Another correspondent from Skye was more direct, labelling tourists "voyeurs on a dying culture" (22 September 1989, p.3). Tourists were not the only ones in the firing