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Opium as an intertextual force:

Philip Pullman`s *The Ruby in the Smoke*

Introduction: Theories and Methods

As an interesting play of history and literary history, during the reign of Elizabeth II, a great matriarchal figure to the English nation (although her role as a monarch is mainly symbolic, especially compared to that of her forerunners) we can witness the revival of interest in the cultural era of her two great predecessors as matriarchs on the English throne, Queen Elizabeth I, and Queen Victoria¹. The attention given to the Elizabethan era is not a new-fangled phenomenon; the English Renaissance gave Shakespeare, “the Bard” to the world, so that time period has been researched and reworked for a long time now. However, the case is different with the Victorian era because for quite a while it was too recent to be treated objectively, some decades had to pass so that the middle of the twenties century could rediscover this era for itself. Its contradictions, repressions and innovations provided a fertile substratum for later writers to comment on.

The first and maybe the best known of postmodern – Neo - Victorian novels is John Fowles’s *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1969) which was written in the sixties, but since then more similar works have followed². Literary criticism also turned with interest towards Neo - Victorianism and many great critical works have been written on this topic.³ We can summarise the phenomenon with Mitchell’s words: “a fascination with the period invaded film, television, trends in interior decoration, fashion, genealogy, advertising, museums, historical re-enactments, politics ...” (1)

Precisely for this reason, this essay does not try to compete with the work of established scholars in the Neo- Victorian field, rather it tries to draw upon their findings in order to

¹ “For despite the recent blockbuster popularity of Shakespeare and Elizabeth I movies, films of Victorian novels have saturated the middlebrow and arthouse movie circuit since the early 1990s”.(Sadoff and John Kucich, 11)

² A.S. Byatt’s *Possession: A Romance* (1990), but we can also mention Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) ,which although was written somewhat earlier, belongs to the wave reflecting upon Victorian fiction, being a postcolonial rewriting of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847).

³ Just to mention a few: KAPLAN, Cora: *Victoriana: histories, fiction, criticism* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007. MITCHELL, Kate: *History and cultural memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Victorian Afterimages* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010 and SADOFF, Diane F. & KUCIC John ed.: *Victorian Afterlife: Post-modern culture rewrites the nineteenth century* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000

claim its own niche in another field, which is (contemporary) young adult fiction and its stance towards the Victorian era. Children and Young Adult fiction has a somewhat marginal place in the Hungarian academic world and unfortunately, it is not rare that it is considered an inferior subject. In his article, “Szépirodalom vs. Lektűr” Bárány Tibor writes about the difficulties of Hungarian literary criticism in making an objective and correct distinction between “high” and “popular” literature because of some old habits and traditions. He claims that the criteria are somewhat obsolete and he proposes a new definition of popular literature which does not treat it as an inferior genre, only a different one. Bárány argues that Hungarian literary criticism is heavily burdened with some old esthetical and methodological habits which make “popular fiction” invisible in the eyes of literary critics⁴ (1). Furthermore, he suggests that these preconceptions have a theoretically weak grounding and they can be harmful, consequently we should try to eradicate them⁵. Sincerely agreeing with the aforesaid, I propose my ideas about a book which is intended for a young adult readership but which certainly has literary merits. I found that opium has an essential role both as a prop in the action of the story and as an intertextual force, which connects Pullman’s book to many famous opium related works. Therefore, I intend to examine these allusions and use them to prove the merit of the book. In the end, we will have seen that Bárány’s proposition that popular fiction should not be overlooked by literary criticism is valid and can open up new fields of study.

However, this essay does not aim to be the apologia of these genres, the same way it does not want to question the “aesthetic value” of canonised works. Quite the contrary, it draws on them, as a support in the examination of the young adult novel in question, Philip Pullman’s *The Ruby in the Smoke*. Furthermore, nor does this essay wish to discover the reasons of the prominence of nineteenth century in postmodern fiction, which is an issue amply treated, among others, Dianne F. Sadoff and John Kucich in their Introduction to *Victorian Afterlife: Post-modern culture rewrites the nineteenth century* (11)

Since the subject of my thesis paper is not a well-researched, canonised author, namely Philip Pullman, writer of children’s and young adult literature and his Sally Lockhart - series, I plan to use approaches other than Neo-Victorian studies, such as postcolonial and

⁴ “Legalább ilyen fontos szerepet játszik a magyar irodalomkritika néhány öröklődő esztétikai és módszertani előfeltevése. Ezek az előfeltevések, amelyeket a kortárs irodalomkritikusok többsége kimondva-kimondatlanul elfogad, lényegében „láthatatlanná” teszik a kritikai nyilvánosság számára a lektűrirodalom műveit.”(1)

⁵“ Amellett fogok érvelni, hogy az előfeltevések elméletileg gyenge lábon állnak, és elfogadásuk káros hatással lehet az irodalomkritika napi gyakorlatára, ezért fel kell adnunk őket.”(1)

deconstructist theory, as well as some essays in the scope of addiction studies, or even postmodern theories. Because of the questioning and subverting quality of the postmodern it is not a futile attempt to try to loosen on the borderline between high and popular literature and examine works which traditionally are considered to belong to a “second-rate” genre. It is the interaction of high and popular literature that makes Pullman’s book most interesting and worth exploring.

In his essay "Tradition and the Individual talent" T.S. Eliot writes about "the virtual library" of the literary works explaining that the works do not exist in isolation, but they are embedded in a flexible, interactive network:

The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. (2)

Here Eliot speaks of works of art, of high literature, and members of the established canon. Our aim is to try and extend his metaphor to the works of popular literature; more specifically to works of young adult fiction. For on the one hand, as I will argue, some writers of young adult fiction rely on classical texts in order to make her work seem more “literary”. On the other hand, the publishers try to use the success of her book to popularise classical fiction.

One of the most observable examples of the strange interaction which takes place between works of canonised literature and works of young adult fiction is the exchange between *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and *Eclipse* (2007), the third volume of Stephanie Meyer`s Twilight-series. The latter makes several references to the first explicitly and implicitly: for example, the protagonists talk about Brontë's novel and compare themselves to Catherine and Heathcliff. Furthermore, there is a love triangle which seems to have been inspired by the one in *Wuthering Heights*. It is more interesting; however, what the young adult series can offer to the classic: marketing and renewed interest. It is not a matter of the literary context, since *Wuthering Heights* needs little recommendation in the circle of critics and literature teachers, but a matter of the real world where publishing houses need to cater for the needs of the widest possible reading circle. That is why they republished *Wuthering*

Heights with a "Twiligish" cover, suggesting that it should or could be read as a novel made especially for young adults.⁶

The former example is not an isolated case; nowadays the young adult section of bookstores seems to be swarmed by "remakes" of classics: the novels of Jane Austen seem to be the most popular, but the reinterpreted versions of the Brontë sisters' works are not far behind⁷. These instances seem to be in accordance with the "recycling tactics" of postmodern literature and the fact that in the reality publishers cannot afford to disregard the needs of the public.

Another noteworthy "trafficking" should be mentioned before starting the analysis of the novel in question, and that is of the "crossover novel" and "cross-reading," because it has influenced the appreciation of young adult novels, as well. Let me summarise Falconer's arguments put forward in the introduction to *The crossover novel: Contemporary children's literature and its adult readership*, which is a great book written on the change in the evaluation of children's books and their ever growing adult readership. According to Falconer, there was a period approximately between 1997 and 2007 which saw the surge of adult interest in children's fiction and it is not a coincidence that the Harry Potter series were published roughly in the same years. However, besides the eager cross-reading adults, derogatively termed as "kiddults", there appeared another group who were far less enthusiastic: critics who saw crossreading as a social transgression. Adults, who should be responsible and should read proper adult fiction, inundated the children's sections of the bookshops, which, according to them, amounted to the decomposition of social order.

Philip Pullman, the subject of my essay, is known to be "one of the most outspoken apologists for children's literature⁸" (Falconer 5). Falconer argues that the reason of adults turning to readings not appropriate for their age because everybody likes, what is more needs, good and inspiring stories but many of those books which are considered to be proper and

⁶ Further information and details can be found in this article, which appeared in the Guardian. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/aug/28/vampire-endorsement-bronte-bestseller>

⁷ Just to mention a few examples of the rewritings: Jenni James: *The Jane Austin diaries* – series, a high school adaptation of many of Austin's stories, Stephanie Barron's *The Jane Austin mysteries* – series, in which Jane Austin features as a resourceful detective, Eve Marie Mont's *A Breath of Eyre*, in which the young modern day heroine lands in the body of Jane Eyre and the first book of Jasper Fforde's Thursday Next – series, *The Eyre-Affair*, where a literary detective has to solve the case of kidnapped literary characters.

⁸ The following quote exemplifies perfectly his stance and his far from degrading view on children's literature: "There are some themes, some subjects, too large for adult fiction: they can only be dealt with adequately in a children's book." (5)

high quality adult literature became too sophisticated and lay more emphasis in the crafted ways of narration than the actual tale. (5)

To recapture the things which we mentioned in this brief introduction; the theories which we will use in the essay: Neo- Victorian and addiction studies, deconstructionism and postcolonialism. Also, we noted that in the past years several changes happened in the literary world: there was a revival of interest in the Victorian era, a strange two - way interaction started to take place between works of canonised and popular literature and last but not least the stance of children`s literature began to change both as a subject of literary criticism and as with regard to its readership. The end of the 90s saw more and more adult people turning towards children`s literature which signalled that these books too can have more in them than just the entertainment of youngsters.

Opium and the People

The book which is the topic of this essay, *The Ruby in the Smoke*, fits into this pattern and since Pullman is an advocator of quality children`s fiction, it is no wonder that the novel is not only a source of entertainment for adult readers, but also a repository of rich intertextual connections, especially with 19<sup>th</sup> century English works. These works are: Wilkie Collins`s *The Moonstone* (1868), Samuel T. Coleridge`s "Kubla Khan" (1816), and Thomas de Quincey`s *Confession of an English Opium Eater* (1821). Furthermore, we can find references to the detective novel tradition established by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle . The title of Philip Pullman`s novel, *The Ruby in the Smoke*, is a very well chosen one. On the one hand, it shows that a ruby, a mystical stone of Indian origin is one of the main "protagonists" of the story: it is one of the main driving forces of the plot, a dangerous object of obsession, which can eventually trigger something very close to addiction. In this sense, the pursuit of the ruby exemplifies the Western or colonial desire for the East, in fact, the invention of the Orient. As Edward Said argues: The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences. (10) The Orient was always a strange yet alluring place which triggered an ambivalent feeling of drive for possession and repulsion. Indeed, the ruby is not the only

treasure from the Orient⁹ which is pursued by the characters; there is the other one which is not as obvious, yet at least as important for the narrative: the "smoke" - opium. It is important to note that *both* the ruby *and* the diamond come from India; the same country from where the valuable opium cargo is shipped to China. This fact only strengthens the link between the precious stones and the drug. The following quote from *The Ruby in the Smoke* demonstrates how the relation seems to taint the beauty of the stones and how it becomes vested with the characteristics of the demonic, invading orient: "Even the Ruby itself is tainted; for the wealth that paid for it came from the poppyfields of Agrapur. Those fields are today more prosperous than ever; the evil remains." (208)

In the following, we will examine the importance of these dangerously alluring treasures of the Orient, which throughout the narrative become the addictive objects of colonising Western desire. Furthermore, we will look at opium in the middle of the web of intertextual connections, which is not only a topical element in the story, but an essential structural element in the narrative helping to unfold the allusions to well-known canonised works and thus bestowing upon the story a whole new layer of interpretation. By using these allusions next to historical facts and "period costumes", Pullman gives an extra strength to the plausibility of the story.

The influence of opium on stories is far from an unprecedented one, the literary works mentioned above can clearly demonstrate this. Yet opium had an effect not only on the literary world, but on the real world, on human history, as well. Thomas M. Santella states in his book on opium that it had the biggest economic, political and social influence among all drugs. (8) Besides becoming one of the major medico-social issues in the second half of the 19th century (see: Berridge), it was the cause of the Opium wars between China and England and was a means of changing people's life either by making them rich from the trade and smuggling of opium or ruining them by casting them to the depth of opium dens. Both fates are represented in *The Ruby in the Smoke*: a pirate / businessman of half Dutch - half Chinese origin made a great fortune by exploiting opium trade, while Bradwell, an unlucky sailor, is trapped by a malevolent character, Mrs. Holland, who is using his own addiction to opium against him. Interestingly enough, the most famous opium related works show the drug from this perspective, the perspective of its user, "the addict" and there are only a few, if any, works celebrating the great economical value of the drug and describing the means how one can get rich by exploiting it. However, opium has another usage beside the two mentioned

⁹ With the words of Said, "

above (profitable commodity and a devastating addictive substance), a quite unique one and that is the use of the drug as a gateway to the understanding of something; the solution of a mystery or some higher Truth.

Detectives, Poets and Drugs

The title of the series "Sally Lockhart mysteries"¹⁰ seems to connect the work with the English detective novel tradition, which was funded by such stories as Collins's *The Moonstone* and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes¹¹ stories. "The early history of detective fiction is saturated with narcotic drugs," (85) states Marty Roth as early as in the first sentence of his essay "Detectives, Drugs, and Empire." Indeed, Conan Doyle's "The Man with the Twisted Lip" starts with the following sentence: "Isa Whitney, brother of the late Elias Whitney, D.D. principal of the Theological College of St. George's, was much addicted to opium." (66) It shows very clearly that we are well into the 19th century, where the pathologisation of the addict had already begun. While in earlier times, taking a drug was only an act, in the second half of the 19th, it turned into such an *essential* trait that it had to be the first thing mentioned in a description. Eve Sedgwick summarises this transformation drawing on Foucault's line of thought on the homosexual:

As defined by [early nineteenth- century norms], [opium eating was a category of...acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth century [addict] became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood... [His addiction] was everywhere present on him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away... The [opium-eater] had been a temporary aberration; the addict was now a species. (130-131)

More remarkable is what Dr. Watson says in the second sentence. "The habit grew upon him, as I understand, from some foolish freak when he was at college; for having read De Quincey's description of his dreams and sensations, he had drenched his tobacco with

¹⁰ The series is not the most well-known work of Pullman, (that is His Dark Material-series, which also has strong intertextual links, this time to Milton's *Paradise Lost*) but it has a good reputation, *The Cambridge Guide to Children's Books in English* describes it as "fast-paced and original, the historical elements well researched and convincing, and its concerns, despite its historicity, are intensely contemporary." (625)

¹¹ It cannot be a coincidence that there is a certain similarity between the name Sally Lockhart and Sherlock Holmes.

laudanum in an attempt to produce the same effects.¹² ("The Man with the twisted lip", 66) It was not the appeal of opium itself that turned Isa's attention to the drug, but a literary work saturated with it. De Quincey's work was a sensation in its own time and through it opium consumption gained a wider publicity. It found its way into detective fiction not only in the person of a lost addict who had to be found by his doctor, as it happens in the "Man with the twisted lip", but, as Roth argues, it was also considered to be a stimulant for the detectives themselves, such as Holmes: they "might have done drugs as poets, who dreamed up the solutions to mysteries." (85, 86)

Like Sherlock Holmes in "The Man with the Twisted lip", Sally, the protagonist of *The Ruby in the Smoke* has to visit an opium den because she needs opium to cater the needs of Bradwell in the hope of getting some help from him. Similarly, although with not so friendly intentions Mrs. Holland was supplying opium to him because she was hungry for the information he could provide. In this situation, opium is clearly the key to some invaluable knowledge, which seems to chime in with what Roth said about Sherlock Holmes's taking of opium.

Beside the detectives another group was mentioned who might use narcotics to enhance their abilities: poets. Both of them are on the look-out for some kind of truth. However, truth means different things for them: detectives is interested in an earthly reality, they search for the „real“ rather than the „true“, poets are in the search of a „higher“, transcendental truth. Rather than believing in a correspondence theory of truth, as detectives do, poets regard truth as a memory of some ideal world. Also, while the detective needs a solution to be successful in his job and to earn his living, the poet asks the help of the Muses, or that of opium, to reach a transcendental truth, and be able to express it. He thus potentially turns into a superhuman, half-angelic half demonic creature, as it is described by Coleridge in *Kubla Khan*: Beware! Beware! / His flashing eyes, his floating hair! / Weave a circle round him thrice, / And close your eyes with holy dread, / For he on honey-dew hath fed / And drunk the milk of Paradise. The quotation verifies quite plastically that the truth which the poet aims to find is different in nature than the detective's truth. While the latter helps to settle the world into its proper order again, the first bestows one with a knowledge which can easily turn into madness, a state like demonic possession.

¹² It might be interesting to mention that in another contemporary Victorian - inspired Young Adult novel, Cassandra Claire's *The Clockwork Angel* (2010) the chief vampire is called De Quincey. What is a vampire if not the ultimate example of addict, whose life is totally turned upside down by the dependency on the substance, blood. Not to mention the fact that the vampire "spreads" its addiction, it contaminates its victims, something similar to what De Quincey's book did to Isa.

However different (and yet similar) the aim might be for the detective and the "inspired" poet they have a common aid for it - opium. In these cases, when taken by "chosen ones" who stand above the average in some ways, opium becomes a revealer of Truth, but when used by the masses it shows not the truth but confused visions and nightmares. This phenomenon is what Derrida describes as *pharmakon*: something which is a cure and a poison at the same time. (234) Madame Chang, the owner of an opium den in *The Ruby in the Smoke* says something similar, when she describes the effects of the smoke: "The power of the smoke is unbounded. It hides secrets of the past so well that the sharpest eyes in the brightest daylight would never find them; and then it reveals them all like buried treasure when they have been forgotten." (91) In this chapter Pullman show us both sides of the coin.

Firstly, in the den we can see the addicts for whom opium is a poison, for them, as Derrida would have it, "it has more affinity with forgetting, the simulacrum, and *bad* repetition than it has with anamnesis and truth. This *pharmakon* dulls the spirit and rather than aiding memory, it loses it." Pullman in describing the den says " it seemed as if the room had taken on the shape of the collective *dreams* of all those who had ever gone there *to seek oblivion*," (89) (italics are mine) thus being in accordance with which Derrida says about forgetting as the effect of the *pharmakon*.

Juxtaposed to this; however, there is the drug as "the remedy", which "enables us to repeat and thus remember." (Derrida 234) And indeed this is what happens to Sally, when she enters the opium den. She has a vision induced by the opium smoke in which she sees flashbacks from her past which are clues to her actual problems. However, this brief remembrance is not enough to answer all her questions; she knows she will have to turn to opium if she wants to reveal the truth. Naturally, it generates the anxiety of addiction in her, but to her question Madame Chang answers the following: "If you are in danger, it is not from the drug. But you have the smoke in your nature now. It has revealed something you did not know; maybe you will crave the smoke for not its own sake, but for the sake of what it can show to you." (92) This insight might add to the point we made about detectives and poets taking the drug; they might not be interested in the drug itself, but rather in the use of it as a gateway to truth.

With the help of opium Sally manages to find the solution to the mystery; however, she was too late, somebody has already solved the problem. While Sally is the protagonist of

the story and she is indeed a remarkable and sharp young woman¹³ and we would except her to be the real master detective, it is Jim a thirteen year old office boy (and fortunately, Sally's friend) who gets to the ruby first. As a contrast to the refined middle – class detectives of classical detective fiction (Sherlock Holmes or Poirot) he is a lower – class boy who is just an inch above the street urchins with whom he has a good relationship. He seems to fulfil the thought experiment which Bényei mentions in his *A krimi, a metafizika és a posztmodern* somebody reads so many detective stories that he thinks that he too can become a detective and solve problems (14)¹⁴. Jim had read a great amount of Penny Dreadfuls, as a consequence he is able to get to the precious stone before anybody else does. Jim's part as a detective fits into the tradition of children's books where children fulfil the role of a detective and they can solve mysteries that adults cannot¹⁵. Furthermore, child detectives are motivated not by such self-centred reasons as the hope of financial remuneration, promise of fame or the quest after some higher, but by the simple and strong curiosity inherent in every child and a thirst for adventure. Totally different are the motifs of the amateur detective in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*, which is one of the earliest examples of English detective fiction beside Arthur Conan Doyle's works.

"My precious..."

Although *The Moonstone* is never explicitly referred to in *The Ruby in the Smoke*, there are many similarities between the two books. The theme of a precious stone inherited by a young girl from an unworthy relative is strongly present in both stories. In *The Moonstone*, the black sheep of the family, John Herncastle, a violent man who came back from India and became an opium addict¹⁶, left the dangerous diamond to his young cousin as a dubious proof of his forgiveness towards his relatives who shunned him. While still in India he became so obsessed with the legends of the Moonstone that when he had a chance to grab during the storming of Seringapatam he took it probably by murdering its custodians. The obsession

¹³*The Cambridge Guide to Children's books* describes her "as a modern woman in a Victorian setting who carries and uses a gun, starts up her own business and has a child out of wedlock." (636)

¹⁴ "Képzelnék el egy olyan illetőt, aki egész életét azzal töltötte, hogy detektívregényeket olvasott, és végül arra az örült gondolatra jutott, hogy a világ ugyanúgy folyik, mint egy Nicholas Blake regényben – regényben. Képzelnék el továbbá, hogy ez a szegény ördög végül arra adja a fejét, hogy bűneseteket derít fel, és úgy viselkedik a mindennapi életben, ahogy egy detektív az ilyenfajta regényekben. (Ernesto Sabato, *El túnel* (105) quoted in Bényei.

¹⁵ To list a few examples: Erich Kästner's *Emil and the Detectives* (1929), R.J. McGregor's *The Young Detectives* (1934), Astrid Lindgren's *Bill Bergson, Master Detective* (1946), Brian Selznick's *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (2007)

¹⁶ "The Colonel had been a notorious opium-eater for years past." (Collins, 48)

with the treasure made him forget the boundaries of ethics and law. The same happened in *The Ruby in the Smoke* to Major Marchbanks who was capable of trading his own daughter for the ruby, not to mention his other big vice: he too was an opium - smoker. “[I]s this pore child going to grow up with a coward for a father? A coward and an opium smoker? (Pullman, 189)

The juxtaposition of the two character traits seems to support the general view that addicts are “weak” people¹⁷; The behaviour of these two characters seem to conform to this presupposition stemming from the 19th century, since they, the opium addicts, are the ones who get fixated upon the precious stones, as well. Another similarity is that both stones are seized during the Sepoy mutiny, which in *The Ruby in the Smoke* is referred to as the Indian Mutiny and as the storming of Seringapatam in *The Moonstone*. Roth mentions the Mutiny and the presentation of the Koh-I-Noor diamond to the queen, and quotes Ashish Roy, a critic, who notes the controversial character of these events: in fact, bloodshed and treachery are the work of an Englishman and not a “wild” native, not to mention the fact that all these awful happenings can be linked to queen Victoria herself. (86)

Violence seems to be an inherent part of the precious stones; both the diamond and the ruby are engulfed in myths foretelling dangerous happenings. The Moonstone is an Indian diamond, which is endowed with legendary traits and has a religious role, as well. Its protector, “the deity predicted certain disasters to the presumptuous mortal who laid hands on the sacred gem, and to all his house and name who received it after him. (Collins, 5) The description of the stones tell us just as much of their nature as the sinister legends. The Moonstone`s description is plastic, even if maybe not as eloquent as the ruby`s will be. “A stone, set like a pommel, in the end of the dagger`s handle, flashed in the torchlight, as he turned on me, like a gleam of fire. (7) “The light that streamed from it was like the light of the harvest moon. When you looked down into the stone, you looked into a yellow deep that drew your eyes into it so that you saw nothing else. It seemed unfathomable; this jewel, that you could hold between your finger and thumb, seemed unfathomable as the heavens themselves. (80) The description of the stone relies on the metaphors which are evoked by its name, “harvest moon”, “yellow” and “heaven” all point towards the sky and the name-giving planet, also signalling the stone`s divine origin.

¹⁷ “Their story is a “narrative of inexorable decline and fatality” (Sedgwick 131)

Foreboding predictions are also there in *The Ruby in the Smoke*. A prediction is made about the stone that it would rest only with a woman of similar devilishness. "There was a legend that the evil of the stone would persist until it was laid to rest by a woman who was its equal." (38) At the end of the story the ruby is thrown into the river Thames and Mrs. Holland, doubtlessly the most evil woman character in the book, is driven by her obsession to jump after it, thus fulfilling the prophecy by death. We can see from this episode that the ruby is a subject of serious addiction: Mrs. Holland sacrifices her life and Major Marchbanks gives away his daughter to get it. They show the same greed with which opium addicts and the traders of opium were struggling to get hold of the drug. The strong drive of the characters is like the microcosmic image of the West striving for Oriental goods; in fact, the two objects - the ruby and opium - are often merged together in metaphoric descriptions. In a remarkable sentence the ruby almost transforms into a substance similar to opium, through its open reference to the most famous poem supposedly inspired by an opium dream, Coleridge's "Kubla Khan":

As the lamplight fell on the stone [that is, the ruby], a strange phenomenon took place: the red glow at the heart of it seemed to swirl and part like smoke, to reveal a series of ledges and chasms – a fantastic landscape of gorges, peaks and terrifying abysses whose depth was impossible to plumb. Only once have I read of such a landscape; and that was in a work on the delusions and horrors of opium addiction. (Pullman p.36)

... And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momentarily was forced:
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:
And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
It flung up momentarily the sacred river ..., (Coleridge)

Looking into the ruby is described similar to looking into smoke, which is a quite a strong reference to opium and in a certain way the act of arriving into the world of Kubla Khan via entering through smoke reproduces the moment of the genesis of the poem. The landscape described is astonishing, but also frightening close to the concept of Edmund Burke's *sublime*. The abundance of chasms, gorges and abysses induce the fear of falling and a paradoxical

sense of agoraphobia enclosed in a small stone. We have an intoxicating sensation of space also in the description of the Moonstone, but there rather than opening to a lower abyss, our gaze are directed towards the sky. Both descriptions give us a sense of falling and a magnetic power radiating from the stone, those captivated by it, like John Herncastle or Major Marchbanks might have fallen into the trap of this mysterious magnetic power. There is such a moment depicted in *The Ruby in the Smoke*: “It [the ruby] seemed to draw in the light of the nearby lamp and magnify it, and cast it out again as visible heat; and inside it was that shimmering drugged landscape of caverns, ravines, abysses, which had so mesmerized Major Marchbanks.” (185) This sentence summarises all the things we listed as common in the two precious yet perilous stones: they are characterised by light and heat, project a sense of uncontrollable space and they mesmerize the onlooker¹⁸. What is more remarkable, here the vision is explicitly called a “drugged landscape”.

These implicit references to *The Moonstone* and to “Kubla Khan” also add to the web of intertextual connections which is unfolding before us. By not quoting the references verbatim just suggesting them the author can achieve two things at the same time. First, he does not make the text too didactic, making it too heavy with literary references which might be bothersome for the readers, since we must bear in mind that this is first and foremost a work for children and young adults and only secondly a “crossover novel”. The readers; however, who do know the books and poems alluded to can participate in a literary kind of detective work by deciphering the references. This in turn can give an excitement comparable to that which the characters (especially Jim, who is a fan of detective stories and Penny Dreadfuls) experience while chasing the ruby and transforming the reading of a detective novel into a literary detective work.

India, animals and hybrids.

The part in the description of the ruby “and that was in a work on the delusions and horrors of opium addiction” brings to mind not only Coleridge’s poem, but also De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium eater*. Probably he was the most famous (and infamous) opium user of the Romantic / Victorian era. He is also mentioned in a later part of

¹⁸ There is another sentence similar to this: “I confess something in its depth and beauty, in the blood-red liquid fire that seemed to fill it, fascinated me and held m attention. (35)

the novel, although in a seemingly unimportant half-sentence. The *Confessions* is read by a half Chinese – half European "pirate" on board of a ship returning from the Far-east to England. "[H]e could be found on the boat deck, in the place he had made his own since Singapore, reading the works of Thomas de Quincey." (122) On the one hand, this act of reading shows his interest in opium, the object of his business, and we can presume that he is reading the book to deepen his knowledge about the habits of the addicts so as to gain a deeper and better understanding of his costumers like a good business man. In addition, here again the spreading of opium is connected to opium related literature: these works are just as contaminating as the substance itself.

We will have a look at the negative or threatening characters in *The Moonstone* and *The Ruby in the Smoke* and examine their representation in a colonial novel and a novel which was written with a mind already conscious of the implications of postcolonial criticism. In *The Moonstone* the three Indians are the most threatening figures; they ceaselessly follow the diamond, which invades the peace of the "innocent English" household. The book was written in the height of colonialism so one might not be surprised that the terms associated with the Indians are not at all praising. Their ruthlessness and animal like nature is emphasised and their distancing from the European culture is always underlined. They are described as childish and mindlessly credulous, they believe in "some old Hindoo superstition" (51), and are "foolish enough to believe in their own magic" (64).

Furthermore, they are bestowed with animalistic characteristics which show their reliance on instincts, their closeness to nature and their believed inferiority to Western people. They have a "tigerish quickness", they "bow in a snaky way" (91) Moreover, they are represented as cunning and plotting, which were the general idea of Westerns about their Oriental "subjects": "Those men will wait their opportunity with patience, and will use it with the ferocity of tigers." (93) There is one instance; however, when they are spoken of with respect and that is the time, when their leader wears a European costume. "He was carefully dressed in European costume. But his swarthy complexion, his long lithe figure, and his greave and graceful politeness of manner were enough to betray his Oriental origin to any intelligent eyes that looked at him (345) "He might not have respected my life. But he did what none of my own countrymen had ever done, in all my experience of them – he respected my time." (346.) Although everybody takes their murderous nature for granted, it never actually features in the novel, it merely stays on the level of Western stereotypes and prejudices, while the actual conduct of the Indians suggests that they are polite and in some

respect even more considerate than the Englishman themselves. In this episode, the evaluation of the Indians is on the whole positive even though their murderous nature is carefully emphasised. This is the only instance of the situations we examine, where the colonial mimicry and “hybridity” is not accessed as negative or threatening maybe because “the dressing-up game” only lasts for about an hour and the disguise is so transparent that nobody really considers it a threat.

After the (temporarily) Westernised Indians, we will consider a more disturbing topic: the “orientalisation” of the rational English citizens, which always means a movement following a downward spiral¹⁹. In both novels, we have the figure of the addict, who is a deadbeat soldier who served in India and came home shunning human company and burying himself in opium. They do exactly what Derrida described in “The Rhetoric of Drugs” as the thing which is usually held against the drug addict: “[T]hat he cuts himself off from the world, in exile from reality, far from objective reality and the real life of the city and the community; that he escapes into a world of simulacrum and fiction” (235). Both Major Marchbanks and John Herncastle live alone with only the serving staff; although the latter has a huge collection of animals. “He had lived alone, ever since he had left India. He had dogs, cats and birds to keep him company; but no human being near him, except the person who came daily to do the house-work (...)” (Collins 49) It strangely chimes in with an episode from the adventures of Sherlock Holmes, “The Speckled Band” (1892,) where the violent stepfather who is disagreeable with his neighbours and stepdaughters, but is extremely fond of his exotic Indian animals and the wandering gypsies. “He had a passion also for Indian animals, which are sent over to him by a correspondent, and he has at the moment a cheetah and a baboon, which wander freely over his grounds and are feared by villagers almost as much as their master.” (114)

Since Conan Doyle’s short story was written later than Collins’s novel it is not unimaginable that he was influenced by the description of John Herncastle. These quotations seem to suggest that those Europeans who go to India and return become somehow corrupted and infected by the wilderness and become too estranged and violent to readjust to the workings of the “civilised” English society. The poor stepdaughter appears to support this hypothesis by describing his stepfather in this way: “Violence of temper approaching to mania has been hereditary in the men of the family, and in my stepfather’s case it had, I believe intensified by his long residence in the tropics.” (114.)

¹⁹ On the other hand, the Western disguise of the Indians seemed only to improve them.

However, in Pullman`s novel it is not only men, (i. e. Major Marchbanks) who can be “contaminated” by the Orient, coming home from India with a serious addiction and “personality distortion”: there is also Mrs. Holland. In her person Pullman subverts the general concepts about Western and Oriental women. In most instances, it is the Oriental women who (by clever manipulations) become the object of Western male desire. In *The Ruby in the Smoke* it is just the other way round: Mrs. Holland, a pretty young woman at that time, caught the attention of the Maharaja, who became desperate to seduce her. As a final attempt, he offered the ruby to persuade her into succumbing.

“The Maharajah hisself fell for me, damn him. You know what he wanted...He was crazy with love for me (...)Well, the Maharajah promised me the Ruby. So I gave in.” (191) The ruby is transformed into the crystallised representative of Desire, its flaming red colour and its ability to mesmerise the onlookers and arouse their longing for itself is supporting this image, which is promised to Mrs. Holland. No wonder that after it had slipped out of her hands she became fixated on getting it back with no regards to the means she had to employ. Eventually, she fulfils the prophecy about the ruby and woman and stone, two former objects of desire, reunite in the depth of the Thames, falling into the abyss, which was envisaged in the description of the ruby.

As we have seen in these novels, opium addiction and/ or a sojourn in the orient seems to entail a change for the worse, degradation into a wild and animalistic state; however, this is only an individual problem while the threatening of invading foreign (hybrid) elements is an ever present fear of the society. This is present to some extent in one of the early instances of detective fiction Poe`s “Murders in the Rue Morgue”, which Roth mentions as an instance showing that in detective fiction crime is the dark side of colonisation and imperial rule returning to take its revenge<sup>20</sup>. (86) If we take Roth`s sentence into consideration, we can interpret detective fiction as a “ventilation” of society`s numerous anxieties about the “return of the repressed”, be it in the form of crime, addiction or a foreign invasion. The appeal of detective stories is that in them rationality and logical thinking, the self prophesied features of the English nation, always succeed to win over the irrational

²⁰ The transgression of the boundary between humans and animals, which we discussed in this section, seems to hunt detective fiction. In this story, the culprit is an ourang-outang from India which is brought into the West and is supposedly tamed, “civilised”. Nonetheless, the tameness is just a surface layer and its true nature, the animal instinct cannot be repressed. It is most interesting that Poe chose an animal as murderer, but not a typical murderous beast (tiger, scorpion, snake), but a primate, which is just under the Homo Sapiens on the evolutionary ladder. However, if we look at it from the other side, it can be seen as a human regressed into its former state.

disturbing powers of crime, which seemed to lull the middle class reader into a comfortable sense of security, reinforcing the belief that the power of the well-organised Empire will always be victorious over the disruptive forces. Detective fiction is not the only genre which is occupied by these anxieties; the violent return of the repressed, be it a foreigner or a hidden part of the self, is a theme which proliferated in the nineteenth century Gothic novels, which are seen by Mario Praz as the more exciting and more original ancestors of the detective stories²¹.

In Bram Stoker's *Dracula* a foreigner arriving on board of a ship from an Eastern direction threatening the Empire, exploiting it for the sake of his unnatural dependency. Similar to Dracula, the half-Chinese – half-European character in *The Ruby in the Smoke*, Van Eeden, also carries the image of the "invading" Orient upon his arrival, since the British tended to see their dependence on the Orient for tea and for the opium trade as a hazard to the intactness of the supposedly "organic", natural body of the British Empire. (Schmitt 80) Eventually, it is him and not Mrs. Holland who turns out to be the arch-enemy of Sally. Said writes about the constant suspicion of Europeans towards the people from the Orient who somewhat resemble them. "[T]he vacillation between the familiar and the alien; Mohammed is always the imposter (familiar, because he pretends to be like the Jesus we know) and always the Oriental (alien, because although he is in some ways "like" Jesus, he is after all not like him." (Said 72) The "mixed" nature of van Eeden confuses even the educated and resourceful Sally.

"But how can you belong to a Chinese secret society? Aren't you Dutch?"

"Oh, partly. It is my fate to look more like my father than my mother, but my ancestry is not in question. My mother, you see, was the daughter of Ling Chi, who earned his living in a traditional and praiseworthy way – you would call it piracy (Pullman 96).

In contrary to the natives who cannot hide their native appearance but take up certain Western behaviours, van Eeden cannot hide his Western look and Dutch name he chooses to follow the habits of his Chinese ancestors. He uses his Western appearance, this perfect "mimicry" to blend in while he is in Europe, which means that it is only a superficial layer on

²¹ "Instead of demons there would be criminals, instead of the mystery of a medieval castle, the mystery of crime; and so it was that the man who was cleverest of all, during the Victorian epoch, at raising an intellectual thrill, Wilkie Collins, initiated the detective story, that positive, bourgeois fairy-tale." Mario Praz, *The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction*, 1956 (152) qtd. in Toth Reka "Bontakozo titok: Babits Mihály és az angol-amerikai detektívregény" (131)

him, covering his Oriental essence. Béneyei writes that mimicry is always connected to appearance and visibility and it seems as though something, which otherwise does not have a phenomenological existence, appeared through mimicry. (149) In my opinion, this statement about the visible nature of mimicry explains how the European appearance is just an outer layer on van Eeden but it has no deeper roots.

In conclusion, we can say that by placing subtle hints about famous opium inspired or related works in his novel Philip Pullman invites us along a literary detective work. At the same time reflecting on Collins's *The Moonstone*, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* and Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English opium eater* he places his own novel into the high canon of opium related works, stepping into conversation with them as a proper postmodern novel would do. He shows us by these hints that it is not only the Ruby which is the "protagonist", but opium trade and addiction has just as big, if not bigger influence on the flow of the story, as it was an influence on the history of the British Empire and the East. All things considered, I think Bárány's suggestion about examining works outside the scope of "high" literature is valid and helps us to discover new fields for serious literary study.

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