



Murder as a Fine Art

David Morrell , ?smet Birkan (Translator)

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Gaslit London is brought to its knees in David Morrell's brilliant historical thriller.

Thomas De Quincey, infamous for his memoir 'Confessions of an English Opium-Eater', is the major suspect in a series of ferocious mass murders identical to ones that terrorized London forty-three years earlier.

The blueprint for the killings seems to be De Quincey's essay "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts." Desperate to clear his name but crippled by opium addiction, De Quincey is aided by his devoted daughter Emily and a pair of determined Scotland Yard detectives.

In 'Murder as a Fine Art', David Morrell plucks De Quincey, Victorian London, and the Ratcliffe Highway murders from history. Fogbound streets become a battleground between a literary star and a brilliant murderer, whose lives are linked by secrets long buried but never forgotten.

Murder as a Fine Art Details

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Author : David Morrell , ?smet Birkan (Translator)

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From Reader Review Murder as a Fine Art for online ebook

Heather Fineisen says

The historical references and the journal of Emily De Quincey were well done. Morrell would please many readers by bringing these well written characters back to the page for more crime solving adventures. A gruesome yet fun romp through Victorian London through the eyes of "The Opium Eater" and his plucky daughter. If they return, I will be along for the ride...

Crotusman says

Wow, this was a truly frustrating read for me. On the one hand, I was immediately drawn into the story after the first chapter. I thought it was superbly written and hit on all the notes that one would expect of a Victorian England set murder mystery. Combine that with a very intriguing premise and I was all in. Unfortunately, it was, save for a few action sequences, mostly downhill from there IMO.

First the good – as I mentioned above, this started off with a bang and I flew through the opening chapter. IMO, Morrell vividly describes the era and, for those with a weak stomach be forewarned, he leaves very little to the imagination. Similarly, whenever Morrell is writing an action sequence the pace of the book seems to really take off and return somewhat to the former glory of the opening chapter.

Secondly, as a wannabe amateur historian, I certainly appreciate all of the research that Morrell performed in order to write this book. In at least one other review I read where someone complained about the mini history lesson that started each chapter. I was the complete opposite. In fact, I was constantly flipping back and forth between my iBook and Wikipedia as I was always looking up new subjects (De Quincey himself, Coldbath Fields Prison, Vauxhall Gardens, that freaking funeral train!). All good stuff IMO.

Unfortunately, for me, the bad outweighs the good.

Characters: The characters struck me as very one dimensional, and, with the exception of De Quincey, felt like they were just stock characters that could have been pulled out of any other novel.

Becker, the trusty, honest Constable who really wants to be a Detective (How do I know? Well, because he tells me so himself a couple of times in fact (once while having surgery performed on himself)) within the first few pages of meeting him. Ryan (He's Irish!), the Detective, who, truth be told, doesn't really seem to do much detecting, other than stating how little he understands when De Quincey speaks. And finally, Emily, De Quincey's forward thinking daughter who bucks society's trends, and marches to the beat of her own drum (itself a clichéd stock character in today's literature and movies).

And while I'm on Emily – ***SPOILERS*** did anyone else find it odd, and completely out of character that she was continually ("I'm staying with you, Father!") able to enter these vile, graphic murder scenes, sleep upstairs in the same building that still housed cold corpses, brave a night in a Victorian era prison, and was prepared to perform surgery on a beggar boy and yet, and yet, she was unable to express that Margaret had (gasp!) had a child out of wedlock when she breaks the news to Ryan and Becker out outside of Westminster Abbey!!!! The point is, it just seemed completely out of character for Emily, the bloomer wearing Victorian era superwoman.

Dialogue: Even taking the time period into account, the dialogue was wooden and way too on the nose IMO. While I noticed it right away, I tried my best to ignore it, but that became impossible as the book wore on. The dialogue was completely and utterly bogged down with exposition. The old show, don't tell maxim really comes to mind here.

Structure: From the book's Amazon page, "'Masterful...brilliantly plotted (my emphasis)....evokes 1854 London with such finesse that you'll hear the hooves clattering on cobblestones, the racket of dustmen, and the shrill call of vendors.'" (Tina Jordan, Entertainment Weekly (Grade: A))

That review was actually the reason for my purchasing this book, and well, respectfully I disagree with Ms. Jordan, particularly with her reference to the novel's brilliant plotting. ***SPOILERS*** – The murderer, who up until then is referred to simply as the Artist, is revealed about a little more than half way through the book (when Brookline is transporting De Quincey back to prison – Brookline explains that he has great familiarity with opium from his many years in India. This comes right after the chapter titled "The Education of an Artist" in which we learn that the Artist learned his trade while serving in India.) But then in the next chapter, Margaret reveals her secret, but it wasn't much of a secret anymore since the two previous chapters had pretty much revealed who the murderer was.

Well, I know this all comes off as a bit harsh, but part of the reason for that is that I thought this was a golden opportunity missed. As I've already mentioned, the story starts out with a bang and really hooks you in, but in the end, it just kind of let me down. That's not to say that it isn't without its strong points, but overall it was more of a miss for me than anything else.

Linda says

A dark, ruby red liquid that seeps into the mind and into the soul.

Laudanum....."Although the constraints of Victorian society discouraged anyone from confessing to what was considered a failing of fortitude."

Thomas De Quincey, author of "Confessions of an English Opium Eater", made no secret of his dependency on what was contained in that little blue bottle to subdue the pains of the head and the face. But no one would be able to subdue the panic and out-of-control fear that escalates after a shopkeeper and his family are found murdered one night in London.

Although it is 1854, the murders reflect the exactness of those committed forty-three years earlier. Has the deviousness crept back, once again, into their lives? Whose demented mind would commit such heinous acts? And what plan of action would bring peace to those dark, winding streets in the underbelly of Victorian London?

David Morrell surrounds you deeply in this atmospheric novel of the screeching sounds, the fetid wafting smells, and the dimly lit streets filled with various personages from the highest on scale to the lowest. Morrell knows how to tell a haunting and stay-with-you tale. Period.

Now here's the thing. I fell into this trilogy with arms wide open like the divers off the high cliffs of Acapulco. I started with the third in the series, Ruler of the Night. Murder as a Fine Art is the first and

Inspector of the Dead is second. Seems like I'm doin' quite the tap dance here. Obviously, this is the one to start with and should be read in order to which one gets a feel for the characters.

Morrell layers his story well with historical references to burial practices, resurrectionists, medical practices, the slums of London, the British East India Company, and police procedures of the time period. You'll come to find how Thomas De Quincy and his daughter Emily (a young woman well ahead of her time) and two of Scotland Yard's finest, Ryan and Becker, fit into the cohesiveness of this stellar story.

This is a dark, dark journey along London's precarious streets. But a chill up the spine does wonders in the wee hours, now doesn't it?

Karl says

Kudos need to go to David Morrell for the detailed research he must have done to write this book. Not only regarding De Quincy but 1850's London. It's about time some one gave De Quincy a fair podium.

As far as the re-enactment of the multiple murders perpetrated in this story, based on the actual murders that took place, the amount of detail supplied moved the story along at a fine pace.

Some of my favorite parts of the book were the back story into the life of the antagonist, especially of his years escorting the heroin shipments to China for the British East India Company.

I must admit to a bit of surprise that this book did not get more attention at the time of it's publication, perhaps it did and I just missed it.

The book was well worth reading and quite enjoyable. I look forward to the next installment of the De Quincy narrative.

Veronica says

This was a well researched book and the author uses an actual multiple murder case from England's past to set the stage for copycat killings 43 years later. He also uses a real life figure and near life long opium addict, Thomas De Quincey, as the main protagonist. The story is told in third person though there are also some parts that are relayed in third person omniscient and these parts come across like the narration for a documentary on Victorian life. Then there are sections that are presented as entries in the journal of De Quincey's daughter, Emily, but other than a change in font I didn't see much difference to the usual third person POV used for the rest of the story. If the goal was to offer more insight into Emily's character then I think things fell short of the mark because I don't feel that I know her any better for the effort.

All in all, I don't think the story worked all that well for me. The murders were pretty awful and the murderer definitely came across as a sociopath but the final scenes - the denouement - seemed overly melodramatic. I also never really connected with any of the characters. I felt mostly annoyed with De Quincey's addiction (and with his always referring to the drug as his "medicine") and with his daughter for basically being his enabler. Perhaps that's not fair of me, but I've never had much patience with addicts so it is what it is. This is supposed to be the first in a trilogy about De Quincey as amateur detective but I'm not invested enough in the

characters to push subsequent books to the top of my TBR list.

Janette Fleming says

*Thomas De Quincey, infamous for his memoir *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, is the major suspect in a series of ferocious mass murders identical to ones that terrorized London forty-three years earlier.*

The blueprint for the killings seems to be De Quincey's essay "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts." Desperate to clear his name but crippled by opium addiction, De Quincey is aided by his devoted daughter Emily and a pair of determined Scotland Yard detectives.

*In *Murder as a Fine Art*, David Morrell plucks De Quincey, Victorian London, and the Ratcliffe Highway murders from history. Fogbound streets become a battleground between a literary star and a brilliant murderer, whose lives are linked by secrets long buried but never forgotten.*

Brilliantly researched, tightly plotted and populated by characters you really care about plus some very vicious pigs. As well as a thrilling murder mystery it is a social critique of various aspects of Victorian society. Highly recommended

Susan says

This novel set in Victorian London uses Thomas De Quincey, controversial author of "Confessions of an English Opium-Eater" and "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts" as the central character in this novel. De Quincey's essay, "On Murder..." dramatised the infamous Ratcliffe Highway killings which terrorised the country in 1811, when the inhabitants of both a shop and a tavern were murdered viciously. Now it is 1854 and De Quincey and his daughter, Emily, are staying in London at the request of an unknown benefactor, who has arranged lodging for them. However, when there is an apparently motiveless murder of an entire family which mirrors that of the Ratcliffe killings, De Quincey's knowledge of the crimes makes him a suspect.

"There is no such thing as forgetting..." wrote De Quincey and he must go back in time to discover why his work and reputation are being used against him. In many ways this is an excellent novel - Detective Inspector Sean Ryan and Constable Becker are great characters, as is De Quincey's daughter. However, I do agree strongly with the previous reviewer - with the obvious research that has gone into this novel, Americanisms like "cookie" and "sidewalk" jar horribly. Also, it did sometimes seem that the author was insistent on using every bit of research and side stories, such as that featuring Dr John Snow and the cholera epidemic, did not also fit the storyline. Overall, though, this is an exciting read, with past crimes intruding on the present, conspiracy in high places and a fast moving plot.

Lou says

1854 London, Lord Palmerston in charge, under the cover of fog with a gas light as aid to see in the streets and the Hansom Cab as means of transport, a macabre scene of death unfolds. David Morrell has created a story in a bygone time, a historical mystery that has truths meet together, facts in fiction. This is Edgar Allen Poe visits Dickens London kind of mystery.

Cholera was not the only insidious nature to visit the people but a wave of murders struck without reason. A past crime, the Ratcliffe Highway killings, may or may not have a connection, could a serial killer be emerging from the fog?

The English Opium-Eater in London, De Quincey. Opium and the alcoholic solution Laudanum, made from Opium, plays an important roll in the lives of the cast of characters including De Quincey who was a real character from history he wrote extensively on this topic and Murder as a fine art in particular. So when you are done reading this you may chase up on De Quincey and read more about this era, more about the Opium trade, the poor of London, and the Ratcliffe Highway killings. There was a great sense of place, time and intrigue in this story.

Truth in fiction handled so well with a Gothic mystery feel that has you captivated and kept reading from the first page.

"The color of Laudanum ruby. It is a liquid that consists of 90 percent alcohol and 10 percent opium. Its taste is bitter. A Swiss-German alchemist invented it in the 1500s when he discovered that opium dissolved more effectively in alcohol than in water. His version included crushed pearls and gold leaves. In the 1660s, an English physician refined the formula, removed impurities such as the crushed pearls and the gold leaves, and prescribed it as a medicine for headaches as well as stomach, bowel, and nervous disorders. By the Victorian era, laudanum was so widely used as a pain reducer that virtually every household owned a bottle. Considering that opium's derivatives include morphine and heroin, laudanum's reputation as a pain reducer was well founded. Toothache, gout, diarrhoea, tuberculosis, and cancer were only some of the ailments that laudanum manufacturers such as Batley's Sedative Solution, Mc Munn's Elixir, and Mother Bailey's Quieting Syrup claimed to alleviate. Women used laudanum to relieve menstrual cramps. Colicky babies were given it."

In an interview I had with David Morrell I asked about this novel and we talked about writing, Gatsby and First Blood read full interview @ <http://more2read.com/review/interview-with-david-morrell/>

Lou Pendergrast:

Welcome and congratulations on your new novel out now Murder as a Fine Art. What was the inspiration behind this new novel, when was seed planted for this, how long did it take to complete writing it?

David Morrell:

The idea for *Murder as a Fine Art* came to me in 2009 when I watched a movie (*Creation*) about Charles Darwin's nervous breakdown. His favorite daughter had died. His wife, a devote Christian, felt that he was damning his soul by writing *On the Origin of Species*. Grief and guilt made him physically ill, but the medical world of the time wasn't capable of seeing the connection. Near the end of the film, a character comes to Darwin and says, "Charles, people such as De Quincey are saying that we can be influenced by thoughts and emotions that we don't know we have." That sure sounded like Freud, but the film is set in 1855, and Freud published in the 1890s. I wondered if the reference was to Thomas De Quincey, an author I studied in a long ago literature course about the 1800s. So I started reading De Quincey, and he did indeed anticipate Freud by a half century. He invented the word "subconscious." He wrote several essays about the interpretation of dreams, again anticipating Freud. He inspired Edgar Allan Poe who in turn inspired Sir Arthur Conan Doyle to create Sherlock Holmes. I fell into what I call a Victorian rabbit hole and decided to write a mystery thriller about De Quincey, placing him at the start of the detective tradition.

Lou Pendergrast:

Tell me why do you choose to use the character De Quincey in your story?

David Morrell:

In addition to being an innovator in theories about psychology, De Quincey was also an expert in murder. He was obsessed by a double set of mass murders that occurred in London's east end in 1811. There were probably mass murders before then, but the lack of widespread communication meant that no one was aware of them. In 1811, though, the mail-coach system meant that London's 52 newspapers could be carried throughout England in two days. The result was a national, paralyzing terror. De Quincey invented the true-crime genre in what's called his Postscript to a sensational essay "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts." For fifty harrowing pages, he portrayed the Ratcliffe Highway killer and his victims, building almost unendurable suspense. That installment of the essay was published in 1854, and my novel *Murder as a Fine Art* proposes that someone begins using the essay as a blueprint to recreate the original murders. Because of De Quincey's obsession with the murders and because he was the first person to write about drug addiction in his notorious book, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, the police see him as the logical suspect. Thus he becomes both the hunted and the hunter as he sets out to find whoever is perverting his work.

Lou Pendergrast:

Is there any truths in this historical fiction story, how much research did it take?

David Morrell:

My goal was to make readers believe that they are in 1854 London, so the research was considerable, lasting

two years. Going to that era is like going to Mars. I kept finding all sorts of strange details that Victorians took for granted but that we find weird. For example, how much did a middle- or upper-class woman's clothes weigh? An astonishing 37 pounds, because they wore metal hoops under their dresses and those hoops needed to be covered by ten yards of ruffled satin.

Lou Pendergrast:

Writing in the language of the olde English tongue how hard was it to write with this and about an environment away from your surroundings, how did you go about doing this?

David Morrell:

The Victorian era didn't use olde English. Their method of speaking, as evidenced in Dickens, was very much like ours, except that their constructions were perhaps more formal. It's true that they used a lot of words that we no longer understand—dollymop, dipper, and dustman, for example, which referred to a prostitute, a pickpocket, and the man who came to houses and collected fireplace ashes for resale to brick factories. I read as many 1850s novels as I could find, and I amassed several shelves of books about Victorian culture.

Lou Pendergrast:

Will you delve into bygone eras again in future works?

David Morrell:

The reaction to *Murder as a Fine Art* has been so enthusiastic that my publisher asked me to write another novel about Thomas De Quincey, so for a while longer, I'm going to be in 1850s London.

Maxine (Booklover Catlady) says

I could not put this amazing book down. I read it over a few hours, still reading it at 3am unable to put it away. Full review to come.

Tony says

I wasn't sure whether to give this 4 or 5 stars...

At the end of this book, Mr Morrell tells us that for two years he 'lived in the London of 1854' in order to fully understand it would be like to live in that time and I have to say, he weaves a fantastically detailed tapestry.

Unfortunately he doesn't do it seamlessly. He uses every opportunity to deliver a history lesson which isn't carefully interwoven into the story, more 'bolted-on'. It becomes a little tiresome at times.

However, this is a wonderfully old-fashioned (in every sense of the word) tale which certainly benefits from the detailed research to shore up all the 'what-ifs' Morrell discusses in the afterword. It also - and rather successfully - borrows technique from Conan Doyle with, among other items, his own version of Holmes and the Baker Street Irregulars!

I will read the next in the series, I'm sure of it. I've decided on 4 stars.

Kevin says

In a word...brilliant!

Thomas De Quincey who wrote "On Murder" describing in detail the 1811 Ratcliffe Highway murders is embroiled in a series of copycat killings in 1850s London.

A friend told me that great historical fiction should make you want to study more on the period. I certainly do...Loved it! David Morrell truly brings 1850s London back to life!

Karl says

This hardcover book is copy 274 of 500 copies signed and numbered by David Morrell.

Susanna - Censored by GoodReads says

2.5 stars.

Features nuanced portrait of Thomas de Quincey, the "English Opium-Eater," but also non-fiction intermingled with the novel (I guess that's one way of preventing "As you know, Bob," syndrome - but it's disconcerting for the reader), and a nascent love triangle.

For a further review: <http://susannag.booklikes.com/post/12...>

Bishop Harber says

Honestly, I'm not entirely sure how I feel about *Murder as a Fine Art*. I don't normally find historical fiction to be all that interesting. Indeed, some of the complaints I have about the novel are in the execution of the historical details.

But I find myself—having started this book nearly 10 hours ago—*captivated* by the story. I fear that I have neglected those who rely on me at work for having spent the entire day reading in-between moments of busyness. I'm thankful for a partner who made dinner as I certainly had no inclination of getting up from my desk and putting down the book.

Was it good? Yes. It really was. Having never heard of Thomas De Quincey prior to picking up *Murder as a Fine Art*, I was intrigued that someone used his infamous 1821 treatise, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, as a basis for a murder mystery. Aside from my objections listed next, I found the book to be absorbing and interesting. When we finally got into the story, it moved quickly and with a logic that made sense. The primary characters were all fleshed out and well-rounded. The Victorian sensationalist novel—a class I just completed this past semester, in fact—was superbly detailed and even the smells of London came through clearly.

What irritated me was the way the first several chapters, and several sporadically placed later chapters, all started out as if reading a textbook on the Victorian era. No matter that this is a historical novel, I wanted to read a novel rather than a textbook. Much of the explanatory material could have been better incorporated into the movement of the novel or the interactions of the characters with each other and their environment. It was a bit jarring to feel like I stepped out of the Era and back into a classroom only to be thrust back into the past again to continue the story. But, this is really a minor irritation and shouldn't be held against any decision as to whether or not it's a good read.

In any regard, the depth of the interaction and the near-Holmesian approach to solving the mystery were fascinating. The philosophical meanderings of De Quincey enhanced the book without sounding preachy. It was compelling to see how he worked through each step of the solution until the end.

Overall, it's still not really my cup of tea, but I'm quite glad I took the chance on the book. It might propel me into other similar novels in the future.

Just? says

siaubo ab?c?l?

Metus prad?jau su tokiu labai antišventišku XIX amžiaus detektyvu, kuriame išsijuosus žmon?ms, tarp j? ir k?dikams, plaktukais daužomos galvos, o tuomet perpjaunamos gerkl?s, darant iš viso to men?. Jaukumo neprideda ir tai, kad tokios žmogžudyst?s iš ties? vyko XIX amžiaus pradžios Londone ir knygoje tikrai daug tikt? fakt?, veikia joje ir tikri veik?jai, išgalvota tik nauja istorija, prat?sianti žiauri? tikrov?.

Visas tas tikros istorijos dvelksmas – labai stiprus šios knygos plusas. Jis lyg neleidžia atsiriboti nuo to

„išgalvoto“ pasakojimo, be to tokiuose istoriniuose detektyvuose labai svarbu kuo geriau išlaikyti autentiškumą, nepriedant per daug šiuolaikiško prieskonio, tai autoriaus atliktas kruopštus to meto tyrimas tikrai atsipirko. Nemažai prideda ir tai, kad Morrellis šitame romane vietomis net ima kalbėti savo balsu ir nepagaili puslapio ar dviejų istorinei pamokėlei – kaip atsirado anglų policija, kaip buvo ieškota choleros epidemijos priežasčių, apie opiją ir visą Viktorijos laiką Anglijos imperiją. Skaitydama eilutes apie tai, kaip ši plotėsi ir kokias teritorijas užėmė net tikėjau išvysti tą taip mane žavintą faktą, kad anuomet toje imperijoje niekuomet nenusileisdavo saulė, bet teko mažumėlį nusivilti. Trumpai tariant, atmosfera knygos man labai patiko ir tai yra vienas didžiausių knygos pliusų.

Visgi ne viskas taip rožinis – iš siužetinės ir idėjinės pusės, man nemažai pritrūko. Tikėjau tokio stipraus, kaip ir nugarėlį reklamuoja, šerlokio detektyvo, kuriame ir galvą pasukti teks, ir vis apsirikti dėl žudiko ir aikštinių nuo vis pamažu aiškėjančių paslapčių. Patys nusikaltimai tikrai verti Šerloko Holms'o prisilietimo, bet pats procesas man kiek nutolo nuo tokio subtilumo. Daugiau buvo nuotykių ir veiksmo negu vietos pasukti galvą, visos kortos buvo padėtos vieno žmogaus rankose – tik jis vienas turėjo supratimą, kas vyksta, o kiti, t.y. detektyvai tik būgiojo paskui ir patys gaudavo kaulus. O iš to atsiranda ir tiek kvailoki dialogai, kur vienas šneka kaip enciklopedija, o kitas neturi žalio supratimo apie elementorius. Aišku, nieko nuostabaus, kai vienas pagrindinis veikėjas žino daugiau, bet man pritrūko galimybės žvilgtelti į jo mintis kelią, pritrūko galimybės svarstyti galimybes kartu su juo, nes tuomet dinga ir dalis domumo, malonumo, intrigos. Bet visgi labiausiai pritrūko psichologinių niuansų, kurie šitaip ryškiai minimi ir kuriais pats autorius pabaigoje taip didžiuojasi. Lyg ir logiškai visi žudymo motyvai, bet taip sausai, kad vos vos perlipa to logiškumo ribą. Psichologiniai niuansai, ypač tokie ekstremalūs turi būti išnarstyti iki paskutiniojo kaulelio, kaip, pavyzdžiui, Deivido Hanterio serijoje. To aš šitame romane labai pasigedau.

Tačiau jeigu nustočiau lyginti su kitais man labiau patikusiais detektyvais ir atsiribuočiau nuo savo išankstinių lūkesčių, turiu pasakyti, kad romanas geras – gerai parašytas, domus ir tikrai turi žavesio ir idėjų.

Jonathan Janz says

Meticulously-researched, richly-described, and not-as-hyphenated-as-this-short-review, MURDER AS A FINE ART is a worthy entry into the diverse canon of one of our most reliable writers. David Morrell's historical murder mystery is definitely worth your time. Also, check out THE TOTEM and FIRST BLOOD, which are both outstanding.

Erin says

Find the enhanced version of this and other reviews at: <http://flashlightcommentary.blogspot...>

A few weeks ago a friend came over for dinner and seeing me sprawled out on our couch, book in hand, astutely asked what I was reading. A slow smile crept across my lips as I considered my response. I had to be careful. I was hanging on every word of the deliciously dark historic thriller, in love with every lurid detail, but how best to explain my enthusiasm for a book on sadistic serial killer left me in a bit of fix. The book in question was David Morrell's Murder as a Fine Art.

Now, having finished the piece and struggling to do it justice in a review, I find myself in much the same position. Should I gush over the historic details that placed me square on the gas lit cobbles of nineteenth

century England? Should I exclaim over his wonderfully dynamic if flawed and morally ambiguous cast? Or should I just bow to Morrell's genius as the author of such a titillating, white-knuckle opus? Quite a quandary, is it not?

Admittedly, I loved the story, but I can't get over the feel of this piece. I have no knowledge of the research that went into its creation, but I'm convinced Morrell exerted considerable effort in this regard. Cover to cover I merely had to close my eyes and I was there, right there on the dingy streets of Victorian London, trailing the sweet smelling coat tails of Thomas De Quincey. I'll grant I have a rather vivid imagination, but even so, I found the period descriptions in this piece a particular treat.

A palatably rich meditation of evil, plush with historic detail, dark and dangerous as the Victorian slums, *Murder as a Fine Art* is a brilliantly crafted, fast-paced, must read murder mystery.

Jeffrey Keeten says

"THE COLOR OF LAUDANUM IS RUBY. It is a liquid that consists of 90 percent alcohol and 10 percent opium. Its taste is bitter. A Swiss-German alchemist invented it in the 1500s when he discovered that opium dissolved more effectively in alcohol than in water. In the 1660s, an English physician refined the formula, removed impurities such as the crushed pearls and the gold leaves, and prescribed it as a medicine for headaches as well as stomach, bowel, and nervous disorders. By the Victorian-era, laudanum was so widely used as a pain reducer that virtually every household owned a bottle. Considering that opium's derivatives include morphine and heroin, laudanum's reputation as a pain reducer was well founded."

Thomas De Quincey's name can not be stated without adding the words Opium-Eater. He was much better known for his vices than even for his fine writing. In 1822 he scandalously wrote a book called *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. I have not read the book, but it is my understanding that he is shockingly candid about his addiction. This overshadows a book he wrote in 1827 called *On Murder Considered as one of the Fine Arts*. He wrote rather enthusiastically and graphically about the Ratcliffe Highway Murders that occurred in London in 1811.

Thomas De Quincey by Sir John Watson-Gordon

They were brutal, bloody crimes committed in a shop keeper's house. The murderer smashed everyone's skulls including a nine month old baby. The same madman, John Williams, then killed several people in a pub. De Quincey could not help, but admire his artistry. Williams might have been an insane serial killer, but his crimson splattered canvas was sublime. De Quincey paints the murders with such vividness and with such specifications in his book that the police wonder how he could possibly know that many details without committing the crimes himself.

"My God, look at how De Quincey praises the murders," Detective Ryan said. "The sublimest that ever were committed. The blaze of his genius absolutely dazzled."

"And here." Constable Becker quoted in amazement: "The most superb of the century. Neither ever was, or will be surpassed. Genius. All other murders look pale by the deep crimson of his."

"De Quincey sounds insane."

New ghastly murders eerily similar to the ones committed 43 years ago are turning London into a scared, tinderbox of rioting mobs and the number one suspect is De Quincey.

Ridiculous.

He's sixty-nine years old.

Daguerreotype of De Quincey taken at about the age he would have been for this book.

He's frail. He keeps correcting people that he is actually just thin not frail, and for most of every day high (can't get much higher) on laudanum.

"The immediate occasion of this practice was the lowness of wages, which at that time would not allow them to indulge in ale or spirits, and wages rising, it may be thought that this practice would cease; but as I do not readily believe that any man having once tasted the divine luxuries of opium will afterwards descend to the gross and mortal enjoyments of alcohol, I take it for granted, That those eat now who never ate before; And those who always ate, now eat the more."
? Thomas de Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*

A spiritual experience in which one can actually feel the soul lifting and the stress and the burden of life falling from your shoulders. You are released from everything even reality. After De Quincey is at one point in the book brutally assaulted in Coldbath Fields Prison he has to ask the constable that saves him.

"Was it real?"

De Quincey's daughter Emily turned out to be a very capable character. One that I found myself at many points admiring her pluck. As her father and herself find themselves enmeshed in the search for the killer, a killer that lured her father to London for a purpose, she is almost as scandalous as her father with wearing very inappropriate clothing.

What you wear is called a bloomer, is that correct?
Named after a woman who championed this mode of dress. Unfortunately she's in a minority. Constable Becker, do you believe it's immodest for a woman to show the motion of her legs?"

Constable Becker may think so, but he certainly likes the way she walks.

"And how much do you estimate the clothes of a fashionable lady weigh, a woman with a hooped dress?"
"She would wear more garments than I do, certainly. Perhaps ten pounds?"
"No."
"Fifteen?"
"No."
"Twenty? Surely not more than twenty-five."
"Thirty-seven pounds."

It does boggle the mind doesn't it. Oh but there is more.

"What is your waist size, Constable Becker?"

By now, she couldn't say anything that fazed him. "Thirty-six."

"Some idiot decided that the ideal waist size for a woman is eighteen inches. To accomplish that, a rigid corset is required, with tightly secured stays, I refuse to submit to that torture. Add the strangulation at the waist to the thirty-seven pounds of clothing, and it isn't at all surprising that many women faint."

I first imagined Emily in bloomers like this. I was wrong of course too contemporary and too short, but they are cute.

Now Emily wanted freedom of movement, but she was not ready as yet to show her ankles. Her bloomers were more like the young Victorian lady in this drawing.

Okay so Emily did perk my interest in corsets. I wanted to discover who this "idiot" was, has to be man right? Only a man would inflict such punishment on women for his visual pleasure. *Herminie Cordolla was the inventor of the corset. The corset is derived from the french word corsetry which means corps of the dead.* Wait a minute that isn't Herman that is Herminie. The inventor of the corset is a woman. She subjugated her own sex? Well I won't put all the blame on Miss Herminie Cordolla. Some form of the corset has been around almost as long as women have been putting clothes on. Not that men are off the hook. We do like seeing women's curves accented.

David Morrell spent two years researching and writing this book. He consulted with Robert Morrison, a biographer of De Quincey, to insure that he did not drift away from the plausible with his main character. He read Victorian novels as well as history books and historical documents from the period to make sure he got what they ate, what they wore, and how they talked down properly. He uses Victorian slang throughout. I wanted to share two of my favorites.

*"Good morning, dear ladies," De Quincey announced. He tipped his shapeless cap. "How is the **linen-lifting** tribe this morning?"*

*"Save your foolishness. A shilling, or no **Bob-in-the-Betty-Box** for you."*

Goodness sakes I do believe those women are ladies of the evening.

Yes David Morrell is the same writer that wrote *Rambo* and *First Blood*, but he has reinvented himself for this book. Whether you liked or didn't like his early work this book breaks new ground and I'm sure you will be pleased with the results. I thoroughly enjoyed Morrell's book about De Quincey. So much so that I will be exploring the Opium-Eater further. Plus Emily pointed out something that Thomas and I have in common.

"It is undignified, but in truth, we need the money. As much as Father is addicted to laudanum, he is addicted to acquiring books. Over the years, no sooner did he cram one cottage with books than he rented another and another."

Okay I'm not that struck by the bibliophile curse, but I do own several rental properties...just in case.

My Review of The English Opium Eater: a biography of Thomas De Quincey by Robert Morrison

If you would like to see a candid, indepth interview with David Morrell conducted by the owner of the Poisoned Pen in Scottsdale, Arizona click this link. <http://new.livestream.com/poisonedpen...>

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten> or you can catch some of my reviews on <http://www.shelfinflicted.com/>.

Patrice Hoffman says

From the author who has given the world an iconic hero we all know as Rambo based off the action novel First Blood, we have his latest Murder As a Fine Art. David Morrell is an accomplished writer who has a strong following that I am happy to be a member of. I haven't read any historical fiction thriller by Morrell before but I think he's done a great job at a genre I hold near and dear to my heart.

Murder As a Fine Art is the fictional story of Thomas De Quincey who is famous for his memoir Confessions of an English Opium Eater. Because of his famous essays involving the Ratcliffe Highway Murders forty years prior, he is a suspect in the newest murders that are done in the same fashion. The essays he wrote with great insight makes De Quincey a prime suspect in London era when detective work and policing were not as we know it today. In an attempt to clear his name De Quincey enlists the help of his daughter Emily, and a pair of intelligent detectives from Scotland Yard.

The tension and suspense never seems to dwindle in this book. Morrell has taken an interesting piece of history along with a famous man in history and has brought them to life in a way that makes you question what's real and what isn't. The characters are well drawn with depth that I believe readers will enjoy. The struggle between De Quincey and his opium addiction have readers sympathetic towards him and eager for his vindication while others will feel strongly about Emily's resilience and enabling. All the main characters in this novel are deeply human and personify Victorian London during 1854.

Historical fiction lovers will appreciate that Morrell provides a lot of information about Victorian London, the people, and the attitudes of the times. Although some bits of information don't seem fluid such as on the establishment of the police department in 1829, I appreciated it being there. I only wish it was more cohesive than it appeared in the text.

Besides the occasional history lecture, this book is compulsively readable. Fans of Morrell will find Murder As a Fine Art is a definite read and should be added to their "read" lists as soon as possible. This novel isn't like Morrell's other spy novels, action adventures, or my favorite Creepers. It is so much more and I can't wait to catch up on the other novels by Morrell I haven't yet read.

Diane says

I've been a fan of David Morrell since the first time I read him, which was Double Image. Murder as a Fine Art did not disappoint.

The research into 1854 London and before, specifically the Radcliffe Highway Murders, was excellent. What wasn't true to form the author noted in his Afterword. The fictional story of real-life author Thomas DeQuincey and his daughter, Emily, weaved into this novel was quite good! So not only was I entertained by the story (and on the edge of my seat for most of it since it is a murder mystery) but I learned a great deal of

an author I never knew of and more.

Kick your feet up and travel back to foggy, murky, mysterious London of 1854 and try to solve the gruesome crimes that mimick the true Radcliffe Highway murders that haunted London in 1811. You may find yourself 'googling' as you read along!
