



Opium

The Flowers of Evil

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ISBN: 978-1-78310-490-1

“Everything one does in life, even love, occurs in an express train racing toward death. To smoke opium is to get out of the train while it is still moving. It is to concern oneself with something other than life or death.”

—Jean Cocteau

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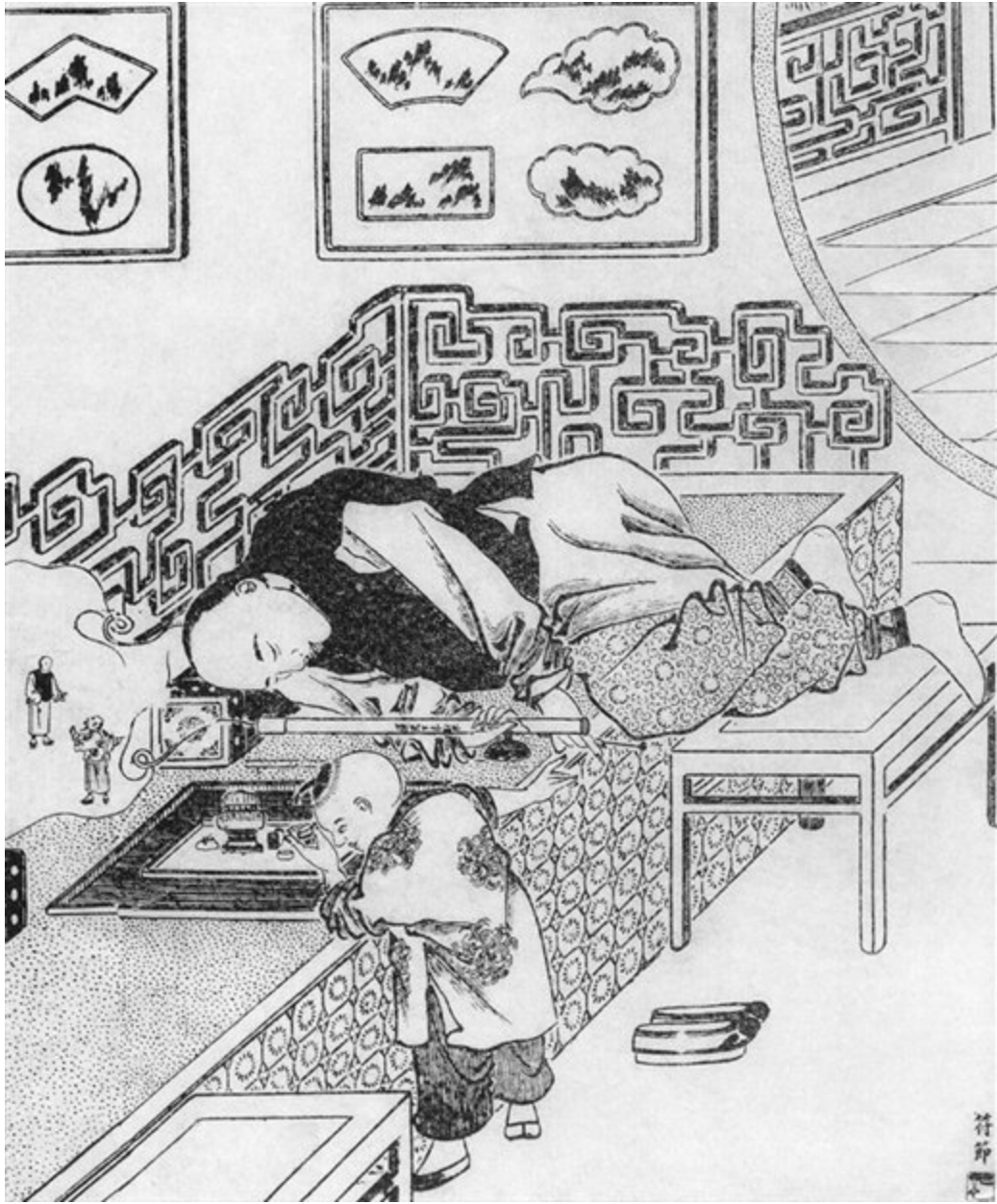
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Chronology

00 Opium may have been introduced into China by Arab importers around this time.

1500 The practice of 'smoking' opium begins.

late 1600s The custom of smoking opium in tobacco pipes is brought to China by the Dutch.

1800s This practice spreads to Europe and America.

1821 Thomas de Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* is published, and for first time, opium, rather than addicts, is portrayed as the hero.

1839 -1842 The First Opium War. To boost exports, the British force the importation of opium from India into China, where it is illegal. Demand for the addictive product intensifies and China orders all British opium destroyed. The British declare war. A year later, China surrenders and is forced to give the important port of Hong Kong to the British. Under British rule, opium becomes the main product of Hong Kong.

1856 -1860 Second Opium War.

1860s The hypodermic syringe is perfected. Patients with chronic pain are given morphine and a syringe, while physicians mistakenly believe that injecting morphine by syringe could cure opium-eating addiction.

1898 Heroin, *diacetylmorphine*, is discovered.

1945 American General Douglas McArthur, in charge of occupied Japan, forbids Japanese

farmers to cultivate opium and halts all narcotic production.

1949 The UN Narcotics Commission establishes a committee in Ankara, Turkey, to control and supervise the trading of opium throughout the world.

1960 Harper Lee's novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, portrays a Caucasian, middle-class heroine who becomes addicted to opium after it is prescribed for medicinal use.

1965 Chinese Premier Chou En-lai declares that the Chinese are encouraging opium consumption amongst American troops in Vietnam, in revenge for British strategies in China in the 19th century.

1984 Intense interest in the opium clipper, *The Frolic*, starts with the discovery in the Redwood Forest of California of many boxes of Chinese products from the ship which were intended to be sold to 'the '49ers'. Pieces of Chinese ceramics had been shaped into arrowheads by Native Americans.

2000s Opium production in Afghanistan, the world's largest producer of the drug, reaches record high levels. Cultivation peaks in 2007.

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UNE FUMERIE D'OPIMUM EN FRANCE



I. Turning On: Introduction

The Beautiful - and Dangerous

Intense interest in the opium clipper, *The Frolic*, started in 1984, with a surprising discovery in the Redwood Forest of California, off the coast of northern California at Mendocina. Pieces of Chinese ceramics which had been shaped into arrowheads by Native Americans were found. The sharpened pieces were discovered among the many boxes of Chinese products from *The Frolic* that were intended to be sold to 'the '49ers', those optimistic miners who rushed to California seeking gold in the mid-19th century.



Male Figure Holding a Poppy Plant

Neo-Assyrian period
Alabaster panel with relief,
110 x 52 x 28 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris





The clipper had spent its previous six years smuggling North Indian opium from Bombay into China. The Baltimore-built ship was designed to be exceptionally fast. It could do an amazing fourteen to fifteen knots, making it capable of escaping the best of Chinese vessels. *The Frolic* was the last of the ships out of Baltimore that embarrassed the slower British ships during the War of 1812.



The 'Glorification' of an Opium Flower

Fragment of a Greek funeral pillar

c. 470-460 BCE

Marble, 56.5 x 67 x 14 cm

Musée du Louvre, Paris





Driving along the California coast today, thrill seekers might enjoy finding poppies growing wild. What could be more exciting than to find something that could produce the miraculous drug that is praised by scholars and poets, physicians and hedonists throughout history? It could be like the excitement Native Americans probably experienced 150 years ago when they found the treasure from *The Frolic*.



Opium Poppy

Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues, c.
1575

Watercolour and bodycolour,
27.4 x 19.3 cm

Victoria and Albert Museum,
London



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Opium has definitely been shown to relieve pain, reduce hunger and thirst, induce restful sleep, and reduce anxiety. However, like other great gifts to mankind, opium can either be of great benefit or be fatal, depending on how, when, and why people use it.



Opium Poppy (*Papaver somniferum*, three varieties)
and Field Poppy (*Papaver rhoeas*)

16th century
Watercolour
Theodorus Clutius Collection

PAPAVER VULGARE



PAPAVER. FLORE VIOLACEI COLORIS. 2
V. Linn. prima, Jacq.



PAPAVER FLORE ALBO



ΜΗΚΚΟΝ ΒΟΙΑΣ
PAPAVER RHODAEUM
ERRATICUM FLUIDVM etc
Delong. etc.
Sily. - Silyb. foet. -
St. Thome's Stigma.
Syl. Copuliat



Radix populi sive...
Lignum

Flores à Paris...
in Antiquarium...



The California dreamers who pick up wild poppies from the side of the road will be brought back to reality after a little research. They will discover that the so-called California poppy (*Eschscholtzia californica*) is in fact a wildflower in the buttercup family. It produces no capsule and therefore is not actually a member of the poppy family, albeit at first glance it certainly looks like its capsule-bearing cousin.



Red Horned Poppy (*Glaucium corniculatum*)

16th century
Watercolour

Theodorus Clutius Collection

PAPAYER CORNICVLATVM
flor' purpurea

Sib. plant. orient.

5



*Scribitur nobis in Gardis
Tiberi*

17
Feb. 1717



Obviously some basic facts and an appreciation about the poppy and opium are needed, even though surely most people have learned some basics already from everyday pop culture. It is almost impossible to watch recent mainstream movies or read pulp fiction without learning that opium is a narcotic drug. When it was studied more closely, researchers learned that opium is obtained from the juice of the immature fruits of the Oriental poppy.



Opium Poppy (*Papaver
somniferum*)

16th century
Watercolour

Theodorus Clutius Collection

PAPAVERVM SPECIES

14

PAPAVER HYBRVM
Flor. per Columbinas
1756

ΜΗΚΣΙΝ ΗΜΕΡΩΣ
PAPAVER MORTENSE sive SATIVVM
Ital. Papaver domestico.
Gal. Ψευδαλ.
German. Mayskörn, Meer. Nigella und O. C. C.
Delf. Grootfaer oft. Doodvoo.

Disse. lib. 4. cap. 15.

Si erit in Gortio.
Florat mente hanc

papaver sativum Gleditsii apud Galienum lib. 17. cap. 17.



7



Careful observers will notice that typical opium poppies have four petals in white, violet, pink, or red. They surround a star-shaped stigma from which at least five and up to sixteen 'rays' fan out. A single pistil (containing from 150 to 200 stamens) is surrounded by five concentric circles. Fertilisation produces from 800 to 2,000 seeds.



Men's Chinese fan

One of the first works of art showing the use of pure opium

End of the 18th century

Ink and paint on silk, radius:

16.5 cm





The true opium-producing plant, *Papaver somniferum* L., is a member of the poppy family *Papaveraceae*. There are over 100 species in that family, several with many varieties. Most are found in temperate Asia and in central and southern Europe, not in the fields of California.



Chinese Opium Smokers

From *China in a Series of Views*,
by George Newenham Wright
Thomas Allom, 1843
Engraving
Private collection





When opium-bearing poppies are studied, many varieties used for the production of poppy seeds and seed oil for baking are not included. Only a few of the many species of poppy contain the alkaloids found in opium. Morphine and codeine are two of the most familiar and useful of some twenty natural alkaloids of opium.



Chinese glass painting

Middle of the 19th century
50 x 35 cm