



Confessions of an English Opium-Eater

Thomas de Quincey (1785 - 1859)

Read by:	Martin Geeson	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
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Confessions of an English Opium-Eater is an autobiographical account by Thomas de Quincey of his addiction to opium and its effect on his life. It was first published in 1821 by *London Magazine* in two monthly editions and brought fame and notoriety to de Quincey virtually overnight as much for its style as its subject matter. It was released in book form the following year and substantially revised years later for an 1856 edition. The book is organized in two parts, with *Part I, Preliminary Confessions*, recounting his childhood and youth and the factors that led to his use of laudanum, a mixture of opium and alcohol. *Part II* is further divided into three parts: *The Pleasures of Opium*, which narrates his early and largely favorable experience;

Introduction to the Pains of Opium, a second chapter of autobiography covering youth to maturity; and *The Pains of Opium*, which recounts the extremes of his usage and debilitating physical consequences such as insomnia, nightmares, visions, and physical irregularities. De Quincey was criticized for dwelling overmuch on the pleasures and not enough on the pains, but, in fact, his narrative on the pains of the drug is substantially longer. He employed a style he called “impassioned prose” that attempted to convey the intensity, expansiveness, and the comforting properties of the experience. *Confessions* is often cited as the first “addiction memoir” and dominated views on the effects of the drug for several generations before the advent of more systematic studies.

Thomas de Quincey (August 15, 1785 – December 8, 1859) was an English essayist best known for *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. He was born in Manchester. His father, Thomas Quincey, a successful merchant, died when he was eight. Three years after his father’s death, his mother, an intelligent but strict parent, adapted the name to de Quincey, moved the family to Bath, and enrolled Thomas in King Edward School and later in Manchester Grammar School to prepare him for Oxford. Deeply influenced by Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads*, he left halfway through to seek him out, failed, and returned home before setting off on a solitary walking tour through Wales with the support of his uncle. He lost touch with his family, became destitute, and made his way to London, where he lived hand to mouth before being discovered by friends and returned to his family. He enrolled at Oxford, where he began to use laudanum, probably to relieve symptoms of neuralgia and other ailments, and earned a reputation as a strange and solitary figure. He completed his studies but failed to take his final oral exams, leaving without a degree. He got to know Wordsworth and Coleridge, came into a small inheritance, settled in the Lake District and married in 1816. As his money ran out he took to journalism, working as an editor, translator and essayist. *Confessions* earned him recognition in his mid-thirties, and he remained a frequent and prodigious contributor to periodicals for the remainder of his life.