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EATER (VINTAGE CLASSICS) BY THOMAS
DE QUINCEY**



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"Among the best essayists of the romantic era... De Quincey may be viewed as a proto-Burroughs, as well as a British cousin to Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Baudelaire, he might with a stretch even be seen as an ancestor of the J.G. Ballard...turn immediately to this excellent, detailed and often harrowing biography" Washington Post "Thomas de Quincey was the original cosmonaut of inner space, his Confessions of an English Opium Eater predating the wave of drug buddy literature from William Burroughs to Irvine Welsh by half a century or more" Glasgow Herald "A stimulating cocktail: exotic dream-sequences conjured up in baroque prosepoetry, camp Gothic effects worthy of Hammer Horror, classical quotations, London street-slang and sprawling footnotes on German philosophy. De Quincey served up this heady concoction of high-culture and low-life in all of his finest writings... At his best, however, he is one of the finest English prose stylists for sheer variety and opiumtinted vividness" Mail on Sunday "The first - and still is the finest - literary dope fiend" Guardian "It is one of the classics of 19th-century life writing and its influence is still felt" Observer

From the Publisher

4 1-hour cassettes

About the Author

Thomas De Quincey (1785-1859) studied at Oxford and failed to take his degree but discovered opium. He later met Coleridge, Southey, and the Wordsworths and worked as a journalist in Edinburgh.

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY HOWARD MARKS

Once upon a time, opium (the main ingredient of heroin) was easily available over the chemist's counter. The secret of happiness, about which philosophers have disputed for so many ages, could be bought for a penny, and carried in the waistcoat pocket: portable ecstasies could be corked up in a pint bottle. Paradise? So thought Thomas de Quincey, but he soon discovered that 'nobody will laugh long who deals much with opium'.

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Most helpful customer reviews

23 of 26 people found the following review helpful.

The Horrors of Addiction

By Jeffrey Leach

Thomas De Quincey wrote this account of his life and his struggle with drug addiction to both educate on the evils of opium and also to share the dream trances that he experienced while in the throes of addiction. This

version by Penguin presents De Quincey's original version from 1821 and then his revision notes from 1856. There is also a short section of comments that De Quincey made concerning his Confessions from 1821-1855. The introduction by Alethea Hayter is one of the best I've seen in a Penguin book, and it really helps in understanding Thomas De Quincey and his writing style.

The Confessions, in a nutshell, begin by recounting De Quincey's early life and the events that led him to begin taking opium. The rest of the tale deals with his problems with opium and his dreams that came from taking the drug. The original version isn't that long of a read, but his revision notes add considerable length, and for the most part weren't as interesting as the 1821 original.

De Quincey's prose is absolutely amazing. He is one of the most gifted writers I've had the pleasure to read (up to this date). Many times I felt as though I was lifted up by his words and carried directly into his world. I've yet to have as profound an experience with any other author. De Quincey can also be difficult. His grasp of the English language will leave many modern readers scratching their heads. Footnotes and notes by the editor help, but a dictionary will find heavy use during the reading of this book. So those with short attention spans, be forewarned. You won't survive this book. Also, De Quincey received a classical education. He makes heavy use of Greek names, places and other classical references. He even uses Greek words in the text (although notes provide translations). I can read Greek and have studied classical history, so I got most of his references and in jokes. This is one of the things that impressed me about De Quincey. He mentioned early on that he could speak classical Greek fluently. Anyone who has studied Greek realizes how difficult this is to do. Even Romans had trouble speaking Greek fluently, so much so that it is mentioned in various historical works when an emperor could do so. The fact that De Quincey can do this is a sign of his deep intellectual abilities. I can only imagine how prolific he might have been if he had not been saddled with an opiate addiction.

An amazing book and one I highly recommend to those who are prepared to read and understand it. For those looking for a justification for drug use, look elsewhere!

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

Not the best edition

By Siobhan

De Quincey's writings on opium addiction are both fascinating and intensely frustrating. As other reviewers have noted, he has an amazing ability to capture the surreality of his experiences on the drug. However, the reader should be aware that De Quincey spends the majority of his space on other subjects: his childhood, his numerous neuroses, obscure points about Greek literature, etc occupy 3/4 of the narrative, while the bits about opium are interspersed throughout but concentrated heavily toward the end. If you don't enjoy his writing, this makes for a long slog through uninteresting content.

For me, at least, his writing style is aggravating in the extreme. De Quincey is self-indulgent and impressed by his own intellect, which he tries to demonstrate to the reader at every opportunity. His prose is florid even by Victorian standards. The over-intellectualism is useful, though, in keeping his opium narratives analytically clear so that readers who've never tried it can immerse themselves in the experience. I've never found anything quite like this book in tone, and for this reason would recommend it to anyone curious about opium or the psychology of drug addiction.

Regardless of your interests in the book, I strongly recommend purchasing a different edition than the Dover Thrift. De Quincey wrote a second, later essay on his opium experience called *Suspiria de Profundis* that is included in many other copies of Confessions (but not this one). The latter work is an important supplement and addendum to the material contained in the first essay, focusing much more heavily on his opium dreams (and is, in my opinion, actually superior in psychological insight and interest value). You will not get the full picture of De Quincey's struggles without reading it.

27 of 34 people found the following review helpful.

For Verbiage Junkies Only

By Bruce Kendall

Thomas De Quincey was a contemporary of Wordsworth and more importantly in terms of comparison, Coleridge. He writes that Coleridge and he met several times and in one instance they perused some Parnesi prints together. Whether or not they were both high at the time, De Quincey doesn't reveal. However, given the tenor of the tangent upon which De Quincey expounds, it is certain that at least he was using, and given Coleridge's history, he probably was a well. Why do I cite this incident? Because it is one of the few points in the narrative that is memorable. As someone interested in literary figures, the image of two 19th century literary hop-heads grooving-out whilst staring at Parnesi prints (you should look up Parnesi on the web - a definite precursor to M.C. Escher) is just plain marvelous.

Unfortunately, that, and a few paragraphs depicting some truly macabre nightmares are the only noteworthy incidents in this book. Too often, De Quincey's labyrinthine riffs don't really lead anywhere. His writing style in some ways can be compared to another of his more illustrious contemporaries, Thomas Carlyle's. Both go in for elongated Latinate constructions, with modifier upon modifier and dependent and independent clauses ad infinitum. Carlyle, however, can pull it off. His great wit and energy of mind holds the center of the thought together, even as the rest of his sentence veers off into Baroque space. De Quincey is not an adept enough magician to perform this trick.

De Quincey's subject is himself. His mode of writing in this instance is primarily that of a diarist. This leads to comparisons with some other English diarists of note. Two that come immediately to mind are Defoe (*A Journal of the Plague Year*) and Pepys (the most famous of all). De Quincey doesn't hold up well in comparison. Defoe's journal is interesting because his subject matter is compelling, he's a great journalist (conveying to our mind's eye the events he depicts), and he gets to the point. Pepys is wonderful because he provides us a full panorama of life in London in the latter half of the 17th century. De Quincey is so absorbed in his solipsistic self-examination, that we as readers aren't even allowed to come up for air, much less see anything around us. That would even be permissible if the narrator were like Proust's Swann, who is at least likeable and self-effacing. Not so De Quincey. He interrupts his own narrative on countless occasions to tell us what a splendid scholar he is and (to borrow a phrase from Ophelia) "what a great mind is here o'erthrown." He peppers the text with words like "heautontimoroumenos" to indicate that he is learned in Greek. Throughout the narrative, he is in way to big a hurry to impress these points upon the reader, instead of allowing the reader to judge for him/herself.

If you want to know what it's like to be a junkie, read Burroughs. If you want to read some painfully constructed English prose, give this one a go.

BK

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