

THE OPIUM-SMOKER  
(IN EIGHT FUGUES)

*To Elaine Simpson*

I

CROWN me with poppy-leaves: sere are the bays.  
Fling down the myrtle: the myrtle decays.  
Still be the strife of the strenuous days!

Still be thy stridency, Player Pandean!  
Soothe me the lute; but oh hush to the pæan!  
Feed me on kisses of flowers Lethean!

Specks on the wheel are the nights and the days,  
Fast as they fall from me, lost in the haze,  
Sobered to softness of silvery grays.

Satan is fallen from the pale empyrean  
Down in the dusk with the dead Galilean:—  
Fill me the cup of the poppy Circean!

II

Hardly a glimmer to chasten the gloom;  
Hardly a murmur of Time at his loom;  
Nothing of sense but the poppy-perfume.

Boy, as you love me, I charge you to fold  
Pipe over pipe into gardens of gold  
Such as a god may be glad to behold.

Seated on high in the æons of doom,  
Sucked as a seed to the infinite womb,  
Sealed is my soul in the sheath of its tomb.

Boy, as you love me, I charge you to mould  
Pipe after pipe, till the heavens are rolled  
Back and are lost as a tale that is told!

### III

Silence and darkness are weaving a web  
Broidered with Nothing at uttermost ebb:—  
Cover, oh cover the shaming of Seb!

Fling the wide veil, O Nuit, on the shame!—  
Shame from the Knowledge and unto the Name—  
Hide it, O hide it, in flowers of flame!

Now in the balance of infinite things  
Stirs not a feather; the universe swings  
Poised on the stealth of ineffable wings.

Surely the sable Osirian bird  
Sole in the æther shall utter the Word  
Now that its crying can never be heard!

### IV

See how the Star of the Universe blazes!  
Millions of meteors in marvellous mazes  
Mingle their magic of peony praises.

Oh! the dark streak on the heart of its flood!  
Smitten is the Star, and its poisonous blood  
Drips through the race of the luminous scud.

Poison and poison and poison! I quiver,  
Drenched with the hate of the horrible river—  
O but the stars of it stagger and shiver!

Leave me in peace, O disaster of light!  
Leave me to solitude, leave me to night!  
Is there no moon to enkindle the height?

V

See how the moon with her amrita dew  
Drinks up the death of the Star, and renews  
Life in cascades of peonian hues!

Nay, but she curves to arise, to increase;  
Glamour on glamour to sicken and cease.  
How shall the warrior win to the peace?

Fade, O thou moon in thy magical bark!  
Sink in the ocean thy silvery spark!  
Leave me, ah leave me alone in the dark!

Art thou not burnt in the fire of my will?  
See, by the flashes that crimson and kill  
I am the master; the magic is still.

VI

See! how the wrath of my rune that I send her,  
Fire of my fire, is flung flying to end her,  
Wrapping in ruin that scintillant splendour.

Fire of my fire! how the brilliance darts forth,  
Runs to the uttermost pole of the north,  
Splashing all space with the spume of my wrath!

Ah! but the subtle, the perilous way;  
That hath no fire to enkindle the clay.  
Ever to all be the work of me Nay!

I who am Being and Knowledge and Bliss  
Lack by so much of the utter abyss :—  
Bring me, O bring me, O bring me to this !

## VII

Nay! it is over ; I may not attain.  
Why am I faint but because I am faint  
Roll me the rapture of amber again !

Ah! but the poppy's deciduous dream  
May not avail me to stand to the stream  
Bearing me back from the Mighty Extreme.

Subtle and sombre the eagle of sleep  
Rolls up the bay to envelope the steep.  
What then is left, what is left—but to weep ?

Maybe the stridency purpled of Pan  
Leads at the last to the light of His plan.  
Maybe his work is the wealth of a man !

## VIII

Bring me the tablets, the stylus of jade !  
Lend me thy light, O compassionate maid !  
Soul of the master, O come to mine aid !

Make me the man of the marvellous mission !  
Sharpen the sword of veridical vision  
Cut me the knot of the mighty magician !

Here I devote me (record me the vow)  
Unto the terrible task of the Tao.  
Soul of the master, the writer be thou !

Bring me the tablets and stylus! Have done!  
Guard me the doors; they are open to none,  
Not to the Emperor! I have begun.