



## Seven Flowers: And How They Shaped Our World

*Jennifer Potter*

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The lotus. The lily. The sunflower. The opium poppy. The rose. The tulip. The orchid. Seven flowers, each with its own story full of surprises and secrets, each affecting the world around us in subtle but powerful ways. But what is the nature of their power and how did it develop? Why have these particular plants become the focus of gardens, literature, art—even billion dollar industries?

The answers to these questions and more are what drove journalist and author Jennifer Potter to write *Seven Flowers*. Drawing on sources both ancient and modern, and featuring lush full-color illustrations and gorgeous line art throughout, Potter examines our changing relationship with these potent plants and the effects they had on civilizations through the ages. The opium poppy, for example, returned to haunt its progenitors in the West, becoming the source of an enormously profitable drug trade in Asia. In the seventeenth century, the irrational exuberance of the Dutch for rare tulips led to a nationwide financial collapse. Potter also explores how different cultures came to view the same flowers in totally different lights. While Confucius saw virtue and modesty in his native orchids, the ancient Greeks saw only lust and sex. In the eye of each beholder, these are flowers of life and death; of purity and passion; of greed, envy and virtue; of hope and consolation; of the beauty that drives men wild. All seven demonstrate the enduring ability of flowers to speak metaphorically—if we could only decode what they have to say.

## **Seven Flowers: And How They Shaped Our World Details**

Date : Published February 27th 2014 by Harry N. Abrams (first published October 3rd 2013)

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## From Reader Review Seven Flowers: And How They Shaped Our World for online ebook

### \* Jennifer says

An incredibly well-researched if rather verbose account of the role 7 different flowers played throughout history in art, literature, medicine, and society. Unfortunately it wasn't quite what I was hoping it would be: I think I was expecting a narrative more oriented towards botanical science or economics. Still I learned something about each of the 7 flowers and I'm not sorry I read it.

Full review: <http://jenn.booklikes.com/post/113752...>

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### Els says

I went from loving this to loathing this to being fine with it, but I honestly think anyone with less interest in botany or history would have died.

Like friends.

I've considered getting my PhD in botany.

And at some point this still felt like eating mud.

I'd still recommend it for ... I dunno, atmospheric reading or something. But it needs to be savored over the course of a year, not choked down. Too much perfume is worse than none. This is a nice perfume-y read. And that's all I've got for today, folks.

\*now knows way too much about the sexual connotations of flowers in art\*

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### Pat Edwards says

I learned a few things about some of these flowers and their cultural influences, but I expected more of a story or thread that would link them together and give a larger, overall picture on these flowers. Many, many facts and interesting tidbits, but not as compelling as I thought it would be.

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### Dholsten says

I give Potter credit for her meticulous research--however, I found myself just half-heartedly reading about each flower except for two of the seven: the poppy and the orchid because I did not know much about them. With the former, I wish more would have been revealed about the WWI connection and the image of the poppy in poetry/art; with the latter, I enjoyed the Chinese historical background.

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**Breen says**

2.5 - 3 depending on the section. For some reason I found the opening section on the Lotus to be very dry and it almost made me want to stop reading the book. However subsequent sections were more readable, while still wordy and dense like extra foliage. This could have used some extra pruning (ie editing). Overall an interesting account of the origin and history of each individual flower over the ages. The title is a bit grandiose. Read this book if a particular section interests you, not as a whole.

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**Stefanie says**

I was shocked at how dry this book is. It's far less interesting than it sounds. It's hard to make history boring for me, but she's done it.

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**Marilyn says**

boring. and not actually about how they shaped our world. It is a history of their cultivation and discovery.

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**Joanna Mawdsley says**

Lotus, lily, sunflower, poppy, rose, tulip, orchid - they all shaped the world in their own way influencing cultures, hearts and minds around the world.

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**Jennifer says**

Read for the Library Book Café "your name" theme.

I liked the idea behind this book but it seemed to lack spark. It felt well-researched like homework rather than passionate interest, perhaps complicated by Potter's earlier work specifically on roses. I think I might have enjoyed it much more as one of the meatier sort of coffee table books, all the words but many more lavish illustrations and photographs and glossy paper. It lacked too what you so often get now in non-fiction (admittedly to the annoyance of many): much sense of a personal engagement, beyond knowing the types she likes best and those which unnerve her. It was interesting enough but eventually was a wee bit of a chore to finish.

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**Cheryl Gatling says**

The seven flowers are the lotus, the lily, the sunflower, the opium poppy, the rose, the tulip, and the orchid.

The subtitle of the book is "How They Shaped Our World." Sometimes these flowers did indeed influence world history, as with the Chinese opium wars, or the Dutch tulip mania. More often, the meanings attached to different flowers are a reflection of what society valued at the time. Potter's real emphasis in the book is that everything about these flowers is fascinating: their origins in various countries, how they were "discovered," the men who wrote books about them, their medicinal properties, their depictions in art, and literature. Sometimes her fascination with the minutiae of the different varieties and the pioneering flower breeders exceeded my own. There were some dry parts.

But there were lots of fascinating tidbits. Here are a few. When the Republicans were in the White House, they dug up all the roses in the White House Rose Garden that were named after Democrats. (It is unknown whether the Democrats did the same in return.) The Ottoman Sultan Ahmed III had luxurious tulip festivals which included tortoises wandering through the gardens with candles on their backs. The obsession with collecting orchids from the wild has driven many of them nearly to extinction, and one of the last Lady's slipper orchids in England was given an armed police guard to protect it from thieves.

My biggest complaint is that the book needed a lot more pictures. Every time she described a flower, or a work of art, I wanted to see that flower or work of art.

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### **Meghan says**

Two and a half stars. While it's incredibly well researched, its narrative is boring as hell. I don't mind a bit of academic reading, but it felt a bit like a long paper written by a college freshman at times.

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### **Cheralyn Darcey says**

#### **WONDERFUL!**

Such an interesting and informative book.

Well researched, gorgeous illustrations and a joy to read.

I particularly liked the historical notes along with modern connections in this work.

A keeper for my research library. Love it!

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### **Sarah Jackson says**

I was really surprised by how much I enjoyed this book. I was expecting a fairly standard horticultural discussion on flora (which I would have liked regardless) but this offered so much more. It provides a really interesting review of the historical popularity and uses of seven wonderful flowers (Sunflower, Lotus, Rose, Lily, Opium poppy, Tulip and Orchid) in art, popular culture, medicine, science and even politics. The book is well research and easy to read and features some marvellous illustrations and colour plates. For any lover of flowers.

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**Joel says**

Wasn't that good. As far as microhistories go, this one is phoning it in.

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**Rose says**

Conversational and interesting essays on seven flowers in history and culture (lotus, lily, sunflower, rose, poppy, tulip and orchid. Very nicely illustrated in black and white and colour.

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