

The nightmares returned; he was afraid to go to sleep. He lay for hours on end stretched out on his bed, sometimes in a state of persistent insomnia and feverish agitation, at other times in appalling dreams from which he awoke with a start, convinced he was losing his footing, falling from top to bottom of a staircase, or plunging, unable to stop himself, into the depths of an abyss.

His neurosis, lulled into quiescence for several days, was now regaining control, showing itself to be fiercer and more tenacious in its new forms.

Now he found the bedclothes uncomfortable; the sheets stifled him; his entire body tingled, his blood felt burning hot, he itched as if from flea bites all down his legs; soon to these symptoms were added a dull pain in his jaws and the sensation that his temples were being squeezed in a vice.

His apprehension increased; unfortunately no way of curing this inexorable malady was to be found. He had without success tried to install equipment for hydrotherapy in his dressing-room. He was prevented by the impossibility of arranging for water to be transported up to the lofty height at which his house was perched, and the difficulty of even obtaining the water in sufficient quantity in a village where the supply only ran parsimoniously at certain times; since he could not be scourged by jets of water which, smacking and drumming directly at his dorsal vertebrae, were the only thing powerful enough to quell his insomnia and restore his tranquillity, he was reduced to brief aspersions in his bath-tub or sitz bath, to simple cold affusions followed by vigorous rub-downs by his manservant with a horsehair glove.

But these imitation showers in no way checked the progress of his neurosis; the most he experienced was a few hours' relief, and these moreover were dearly paid for by fresh bouts which returned to the attack with increased violence and intensity.

His boredom became immeasurable; the joy of possessing astounding blooms had run its course; he had already grown indifferent to their composition and their delicate variations; and then, despite the care he lavished on them, most of his plants withered and

died; he had them removed from his rooms and, because he was now in a condition of extreme excitability, he became vexed at no longer seeing them and his eyes were offended by the empty spaces which they had occupied.

To amuse himself and fill the interminable hours, he turned to his boxes of prints and sorted his Goyas;\* some early versions of certain etchings from the *Caprices*, which were proofs (identifiable by their reddish tints) bought at sales long ago for exorbitant prices, raised his spirits; he immersed himself in them, following the artist's flights of fancy, enthralled by his dizzying scenes, by his witches riding on cats, by his women trying to pull out a hanged man's teeth, by his bandits, his succubi, his devils and his dwarfs.

Then he went through all the other series of Goya's etchings and aquatints, his *Proverbs*, which are so macabre in their horror, his war scenes which are so ferocious in their rage, and finally his etching entitled *The Garrotted Man*, of which he treasured a wonderful trial proof, printed on heavy paper, unmounted, with visible wire-marks criss-crossing the surface of the paper.

He was captivated by Goya's savage exuberance, by his corrosive, frenzied talent, although the universal admiration which his works commanded today did tend to dampen somewhat his enthusiasm, and it was now many years since he had stopped framing them, for fear that if he were to display them, the first imbecile who happened to see them would deem it necessary to proffer some idiotic remarks and to go into carefully studied ecstasies before them.

The same was true of his Rembrandts, which from time to time he would examine on the quiet; and, indeed, just as the most charming tune in the world becomes vulgar, intolerable, as soon as the general public is humming it, as soon as the street-organs have taken it up, the work to which charlatan art fanciers do not remain indifferent, the work which nitwits do not challenge, which is not satisfied with arousing the enthusiasm of the few, also becomes, by virtue of that very fact, corrupted, banal, almost repellent to the initiated.

Indeed, this promiscuity of admiration was one of the greatest trials of his life; incomprehensible successes had ruined forever, in his eyes, pictures and books which he had formerly held dear; in the face of the approbation of the masses, he would eventually discover imperceptible flaws in these works, would reject them, wondering if

his own taste was not becoming less discriminating, if he was not being duped.

He reclosed his portfolios and, once again at a loss, relapsed into depression. So as to give fresh direction to his ideas, he then embarked on some soothing reading and, hoping to cool his brain with literary opiates,\* tried those books which hold such charm for convalescents and invalids, who would be fatigued by more tetanic or phosphate-rich material: the novels of Dickens.

But these volumes produced an effect quite different from what he expected; those chaste lovers, those Protestant heroines in their high-necked gowns, loved on an astral plane, content with downcast glances, and blushes, and tears of joy, and clasped hands. This exaggerated purity promptly thrust him into the opposite excess; by virtue of the law of contrasts he leapt from one extreme to the other, recalling vibrant, earthy scenes, thinking of what human couples did, of their intermingled kisses, of their 'dove' kisses as ecclesiastical prudery terms them, kisses which penetrate beyond the lips.

He laid aside his reading and let his mind wander far from strait-laced England, to the licentious peccadilloes and salacious practices of which the Church disapproves; he was filled with erotic excitement; his mental and physical sexual frigidity, which he had supposed permanent, vanished; once again, solitude affected his disordered nerves, and once again he became obsessed, not by religion itself, but by the wickedness of the actions and sins which the Church condemns; the eternal subject of its obscenities and threats became his exclusive preoccupation; the carnal side of his nature, which, torpid for months, had at first been stirred by the irritant of reading pious works, then awakened and fully aroused in a paroxysm of nerves brought on by the cant of the English writer, manifested itself fully, and, his stimulated senses carrying him back to the past, he wallowed in the mire of his former iniquities.

He stood up and gloomily opened a little silver-gilt box, its lid studded with aventurines. It was full of violet sweetmeats; he took one, feeling it with his fingers as he reflected upon the strange properties of this bonbon whose sugar-coating looked like hoar-frost; in the past, when he had first become impotent, when he used to dream of woman without bitterness or regrets or renewed desire, he would place one of these bonbons on his tongue, let it melt, and suddenly,

with infinite sweetness, there would arise very faint and languid recollections of his earlier debaucheries.

These sweets, invented by Siraudin\* and known by the idiotic name of 'Pearls of the Pyrenees', were a drop of sarcanthus scent or female essence crystallized in a lump of sugar; they penetrated the papillae of the mouth, awakening memories of water opalescent with rare aromatic vinegars and deep, intimate kisses, steeped in perfumes.

As a rule he would smile as he breathed in this amorous aroma, these phantom caresses which evoked glimpses of nudity in his brain and for a second rekindled his once passionate appetite for certain women; now, the effect of the bonbons was no longer half suppressed, no longer content with reviving images of remote, dimly remembered carousals; on the contrary, it tore aside the veils and projected before his eyes the urgent, brutal, corporeal reality.

At the head of this parade of mistresses which the taste of the bonbon helped to portray in precise detail, there was one who paused, displaying large white teeth, satiny rose-pink skin, an up-tilted nose, silver-grey eyes, and blond hair worn in a fringe.

This was Miss Urania,\* an American, with a sturdy body, sinewy legs, muscles of steel, and arms of cast iron. She had been one of the most famous acrobats of the circus.

Des Esseintes had spent long evenings watching her attentively; the first few times, he had seen her as she actually was, that is, well built and beautiful, but he had felt no urgent desire to make her acquaintance; she had nothing to recommend her to the lusts of a jaded debauchee, yet he returned to the circus, enticed by he knew not what, driven by a feeling that was difficult to define.

Little by little, as he watched her, strange notions came to him; while he was admiring her suppleness and her strength, he began to discern an unnatural change of sex taking place in her; her graceful little ways, her feminine affectations became less and less apparent, while their place was taken by the agile, vigorous graces of a man; in a word, after having first been a woman, she then, after wavering, after toying with androgyny, seemed to make up her mind, to define herself, to become a man completely.

'Therefore,' thought Des Esseintes, 'just as a strapping young fellow will fall in love with a frail girl, this female clown must

instinctively be attracted to a weak, hollow-chested, short-winded creature like myself'; and on his part he even actually experienced, while taking stock of himself and giving rein to his spirit of comparison, a sense that he himself was becoming feminine, and he positively coveted the possession of this woman, yearning in the way an anaemic young girl would for the vulgar muscle-man whose arms could crush her in an embrace.

This exchange of sex between Miss Urania and himself had greatly excited him; 'We are meant for one another,' he declared; to this sudden admiration for brute force which, until then, he had detested, was added the monstrous appeal of self-abasement, the pleasure of a common prostitute who eagerly pays a high price for the boorish caresses of a pimp.

Before making the decision to seduce the acrobat, and turn his dreams into reality if that were possible, he confirmed those dreams by putting those thoughts of his own into the unwitting lips of the woman, by reading his own designs afresh in the fixed and unchanging smile of the performer, as she spun on her trapeze.

One fine evening he resolved to send a message via the attendants. Miss Urania deemed it requisite not to yield without a preliminary courtship; nevertheless she did not play too hard to get, knowing, from the gossip she heard, that Des Esseintes was rich, and that his name helped to launch a woman. But, as soon as his desires were fulfilled, he experienced the most inordinate disappointment. He had imagined the American woman to be as stupid and brutish as a wrestler at a fair, yet her stupidity, unfortunately, was entirely feminine. She unquestionably lacked education and tact, had neither good sense nor wit, and revealed a brutish avidity at table, but she still had all the childish emotions of womankind; she was as inclined to chatter and flirt as girls whose minds were filled with nonsense; the transmutation of masculine ideas into her woman's body had simply not occurred.

Furthermore, in bed she displayed a puritanical restraint, and none of those rough, athletic propensities which he both desired and feared; she was not subject, as he had for a moment hoped she would be, to the disordered passions of his sex. Had he thoroughly fathomed the depths of her greedy desires, he would, however, perhaps have detected a leaning towards a delicate, slender creature, towards a temperament diametrically opposite to her own, but then he would

have discovered that her preference was not for a young girl, but for a cheerful little shrimp of a fellow, for a skinny, comical clown.

Inevitably, Des Esseintes resumed the male role he had momentarily abandoned; his feelings of femininity, of weakness, of having bought himself a kind of protection, of fear even, vanished; self-deception was no longer possible; Miss Urania was an ordinary mistress, who did not in any way justify the intellectual curiosity she had inspired.

Although the charms of her fresh body, of her magnificent beauty, did at first astonish and captivate Des Esseintes, he very soon sought to escape from the relationship and precipitated the breakup, for his premature impotence was further aggravated by the icy caresses and prudish depravity of this woman.

And yet she was the first to halt before him, in this uninterrupted review of his libidinous past; but, essentially, if she was more strongly imprinted on his memory than a host of others whose charms had been less misleading and who had afforded him less limited pleasures, that was because of her smell—the smell of a healthy, vigorous animal; her superabundant good health was at the opposite pole from the anaemic, highly wrought perfumes of which he recognized faint traces in Siraudin's delicate bonbon.

Miss Urania, like some antithetical fragrance, forced herself inexorably upon his memory, but almost immediately Des Esseintes, jarred by the unexpectedness of this natural and crude aroma, reverted to civilized perfumes, and, inevitably, began thinking about other mistresses; they were crowding in on his thoughts, but now, above all the others, arose the woman whose unnatural gift had satisfied him so completely over a period of several months.

That one was a brunette, small, skinny, and black-eyed, whose pomaded hair, plastered to her head as if painted on with a brush, was parted like a boy's near one temple. He had made her acquaintance at a *café-concert*, where she was performing as a ventriloquist.

To the stupefaction of the crowded spectators, who found these feats disturbing, she made cardboard figures of children, arranged on chairs in a row like Pandean pipe reeds, speak in turn; she conversed with dummies that seemed almost alive and, in the hall itself, one could hear the buzzing of flies round the candelabra and the rustling made by the silent audience as—astonished to find themselves still seated—they instinctively drew back in their chairs,

believing imaginary carriages to be grazing them as they drove by between the café entrance and the stage.

Des Esseintes had been fascinated; a mass of ideas sprang up in his mind; first of all he made haste, using his arsenal of banknotes, to conquer the ventriloquist, who appealed to him by the very contrast she provided with the American. This brunette reeked of concocted, noisome, heady perfumes and she burned like the crater of a volcano; despite all his stratagems, Des Esseintes was exhausted after a few hours; but he nevertheless gladly persisted in allowing himself to be fleeced by her, for it was the phenomenon, rather than the mistress, that enticed him.

Besides, the plans he had formulated had matured. He made up his mind to carry out certain projects which until then had been unrealizable.

One evening he had a little sphinx of black marble brought in; it lay couched in the classic pose with outstretched paws and rigidly upright head; he also obtained a polychrome clay chimera with a bristling, spiky mane, that flashed its ferocious eyes and with its ridged tail fanned flanks as puffed-up as a pair of blacksmith's bellows. He placed one of these creatures at each end of the room and put out the lamps, leaving the reddening embers in the hearth to cast an uncertain light round the chamber, and magnify the objects which were almost engulfed in shadow. Then he lay down on a sofa, beside the woman whose motionless face was lit by the glow from a half-burnt log, and waited.

Using strange intonations which he had slowly and patiently made her rehearse beforehand, she, without so much as moving her lips or looking at the mythical creatures, brought the pair of them to life. And in the silence of the night, the wonderful dialogue of the Chimera and the Sphinx\* began, recited by guttural, deep voices, now raucous, now shrill, almost supernatural.

'Here, Chimera, stop.'

'No, never.'

Lulled by Flaubert's splendid prose, he listened avidly to the terrible duet; shivers ran down him from head to foot when the Chimera uttered the solemn and magical line:

'I seek fresh perfumes, larger blossoms, pleasures as yet untried.'

Ah! It was to him that this voice, as mysterious as an incantation,

was speaking; it was to him that it was describing its feverish craving after the unknown, its unattained ideal, its need to escape the horrible reality of existence, to pass beyond the confines of thought, to cast about, without ever arriving at a certainty, in the misty reaches that lie beyond art! All the miserable inadequacy of his own efforts chilled his heart. Gently he embraced the silent woman by his side, taking refuge in her like a disconsolate child, not even seeing the sulky expression of the ventriloquist who had to play a part and ply her trade, at home, in her leisure hours, far from the footlights.

Their relationship continued, but soon Des Esseintes's sexual inadequacy became worse; no longer could the effervescence of his mind thaw the ice in his veins; no longer did his nerves obey his will; he was obsessed by lewd fantasies typical of dotards. Conscious that he was becoming more and more hesitant with this mistress, he turned for assistance to that most reliable adjuvant of aged and unpredictable lechers—fear.

While he was holding this woman in his arms, a rough drunken voice would suddenly shout from outside the door: 'Open up! I know you're in there with your gigolo, jus' you wait, jus' you wait, you slut!' Instantly, like those rakes who are excited by the terror of being caught *in flagrante delicto*, in the open air—on the river bank, in the Tuileries Gardens, in a shelter or on a park bench—his virility was fleetingly restored and he fell upon the ventriloquist, whose voice went on clamouring outside the room; and he experienced unbelievable transports in the course of this turmoil, this panicky alarm of a man who is in danger, who is interrupted and forced to make haste in his lechery.

Unfortunately these sessions were of brief duration; despite the exorbitant prices he was paying her, the ventriloquist dismissed him and that very same evening gave herself to a likely fellow with less complicated requirements and more reliable loins.

He had been sorry to see that one go; when he recalled her ingenuity, other women seemed without savour; even the corrupt graces of childhood struck him as insipid; the contempt he felt for their monotonous affectations grew so intense that he could no longer bring himself to endure them.

One day as, ruminating on his disgust, he was taking a solitary walk along the Avenue de Latour-Maubourg, he was approached near

the Invalides by a very young man who asked to be shown the quickest way to the Rue de Babylone. Des Esseintes pointed it out and, since he too was crossing the esplanade, they walked together.

The young man's voice was insistent, unexpectedly so, asking for more detailed directions, saying: 'So you think that if I took the left turning that would be longer; however I was assured that by cutting across the avenue I'd get there faster'—a voice that was at once beseeching and timid, very low and sweet.

Des Esseintes examined him. He looked as if he should be in school, and was wretchedly dressed in a little cheviot jacket too tight round the hips and barely covering the small of his back, close-fitting black trousers, a low-cut turn-down collar over a ballooning dark-blue cravat striped in white and tied in a loose bow. In his hand he carried a hard-backed school book, and he wore a brown bowler with a flat brim.

His face was disquieting; pale and drawn, with quite regular features under long black hair, it was lit up by great liquid eyes, their blue-shadowed lids close to a nose stippled in gold by a few freckles; the mouth that opened beneath, though small, was bordered by thick lips divided down the centre with a groove, like a cherry.

Face to face, they stared at one another for a moment, then the young man lowered his eyes and came nearer; soon his arm brushed that of Des Esseintes, who slowed his pace as he thoughtfully considered the young man's mincing walk.

And, from this chance encounter, was born a mistrustful relationship which lasted for months; Des Esseintes could no longer think of it without a shudder; never had he submitted to a more seductive, more compelling servitude, never had he experienced such dangers, yet never had he felt more painfully fulfilled.

Among the recollections haunting him in his solitude, the memory of this mutual attachment dominated every other. All the leaven of frenzied passion that a brain over-excited by neurosis could contain was in a ferment; and, in this pleasure he found in memory, in this morose delectation, as theologians call the recollecting of former infamy, he interwove spiritual ardours with the physical visions, ardours sparked by his earlier readings of such casuists as Busembaum, Diana, Liguori, and Sanchez\* on the topic of sins committed against the Sixth and Ninth Commandments of the Decalogue.

Religion, by engendering a divine ideal in that soul it had perme-

ated, and which may have been predisposed to her influence by a heredity dating back to the reign of Henri III,\* had also aroused in it the illegitimate ideal of sensual pleasure; obsessions both libertine and mystical mingled together, preying on a brain which was tormented by the obstinate desire to escape the crass pleasures of the world, to lose itself, at the opposite extreme from what custom consecrated, in original modes of ecstasy, in celestial or infernal excesses, both equally devastating because of the squandering of phosphorus they entailed.

Emerging, now, from these reveries, feeling drained, exhausted, half dead, he immediately lit the candles and the lamps, flooding himself with light, in the belief that then he would not hear, as clearly as he did in the dark, the muffled, persistent, intolerable sound of his arteries beating faster and faster beneath the skin of his neck.

- 70 *hydrotherapy*: a water cure for neurosis described in the Goncourts' journal.
- 71 *usafoetida . . . valerian*: cures used by Huysmans himself (see letter to Zola of 16 April 1882).
- 72 *plants . . . of exotic origin*: the fashion for rare plants which grew during the Second Empire was underpinned by its literary treatment in the Goncourts' *Renée Mauperin* (1864), Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale* (1869), and Zola's *La Curée* (1871).
- 73 *monstrosities*: Huysmans may have found these symbols of 'the unnaturalness of nature' in the Jardin des Plantes or in specialist catalogues. Several of the species cited by Des Esseintes appear, as Fumaroli notes, in *L'Album de clichés électrotypes*.
- 76 *Cattleya*: used to embody the symbolic erotic charge of flowers, as readers of Proust will recall, in the passion of Swann and Odette depicted in *Un amour de Swann*.
- 77 *It all comes down to syphilis*: an echo of Flaubert's *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* (*Dictionary of Received Ideas*), which tells us that 'everybody is affected by it'.
- 83 *sorted his Goyas*: Francisco de Goya (1746–1828), the most important Spanish artist of the last quarter of the eighteenth and the first quarter of the nineteenth centuries. Stylistically his work spans the period from late Rococo to Romanticism. His *Caprichos* print series (published in February 1799) satirized the follies of contemporary Spanish society and brought him international attention. For details of the *Proverbs*, see n. to p. 53 above. During the Peninsular War Goya was called to a besieged Saragossa to paint its citizens' 'glorious deeds' against the French army; he recorded the atrocities and horrors he saw in drawings and small paintings which formed the basis of the print series *Disasters of War* (1810–20, unpublished until 1863). Earlier, in the late 1770s, he had etched *The Garrotted Man*, a powerful image whose technique resembles the work of Tiepolo. Though subsequently many nineteenth-century commentators viewed his works as repugnant and as the products of a 'diseased' mind, in 'Quelques caricaturistes français: Goya' (published in *Le Présent*, 1857), Baudelaire saw that Goya obtained beauty from ugliness.
- 84 *literary opiates*: Huysmans's French text refers here to 'solanées' (from *solari*, to relieve), the family of plants to which tobacco belongs.
- 85 *Siraudin*: a famous confectioner, also patronized by the heroine of Edmond de Goncourt's *La Faustin* (1882). He set up his shop on the Boulevard des Capucines after co-authoring, with Labiche and Lubize, the play *Le Misanthrope et l'Auvergnat*. His sweets called 'Perles des Pyrénées' are mentioned on various occasions in the Goncourts' journal and contain sarcanthus, a plant from the orchid family found above all in China.
- Miss Urania*: Baldick sees her as an echo of Tompkins in the Goncourts' *Les Frères Zemganno* (1879). For images of circus performers as objects

- of desire, see the paintings of Degas (*Miss Lola au cirque Fernando*) and Rops (*La Femme au trapèze*).
- 88 *dialogue of the Chimera and the Sphinx*: a reference to Flaubert's *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, which also enjoys a far wider field of intertextual allusion. The sphinx (famously reproduced in Moreau's *L'Œdipe et le Sphinx*) symbolizes the ineffable mystery of Woman (as construed in a male vision which is both idealizing and misogynist). See Bram Dijkstra's *Idols of Perversity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).
- 90 *Busembaum, Diana, Ligouri, and Sanchez*: Hermann Busembaum, author of *Medulla theologiae moralis facili ac perpetua methodo resolvens casus conscientiae ex variis probatisque authoribus concinnata* (1657), the classic manual of Catholic moral theology until the end of the eighteenth century. Antonin Diana, seventeenth-century Sicilian theologian, author of *Resolutiones morales* (1629–56), abridged in Rome as *Tabula aurea operum omnium* and *Practicae Resolutiones lectissimorum casuum*. Saint Alphonse-Marie de Ligouri (1696–1787) founded the missionary institute of the Ligouristes and wrote a *Moral Theology* (1755) and *Practical Instruction for Confessors* (1780). Thomas Sanchez (1550–1610), famous Spanish Jesuit, wrote for confessors *Disputationes de sancto matrimonii sacramento*.
- 91 *Henri III*: (1551–89), King of France who succeeded Charles IX in 1574.
- 93 *Clapissou's*: Antonin Louis Clapissou (1808–66), author of comic-operas and bland romances.
- 94 *the Atkinsons . . . the Piesses*: J. & E. Atkinson of London had a shop in Paris in the faubourg Poissonnière. We find Chardin, Lubin, Legrand, and Violet at Rue Auber, Rue Saint-Anne, Rue Saint-Honoré, and Boulevard des Capucines respectively. Huysmans got hold of the catalogue, *Produits spéciaux recommandés de Violet, parfumeur breveté, fournisseur de toutes les Cours étrangères* (around 1874). Septimus Piesse was an olfactory chemist in London, author of *Des odeurs, des parfums, et des cosmétiques* (second French edition, with Chardin, Hadancourt, and Henri Massignon, 1877), which Huysmans used.
- Saint-Amand's*: a reference to Marc-Antoine de Gérard Saint-Amant (*sic*) (1594–1661), capricious baroque poet of *peinture parlante* in varying modes—pastoral, heroic, comic, burlesque, and satirical—with a zestful, exclamatory style noted by Huysmans. Cited as a precursor of Romanticism by Gautier, who also adds to the notorious stereotype of a life said to be as indulgent and extravagant as his writing.
- Bossuet*: Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704), noted orator at the court of Louis XIV.
- Victor Hugo and Gautier*: Huysmans draws a comparison between the 'language of flowers' and the literary orientalism of romantic poetry by Victor Hugo (1802–85; see *Les Orientales*, 1829) and Théophile Gautier (1811–72).



elements of which his sense of smell had discerned and analysed, spread from the valley of Fontenay up to the fort, assaulting his overtaxed nostrils, discomposing afresh his ruined nerves, and throwing him into such a state of prostration that he collapsed in a faint, close to death, on to the wooden sill of the window.

The servants hurried off in alarm to fetch the Fontenay doctor, who could make nothing whatever of Des Esseintes's condition. He stammered out a few medical terms, felt the patient's pulse, examined his tongue, tried in vain to make him speak, prescribed sedatives and rest, promised to return on the morrow, and then, at a sign of refusal from Des Esseintes (now sufficiently restored to reprove his servants for their zeal and to dismiss this intruder), the doctor departed, to report to the entire village on the eccentricities of this house, whose furnishings had left him dumbfounded, paralysed with shock.

To the great astonishment of his servants who now did not dare stir from their pantry, their master recovered in a few days; and, encountering him unexpectedly, they found him drumming his fingers on the windowpanes and gazing uneasily at the sky.

One afternoon Des Esseintes rang the bell sharply and ordered that his trunks be packed for a long journey.

While the husband and wife were selecting, under his instructions, the appropriate items to pack, he was pacing feverishly up and down his dining cabin, consulting the times of the packet boats, and then striding into his study, where he continued to scrutinize the clouds with an air at once impatient and pleased. For a week now the weather had been atrocious. Across the grey plains of the sky, rivers of soot were endlessly rolling mass upon mass of clouds, like so many boulders torn up from the earth. From time to time a heavy down-pour would break out, submerging the valley in torrents of rain.

On that particular day the appearance of the sky had changed. The ink-black floods had vaporized and dried up, the jagged edges of the clouds had melted away; the sky, under a nubilous film, was completely flat. Little by little this film seemed to be moving nearer, and a watery mist enveloped the countryside; the rain was no longer crashing down in cascades as on the preceding day, but instead was falling incessantly, fine, penetrating, stinging, liquefying the garden paths, turning the roads into a swamp, linking earth to sky with its innumerable threads; the light was growing murky; a livid glow lit up the village which was transformed, now, into a lake of mud stippled by the needle-sharp raindrops which pitted the muddy liquid

of the puddles with drops of quicksilver; in this desolation of nature, all the colours had faded, so that only the roofs were glistening above the lack-lustre tones of the walls.

'What weather!' sighed the old manservant, putting on to a chair the clothes his master had asked for, a suit made for him in London some time ago.

Des Esseintes's sole response was to rub his hands together, and settle down before a glass-fronted bookcase where a fan-shaped assortment of silk socks was displayed; he hesitated over the shade and then, observing the gloom of the day, the drab monochrome of his outfit, thinking of the object of this enterprise, he quickly chose a pair in dingy green silk, hurriedly slipped them on, put on a pair of buckled high-lows,\* then the suit—a mousy grey checked in a darker grey and flecked with brown—placed a small bowler on his head, enveloped himself in a flax-blue Inverness cape, and, followed by his servant bent double under the weight of a trunk, an expanding suitcase, a carpet-bag, a hat box, and various umbrellas and walking-sticks wrapped in a travelling rug, made his way to the station. There he informed his servant that he could not specify the date of his return, that he would be back in a year, in a month, in a week, perhaps sooner, ordered that nothing in the house should be disturbed, handed over the approximate sum of money needed to run the household during his absence, and climbed into a carriage, leaving the old man standing behind the barrier in bewilderment, his arms dangling and his mouth agape, as the train moved off.

He was alone in his compartment; a blurred and dirty countryside, seen as though through an aquarium filled with murky water, raced away at top speed behind the string of rain-lashed carriages. Sunk in thought, Des Esseintes closed his eyes.

Once again, this solitude, which he had desired so ardently and finally obtained, had resulted in dreadful anguish; this silence which he used to think of as compensation for the inanities he had listened to for years, now weighed him down like an intolerable burden. He had awakened one morning feeling as agitated as a prisoner who has been locked in a cell; his trembling lips attempted to articulate sounds, his eyes filled with tears, and he had difficulty breathing, like someone who had been sobbing for hours on end.

Consumed by a longing to walk about, to gaze upon a human face, to talk to another human being, to be part of ordinary life, he went

so far as to try to detain his servants, having summoned them on some pretext; but conversation was impossible, for not only had these old people been rendered almost mute by years of silence and sick-room routines, but the distance at which Des Esseintes had always kept them was such as to discourage them from opening their mouths. Besides, they were slow-witted and incapable of giving anything but monosyllabic answers to questions they were asked.

He could not, therefore, find any kind of help or relief with them; but now a new phenomenon was manifesting itself. The novels of Dickens which he had recently read to calm his nerves, and whose sole effect had been the opposite of that improvement in health he had been hoping for, began slowly to act upon him in an unexpected manner, evoking visions of English life which he would mull over for hours; little by little, into these imaginary musings, there crept ideas of a specific reality, of a journey accomplished, of dreams confirmed, and these were joined by a longing to experience fresh impressions and thus escape from the exhausting extravagances of a mind that was growing dazed with operating in a vacuum.

This appallingly foggy and rainy weather further encouraged these thoughts, by intensifying the memories of his reading, by constantly placing before his eyes the image of a land of mist and mud, by preventing his desires from deviating from their point of origin, from straying from their source.

Suddenly, one day, he could stand it no longer, and made up his mind. His haste was such that he made his getaway far too early, longing to escape from the present, to feel himself jostled about in the hurly-burly of the streets, in the din of the crowds and the railway station.

'Now I can breathe,' he told himself as the train waltzed to a halt under the dome of the terminus at Sceaux, timing its final pirouettes by the staccato racket of the turntables.

Once out in the street, on the Boulevard d'Enfer, he hailed a cab, revelling in the way he was encumbered by his trunks and rugs. By promising a generous tip, he came to an understanding with the cabby, who was sporting nut-brown trousers and red waistcoat: 'I'll pay by the hour,' he said; 'stop in the Rue de Rivoli, in front of *Galigani's Messenger*;\* for he planned to buy, before departing, a Baedeker or Murray\* guide to London.

The cab lumbered off, its wheels sending up arcs of muddy spray;



they were driving straight through a swamp; beneath the grey sky, which seemed to be resting on the roofs of the houses, water was streaming down the walls from top to bottom, the gutters were overflowing, the paving stones were coated with mud the colour of gingerbread, in which passers-by were sliding about; as the omnibuses swept closely by, the people crowding the pavements came to a halt, and women, bending low under their umbrellas and pulling their skirts up to their knees, flattened themselves against the shop-fronts to avoid being splashed.

The rain came slanting in through the windows; Des Esseintes had to pull up the panes which were streaked by the streaming water, while spatters of mire radiated out like fireworks from every side of the cab. To the accompaniment of the monotonous sound of the rain drumming on the trunks and on the vehicle's roof, like so many bags of peas being shaken about above his head, Des Esseintes pondered over his trip; this dreadful weather was already an instalment of England that he was being paid in Paris; a rain-swept, gigantic, measureless London, stinking of heated metal and soot, smoking everlastingly in the fog, was unfolding now before his gaze; then a succession of docks stretched out as far as the eye could see, filled with cranes, and winches, and bales, swarming with men perched on masts and sitting astride spars, while down on the wharfs countless others, heads down and bottoms in the air, bent low over barrels that they were rolling into the cellars.

All this activity was taking place on the waterfront, and in vast warehouses washed by the dark, scummy waters of an imaginary Thames, amid a forest of masts, a thicket of beams which pierced the sky's leaden clouds; high up, on the skyline, trains were racing along at full speed, and down below, in the sewers, other trains were running, emitting hideous shrieks and belching forth clouds of smoke through the shaft openings, while along all the boulevards and streets—where, in an eternal twilight, blazed the monstrous, garish depravities of advertising—streams of carriages flowed between two columns of silent, preoccupied pedestrians who stared straight ahead as they walked, their elbows pressed to their sides.

Des Esseintes shivered with pleasure at feeling himself part of this terrible world of commerce, isolated by this fog, caught up in this incessant activity, in this pitiless machinery which ground down millions of hapless wretches, whom philanthropists, by way of con-

solation, encouraged to recite verses from the Scriptures and sing psalms.

Then, the vision vanished suddenly as the cab gave a jolt that bumped him about on the seat. He looked out of the windows; night had fallen; the gas lamps, ringed by yellowish haloes, flickered in the thick of the fog; strings of lights swam in the puddles and seemed to encircle the wheels of the carriages as they bounced along through the filthy liquid fire; he tried to see where he was, caught a glimpse of the Arc du Carrousel, and suddenly, for no apparent reason, perhaps as a simple reaction to returning to earth from those imaginary places, his thoughts travelled back in time, to the memory of a trivial incident; he recalled that his servant, whom he had watched packing the trunks, had failed to include a toothbrush among the utensils in his toilet case; so then he mentally checked through the list of what had been packed; everything had been put into his case, but the annoyance of having left this toothbrush out remained with him until the driver stopped the cab, and interrupted the sequence of these reminiscences and regrets.

He was in the Rue de Rivoli, outside *Galvani's Messenger*. Separated by a door of frosted glass covered with notices, and laden with passepartout-framed newspaper cuttings and blue telegraph forms, two huge shop-windows were filled to overflowing with picture-albums and books. He drew closer, attracted by the sight of those paper-board bindings in bright blue or cabbage-green, embossed, along all the seams, with silver and gold arabesques, and of those cloth covers in light brown, leek-green, pale yellowish green, and currant-red, stamped with black fillets on the back and sides. There was something anti-Parisian to all this, a commercial character that was brasher yet somehow not as contemptible as that of cheaply produced French bindings; here and there, among the open albums displaying copies of comic scenes by du Maurier or John Leech,\* or catapulting Caldecott's\* unruly cavalcades across badly coloured plains, a few French novels could be seen, blending their benign, self-satisfied vulgarity with this verjuice of hues.

Tearing himself away, eventually, from this sight, he pushed open the door and entered a vast bookshop, full of people; foreign ladies sat unfolding maps and chattering away in strange tongues. An assistant brought him a whole collection of guides. He too sat down, turning over these books whose flexible bindings bent in his hands.

He leafed through them, stopping at a page in Baedeker that described the museums of London. He found the brief, precise details given in the guide interesting, but then his attention shifted from the early English painting to the modern, which appealed to him more. He recalled several examples he had seen in international exhibitions and thought that he might see them again in London: paintings by Millais, such as *The Eve of St Agnes*,\* with its moon-silvered green tones; some oddly coloured works by Watts,\* speckled with gamboge and indigo, pictures that had been sketched by the hand of an ailing Gustave Moreau, painted in by an anaemic Michaelangelo, and then touched up by a blue-obsessed Raphael; among other canvases, he remembered a *Curse of Cain*, an *Ida*, and several versions of *Eve*, where, in the peculiar, mysterious amalgam of those three masters, one could sense the personality—at once sublimated and crude—of a learned, dreamy Englishman, tormented by a fixation on hideous colours.

All these pictures crowded together, battering at his memory. The assistant, startled to see this customer sitting lost in thought at a table, asked him which guide he had selected. Des Esseintes looked at him in bewilderment, then apologized, purchased a Baedeker, and left the shop. Outside it was wet and icy cold; the wind was blowing from the side, whipping the arcades with its stinging rain. 'Drive over there,' he told the cabby, pointing to a shop at the end of an arcade, on the corner of the Rue de Rivoli and the Rue Castiglione. Its whitish panes were lit from inside so that it resembled a gigantic nightlight burning in the sickliness of that fog, in the misery of that pestilential weather.

This was the 'Bodega'. Des Esseintes wandered into a huge room which stretched on and on like a passage, supported by pillars of cast iron, its walls lined along both sides with tall, upright casks on stands.

Girdled by iron hoops, the belly of each cask was encircled with a notched wooden band like a pipe-rack, from which hung tulip-shaped glasses, stem in air. The casks, their lower sections pierced by openings with stoneware spigots connected to them, were emblazoned with the royal arms and bore coloured labels displaying the name of their vineyard, the amount of wine they contained, and its price, whether bought by the cask or by the bottle, or drunk by the glass.

In the space left vacant between these rows of casks, under the hissing gas-jets of a hideous chandelier painted iron-grey, stood a succession of tables laden with baskets of Palmers' biscuits and stale, salty cakes, and with heaped-up plates of mince-pies and sandwiches that concealed, beneath their bland exteriors, fiery mustard poultices; beside them was a hedge of chairs reaching right to the rear of this cellar where yet more hogsheads were visible, bearing on their lids small barrels which lay on their sides and were stamped with names branded into the oak.

A smell of alcohol smote Des Esseintes as he took a seat in this room where strong wines lay slumbering. He looked around: near him stood a row of tuns, with labels naming the entire range of ports: harsh or fruity wines, mahogany or amaranthine in colour, distinguished by laudatory designations: 'Old Port', 'Light Delicate', 'Cockburn's Very Fine', 'Magnificent Old Regina'; over there, thrusting out their formidable bellies, enormous casks stood shoulder to shoulder, containing the martial wines of Spain, sherry and its derivatives, the colour of pale or dark topaz, wines both sweet and dry: San Lucar, Vino de Pasto, Pale Dry, Oloroso, Amontillado.

The cellar was packed; leaning on the corner of a table, Des Esseintes waited for the glass of port he had ordered from an English barman busy opening explosive bottles of soda, whose oval shape recalled, though on a much bigger scale, those gelatin and gluten capsules pharmacists use to mask the taste of certain medicines.

Englishmen swarmed around him: ungainly, pasty-faced clergymen, dressed from head to foot in black, with soft hats, laced-up shoes, interminably long overcoats studded with tiny buttons down the chest, clean-shaven chins, round spectacles, and lank greasy locks; men with coarse, pork-butcher faces, others with bulldog snouts, apoplectic necks, tomato-like ears, bibulous cheeks, blood-shot, moronic eyes and fringe-like whiskers such as one sees on some large apes; further away, at the far end of the wine-cellar, a tall, lanky, tow-headed idler, his chin sprouting white hairs like an artichoke heart, was using a magnifying glass to decipher the minute print of an English newspaper; opposite him some kind of American naval officer, squat and stout, with swarthy skin and bulbous nose and a cigar stuck in the hairy orifice of his mouth, was nodding off while gazing at the framed advertisements hanging on the walls for the

wines of Champagne—the labels of Perrier and Roederer, Heidsieck and Mumm, and (adorned with the hooded head of a monk) the name in Gothic script of Dom Pérignon, of Reims.

Overcome by a kind of languor in this guardroom atmosphere, and dazed by the chatter of the Englishmen as they conversed, Des Esseintes let his mind drift, picturing, under the influence of the crimson tints of the port wine filling the glasses, the Dickensian characters who so enjoyed drinking it, and in his imagination populating the cellar with quite different beings, seeing here the white hair and fiery complexion of Mr Wickfield,\* there, the cold, cunning expression and implacable eye of Mr Tulkinghorn,\* the lugubrious solicitor of *Bleak House*. These characters were actually emerging from his memory and installing themselves, complete with all their exploits, in the Bodega; for his recollections, revived by his recent reading, were uncannily exact. The city of the novels, the well-lit, well-heated, well-cared-for, well-ordered houses of the novels, where bottles of wine were being unhurriedly poured out by Little Dorrit, by Dora Copperfield, by Tom Pinch's sister,\* appeared to him in the form of a cosy ark sailing through a flood of mud and soot. He settled down comfortably in this fictional London, happy to be indoors, listening to the sepulchral hooting of the tugs travelling down the Thames, behind the Tuileries, near the bridge. His glass was empty; despite the warm fug that filled this cellar, which the fumes of cigars and pipes made still stuffier, he gave, as he suddenly returned to the reality of this foul-smelling wet weather, a little shiver.

He asked for a glass of Amontillado, but then, in the presence of this dry, pale wine, the gentle lenitives, the soothing stories of the English author vanished and in their place appeared the harsh revulsives, the painful skin irritants of Edgar Allan Poe; the chilling nightmare of the cask of Amontillado,\* of a man walled up in an underground vault, gripped hold of his mind; the kindly, commonplace faces of the American and English drinkers filling the room seemed to him to mirror involuntary, monstrous thoughts, and unconscious, abominable designs; then he noticed that people were leaving and that the dinner hour was at hand; he paid, dragged himself from his chair, and, his head swimming, made for the door.

The instant he set foot outside, the rain smacked him in the face; the gas lamps, inundated by the drenching, gusting rain, fluttered their tiny fans of flame without casting any light; the clouds had

moved down even lower and now hung round the bellies of the houses. Des Esseintes gazed at the arcades of the Rue de Rivoli, sunk in shadows and submerged in water, and it seemed to him that he was standing in the dismal tunnel dug under the Thames; hunger pangs in his stomach brought him back to reality; he returned to his cab, tossed the driver the address of the tavern in the Rue d'Amsterdam,\* near the station, and consulted his watch: it was seven o'clock. He had just enough time for dinner; the train did not leave until 8:50 and, counting on his fingers, he calculated the hours the crossing from Dieppe to Newhaven would take, telling himself: 'If the times given in the guide are correct, I shall be in London at exactly half-past twelve tomorrow.'

The cab drew up outside the tavern; once again Des Esseintes got out and entered a long hall decorated in brown paint without any gilding, and divided by waist-high partitions into a series of compartments like the loose boxes in a stable. This room, which widened out near the door, had a large number of beer pumps set up on a counter, alongside some hams as well-seasoned as the wood of an old violin, lobsters the colour of red lead, and soused mackerel which, with slices of onion and raw carrot, pieces of lemon, bunches of bay leaves and thyme, juniper berries and peppercorns, were swimming in a murky-looking sauce.

One of the stalls was empty. He took possession of it and hailed a young man in a black suit, who bowed and jabbered at him in an incomprehensible tongue. While his place was being laid, Des Esseintes studied his neighbours; just as in the Bodega, islanders with china-blue eyes, purple faces, and pensive or arrogant expressions were glancing through foreign newspapers, only here there were some pairs of unaccompanied women dining on their own, sturdy Englishwomen with boyish faces, oversized teeth, apple-red cheeks, long hands and long feet. They were attacking a beefsteak pie with unfeigned zest; this is a hot dish of meat cooked in a mushroom sauce and then covered, like a pie, by a pastry crust.

After having had no appetite for so long, he was disconcerted by the sight of these strapping females whose voracity whetted his own hunger. He ordered oxtail soup, and really relished this concoction which is at one and the same time rich, smooth, greasy, and substantial; then he studied the list of fish and asked for smoked haddock, which is like smoked cod, and he thought looked good;

then, his appetite sharpened by watching others gorge, he ate some sirloin with potatoes, and downed two pints of ale, spurred on by that faint musky flavour of the byre exuded by this fine pale beer.

His appetite now almost satisfied, he picked at a piece of sweetly-sharp blue Stilton, nibbled on some rhubarb tart, and, for a change, quenched his thirst with porter, that black beer which tastes of sugarless liquorice.

He drew breath; it was years since he had stuffed himself like that or drunk so much; this change in his habits, this choice of unfamiliar, filling food had awakened his stomach from its slumber. He settled back in his chair, lit a cigarette and prepared to enjoy his coffee which he laced with gin.

The rain was still falling; he could hear it pattering on the glass roof at the back of the room and pouring in cascades down the waterspouts; inside, no one was stirring; they were all pampering themselves, just as he was, sitting in the dry with little glasses of spirits before them.

Tongues were loosening; as almost all the English were casting their eyes up as they talked, Des Esseintes concluded that they were discussing the bad weather; not one of them was laughing, and they were all dressed in grey cheviot striped in nankeen yellow and blotting-paper pink. He cast a delighted glance at his own clothes, the colour and cut of which did not differ in any obvious way from those of his neighbours, and he knew the satisfaction of not looking out of place in these surroundings, of being, as it were, in a superficial way, a naturalized Londoner; then he gave a start: 'Is it time for the train?' he wondered. He looked at his watch: 'Ten minutes to eight; I can stay here for almost another half-hour'; and, once again, his thoughts returned to the plan he had formed.

In the course of his sedentary life only two countries had ever appealed to him: Holland and England.

He had satisfied the first of these desires; one fine day, unable to resist any longer, he had left Paris and visited, one after another, the cities of the Netherlands. On the whole, this trip had left him bitterly disillusioned. He had imagined a Holland like that painted by Teniers and Jan Steen, Rembrandt and Van Ostade, picturing in advance, for his own personal enjoyment, ghettos of superb-looking Jews as sun-tanned as cordovan leather; visualizing prodigious fairs and perpetual drunken revelries in the country villages, expecting to

find the patriarchal geniality, the jovial over-indulgence celebrated by the Old Masters.

True, he had indeed found Haarlem and Amsterdam captivating; the peasants, seen in all their crude rusticity out in the actual countryside, undoubtedly resembled those painted by Van Ostade, with their coarse, rough-hewn brats and their monstrously fat old women, all bulging breasts and bellies; but of unbridled merriment or domestic tippling, not a sign; in a word, as he was obliged to admit, the Dutch School\* of the Louvre had misled him; it had simply provided him with a springboard for his dreams; he had cast himself off, bounding forward along a false trail and wandering off into unattainable dreams, not finding anywhere on earth that magical, genuine countryside he had hoped for, never ever seeing, on meadows strewn with wine casks, village men and women dancing, their faces streaming with happy tears as they jumped for joy, and laughing so much that they wet their skirts and breeches.

No, certainly, there was nothing like that to be seen; Holland was a country like any other and, furthermore, a country that was not in the least primitive or artlessly good-natured, for in Holland the prevailing religion was Protestantism, with its rigid hypocrisy and solemn inflexibility.

He recalled his disillusionment; again he consulted his watch; he still had ten minutes before the train departed. 'It's high time to ask for the bill and leave,' he told himself. His stomach felt heavy and his whole body was filled with the most extreme lethargy. 'Come on,' he said to get up his courage, 'I'll have one for the road', and, calling for his account, he filled a glass with brandy. An individual dressed in black carrying a napkin over his arm, a kind of major-domo with a bald, pointed head, a greying, wiry beard, no moustache, and with a pencil behind his ear, came up and, standing with one leg forward like a singer, drew a notebook from his pocket; then, without looking at the paper, but gazing at a spot on the ceiling beside a chandelier, he wrote out and added up the cost of the meal. 'Here you are, sir,' he said, tearing the page from his notebook, and handing it to Des Esseintes who was staring at him curiously, as if he were some rare animal. What an unexpected John Bull, he thought, as he contemplated this phlegmatic creature whose clean-shaven mouth made him look vaguely like a signalman in the American navy.

At that moment the door of the tavern opened; some people came

in bringing with them a smell of wet dog mingled with coal fumes which the wind blew back into the kitchen as its unlatched door banged; Des Esseintes felt incapable of moving his legs; a gentle, warm languor was flowing through his limbs, and even preventing him from stretching out his hand to light a cigar. He kept telling himself: 'Come on now, on your feet, you must hurry'; but instantly there would be objections to gainsay his commands. What was the point of moving, when one could travel so splendidly just sitting in a chair? Wasn't he in London now, surrounded by London's smells, atmosphere, inhabitants, food, utensils? What therefore could he expect, other than fresh disappointments, as in Holland?

He had just time to hurry to the station, and an immense distaste for the journey, a pressing need to remain quietly where he was, were making themselves felt with ever greater urgency, ever greater persistence. Lost in thought, he let the minutes slip past, thus cutting off his retreat, telling himself: 'Now I'd have to dash to the barrier, deal with the luggage in a great rush; what a bore! What a business that would be!' Then he told himself once again: 'In fact, I've experienced and I've seen what I wanted to experience and see. Ever since leaving home I've been steeped in English life;\* I would be insane to risk losing, by an ill-advised journey, these unforgettable impressions. After all, what kind of aberration was this, that I should be tempted to renounce long-held convictions, and disdain the compliant fantasies of my mind, that I should, like some complete simpleton, have believed that a journey was necessary, or could hold novelty or interest?' He looked at his watch; 'It's time I went home,' he said, and this time he got to his feet, went outside, and ordered the cab driver to drive him back to the station at Sceaux, and he returned to Fontenay with his trunks, packages, suitcases, rugs, umbrellas, and walking sticks, feeling as physically exhausted and morally spent as a man who comes home after a long and hazardous journey.

During the days following his return home, Des Esseintes turned his attention to his books, and, at the thought that he might have been separated from them for a long period, he experienced a satisfaction as real as what he would have felt had he come back to them after a genuine absence. Under the influence of this feeling, his books seemed new to him, for he discovered beauties in them which he had forgotten about during the years since he had first acquired them.

Everything—books, knick-knacks, furniture—held a special charm in his eyes; his bed seemed softer, compared with the bed he would have occupied in London; he found the discreet and silent attentions of his servants delightful, exhausted as he was by the mere thought of the noisy loquacity of hotel waiters; the methodical organization of his life seemed all the more desirable, now that the randomness of travel was a possibility.

He steeped himself afresh in this bath of habit, to which artificial regrets added a more bracing, more invigorating quality.

But what principally engaged his attention was his books. He examined them, then replaced them on the shelves, checking to make sure that, since his arrival at Fontenay, heat and rain had not damaged their bindings or spotted their priceless paper.

He began by going through his entire Latin library, then rearranged the specialist treatises by Archelaüs, Albertus Magnus, Raymond Lull, and Arnaud de Villanova,\* which dealt with the cabbala and the occult sciences; next he inspected his modern books, one at a time, and discovered to his joy that they were all in perfect, dry condition.

This collection had cost him considerable sums of money: for in actuality he could not bear to see, on his own shelves, those authors he treasured represented by editions similar to those he saw in other men's libraries, printed on rag paper, in clumsy, hobnailed lettering.

In Paris, in the past, he had had certain books typeset for him personally, hiring special workers to print them on hand-presses; sometimes he would call on the services of Perrin of Lyons,\* whose slender, pure lettering was suited to reprinting old texts in the original archaic form; sometimes he would have new type sent from

- 94 *the Malherbes*... *Baour-Lormians*: François de Malherbe (1555–1628), reformer of French poetry who demanded discipline, craftsmanship and rhetorical clarity from his fellow poets. Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636–1711), poet, satirist, and critic, known as the 'régent du Parnasse', most renowned for his *Art poétique* (1674) and as the aesthete of neo-classicism. François Guillaume Andrieux (1759–1833), dramatist and poet, chair of French literature and ethics at the Collège de France from 1816, who embodied Classical academic resistance to early Romanticism. Pierre François Marie Baour-Lormian (1770–1854), translator, poet, and reactionary supporter of the Classical critique of Romantic originality (notably in his satire *Le Classique et le Romantique*, 1825).
- 96 *Boucher's*: François Boucher (1703–70), painter, draughtsman, and etcher who dominated eighteenth-century fine and decorative arts in France until the emergence of Neoclassicism. Venus reappeared throughout his mythological painting, from *Venus Asking Vulcan for Arms for Aeneas* (1732) as he tried to establish himself, via his design for the tapestry of *Venus in the Forge of Vulcan* (1757) in his series *The Loves of the Gods*, to his masterpiece, the *Triumph of Venus* (1740), commissioned by the Swedish Ambassador in Paris, Tessin.
- Thémidore*: Claude Godard d'Aucour's scurrilous thesis novel *Thémidore* (1715), about a certain abbé Dubois, quite possibly encountered by Huysmans in Kistemaeker's edition of 1882 prefaced by Maupassant.
- 100 *industry*... *Pantin*: in *L'Art moderne*, Huysmans champions the aesthetics of modern life: 'The factory chimneys which rise up in the distance mark out the North, Pantin for instance, with a stamp of melancholy grandeur that it would not otherwise have had.'
- 104 *high-lows*: boots fastened in front and reaching over the ankle. Huysmans uses the term *brodequins*.
- 105 *Galignani's Messenger*: a reference to the location of the major English daily newspaper in Paris, *Galignani's Messenger*, founded in 1814, which carried stories on England and France culled from other papers. Its moderation and impartiality allowed it to survive changes of regime and its supposed accuracy drew a sizeable readership in spite of its price.
- Baedeker or Murray*: famous nineteenth-century travel guides.
- 107 *du Maurier or John Leech*: G.-L.-P. Busson du Maurier (1834–96) produced paintings, drawings, and writing, and was known particularly for his work in *Punch*. His humorous verse includes 'The History of the Jack Sprats' and his parody of William Morris's ballads, 'The Legend of Camelot', with mock Pre-Raphaelite illustrations. His novel *Tribby* (1894) was also to gain particular fame. John Leech (1817–64), friend of Thackeray and one of the most noteworthy English caricaturists, did about 3,000 drawings of political cartoons and scenes of everyday middle-class life for *Punch* from 1841 onwards, and illustrated around fifty books, including Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*.

- Caldecott's*: Randolph Caldecott (1846–86) painted, did drawings for *Punch*, *The Graphic*, and *The Pictorial World*, and illustrated fantastic tales and books for children. Praised alongside Kate Greenaway and Walter Crane in a digression on illustrated children's albums which appeared in Huysmans's collection of art criticism, *L'Art moderne*.
- 108 *Millais*... *The Eve of St Agnes*: the *Eve of St Agnes* by Sir John Everett Millais (1829–96) was a pre-Raphaelite painting shown at the Royal Academy in 1863, much appreciated by Whistler. It was based on Keats's poem, 'The Eve of St Agnes', quoted in part by Millais in the Academy's catalogue: 'Full on this casement shone the wintry moon... her vespers done, | Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees...'
- Watts*: George Frederick Watts (1817–1904), a painter of historical frescos and portraits, was particularly well known for *Hope* (1886), inspired by the Pre-Raphaelites. Huysmans saw the *Curse of Cain*, *Ida*, and three versions of *Eve* at a small exhibition in 1883 at the galerie Georges Petit, Rue de Sèze, Paris.
- 110 *Mr Wickfield*: Miss Trotwood's lawyer in *David Copperfield* (1849–50), who gives lodgings to David and whose daughter David eventually marries.
- Mr Tulkington*: lawyer in *Bleak House* (1852–53).
- Little Dorrit*... *Tom Pinch's sister*: characters from Dickens's *Little Dorrit*, *David Copperfield*, and *Martin Chuzzlewit* respectively.
- cask of Amontillado*: reference to *The Cask of Amontillado* (1846) by E. A. Poe, in which the narrator Montresor lures his enemy Fortunato into a catacomb with an offer of rare sherry and then buries him alive.
- 111 *Rue d'Amsterdam*: the Austin Bar or English Tavern, situated at what is now 24 Rue d'Amsterdam, enjoys superior literary credentials. Baudelaire took a room above it, the Goncourts lauded its 'authentic roast-beef', Valéry took Mallarmé and Huysmans there, and after its rebirth as the Bar Britannia, Gide dined there with Copeau in 1912.
- 113 *the Dutch School*: for Huysmans's major analysis of Dutch painterly realism, see his *L'Art moderne*.
- 114 *Ever since leaving home*... *English life*: this idea can be tracked back to a letter of 1882 to Huysmans's editor in Brussels which notes, 'By dressing up in the style of Old England, reading Dickens and going to drink port at the Bodega, you can easily imagine yourself on a journey visiting that diabolical city of industry praised by Taine and de Amicis.'
- 115 *Archelaüs*... *Villanova*: Archelaüs, Greek poet and alchemist of the fifth century AD referred to in J. L. Ideler's *Physici et medici Graeci minores* (Berlin, 1842), which quotes the 136 lines of his poem in iambic verse on sacred art. Albert Magnus (1193?/1206?–1280), German philosopher and theologian. One of the first thinkers of his time to regard philosophy and science as 'pure' fields of knowledge in their own right, and to draw upon the long neglected writings of Arab philosophers as well as upon