

THEOPHILE GAUTIER

LETTRE À LA PRÉSIDENTE

VOYAGE EN ITALIE

—1850—

[Translated by Patrick Kearney]



DE L'IMPRIMERIE
DU MUSÉE SECRET DU ROI DE
NAPLES
—1890—

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NOTICE TO THE READER

Émile Bergerat, Théophile Gautier's son-in-law, in his curious and well-documented book Théophile Gautier, Entretiens, Souvenirs et Correspondance (1879, Charpentier), expresses himself as follows in a note appended to Letter I, to Eugène de Nully, 1835: "As for the tone that prevails in this letter — and which I have been obliged to soften, I confess — one must not forget that the Master was twenty-four when he wrote it; that he addressed it to an intimate friend who, like himself, was a dyed-in-the-wool Romantic and accustomed to the salty speech of the studios of the time. Besides, it was not intended for publication; it is hardly necessary to point that out. Théophile Gautier wrote two or three free letters in his life (one among others during his journey to Russia), less for the vulgar reasons one might suppose than in order to exercise the Rabelaisian verve that was within him and to amuse himself with the use of words fallen into desuetude.

"He handled the language of the old Gallic storytellers with prodigious eloquence; one of those letters of which I speak places him on a level with Rabelais; of that tour de force, the craftsmen of our trade who know it speak only with enthusiasm: it is the account of a journey to Italy; it runs to more than twenty pages and would make a little volume... if it were printable. It is not, alas; for it would demonstrate what a goldsmith of words Théophile Gautier was, and what a storyteller!"

This demonstration which Monsieur Bergerat deemed it impossible to provide — this letter, this masterpiece of rich and colourful language which an excess of prudery has kept so long under a bushel — we now present, for the first time, for the diversion of Pantagruelists and no others, as Master François says.

We mean to offer curious bibliophiles the prose pendant to the charming publication which an Artist-Publisher — we have named him Poulet-Malassis — offered them in 1873 under this title: Poésies de Théophile Gautier qui ne figureront pas dans ses œuvres. — France, Imprimerie particulière, ornées d'un portrait singulier.

This piece of spermatic — and turd-besmirched — eloquence may boldly present itself as unpublished, despite the arse-wiping edition that appeared some time ago, printed in the depths of a cellar and owing its existence to the inept collaboration of a broker, a printer, and a Parisian publisher, each more of a rogue than the last.

Présidente¹ de mon cœur,

This filthy letter, intended to replace the Sunday obscenities, has been a long time coming; but that is the fault of the filth, not of the author.

Modesty reigns in these solemn yet ancient precincts, and I greatly regret that I can send you only turd-smearred trifles, lacking much in the way of spermatic vigor. I shall proceed in the order of my route:

At Geneva, the government recommends to you, at the city gate, to look behind you; which is saying a great deal in a Protestant town where, to humiliate the Catholics and show them that they are nothing but sensual pagans, the women shave down their rumps and breasts with modesty's joiner's plane, in the American manner.

We strained every nerve to behold the twelve buttocks decreed by authority, and succeeded in discovering only four, teetering upon the tightrope, parted by a perineum

¹ There was at that time in Paris a young, beautiful, and charming woman [Apollonie Sabatier], well known in artistic circles as much for the magnificent portrait that Ricard had painted of her as because she was said to have served as the model for the sculptor Clésinger in the execution of the beautiful statue from which his reputation dates: *La femme piquée par un serpent*.

Madame S... lived on the rue Frochot. She received only artists and, every Sunday, gathered around her table most of my friends: **Théophile Gautier**, **Gustave Flaubert**, **Louis Bouilhet**, **Charles Baudelaire**, **Pierre Rayet**, the composer, **Auguste Préault**, the sculptor, **Maxime Du Camp**, and **Henry Monnier** were her regular guests. Since, as Gautier used to say, "she showed herself superior to other women, first because she was better formed, and secondly because, contrary to the habits of persons of her sex, she did not require that one pay court to her, and allowed men to speak before her of the most serious and abstract matters," she had been nicknamed *the Présidente*; and Madame S... bore that charming title with all the wit and grace imaginable. (Ernest Feydeau, *Souvenirs intimes* de Th. Gautier.)

that arched up like a vaulted ceiling, and composing, beneath the skirts of two young German mountebanks, a pair of buoyant, well-rounded rumps that would hardly have proved unwelcome in a private tête-à-tête.

Not knowing a word of German, it was impossible for us to open relations with these posterior charms, one of which was worthy of Goethe's Mignon — precisely because it was not *mignon* in the least.

Oh! how willingly, celestial rump — who didst appear to me between four candles — would I have unfurled in thy honour one of the fourteen frock-coats, that very subject of Louis's² anxieties, he who shifts them from place to place at every instant!

The following night, Dom Jacquemart de Bandeliroide, preoccupied with that white rump fluttering against the blue of the sky, caused me to dream that I was Brindeau of the Théâtre Français, and that, with the cup-and-ball dexterity that distinguishes that plump pederast, I was receiving upon a boxwood peg the little dancer, fastened by the waist to a string. The marshy and geographical miscarriage that ought to have resulted from these nocturnal phantasmagorias did not take place, because the crankshaft of love was boring into my navel with such force that anguish awakened me, my dream having transformed me into a bottle-rack upon a carpenter's bench. Louis cowardly splashed a thick and yellow discharge, and the chambermaid, in making his bed, may have discovered America in the sheets. So much for Geneva, homeland of Monsieur Crépin and Monsieur Jabot, whose style the government borrows. As for the rest, not a single phallus upon the walls — they are doubtless lodged in the women's quim, if one may call *quim* that machine for manufacturing watchmakers which the Protestant women trundle between their

² 'Louis.' Louis de Cormenin, son of the famous pamphleteer of the reign of Louis-Philippe. He died in 1866.

emaciated thighs beneath a meagre tuft of hair whose white blossoms give it the look of a brush.

In the Valais we encountered my chimera — that is to say, the woman with three nipples; but the third was a goitre, and it was the only firm one. I was not tempted to ask this Swiss Isis whether she wore her quim crosswise — a Chinese fancy that tickles my imagination. At the inn of the Simplon, whose wallpaper depicts the English in China like a novel by Méry, a winged and monstrous umbrella insinuates itself into the mouth of Lady Bentinck, who cries out, “Very delicious!” The cannons are transformed into members that discharge; the wheels become the testicles, the barrels the phallus, and the smoke imitates ejaculatory foam. These Priapic embellishments are due to the libidinous pencil of young French art students.

At Domo d’Ossola, the conveniences — which fifteen hours upon the road made it a pious duty for us to visit, there to deposit our libations — presented an enchanting and fairy-like aspect; they were painted in fresco and depicted bouquets of roses bursting open like the arseholes of blondes, with a touch of crimson at the center. It is exceedingly pleasant to squat there, one’s eye fixed upon these flowering anuses — or these anal blossoms — unfolding their petals: the puckered folds of a sphincter, ready either to swallow a prick or to disgorge a turd.

One thing cast me into great perplexity: it was a small bottle of oil, in which a feather was steeped, set upon a little board; I asked the waiter what was the purpose of this oil and this feather; he grew flustered, blushed, stammered, and fled. At first I thought its use was to facilitate stercoral operations for those anuses furnished with hemorrhoids who travel upon Rattier and Guibal cushions. But it seems that this oil served to lubricate the backside of that pretty fellow, much sought after by the English who go to Italy to indulge their taste for pederasty — punished with the

rope in their charming island; a touching solicitude on the part of the government, which thus secures a few elderly encounters for Englishwomen, who would never be bedded without it. Imagine, O Présidente, in that latrine adorned with roses — the customary place of assignation — a Lord gravely passing the feather over the arse of this young scamp, ill-wiped but narrow: Lord Brougham, or Lord Palmerston, or some other venerable personage, praline-colored, with white whiskers and white brows.

In the evening we were given a puppet show; the man and the woman, both very young and recently married, lent their voices to the little figures. The wife, armed with a clitoris that made her skirt lift like the tip of a sword — or a prick in erection — possessed a tromboning organ, a hairy contralto, in the Crapobiska style, in the manner of Ernesta; and the husband a fluted voice, in the style of Abelard after the operation — which did not prevent him from fucking and jerking off his wife during the monologues of the heroes beset by the rigors of fate and love; an entertainment that made the canvas tremble, marked the woman's knees amid the scenery, and set the puppets' legs dragging at the moment of their swoon.

At Sesto Calende I saw poor hens so often mounted by far too numerous cocks that their backs were entirely plucked bare, their rumps raw, and they seemed ready to turn themselves upon the spit to escape such martyrdom. For, O Présidente, if you yourself had been climbed twenty-two times a minute, and that from three in the morning until eight at night, you might perhaps think it excessive. True, women do not share the ideas of hens; these, moreover, wore a single feather at the rear, for the convenience of the young inn-boys, who, whenever they spy an English carriage, go and pluck it out and dip it into the little bottle of oil, awaiting the event.

At Milan we made the ascent of the cathedral spire —

a snowy phallus that pierces the sky. The walls of the staircase are adorned with the strangest and most varied injunctions to cleanliness. The Italian is so naturally swinish that he relieves himself anywhere whatsoever, which is why the night-soil men die of hunger in this country that plants a boot in the backside of Sicily. I copied down a few inscriptions:

What you have drunk, pray homeward bear
Let no excess be sprinkled here.

A gentleman, of decent stock,
Will choose the place — not lift and cock.

If pressure mounts and will not wait,
Defile not this well-scrubbed state.

This slight sample will suffice for your understanding; there are placards of similar import for the space of five hundred and twelve steps above sea level — and not above the level of filth, for one finds them upon the sharpest spires, which were not laid by swallows, but indeed by men, “*Evipiprokto andres*,” as Aristophanes says in his great dispute between the Just and the Unjust; (that Greek, if Fenand is not there to explain it to you, signifies nothing dishonest, but merely men with capacious fundament-holes; do not set your imagination to work upon it).

In that same Milan, at the Hôtel de la Ville, in the conveniences — which there lose their proper name and are called *gardens* by a euphemism of the best taste, whence comes *to garden*, meaning to take a shit — we found a sonnet torn in two, in praise of the incomparable Sofia Cruvelli, a celebrated singer entirely unknown.

Who could possibly have possessed enough copies of that precious poetry to wipe himself with it in such a fashion, if not the Diva herself? The sonnet had all the strength of a curling-paper dressing gown; yet what rendered it beyond price was a touch of golden russet, rich and warm,

recalling Siennas, mummies, and the most titanic bitumens; there were no fig-seeds embedded in it, but a hair of blue-black hue, thick and tightly curled, which set my erect imagination wandering deliciously from the crimped heights of the mound to the sunburst of hair blossoming about the mystic rose, stirred by the sighs of a melancholy belly. I envied the fortune of that paper, which had traversed that tawny cleft of the buttocks, brushed that intestinal channel, grazed those chocolate-colored buttock-cheeks, and tickled that clitoris with its Creole-thighed hood; and, while lengthening my foreskin like the tip of an old slipper, I spun forth, with a strand as limpid as a hair of crystal, the following quatrain:

Blest the bed her spade laid low!
Blest the seat that felt her go!
Blest the sheet she left her mark!
Blest the verse that wiped the spark!

In Milan one bathes with the women, in tubs of white marble; we had the tubs, but not the women, and so contented ourselves with sluicing off the glans in the hush of the bathing closet, without having first earned that little abluion by any energetic intrusion ending in slobber and curd.

But it seems the baths double as houses of pleasure, and that one goes there to grab a quick bite of backside, much as in France one drops in at a restaurant for a snack. The tub serves at once as sofa and bidet, and the member plays both dildo and syringe — only, alas, the spout does not run on tap.

From Milan to Venice, I have nothing Priapic to report, save for a monstrous erection brought on by the self-abuse of a badly sprung carriage, whose cushions worked at my inner thighs in a most depraved fashion; picture a marrowbone, a stag's antler — whatever you can imagine

hardest of all. One might have taken it for an antediluvian prick, petrified in a cavern of stalactites; a bronze phallus fallen from the loins of the god of Lampsacus; an Indian Lingam seeking its mysterious conjunction with the sacred Yoni; a generative emblem, a kind of symbolic winnowing fan borne in the processions of Eleusis; a Napoleonic column erected upon the Place Vendôme of my pubis; a lectern from which to read the Gospel of Love at the Mass of Venus.

Oh! how agreeable it would have been, in that dire predicament, to feel a hand slipping through the gap in my fallen breeches and rounding itself about that staff of flesh like an ideal quim! How a tongue, silvering with luxurious saliva that little ribbon of foreskin — the man's own clitoris — would have made me splatter against the carriage ceiling a jet of spermy purée! Why did not some spherical white backside, parting its round, elastic, and fresh thighs, unstop into the very center of delights — the vermilion paradise, the love-nutcracker — that Master Jean Chouart, that breeches-mushroom, that pestle of the mortar of Cythera? It would have rung out a brave carillon of balls and a stout clattering of this and that.

At the end of nine leagues, and after three changes of postilions — not in the arse — I subsided, and from noon until six went unrigged, without the aid of Saint Carpius's fork. My imagination, soothed and rid of those fantasies shaped like rumps, hairs, and quims that had been capering through my brain, returned to a sense of reality; and I perceived that I was not drifting among the clouds of some Priapic heaven, but rather caught in a frightful whirlwind of dust; whereupon I composed this quatrain:

Through bleary lids the grit is blown,
The wind, with sand, scours to the bone;
It scrapes and scalds without reprieve
The saucepans that we call our eve.

Here are our adventures in Venice: While examining some chains of mail in a shop, we beheld a pretty girl in her shift, clad only in the rag of a shawl whose tip was kissing her backside; no stockings, slippers on her feet, one breast to the breeze, an eye that seemed to circle her head seven times over, a mouth that looked furnished with three rows of teeth like a shark's, and at the nape of her neck a chignon made of a heap of braids, coiled like an anchor-chain upon the deck of a three-decker. She was squabbling with the jeweler over a hollow gold ring worth three or four zwanzigers, calling him dog, cow's son, damned wretch, whore's excrement, informer, galley-slave — and German, the greatest insult of all. She swore and blasphemed by the body of Bacchus and the blood of Diana; in short, she was in a fury — and charming. We bought her ring from her, and I told her to come to the house under the pretext of a portrait. She came two or three days later, and I made a bit of pastel of her, which she carried off. The acquaintance was made; but we were two against one, which was almost as cowardly as being five against one, as at Widow Poignet's. We tossed a coin for the girl; Louis won, and accordingly was the happy man.

Behold his happiness, enclosed herewith, described by his own hand, in the style of the gods.³

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I shall add only this detail, which seems to suggest a doubtful virginity: at the shepherd's hour, at the supreme moment, when the young couple were about to clink

³ There was evidently here a poem by Louis de Cormenin, enclosed with Gautier's letter; this poem has not been recovered.

glasses at the navel, the young bride wetted her fingers in her mouth and slipped them down into the lower slit, to grease the outer lips, soap the nymphs, slick the worming walls, and ease the triumphant entry of my friend's cock. In this amoroso-melancholic scene I played the ancient chamber-slave, holding, in one hand, the candle — and in the other, my prick.

Thus the young girl, touched by my plight, brought with her on the second visit a friend aged eighteen, “like an old ox” — blonde, pink, regular in feature, with a gentle and melancholy expression, rather pretty in sum, save for teeth somewhat disordered, too English for a Venetian who was in fact from Turin. While I played beside her the part of Mr. Clamber-up-Thighs, political candidate and rival of Mr. Gnaw-my-Cheek — that is to say, while my hands, fingered like crabs and creeping like spiders, made their way to the Café of the Two Columns, at the back of which lies the sapper's tavern — this beauty recounted her story to me, which bore no resemblance to that of Julie.⁴ She was a chorus dancer at La Fenice, but the bombardment had closed the theatre and interrupted her choreographic career; no longer able to display her backside in public, she displayed it in private. Her cunt, rather small, was furnished with short, straight, close-set hair like felt, or the fur collar of a dog; I drew her tits from her corset, whose laces were partly loosened; they were large, fairly firm, very white, veined with blue, with a small pink tip surrounded by a broad hydrangea-coloured aureole. The milk that swelled them gave them the look of Rubensian breasts that would have delighted Boissard — and did not displease me.

I forgot to mention that the poor creature was somewhat pregnant, on the pretext that the Austrian army never

⁴ A reference to the heroine of an erotic novel by Mme Guyot, *Julie, ou J'ai sauvé ma rose*.

withdraws, and that Hungarians are no geldings — though, according to Gérard,⁵ one must pronounce *hongrais*, like *français*. When I pawed the backside of the respectable mother, the foetus, confined within the ex-dancer's little pumpkin-shaped belly, knowing what that portended and accustomed to such preliminaries, hopped beneath its white envelope like a toad under a napkin and wedged itself deep in the womb to avoid the blows of a cock. Just so a cat pursued under a bed with a stick presses itself against the wall and curls up miserably. Its head made a small bulge in the maternal flank; I wondered whether I should go poking at this foetus injected by an Austrian syringe; had I been certain it was a girl, I would readily enough have plucked that maidenhead from within her mother's cunt; but, being in Italy, I feared it might be a little pederast, an embryonic catamite, a precocious bardash, an anticipatory sodomite, who would offer me his arse before his time and lead me to his anus through the maternal vagina. It must also be said that the thirteen English frockcoats were in Louis's pocket, and the fourteenth upon his imperial and triumphant member. Vague visions of gelatine capsules and strawberry roots danced before my eyes, and I placed delicately in the young woman's hand what she believed I was about to put in her backside. My forefinger — or rather my ring finger — suitably moistened, slipped between the lips of her sex, and a few voluptuous frictions upon the little leaves of the clitoris soon brought that interesting organ into bloom.

This young pupil of Terpsichore, as skilful with her hands as with her feet, drew back, first slowly then precipitously, the skin of my foreskin back and forth in a rhythm resembling an air from *Giselle*,⁶ and that exercise, repeated for some time, brought forth in her a clear water, a limpid

⁵ Gérard De Nerval.

⁶ *Giselle*, an 1841 ballet by Théophile Gautier.

whitish foam, and in me a thick, glutinous seed full of clots which looked, in the hollow of her hand, like a pot of overturned apple jelly from Rouen. At about this juncture the fellow Louis emerged from his room, satisfied of mien, crest aloft and eye sparkling like a cock descending from a hen he has just mounted. The Vicenza (such was the name of his beauty) puffed her dress about her backside with the most detached air in the world; thus passed our loves in Venice. Louis spent yet another frockcoat with young Vicenza, reducing to twelve the number of those neutralizing intestines.

A few days earlier we had encountered, in the Piazza San Marco, a ruffian who offered us teguments of goldbeater's skin; to which we replied that we ourselves were dealers in sheep's intestines, and that the slightest cunt would suit our business better. The creature promised that in the evening he would procure for us prick-cases, molds for frock-coats — that is to say, ideal whores, of the magical variety, Paul Veroneses, cut-out Titians, at modest prices. That night he set off with a busy and mysterious step; we followed discreetly; he plunged into a maze of inextricable alleyways and a succession of varied cutthroat corners; we quickened our pace, and then began, through the streets of Venice — scarcely two feet wide — a wild chase in the manner of Decamps's Turkish patrol. The skirts of our coats flew in the wind, our caps were bent back by the speed of our run; even our shadows struggled to keep up along the walls, tracing behind us the most comical silhouette in the world.

Never did corsair ships race so fast after their pasha. It tired us greatly, especially in the deplorable state we were in; our cocks jutted out above our waistbands like the hilts of Ottoman daggers, and our balls clashed cymbals in the depths of our breeches. At last the pimp ushered us into a cul-de-sac, at the end of which stood an abominable hovel

furnished with a doll more or less on springs, a Carconte⁷ in a low-cut black dress, her skin rubbed with rind in lieu of cold cream, worn down, sucked dry, rasped; an old nag on its last legs, who, besides the scars of the bubo she might have carried in her groin, displayed at her neck a few scrofulous pits. When I beheld this Margot, I stepped back three paces and excused myself on the grounds that we were two; to which she graciously replied that it made no difference, and that we could stuff her both at once, one in front, the other behind. As this arrangement did not suit us, the ruffian marched us another two or three leagues through unimaginable quarters, ringing at doors from which people emerged only to hurl insults at him; for, seeing us hard to please, he meant to introduce us into the bosom of families and, knocking at random, would ask whether there was in the house a girl of good will who might consent, for money, to have her little gingin scrubbed by wealthy English foreigners, however ill-dressed. By extraordinary chance, all the Venetian women were virtuous that evening; or, more naturally, all were already busy fucking and would not have their lovers interrupted in order to have their fish-snouts smeared by vile strangers. We also encountered a young painter who had fired sixty shots in fifteen days, always with new women, without ever wrapping his cock in vegetable paper, and who nevertheless was not yet dripping

O prodigy! our Don Juanism was sorely humbled by such rapid conquests. At this painter's I saw a very fine arse and a superb mound, whose description I herewith send you enclosed:⁸

We might have come to terms with her, but a few days later we learned that she had gone off to Padua — which

⁷ Mistress of the bandit Caderousse in *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* by Alexandre Dumas.

⁸ Here again, there were verses which have not been recovered.

is to say that the authorities had deported her to the mainland, finding her too soft in the backside or too wild at Mass to remain upon an island.

In plain English, she had the clap.

There was indeed the hostess of the house, a young wench pleasant enough, save for a straight nose carved in marble with somewhat too lavish a hand; but she was in childbed, and however enterprising one may be, one cannot drive a foetus back up into its mother's belly with thrusts of a cock; nor is it diverting to feel a brat turning somersaults upon the springboard of your glans. We should have feared scraping our pricks on some forceps left behind, or encountering, in that labouring vagina, the midwife's hands still at work.

I do not conceal from you, *Présidente*, that this young woman, scarcely delivered, seemed to find us coarse and indelicate for not hurling ourselves into the torrent of her offscourings, through her placentas, afterbirths, and thinned membranes. Though barely twenty-two years of age, she had already spewed six brats from her hairy mouth. All six had kicked the bucket; children do not live in Venice; these little dead ones are called advocates, in that they are supposed to go to Paradise to plead their parents' cause. Of five or six, scarcely one survives. The rest are for the scrap heap.

Padua swarms with very pretty girls who come there to give their saucepans a rattle, thanks to the Academy of Medicine. The bill of fare runs thus: Mercury, Copaiba, Cubeb, Sarsaparilla, Nitrate of Silver — and other delicacies à la Charles Albert. One blows one's nose there gingerly, for fear it may come away in one's hand; one ought to fuck in galvanized-iron frockcoats to have any confidence in the proceedings. At the inn they showed us the privies of Ezzelino, tyrant of Padua, far more savage than Angelo. It was there that Catarina — a detail that coward

Hugo discreetly suppressed — fainted in floods, while her husband and Thisbé carried on their undertakers' dialogue.

In these quarters one must squat beneath a wooden bar that cracks your kidneys when you rise, or else perch upon that same bar as it turns and sends you pitching into a sea of spunk. Catarina's rocket, flared into a sunburst against the wall, is perfectly visible to the naked eye — and better still to an eye properly fitted out.

Florence contains a single whore; she resides with an honest family, at an upholsterer's. You enter, ask for a bedside table, a bidet, or some other article of that sort, with a sly and lubricious air, and the meaning is understood. But the poor creature is so occupied that one must put one's name down a fortnight in advance; if she were to wash herself, she would drain the Arno dry — but that would take time. Each client is allowed only six thrusts forward and six back; those who grind must pay triple, according to the length of the boring. There are indeed two flower-girls, very bold, very provocative, who always seem ready to tumble onto their backs; but the first once took a stroke during which she caught a pox she still carries, according to some — from which she is cured, according to others — but which makes her more skittish at mounting than a flayed mule. The second is in love with a thief who renders her impregnable in virtue; as for respectable women, they are difficult to donkey, since they always have a virile poultice plastered over the mound. Husband, lover, and servant succeed one another with scarcely an interval; one must wait for a vacancy and stand at the edge of the cunt, root in hand, ready to plant it the instant the spot falls free — which happens rarely. There are besides, in Florence, a heap of dubious tortoisés more or less separated from their husbands, scandalous hussies, first-rate old tarts gone out of fashion, lionesses kept in reserve, reputations derailed,

dropped wombs, pessary-wearing vaginas, Russian informers, English bluestockings, doubtful tribades, and wandering sodomites, where one might find lodging for one's worm, if one had Balzac's tastes; but for that one must go daily to the Cascine Park, hold conversation on the step of carriages, dressed as for a first-night at the Bouffes, white gloves to the elbow and patent boots to the backside, a carnation stem thrust in the urethra and a skewer in the buttonhole — all that merely to swab out an old cannon fouled by more than thirty thousand shots.

At Rome one plays the ace of clubs with the little abbés, but the women have a dreadful fear of the raticjons and mop-headed parrots who shove their aspergillum up their arses while sprinkling the inside of their bellies with preacher's spunk — the most flowing of all, if Béroalde de Verville is to be believed. Every whore must be married; otherwise she is clapped into prison, and the climbers, if caught, pay three hundred francs fine. The sole industry of the Romans is to wed a pretty girl and prostitute her to cardinals and foreigners. Despite this decent façade, there reigns here a splendid pox, American in origin, as pure as in the days of Francis I. The entire French army lies on its flank; swellings burst in the groin like shells, the clap spurts in purulent jets and rivals the fountains of the Piazza Navona; rhagades and cockscombs hang in purple fringes from the backsides of the sappers, mined in their very foundations; tibias exfoliate into exostoses like columns of ancient green marble in a Roman ruin; pustular constellations star the deltoids of the General Staff; and one sees lieutenants strolling the streets, speckled and spotted like panthers with roseolas, freckles, coffee-colored stains, warty excrescences, horny and cryptogamic growths, and other secondary and tertiary accidents that appear here within a fortnight. You may observe colonels, and even common soldiers, marching bow-legged, legs spread wide,

bearing as hernias monstrous discharges fallen into their purses. They resemble pumpkin thieves who have hidden their loot in their trousers. Not a single prick stands straight; they all curve in tortuous folds like Monsieur Jean Racine's sea-serpent, or like the turnip that serves as member to that ass Vacquerie (aged thirty-four). Five hundred cocks have been left on the field, and a thousand crippled men beg the Capuchins for the Invalides. The Roman women have wounded more of our number than the Romans; which is a pity, for they are outrageously beautiful — a heavy, compact, massive beauty, but incontestable.

They are enormous and seem to have stepped down from the pedestals of the Museum. Twenty children might at once be housed within their robust flanks; it would take corsets braced with iron to contain their haughty breasts.

The story of the mother of Beatrice Cenci, whose head, it was said, could not be cut off because her breasts, large as cannonballs, prevented her from laying her neck upon the block (a tale that had always struck me as singular), is perfectly intelligible here: it is not the great pendulous teat of Rubens, the vast Flemish vat of glue that quivers at every motion, the Niagara of flesh cascading from the heights of the chest over the mountains of the belly and into the valleys of the pubis, as one sees in the bacchanals of Jordaens; it is two globes carried before one, a second backside affixed to the stomach, two immense tureens seen from their convex side, a Capitoline and a Palatine of human flesh.

The other evening we went to visit a young beauty who, after making a few demure objections and assuring herself that we were not informers, removed her gown and unhooped herself, allowing us to paw her charms bare. Her bosom burst into the room, smashed through the floorboards, overflowed into the Via Condotti, rolled down the Corso as far as the Piazza di Venezia, and left us

buried beneath a deluge of lilies and roses (Dupaty style). Louis, crushed beneath the fall of that double Mount Gordan and caught between globes as large as Green's balloons, loosed a silvery strand into the narrow ravine, where he marked his trace like a snail upon a vine leaf; and I slipped away to compose his epitaph, should he remain buried under the landslide. He believes, in this manner, that he has escaped the pox, though he is not without anxiety concerning the itch; as yet, however, no parasitic mite has yet manifested itself upon his cavernous muscle.

We have just been given the address of a married woman, Rue des Quatre-Fontaines, No. 48, near the obelisk of Monte Cavallo — a granite prick that serves her for a sign. She lives on the first *piano* (a word which, having nothing to do with Énard, simply means a floor) and is called Nana. Her husband goes out every day from noon until three, and then the foreigners arrive; and Nana, who is said to be the most beautiful woman in Rome, strips naked as a silver platter, as a church wall, as an academician's speech, and shows her arse to society, which is free to turn it over. This plastic spectacle costs from five to ten francs, depending on whether one is content to look or chooses to consume in earnest. The husband returns at three; Nana puts her shift back on and attends to household duties like an honest wife. This agreeable industry has procured the rascal a house and a few annuities. We shall go to see her, and I will send you a detailed description.

We hear talk of Naples and of a certain Via Capuana that is nothing but a brothel a league long. But let us not anticipate the filth and keep a few obscenities in reserve for the final relish. Forgive me, dear Président, this interminable letter, and give me credit for the efforts I have made not to wound your modesty. I hope that, in these indelicate subjects, I have never forgotten that Latin in words may affront decorum, but that the French lady

reader does not wish to be respected.

Soon I shall be able to resume my place at the Sunday banquet and leave the pen for the tongue (oh, that it were already thrust in!) — I shall not be particular as to the choice of hole.

THE IMAGINARY SWINE

Or

THE BASTARD WITHOUT KNOWING IT.

P.S. Present my most erectile indecencies to Mlle Bébé-beuh! — eh! — and my condolences to Fernand's spinal marrow, myelitic⁹ to the third degree. If this paper were not so frivolous and fit for wiping one's arse, I would beg you to convey my affectionate regards to Alfred¹⁰ — but I dare not lay my homage along this wall.

Rome, 19 October 1850.

⁹ From myelitis, inflammation or softening of the spinal cord.

¹⁰ Alfred de Musset.