

Decadent Perfume: Under the Skin and through the Page

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On 1 October 1912, the *New York Times* ran the provocative report 'Perfume now Injected: Latest Fad in Paris. Skin Becomes Saturated with Aroma'. Similar articles had been circulating since at least 1896, when the *L.A. Times* called subcutaneous perfume injection a 'Queer Fad of French Women'.¹ Was it an urban myth? Were Americans overreacting to quirks of continental fashion? Or were French women in fact infusing themselves with perfume? Max Nordau had already deemed seekers of olfactory sensation *degenerate* (502), warning that pleasure in smell becomes a 'malady of love [...] from which only the degenerate suffer' (501). Willful puncturing of the skin recalls an algophilic behaviour that one turn-of-the-century practitioner attributed to a 'degenerate's fantasy' frequently observed in hysterical women: sticking oneself with pins (Clérambault 29–30). The image of penetrating the body with scented liquid suggests fashionable drug fads of the period as well: ingestion and injection of ether, opium eating, morphine shooting parties.² At least one reporter emphasized the correlation between perfume injection and drug abuse:

A Paris physician (says our correspondent) has nipped in the bud a habit which promised to be as dangerous as that of morphine. It appears that a well-known Parisienne had discovered that subcutaneous injections of certain perfumes gave their special fragrance to the skin, and that it was quite possible to exhale the lily, the rose, or any other floral scent. ('Injections of Perfumes', *New York Times*, 1898)

This attention to the biological intimacy of perfume injection, its perilous eccentricity and the physical alteration that results, bespeaks a suspicion of perfume abuse that seems to have intensified as fragrance products became more affordable, more available and more feminized in the nineteenth century. By delivering fragrance through and beyond the protective skin, women would in a sense become one with perfume, and in so doing, perfume the space around them just by breathing.

Personal hygiene manuals published throughout the nineteenth century guide women to use fragrance with caution, offering advice on careful selection of an appropriate scent, proper dosage and strategic application. The purported injection fad represents a peculiar breach of perfume-application etiquette. In the nineteenth century, tasteful women were advised to scent their handkerchiefs, linens, writing paper, even shoes – but not their skin (Corbin, 269). Yet illustrated advertisements reveal a shift in modern French grooming practices from perfuming accessories towards perfuming the skin, sometime in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century (*Figure 1*). I suspect that this alteration of mainstream etiquette – surely a developing trend rather than an overnight phenomenon – to some degree fuelled a growing apprehension of perfume and its wearers at the *fin de siècle*, and contributed to increased attention to perfume in fiction and non-fiction writing. When it radiates from a woman's skin, perfume affirms the presence of skin itself. And skin, long considered the threshold space between health and sickness, body and miasma, also suggests a threshold between public and intimate space. Perfumed skin, whether or not it bears the mark or sting of the hypodermic needle, implies the crossing of this flesh boundary, an altered bodily state that invisibly alters the atmosphere around it.

The perceived threat of invading women's skin and blood (and consequently, the space around them) with injected aroma links perfuming, in an unexpected way, to etiologies of miasmatic (smell-borne) contagion that were only slowly discredited by germ theory in the second half of the century.³ Gradually changing beliefs about miasma paralleled cautious modifications of daily skin care rituals. Fear of devitalizing the body by soaking the skin in water remained prevalent for quite some time. Daily bathing was considered dangerous well after the menace had been disproved.⁴ As late as 1882, Franco-English cosmetics manufacturer and perfume historian Eugène Rimmel (1820–1887) continued to support the refuted premise that perfume was an antidote to miasma.⁵ At the same time, he lamented a growing fear of perfume expressed by some medical practitioners: 'Et cependant, nous voyons certains médecins faire une guerre acharnée aux parfums en disant qu'ils sont nuisibles à la santé' ('And yet we see certain doctors waging a bitter war on perfumes by saying they are harmful to the health'; 21). Rimmel defended the implementation of 'aromatic fumigations' and the use of perfumes to 'neutralize miasma'. A savvy marketer, the perfumer owned a shop in Paris, with branches throughout Europe (including London, Florence, and Rome). He further broadened his reach with a detailed mail-order catalogue. Although he was not alone in clinging to outdated beliefs about miasma, it was certainly in his interest as a businessman to promote perfume as both a luxury good and an 'objet d'utilité' (22).

Les
**PARFUMS
LUBIN**
mettent l'âme
en fête

En leur charme grisant, certains des Parfums Lubin — tels BOUQUET GREUZE, ENIGMA, PAMPRES D'OR — sont comme des parfums de rêve. Ils créent autour de qui les respire une atmosphère de poésie et d'extase et font éclore en l'imagination mille songes délicieux.

11, Rue Royale, Paris, et en toutes bonnes Parfumeries

Figure 1: A 1912 Lubin print advertisement showing a woman spraying her skin with perfume. Author's copy.

In a more prurient way, stories of perfume injection echo the tendency in learned discourse that Rimmel observed, to discredit the salubrious properties of fragrance and, more radically, to deem perfume use potentially toxic and aberrant. It is as if suspicion of perfume supplanted the fear of miasma as an olfactive indicator of hygienic and social danger. But unlike the involuntary absorption of disease-ridden smells, *fin-de-siècle* perfume abuse (be it heightened sensitivity to odour or overzealous spritzing, huffing, injecting or imbibing)⁶ was considered a deviant behaviour rather than an environmental hazard, and one – accurately or not – often ascribed to women, and linked to mental and emotional instability, in fiction as in medical literature of the era.

Studies in social history and literary criticism reveal a symbiosis between nineteenth-century medical depictions of hysterical women and comparable iterations in literature and the visual arts.⁷ Medical case studies of hysteria, often with an emphasis on the afflicted woman's sensitivity to smells and other sensory stimuli, constitute one of many narrative threads that contribute to the incomplete story of perfume and women's bodies. This story has no dominant discourse. Instead, a proliferation of nineteenth-century novels and poetry featuring fragrance and odour perception converge with disparate sources of non-fiction writing (newspapers, fashion magazines, advertisements, medical treatises) to co-construct the intertwined culture and poetics of perfume.⁸

Driven by the search for a documented case of perfume injection in France, this essay reveals a peculiar concurrence of *fin-de-siècle* thought and practice around decadent portrayals of women and their bodily connection to perfume. I posit that the more obtainable and feminized perfume became, the more toxic and symptomatic its portrayal. A growing suspicion of perfume, and vigilance to its implementation and proximity to the body, coincided with an increased likelihood that women of all classes might leave their scent trail in spaces beyond the privacy of the boudoir.

The foundation story of French perfumery (reiterated in hygiene manuals, novels and medical writing) maps the rise of perfume culture as a progressive civilizing journey, from the temples of ancient Egypt to the dressing tables of modern France where social and moral degeneration through perfume abuse was ever imminent. An examination of a portion of this history will show how women's perfume habits, portrayed in published etiquette advice, were echoed in medical discourse on deviant behaviour. The essay will then focus on two remarkable yet nearly forgotten *fin-de-siècle* manifestations of decadent perfuming. The first occurs in Edmond de Goncourt's 1884 novel *Chérie*, the fictional study of a young hysteric with a decadent, erotic connection to perfume. The second, a real-life swooning perfume-lover, involves the nameless consumer to whom an unusual gadget called the Lance-parfum

Rodo (1896) was marketed. Like Goncourt's novel *Chérie*, Alphonse Mucha's advertisement poster for the Rodo, and the surprisingly hazardous product itself, contribute to a network of discourse on social and literary implications of permeating the body and the page with perfume.

The grandeur and decadence of perfume use

Although France has a long tradition of fragrance production, the dawn of modern perfumery dates to the Napoleonic era, an age that saw both the democratization of certain luxury goods and dogged efforts at hygiene reform. After the Revolution of 1789 the manufacture of scented products escalated. Mass production, new models of commerce and advertising, and the production of synthetic scents contributed to ever-widening distribution of perfumes and fragrance accessories.⁹ Perfume had been, and remained, a product fashioned for both women and men. Royal perfumer Simon Barbe called Louis XIV the 'plus doux fleurant' (Le Guérier, *Le Parfum* 132–3). Louis XV and his 'Perfumed Court', the Directory-era Muscadins (noted for their powerful, musky scent trails [de Feydeau 1003–4]), and Napoleon I, a heavy user of eau de cologne at home, on the battlefield, and in exile, figured among France's most notorious fragrance eccentrics. But in the nineteenth century, the balance of perfume use gradually shifted to women, a newly mobilized customer base (Corbin 260–6).¹⁰ This fluctuation in consumer practices is reflected in two French novels set against a backdrop of evolving cosmetic sales tactics in Paris. Balzac's 1837 *Histoire de la grandeur et de la décadence de César Birotteau* tells the story of a perfume-shop owner who markets scented hair oil to men. Zola's 1883 *Au Bonheur des dames* (translated as *The Ladies' Delight* or *The Ladies' Paradise*, the novel uses the name of the fictional department store as its title) depicts the rise of an unstoppable department-store machine whose labyrinth aisles lure women shoppers in droves.¹¹ The *parfumerie* department at *Bonheur des dames* has been strategically placed near the store's reading room and popular buffet, where its penetrating aromas reach prospective clients throughout the gallery, beckoning them to join the crush of eager hands vying for *Bonheur* speciality soaps. At the centre of stunning displays rests a silver fountain featuring a shepherdess standing in an abundance of flowers. The female shoppers dip their handkerchiefs into the fountain's violet water as they pass (479–80).¹²

Increasingly feminized fragrant products aroused deep ambivalence even as their popularity began to soar.¹³ Although an indicator of luxury and status, too much of the wrong perfume was deemed vulgar, even morally corrupt. 'L'histoire des parfums est, en quelque sorte, l'histoire de la civilisation' ('The

history of perfumes is, in a way, the history of civilization') claims Eugène Rimmel in 1870 (13).¹⁴ Yet it seems that 'advancement' can easily lead to excess and degeneration. Even the *Industrie chimique's* perfume section in the international jury report for the 1900 Exposition Universelle presents progress in perfumery in the context of the rise and decay of a civilizing force (368). Like most perfume manuals of the era, the jury report notes that use of fragrances began with religious rites and ceremonies, in the form of unguents and burned resins – a history embedded in the word perfume/*parfum* (from the Latin *per* and *fumare*).¹⁵ In due course, perfume functioned as an embellishment, notably for women: 'Il constitue un art véritable dans lequel la femme règne en maîtresse' ('It constitutes a true art in which woman is the reigning mistress'; 10). According to the report, all cultures follow this path of development, their perfume use inevitably driving them to excess and abuses (10). The arc of progress in fragrance use inevitably leads to hygienic decadence.

At the end of the century, experts in various domains warn women that no matter how artful, fine or cultivated, the perfume-wearer always hovers perilously close to a brush with excess and a fall from social grace: one must modulate grooming that acts against nature. Although Auguste Debay's *Les Parfums et les fleurs* is not an etiquette manual, its introductory chapter on the history of perfume (in both the 1861 and 1884 editions) urges women to use light perfumes selected with caution (17–18). Baronne Staffe concurs in her popular *Cabinet de Toilette* (1891).¹⁶ Women should perfume their possessions with one innocuous signature scent (297–8). Above all, they should not overdo it ('il ne faut jamais en abuser') (297).

In an understandably droll tone, Count Robert de Montesquiou-Fézensac, not one to shy away from peculiarity,¹⁷ prefaces his 1900 *Pays des aromates*¹⁸ with provocative tales of perfume extremism across the centuries. 'Pénétrons de notre sujet,' he puns (literally, 'let's penetrate ourselves with our subject'; 9), reinforcing the suspect phenomenon of penetration so often attributed to the powers of perfume. Montesquiou's history of perfume includes the widely circulated story of musk-crazed Empress Josephine ('la Folle de musc'). Years after she had left, workers toiling to rid the Malmaison of Josephine's indestructible *sillage* reportedly passed out from the musky animal stench (11–12).¹⁹

In an anecdote commensurate with perfume injection reports, Montesquiou then unveils the contemporary perils of sub-cutaneous facial injections administered by *émailleurs* (literally enamellers) to wrinkled areas of the skin. His description of the result bears an uncanny resemblance to that of facelifts and excessive Botox treatments today.²⁰ Here again, light-hearted anecdotes hint at a more dangerous connection between cosmetics and unhealthy, eccentric behaviours.

Montesquiou may have been familiar with the 1890 publication *Hygiène de la beauté*, in which Dr E. (Ernest) Monin maps out the relationship between physiology, mental health and olfaction, offering examples from Gétry's swooning at the smell of a rose, to the Duchesse de Lamballe's intolerance of the smell of violets, to Empress Josephine's immoderate use of musk and her husband Napoleon's equally inordinate love of eau de cologne.²¹ These accounts of physical and emotional responses to smell culminate in a discussion of the more insidious effects of odours on the nervous system (174–5). Monin cautions the reader to blame not the smells themselves, but rather the out-of-control imaginations and nervous systems of hysterical women and hypochondriacal men with adverse reactions: 'les causes se trouvent plutôt dans la perversion nerveuse de l'individu que dans les propriétés des plantes' ('the causes are found more in the nervous perversion of the individual than in the properties of plants'; 127–8). In 1909 Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault observed an erotic physiological reaction to the smell of perfume among hysterical patients with kleptomania and silk fetishes (*Passion érotique des étoffes chez la femme*).²² One diagnosed hysteric pairs the pleasure of stealing silk to her use of cocaine, morphine, ether and alcohol. She also reports drinking Botot mouth rinse and eau de cologne – primarily to mask the odour of ether on her breath.

According to Clérambault, women with sexual imbalances are particularly susceptible to *synesthésie génitale* (65–68) – sexual arousal via sensorial stimuli, including smells. Since silk was a vehicle for the appreciation of perfume, it is possible that smell played a larger than acknowledged role in this fetish generally associated with the touch and even the sound (a *froufrou* or *cricri*, according to one patient)²³ of silk fabric. Although his case studies reveal an underlying connection between the danger of odour sensitivity and the lure of products marketed to women (dresses and fabrics), Clérambault's observations never focus specifically on cosmetic perfume, nor do his case studies mention perfume injection.

At least one report of perfume injection is substantiated by Dr Antoine Combe, a subscriber to the theory of a naso-genital reflex, that is, a direct link from the nose to the 'genital apparatus' via the olfactory nerve and spinal fluid.²⁴ Combe's 1905 treatise *Influence des Parfums et des odeurs sur les névropathes et les hystériques* opens with the requisite (brief) 'Historique des parfums' from ancient Babylon to modern France. Combe sees perfume's entry into the domain of personal grooming (as opposed to religious ritual) as a trigger for abuse and debauchery, citing examples from Ancient Greece, Rome and Gaul, to Henri III and Madame de Pompadour. The history of perfume has now ended, he claims, with the introduction of synthetics to accelerate production and the widespread availability of fragrant products.

An instant on the grand boulevards of Paris is all it takes to plunge into the *sillage* of overly perfumed high- and low-class women alike (13).

To punctuate his indictment of contemporary perfume practices, Combe comments on the perfume injection fad. He clarifies that though *la violettomanie* is not, as some would have it, ‘all the rage’, he has encountered many women who tried and quickly renounced this form of ‘snobisme’,²⁵ because of a rather prolonged burning sensation left by subcutaneous perfume injections (13–14).²⁶ Combe concludes that injection is hardly the most serious example of contemporary perfume abuse:

Et, de même que nos ancêtres ont fait des orgies de parfums, les sensuels d’aujourd’hui y cherchent de nombreuses jouissances. Nous ne parlons pas des éthéromanes qui se grisent en respirant de l’éther jusqu’à la narcose, mais de ceux qui ‘se saouilent’ [sic] en inhalant des parfums. (14)

And, just as our ancestors made orgies of perfume, today’s sensualists seek all sorts of pleasures in it. We are not talking about ether addicts who intoxicate themselves to the point of unconsciousness by inhaling ether, but of those who ‘get drunk’ by inhaling perfume.

Combe then reports the self-observation kindly offered by a M. X, aged 27 years, for whom 30 grams of *Jicky* (by Guerlain) induced hallucinations:

Après quelques nouvelles inhalations, les objets voisins se transforment – (sensations un peu analogues à celles que fait éprouver le haschich) – et semblent entrer dans le monde des rêves. Je me souviens, en particulier, d’un abat-jour qui me semble être la coupole des Invalides. (14)

After a few more inhalations, neighbouring objects transform – (sensations analogous to those caused by hashish) – and seem to enter into the world of dreams. I remember in particular a lampshade that seem to me to be the dome of the Invalides.

The selection of *Jicky* for this experiment in perfume huffing seems far from arbitrary. Created in 1889, Aimé Guerlain’s groundbreaking, daringly unnatural fragrance, does not recreate the scent of an identifiable flower or bouquet. Its blend of multiple synthetic and natural ingredients (including civet) renders the composition abstract rather than mimetic. *Jicky* is the sort of perfume made possible by what Combe describes as an industry once based on flowers, now taken over by chemists and synthetic processes (13).²⁷

Nineteenth-century studies of neurology and physiology often focus on olfactory disorders, hypnosis via fragrance and reactions to smells of all kinds, including perfume.²⁸ As seen in his account of *Jicky* abuse, Combe further blends scientific inquiry and material culture by identifying the brand names of perfumes administered in studies of hysterical patients,

products that would have been sold in apothecary shops and department stores throughout Paris: 'Violette (Viville, Paris) [...] *Peau d'Espagne* (Viville)' (45). In setting up his studies, Combe makes no taxonomical distinction between the odours of perfume and the more noxious substances he administers: *L'Héliotrope* and *Trèfle azuré* (by Auber, Paris), chloroform, and above all, ether; all 'produisent une crise à la première ou à la seconde inhalation' ('produce a fit at the first or second inhalation'; 45). Similarly, when experimenting on hysterics with odour sensitivities, Combe pays particular attention to subgroups of cosmetic perfume. Violet, heliotrope, white lilac and *Peau d'Espagne* had no effect on one patient but a few whiffs of *Chypre*²⁹ threw her into a hypnotic trance (61–2). These product names and fashionable scents are reminders of the commodity status of perfume its availability and recognizable presence. Like Huysmans's lengthy passages on perfume in *À Rebours*, which mention contemporary perfumers by name and repurpose information from perfume manuals,³⁰ Combe's medical writing is suffused with the history and marketing of perfume.

The case of *Chérie*

Literary works of the late nineteenth century frequently feature characters who demonstrate a particularly attuned sense of smell, often accompanied by deep connections to perfume. Narrative interventions, some lengthy, some brief, further highlight the primacy of smell perception and odourous materials. Max Nordau seizes upon this 'unhealthy predominance of the sensations of smell' (502) in his diatribe against various modern writers (naturalists, symbolists and decadents), citing Baudelaire, Goncourt, Huysmans and Zola as chief offenders. Nordau in fact offers a passage from Goncourt's *La Faustin* (1882) to illustrate that such writers linger on 'bad odours,' particularly the smell of women and their skin (501). Yet Nordau does not examine the Goncourt novel that rivals Huysmans's *À Rebours* in its portrayal of perfume fervour.³¹ Edmond de Goncourt fictionalized the etiology of fragrance-enhanced hysteria in his relatively unnoticed *Chérie* (1884), the 'case study' (his words) of a hysterical woman whose autoerotic pleasure is stimulated by perfume.

Although *Chérie* was a success at the time of publication,³² the novel was nearly forgotten in the twentieth century. Published the same year, Huysmans's *À Rebours* has emerged as an emblematic example of decadent fiction, recognized for its detailed attention to olfaction and perfume, particularly in chapter 10. Suffering from olfactory hallucinations, Des Esseintes reflects upon his acquired knowledge of everything pertaining to the history, production and blending of perfume. The heady vapours emanating from his

collection's countless open bottles, mingled with the weight of memories and a creeping aroma of imagined frangipani, finally cause him to pass out.

Like *Des Esseintes*, *Chérie* shows an unusual fascination with smelling, wearing, and acquiring perfume. But *Des Esseintes* is characterized as an overzealous yet learned connoisseur capable of arranging his collection by category, of orchestrating his blends to harmonize with the rhythms of Baudelaire's poetry. In contrast, *Chérie's* messy, erotic obsession embodies the physicality, the smell and the tactility of perfume – its liquidity, its tangible presence on fabric, paper and skin. Both books dramatize the concept of degeneration that distinguishes these works, stylistically and theoretically, from earlier, related naturalist novels by the same authors.³³ *Des Esseintes* has lost his sexual appetite. *Chérie* dies a virgin. Yet *Des Esseintes* methodically manages, stages, even choreographs his physical and social withdrawal. The architecture of *À Rebours*, a series of vignettes divided into neatly framed chapters, contributes to a representation of *Des Esseintes's* eccentricities as carefully, consciously installed works of art. In contrast, *Chérie's* one hundred and five chapters vary radically in length and tone.³⁴ Their loose, uneven, unframed construction mimics the fluctuation of *Chérie's* hysterical symptoms, her excess and volatility.

Goncourt in fact cultivated the structural imbalance of the novel *Chérie*. After the death of his brother Jules, Edmond went on to write four more novels,³⁵ rejecting by increments the naturalist model for which, as Jules had predicted, the two would be remembered. Of these four works, *Chérie* – 'pauvre dernier volume du dernier Goncourt' ('poor/pathetic last novel of the last Goncourt'; xiii) (as Edmond himself described it) – is probably the most unexpected (it deals with a wealthy heroine), and the most experimental (it has been called a novel without a plot).³⁶ This is no accident. Finding that novels rich in action and plot twists were exhausted early in the century by the likes of Soulié and Sue (iii), Goncourt advocates in the preface to *Chérie* a constant rebirth of genre, through revolutionary renovation and negation of the status quo.³⁷ This modern novel would be a work without adventures, without intrigue and without base amusements (iv).

Chérie lives up to the claims of its preface,³⁸ going against the grain of naturalism by blending non-fiction narrative strategies with representations of decadent taste and practices. Literary reinvention meets documentary attention, particularly in the extensive passages on fragrance. *Chérie's* devotion to perfume and Goncourt's narrative interventions on the subject suggest that he, in the manner of his contemporaries Huysmans and Montesquiou, did significant research in the apothecaries and perfume manuals of his day, even recycling the Malmaison anecdote (300)³⁹ we have seen in Monin and Montesquiou.

Like Huysmans, Goncourt fills his pages with lists of perfume ingredients (298–9), interrupting the story at hand with detailed information on the social history and production of perfume, featuring the names of popular contemporary blends whose names could be read at a glance in magazine ads of the era. Chérie develops a taste for triple-odour extracts ‘à baptême anglais’: *Kiss Me Quick*, – *Lily of the Valley*, – *New Mown Hay* (the list goes on), as well as the more complex ‘bouquet de l’Impératrice Eugénie’. Echoing some concerns about multiple notes in perfumes voiced by medical doctors and etiquette specialists of the era, the narrator emphasizes that Chérie selects triple blends and bouquets – rather than less complicated, single-note fragrances – which envelop her in a ‘floating blend’ of tuberose, orange flower, jasmine, vetiver, opopanax, violet, Tonka bean, ambergris, sandalwood, bergamot, neroli, rosemary, benzoin, verveine and patchouli (299).⁴⁰ She perfumes her clothing, skin and hair with the nauseatingly strong vegetal and animalic notes (298; see note 19); like the Empress Josephine, she is crazy for musk (301). Clearly, Chérie has not followed the advice of Madame Celnart, Baronne Staffe or the other dispensers of hygiene and etiquette circulated at the time.

Chérie’s inclusion of contemporary perfume names and industry jargon blurs fact and fiction in the name of an idiosyncratic documentary truth. Following a call for contributions embedded in the preface to his 1882 novel *La Faustin*, Goncourt constructs his heroine’s ‘monographie de jeune fille’,⁴¹ with a carefully manipulated (and much-embellished) compilation of memoirs from at least four real women, none of whom seems to have been responsible for the passages on perfume.⁴² The mosaic-like narrative, obviously and intentionally free of plot twists, offers episodes and commentary on the life of Chérie Haudancourt, granddaughter of a minister of justice. Chérie veers towards hysteria and untimely death, destined by heredity but also nurtured by a self-sabotaged libido. In an interview, Goncourt explained that Chérie is hysterical by her strong, unsatisfied desires (Cabanès, ‘La Documentation dans le roman des Goncourt’, 454). Although it is true Chérie does not channel her sexual energy into marriage, she indeed finds other, less conventional outlets.

Although the novel lacks a recognizable story arc, episodes lead up to chapters 38–42, which deal with Chérie’s young womanhood, culminating in her first menstruation (at the end of chapter 41 and beginning of 42). This passage earned Huysmans’s praise and rivalled an episode by Zola on the same subject.⁴³ Five conspicuous lines of uninterrupted elliptical marks fall between general commentary on the onset of menstruation (a frightening event that, according to the narrator, usually takes place in the night; 210), and Chérie’s internal monologue (occurring at her bedside in the morning) in reaction to her own presumably similar experience (211) (*Figure 2*). The

en elle, avivent et précipitent la formation de la femme, ainsi que la tiédeur humide d'une serre-chaude pousse la floraison d'une fleur.

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Un sommeil trouble où, parmi les cauchemars, ont lieu la sourde et tourmentante élaboration de la femme dans la jeune fille, le détournement du plus pur de ses veines pour les fonctions de la maternité, le chaud éveil d'un organisme encore végétant : c'est le sommeil, pendant plusieurs mois, des vierges impubères, jusqu'à la nuit de fièvre, où elles se réveillent dans la terreur de ce sang inattendu.

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— Bien sûr, — se disait Chérie, assise le matin sur la petite chaise au pied de son lit, dans laquelle autrefois, tout enfant, elle man-

Figure 2: From Edmond de Goncourt's 1884 *Chérie*. Author's copy.

prominent ellipsis draws attention to the unsaid – the absent description of the onset of menses. The series of dots also mark the page itself, evoking visually the blood that will not be described in words. In a sense, the physical page of the book stands in for the fabric or skin on which Chérie most likely discovered her blood.

Here begins a downward spiral, accelerated by Chérie's solitary sexual awakening, her love of fiction and her attachment to perfume. At the age of fourteen, Chérie develops a taste for novels. She takes to sneaking downstairs at night to read in the dark, 'sollicitée par une curiosité malsaine de vierge' ('solicited by an unhealthy virgin's curiosity'; 148). Gustave Flaubert wrote against the grain of romantic aesthetics in *Madame Bovary*, underscoring his act of literary rebellion in the description of Emma's reading practices and casting Emma as a would-be romantic heroine in a realist novel. Goncourt takes a similar tack when he in turn writes against the naturalist novel, arming his own Second-Empire heroine with a book from Emma's collection, Bernardin de St. Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*. But unlike Emma, Chérie associates her reading with transgression:

Elle lisait, du feu monté aux joues, le cœur lui battant plus vite qu'à ordinaire, et prenant tout à coup d'adorables airs du coupable, quand on la surprenait dans la lecture, cependant autorisée, du livre de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. (150)

She would read, her cheeks ablaze, her heart beating more quickly than usual, and suddenly taking on adorable airs of guilt, when she was caught in the nonetheless sanctioned reading of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's book.

One of the obvious differences between Emma's and Chérie's identification with *Paul et Virginie* is the latter's own eroticization of the book. Her erotic response to reading (enhanced by her narrator's eroticized, teasingly structured description of that response), is made possible by liberal application of perfume not to her body or linens but to the pages of the book:

L'émotion intimement heureuse que la jeune fille éprouvait de la lecture de *Paul et Virginie*, ainsi que d'autres livres honnêtement amoureux, pour la faire plus complète, plus intense, plus entrante avant dans tout son être, devinerait-on jamais ce qu'elle avait imaginé? Le livre qu'elle lisait, elle le trempait, elle le plongeait dans des eaux de senteur, et l'histoire d'amour arrivait à son imagination, à ses sens, par les pages toutes mouillées, tout humides de parfums liquéfiés. (150–1)

The intimately happy emotion that the young woman would experience in reading *Paul et Virginie*, as well as other honourable love stories, to make it more complete, more intense, more penetrating in her whole being, can you guess what she thought up? The book that she was reading, she would

drench it, she would drown it in scented waters, and the love story would reach her imagination, her senses, via these pages, all wet, all damp with liquefied perfumes.

The porous, perfumed pages facilitate penetration of Chérie's mind and body through dangerous reading.⁴⁴ Moreover, Chérie revises this formerly 'honourable' book by 'writing' not in ink, but in her own perfume. She saturates the pages as she might dip a handkerchief in violet water and, in so doing, writes into the book her signature scent. Earlier, elliptical marks on the printed page placed ink where one might imagine blood. This later passage again suggests a parallel between the body and the page. The emphatic and drawn-out description of perfume's wetness reads metonymically as an evocation of the body's natural, damp secretions (sweat, vaginal fluid). Fabricated perfume gradually mingles with and 'displaces' natural fluids in this novel whose action dramatizes a move away from nature (and naturalism) and towards decadence.

Attention to smell in French fiction is often associated with the naturalist or realist aesthetic that produced evocations of muck, stench, death, disease and debris (along with perfume) in literary texts. It is not surprising, in the light of this smelly legacy, that in his preface to *Les Frères Zemganno*, Goncourt articulated his move against naturalism in terms of odour: 'Le Réalisme, pour user du mot bête, [...] n'a pas en effet l'unique mission de décrier ce qui est bas, ce qui est répugnant, ce qui pue; il est venu au monde aussi, lui, pour définir dans de l'écriture *artiste*, ce qui est élevé, ce qui est joli, ce qui sent bon [...]' ('The sole mission of Realism, to use this stupid term, [...] is not to decry what is base, what is repugnant, what stinks; it came into the world, too, to define in *artistic* writing, what is elevated, what is pretty, what smells good [...]'; viii). By embedding *Paul et Virginie* within *Chérie*, Goncourt reinforces his objective – to create a new kind of fiction – and accentuates a novelistic evolution with touchstones at 1787, 1857 and now 1884. The episode marks, in liquid fragrance, the writer's deliberate alteration of what had become naturalist norms. Goncourt's literary project involves a conscious jettisoning of novelistic baggage – not just earlier romantic novels, but also a gritty brand of realism attributed to Flaubert and to the Goncourt brothers themselves. When Chérie drenches the pages of *Paul et Virginie* in perfume, she performs an act of hybrid reading closely related to Goncourt's hybrid writing. She renders romantic pages naturalist by giving them odour, while embellishing them with the artificial accessory of choice: perfume. Chérie's strange obsession with perfume, an over-determined awareness, an indulgence, perhaps a toxic addiction, marks a place where body and page co-mingle, where natural and unnatural desires converge, and where Goncourt articulates his new aesthetics against those of the past.

By vicariously dousing the pages of *Paul et Virginie*, and similarly marking his own pages with enumerated perfume materials (especially 298–9), Goncourt denounces, degrades, denaturalizes and rebrands the novel. The earlier substitution of ink for blood seems to foreshadow Chérie's act of drenching her book's pages with the fabricated, partially synthesized odours of perfume. Chérie's dramatization of Goncourt's literary insurgence also functions as a pivotal episode in Chérie's life story.⁴⁵ Perfume addiction is crucial to the documentation of her rapid psychological and physical decline:⁴⁶

Respirer dans l'atmosphère des exhalaisons entêtantes, dans une sorte d'embaumement écœurant de l'air, c'était devenu, pour Chérie, une habitude, une despotique habitude, et quand elle ne l'avait pas, cette atmosphère *ambrosiaque*, il manquait à sa vie quelque chose; elle ressemblait à un fumeur privé de fumer [...]

A sentir le mouchoir trempé de ces bouquets, Chérie éprouvait du bonheur ayant quelque chose d'un très léger spasme. Il se faisait une détente de ses nerfs, une douce résolution de son moi, une sorte de contentement chatouilleux, un engourdissement à la fois jouisseur et un peu léthargique de son corps duquel, très souvent oublieuse des gens qui se trouvaient autour d'elle, Chérie se soulevait, pour aspirer de nouveau la senteur pleines narines, frénétiquement, dans un renversement du buste où sa tête s'en allait un rien en arrière, avec des yeux se fermant de plaisir. (298–9)

Breathing in the atmosphere of heady exhalations, in a sort of nauseating embalming of the air, had become for Chérie, a habit, a despotic habit, and when she did not have it, this *ambrosial* atmosphere, something was missing from her life; she was like a smoker deprived of smoking [...]

By smelling her handkerchief soaked in bouquets, Chérie experienced happiness having something like a light spasm. There was a relaxing of her nerves, a gentle resolution of her self, a sort of ticklish contentment, a torpor in her body that was at once sensual and a little lethargic, out of which, very often forgetting the people around her, Chérie would get up, to breath in deeply through her nostrils a new aroma, throwing back her chest with an ever so slight tilt of the head, with her eyes closed in pleasure.

Chérie's erotic reaction to perfume echoes naso-genital reflex theories and the symptoms of synaesthesia associated with hysteria in medical writing. Perfume enables and enhances her withdrawal from society and facilitates her entry into a toxic, private world of sensual pleasure. This may explain why perfume (oddly) goes unmentioned in the many passages devoted to Chérie's attention to clothing, accessories and toilette in preparation for social gatherings.⁴⁷ For Chérie, fragrance functions not in social ritual, but in solitary pleasure eventually reserved for the bedroom:

Maintenant, tous les matins, à son premier réveil, la jeune fille se levait, et, encore endormie, d'une main cherchant à tâtons, atteignait un vaporisateur, et se mettait à insuffler l'intérieur de son lit de la senteur de l'héliotrope blanc.

Puis, aussitôt, elle se refourrait entre les draps parfumés, prenant soin de les ouvrir le moins possible. Et, la tête enfoncée sous la couverture jusqu'aux yeux, elle prenait une jouissance indicible à se sentir pénétrée, caressée, rafraîchie par l'humidité odorante de la vaporisation dans laquelle il lui semblait, son être encore mal éveillé, à demi s'évanouir, s'en aller, lui aussi, comme s'il était volatilisé, en parfum et en bonne odeur.

A la fin elle se rendormait, trouvant une volupté dans un sommeil où il y avait un peu d'ivresse cérébrale et un rien d'asphyxie. (301–2)

Now, each morning, upon awakening, the young woman would get up, and, still drowsy, groping, would reach for a vaporizer, and would begin imbuing her bed with white heliotrope.

Immediately after, she would wrap herself in the perfumed sheets, taking care to move as little as possible. And, her head buried under the covers up to her eyes, she experienced inexplicable pleasure in feeling penetrated, caressed, refreshed by the fragrant dampness of the vaporization in which, it seemed to her, still not quite awake, half fainting, her very being itself was taking flight, it too, as if it had been volatized in fragrance, in good odour.

After that, she would fall asleep again, finding voluptuousness in a sleep where there was a bit of cerebral inebriation and a dash of asphyxiation.

Like the saturated pages of *Paul et Virginie*, the scented sheets provide a delivery system for perfume. They also facilitate its 'unwholesome' contact with the skin.

Chérie's closing chapter takes the form of an obituary notice, with no narrative commentary and no cause of death reported – though suicide has been clearly foreshadowed in her final line of dialogue: 'Adieu! – faisait Chérie, appuyant sur le mot' ('Farewell! – said Chérie, emphasizing the word'; 354). Perfume certainly plays a key role in the simultaneous degeneration of the naturalist novel and of its doomed protagonist. Death by perfume may well have been the decadent fate of Chérie, as it was of Goncourt's naturalism.

The Lance-parfum Rodo

A poster produced to mass-market perfume would seem by nature and purpose antithetical to the decadent poetics of Goncourt's post-naturalist novel. Likewise, Alphonse Mucha's fluid style and carefully balanced compositions (often considered the foundation of Art Nouveau, though Mucha

himself did not espouse the term)⁴⁸ hardly invoke the deliberate disharmony of *Chérie*'s narrative forms. Yet the visual interpretation of solitary perfume bliss in Alphonse Mucha's Lance-parfum Rodo (1896)⁴⁹ could serve as an illustration for *Chérie*. The poster has nearly vanished from chronicles of the artist's life and work.⁵⁰ The catalogue for the first public exhibition of Ivan Lendl's vast Mucha collection (2013) offers a rather vague description of the Rodo: 'Mucha's beauteous maiden advertises a perfume spray – seemingly something of a novelty at the time, as the fact that the container dispenses the fragrance 'automatically' is stressed in the copy' (Rennert and Srp 112). What made the Rodo new and automatic? (Figure 3)

The Rodo composition unfolds around a central female figure, her head doubly haloed in radiating tresses against a rounded architectural backdrop. In a number of Mucha's posters (for *Job* cigarettes in 1896 and 1898; for *La Trappistine* liqueur and *Chocolat idéal* in 1897), the model's handling of the object suggests the tactile power and enjoyment of owning it (see the cover illustration for *La Plume* 1 August 1897). Evocation of the product's palpability extends to its seemingly tangible, decorative emanations as well – substances that could engulf the user, and that could be physically consumed (inhaled, ingested or absorbed by the hair and skin): smoke, liquid, vapour. Stylized emissions traverse, entwine or harmonize with the lines of the woman's body and gestures, reinforcing the play of circle-and-line interaction characteristic of Mucha's work,⁵¹ and creating reciprocal infiltrations of the body by the product, the product by the body.

The Rodo advertisement illustrates speedy delivery of fragrance in a blade-like jet spray. The substance ejected by the Lance-parfum (literally a perfume thrower/flinger/launcher) darts at an angle in front of the woman's chest, into the rumpled but unsullied white cloth in her left hand (perhaps a handkerchief). Like *Chérie*'s sheets, or the pages of her books, the fabric in the model's hand now bears the perceptible yet invisible signature of the woman's perfume. Draped over the advertisement copy below, the fabric draws attention to the words it justifies: 'Le Rodo Automatiquement Parfume et Rafrâichit sans mouiller ni tacher. SE VEND PARTOUT' ('The 'Rodo' automatically perfumes and refreshes without dampening or staining. SOLD EVERYWHERE').

The woman's eyes are directed towards, though not quite focused upon, the jet of perfume, leaving the viewer outside of a closed compositional circle that isolates the model and her perfume in a moment of everyday decadence. She perceives the perfume's trajectory with lips sealed and eyes half shut, her vague glance leading as much towards her nose as towards the Rodo or its perfume spray. In fact only the nostrils, clearly visible, open her face to the world, her body to perfume. They contribute visually, and by association, to a representation of olfactory experience.⁵²



Figure 3: Alphonse Mucha, Lance-Parfum Rodo (Paris: F. Champenois, 1896).
The Mucha Foundation.

The woman's overt role in the composition is to demonstrate how the Rodo works, yet the *mise en scène* evokes pleasures beyond the joy of tidy perfume spritzing. A precursor to women in fragrance advertisements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, she conveys in both face and body, a tension between surrender and control, enhanced by the suggestion of sensorial and sensual delight.⁵³ While the hands show steady manoeuvring – aiming, holding (or perhaps squeezing) the Rodo and deftly catching its emissions – the soft, loose clothing and hair indicate *négligé* and abandon. In contrast to the purposeful movement of the hands (muscles engaged, the finger of the right hand daintily arched),⁵⁴ the nearly blank facial expression and heavy-headedness imply that operation of the Rodo is so simple it can be performed inattentively, unconsciously or in your sleep.

The iconic *femme Mucha* is known for her flowing mane, often capped in flowers or a bandeau, its lush tendrils unfurled in harmony with organic and architectural background elements. Although the tousled tresses of this bare-headed woman (*en cheveux*) may at first appear to be cropped, they have most likely escaped from a hidden ribbon or chignon, the once crimped side curls now slackened. Unruly 'bed head' contributes to the portrayal of perfume application as an intimate indulgence.⁵⁵ The suggestive shape of the Rodo itself – its handling and its action, too – enhance this portrait of solitary, erotic perfume bliss. While perfume application may be a clean business (no wet spots, no stains), it can also lead to secret, unwholesome pleasures and to unhealthy self-dispossession.

The poster serves as a reminder of how cosmetic fragrance was used and perceived in the late nineteenth century. Perfume was becoming more popular and easier to buy. The three-pack container on the left of the poster (reminiscent of travel sprays and *recharges* packs today) conveys practicality and portability that may connect the neologism *Rodo* (which reads as a reversal of *odor*, and sounds like a play on *robot*) to the verb *rôder* (to wander, to roam – but also to loiter, to lurk) (*Figure 4*). The promise to provide dry, invisible scent is significant, since fragrance was applied to linens.⁵⁶ It is difficult to imagine, though, that the ample spray depicted would not have left some sort of temporary trace on white fabric.

While the advertisement claims that the Lance-parfum is sold everywhere, a search through histories of French perfume shows the Rodo device to be as elusive and resistant to commentary as the poster itself.⁵⁷ This may be because the Lance-parfum was as much a pharmaceutical product as a cosmetic. Patented in 1897⁵⁸ by chemical manufacturer the Société Chimique des Usines du Rhône (perhaps another link to the Rodo name), the Lance-parfum Rodo was the serendipitous reincarnation of an ethyl chloride dispenser called Kélène.⁵⁹ Records show ethyl chloride in surgical use as far back as 1831,



Figure 4: The Lance-parfum Rodo in original packaging. The Mucha Foundation.

but it was not until the 1880s that it was commonly administered, probably owing to previous difficulties experienced in packaging a volatile substance that vaporizes at room temperature. Enter the 'Lance chlorure d'ethyle', which preserved ether in a liquid state until the seal was broken. The tubes, sometimes sold in multi-packs like the eventual perfume, allowed medical doctors to store and transport small doses of the anaesthesia.⁶⁰ The notion of using this appliance to propel perfume came by accident. The Société Chimique des Usines du Rhône manufactured both pharmaceuticals and synthetic perfume ingredients.⁶¹ Violet fragrance spilled into ethyl chloride and an idea was born. Like its medical prototype, the Lance-parfum was a projection system for (now perfumed) ethyl chloride released automatically in a jet when the seal was broken: ethyl chloride meets warm air; liquid becomes vapour – hence the promise of dry, unstained, but scented fabric.

The device was heavily marketed at the Carnival in Rio de Janeiro, where users reportedly suffered intoxication, hallucination and cardiac trouble. Some perished. Because of further reported deaths related to Lance-parfum abuse, the product was finally outlawed in the 1960s. A 1911 trade manual for perfumers summarizes the chemistry and mechanics of generic *lances-parfums*. The author highlights the refreshing sensation produced by solvents including ethyl chloride but also deems the gadgets dangerous because they are highly flammable ('Recettes et Procédés Utiles'107–8). Perhaps the contents of the Rodo have influenced the artist or even the model who languorously portrays the everyday decadence of inhaling (and presumably exhaling) fragrant anaesthesia, as her skin and clothing remain dry and unstained.

Like the post-realist *Chérie*, and the fragrance-drenched pages of *Paul et Virginie*, the otherwise harmonious and decorative image of the Rodo user is transformed by a woman's decadent perfume. The Mucha poster and the Goncourt novel attest to an uneasy titillation provoked by perceived moral and hygienic risks of perfuming the woman's body. In the light of medical writings on hysteria and popular accounts of eccentric perfuming, it is plausible that even if ethyl chloride and perfume did not mix before the birth of the Rodo and similar *lances-parfums*, perfume sniffing, ether drinking and even morphine shooting would have been seen as comparably noxious perversions.⁶² Swooning on ethyl-chloride perfumes and *Jicky* huffing may not have been widespread practices in France. Combe's loosely substantiated evidence suggests that many reports of perfume injection emerged from what Eugen Weber called the 'showy perversity' (36) of a fashionable few, quickly sensationalized in the popular press.⁶³ Nonetheless, fascination with French fragrance shooters reflects a changing culture of perfume in the nineteenth century, made possible by a convergence of aesthetic innovation, marketing trends and medical discourse.

Alterations of everyday practices are echoed in a range of mutually reinforcing discourses revealing a rapidly changing culture of smell (and more specifically, of perfume) in nineteenth-century France which, though unnamed, could not be ignored.⁶⁴ The cases of *Chérie* and the Rodo demonstrate that reading highly stylized literary and visual texts in relation to what David Howes has called 'an ever-shifting construction of the sensorium' (xi) can expand understanding of the works themselves and how they inevitably reflect, influence, form, and inform one another. This is especially significant for readers of modern French literature. While the rise of commercial perfumery in France coincides with a proliferation of novels and poetry featuring fragrance and odour perception, relatively little critical attention has been accorded to this connection. Writers from Balzac to Baudelaire to Proust have been recognized for their attention to odour, memory and mind-body connections. Reading such works through the sensory filter of modern, feminized, perfume culture discloses the reciprocal permeability of fiction and non-fiction texts, images and daily rituals, and suggests the presence of women where they may have been otherwise overlooked.

Notes

- 1 See also 'Her Point of View' (1891); 'Injecting Perfume into the Blood' (1891); 'Injections of Perfume', *The New York Times* (1898) and 'Injections of Perfume', *The Washington Post* (1898) (both attributed to *the London Chronicle*); 'Perfume Whim is Yankee Fad' (1912).
- 2 Eugen Weber discusses the rise of smoking, drinking and drug use (tobacco, opium, morphine, ether) in the second chapter of *France: Fin de Siècle* (27–50).
- 3 David S. Barnes tracks the gradual acceptance of germ theory in nineteenth century France in *The Great Stink of Paris and the Nineteenth-Century Struggle against Filth and Germs*.
- 4 In chapters 13–15 of *Le Propre et le sale*, Vigarello recounts changes in attitude regarding the function of skin and its relation to water and disease, emphasizing that prevailing theories were not always reflected in daily practice. See also Corbin (260–6).
- 5 In the 1882 edition of *Le Livre des parfums* (as in the 1870 edition, 19–20) Rimmel cites an article published 'a while ago' that hypothesizes that the odour of flowers is anti-pestilential: '*Pourquoi le PARFUM ne serait-il pas le contre-poison du miasme?*' [...] 'Il faut prouver que le parfum n'est pas destiné seulement à masquer l'odeur désagréable du miasme, mais à le réduire radicalement, et qu'il est non un objet de luxe, mais un objet d'utilité et un des vrais gardiens de la santé' ('Why would PERFUME not be an antidote to miasma? [...] One needs to prove that perfume is not destined only to mask disagreeable odour, but to reduce it radically, and that it is not a luxury object, but an object of use and one of the true guardians of health') (see 21–23).

- 6 On the dangers of perfume drinking, see 'New Fad in Drinking: Perfume Habit is the Latest form of Dipsomania' (1899) and 'Perfume in Liquor: Hysterical Woman Taken to Receiving Room is Esthetic in her Indulgence' (1910). Clérambault also mentions that one of his patients with erotic silk fetishes sometimes drank eau de cologne, among other things (ether, rum, white wine, mouth-wash) (50).
- 7 See full volumes by Beizer, Ender, Evans, Finn, Matlock, and Mesch.
- 8 In his study of Rachilde and *fin-de-siècle* writing, Michael Finn characterizes a confluence of disparate discourses as sharing a 'mutual permeability' (13). I find this an appropriate and evocative term for the study of perfume culture as well. For further discussion of the poetics of perfume and the olfactory in French literature (Baudelaire in particular) see Krueger 'The Scent Trail of "Une Charogne"', and 'Flâneur Smellscapes in *Le Spleen de Paris*'.
- 9 Synthetic odour chemicals were used as early as 1837 (benzaldehyde), and drove trends in popular fragrances across the century. For example, coumarin (1868) is often described as the scent of new-mown hay. Quinolines (1880) suggest smoke and leather. Ionone offers a violet note (1893). See Stamelman's detailed discussion of the use of synthetics in specific perfumes of the nineteenth century (96–99), as well as Le Guérier's chapter 'Vers la parfumerie industrielle' in *Le Parfum* (especially 181–90).
- 10 Elisabeth de Feydeau discusses the history of men and perfume culture (practices, advice, attitudes, gender-focused and unisex marketing), from seductive uses mentioned in the Bible, to the nineteenth-century Dandy who cultivated a perfume aesthetic (and his bourgeois counterpart who did not), to twentieth-century trends in sports perfumes and the recent popularization of oud fragrances by Yves Saint Laurent (featured in the 2002 *M7*) and niche houses like Kilian (1027; 226–66).
- 11 Zola based his fictional department store on the Bon Marché (1838) and the Grands Magasins du Louvre (1855). The character Grognet, who owns a small perfume shop, figures among the final victims of a neighbourhood cleansing ('nettoyage', 428) attributed in the novel to the rapid expansion of large department stores which brutally destroyed small businesses.
- 12 On a larger scale, a fountain whose waters cascaded over natural flowers and plants would later dazzle visitors to the French perfume section at the 1900 World's Fair (Piver, 1900). The *Paris Exposition, 1900: Guide Pratique du visiteur de Paris et de l'exposition* emphasizes the luxurious decor of the perfume pavilions, the grace and delicacy of both the products and the clients, and its unique, utterly feminine style (280). The exhibit owed its distinct appeal in part to walls adorned with decorative depictions of women symbolizing flowers (Piver, 5–6).
- 13 On the expansion of perfume-making from a craft to an industry see Stamelman (90–9). Corbin discusses the rapid growth of the perfume industry under Napoléon III (289).
- 14 Eugene Rimmel's *Le Livre des parfums* offers examples of this approach to

- telling the history of perfume as a history of civilization. Although outdated (he has a chapter on 'La toilette chez les sauvages', for example), his influential text is cited and paraphrased well into the twenty-first century. Elisabeth de Feydeau's 2011 *Les Parfums* begins with an updated, more culturally sensitive articulation of this idea: 'Raconter l'histoire des parfums, c'est dérouler toute l'histoire de l'humanité' ('To tell the story of perfumes is to unfold the entire history of humanity'; 3).
- 15 For a history of the word *parfum* and its changing usage see Gobet and Le Gall (2011). The entire book is dedicated to the word *parfum* and its derivatives, and to the naming of perfumes.
 - 16 Blanche-Augustine-Angèle Soyer (1843–1911) wrote dozens of popular etiquette manuals and how-to books (on fashion, manners, letter-writing, how to find love) under the pen name Baronne Staffe.
 - 17 Montesquiou is said to have inspired two eccentric fictional characters, Des Esseintes in *À Rebours* and the Baron de Charlus in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. See Stamelman's sub-chapter on Montesquiou and perfume (146–51).
 - 18 In 1900 Montesquiou published both *Pays des aromates* and *Musée rétrospective de la classe 90: Parfumerie*. They contain much of the same material, with differences in the first section.
 - 19 The term *note animale* is still used in perfumery, although the materials themselves are now usually synthetic. The animal note in perfumery is often described as smelling of a horse stable or a barn yard. Use of natural animal products (traditionally ambergris, castoreum, civet and musk) in perfumery today is for the most part banned or at very least highly regulated (see de Guérier *Le Parfum* [263–70] on the use of animal products in perfume). In the nineteenth century, however, animals were hunted for the perfume materials they supplied. In Rimmel's day, the gland in the musk deer was sold with fur and tail attached to assure authenticity. Derived from an excretory gland, musk is indeed one of the strongest and most tenacious perfume notes, brutally pungent and distinctly 'animalic' in its raw state. According to Rimmel, the raw stench of musk was so strong, that Chinese hunters had to cover their own noses and mouths to prevent hemorrhaging as they extracted the glands (247-51). Yet in small doses, musk accentuates less assertive fragrance notes, amplifying both the intensity and longevity of the entire blend.
 - 20 As Montesquiou describes it: 'Il s'agit d'injections sous-cutanées de substances ayant pour effet de tender la peau et d'empêcher la ride. Mais il en résulte pour le visage, un aspect figé, morbide, voire macabre, un air de masque au sourire interdit, désormais privé d'expression' ('It's about sub-cutaneous injections of substances having the effect of stretching the skin and preventing wrinkles. But as a result the face has a frozen, morbid, even macabre appearance, the look of a mask forbidden to smile, henceforth deprived of expression'; 21–22).
 - 21 Montesquiou's anecdotes about the history of perfume echo Debay and Monin, who do not figure in the 'Catalogue des livres' published in Montesquiou's

- two volumes related to the 1900 Paris World's Fair. The stories were so often recounted, however, that it is likely they show up in at least a few of the 111 books listed there, or in some of the 24 volumes on flowers, perfumes and gardens mentioned in the catalogue of Montesquiou's personal library (Bertrand 802).
- 22 See Peta Allen Shera's analysis of Clérambault's studies in Cryle and Downing's special 2009 issue of the *Journal of Sexuality*.
- 23 Clérambault uses the verb *crier* (to cry [out]), to identify the sound of silk. In 1910, forty-nine-year-old Marie D. explains, 'La masturbation à elle seule ne me fait pas grand plaisir, mais je la complète en pensant au chatolement et au bruit de la soie' ('Masturbation on its own does not give me great pleasure, but I supplement it by thinking of the shimmer and the sound of silk'; 105).
- 24 On naso-genital reflex see Combe (46–47), and Harrington and Rosario (1992), who also offer a detailed account of olfaction in medical thinking in the nineteenth century, including pervasive theories of olfaction in relation to evolution, nasal reflex neuroses, olfactory and neurological disorders, smell and brain function, and olfaction and sexual deviance. Annick Le Guérer studies the importance of odour and the nose in the history of psychology in 'Le Nez d'Emma', and on smell and civilization in *Scent*, especially chapter 8 (188–93).
- 25 Snobbery is a characteristic of degeneration according to Nordau (5).
- 26 Combe quotes in full an anecdote from a humour column entitled 'Les gaietés de la médecine,' published in *Le Mouvement thérapeutique et médical* (1 June 1897), a monthly trade paper for practitioners edited by Dr E. (seemingly the same Dr E. Monin who wrote more than a dozen hygiene manuals, including *Hygiène de la beauté* [discussed earlier], and *Les Odeurs du corps humain*) (13). In 1912, the *Los Angeles Times* printed a brief story that traces the origins of the Parisian injection trend to a 'clever and popular' American society woman, Mrs 'Bobby' McCreary, who was living in Paris. See 'Perfume Whim is Yankee Fad: My Lady Uses Hypodermic Needle to Scent Herself'.
- 27 *Jicky* was marketed to both men and women. It was and still is considered revolutionary and modern. *Jicky* is the oldest perfume in continuous production today, though the formula has inevitably morphed over the years, due in part to evolving industry standards. On the history and reception of *Jicky* see de Feydeau (948–9), Fellous (36–64), Gobet and le Gall (117) and Stamelman (184–5).
- 28 On perfume and hypnosis, see Combe (49–62). For a more thorough discussion of hypnosis in nineteenth-century France, see Silverman, chapter 5, 'Psychologie nouvelle' (106).
- 29 One of seven classic perfume families today, *Chypre* is named for Coty's iconic 1917 *Chypre* (no longer in production), and generally composed as variations on a basic structure of bergamot, labdanum, patchouli, and oak moss. (*Classification officielle des parfums* 7; see also Feydeau [870]). *Eau de Chypre* dates to the Middle Ages. Louis XIV's perfumer, Simon Barbe, includes a recipe for *poudre de Cypre* in his 1693 *Le Parfumeur François*, in a section called 'Poudre de mousse chene: autrement dit cypre [sic]' (7). Mousse de chène (oak moss) is one of

- the natural ingredients now highly restricted by the International Fragrance Association's self-regulatory Code of Practice, which increasingly introduces measures to protect consumers from potential allergic reactions. Perfumes called *Chypre* were widely available in the late nineteenth century, but their formulae were not necessarily precursors to Coty's *Chypre*.
- 30 Much of Huysmans's information on perfume is traced to G.W. Septimus, *The Art of Perfumery* (first published in 1857 and in a fourth edition by 1880).
- 31 Nordau calls the *fin-de-siècle* mood 'the impotent despair of a sick man' (3), and indeed tends to focus on men as decadent subjects. *Chérie* would seem to exemplify what he calls a 'voluptuary' with a 'sensitive nature yearning for aesthetic thrills' (5), but the male protagonist of *À Rebours* better serves Nordau's argument.
- 32 On the popularity of *Chérie* (6000 of the 8000 copies released sold in one day) see Ashley (19–20) and Fosca (339). As Ashley notes, *Chérie* was nearly forgotten in the twentieth century, and was finally re-edited in 2003 by Cabanès and Hamon.
- 33 Examples of the Goncourts' naturalist novels include *Germinie Lacerteux* (1865), *Manette Solomon* (1867), and *Madame Gervaisais* (1869). Huysmans wrote *Marthe, histoire d'une fille* (1876), *Les Sœurs Vatard* (1879), *En Ménage* (1881), and *À vau-l'eau* (1882) (and many other works), before rejecting the Naturalist school.
- 34 See extensive studies of sources in Ashley and Bayle.
- 35 The four novels Edmond de Goncourt published after his brother's death are: *La Fille Elisa* (1877), *Les Frères Zemganno* (1879), *La Faustin* (1882), and *Chérie* (1884).
- 36 See Ashley (149–74) and Bayle (1983) for analysis of plot structure in *Chérie*.
- 37 See Ashley's chapter on the complicated interplay of prefaces in Goncourt's works (51–67), and on how it came to pass that the preface to *Chérie* contains the preface to the Goncourt journal (62–3).
- 38 The two authors had already published potentially rival novels about prostitutes: *Marthe, Histoire d'une fille* (Huysmans 1876), and *La Fille Elisa* (Goncourt 1876).
- 39 All quotations are from the 1884 edition of *Chérie*. All translations are my own, unless otherwise attributed. I have retained original sentence structure whenever possible, particularly in the frequently winding Goncourt quotes.
- 40 The list of perfume notes filling the air around *Chérie* may seem exaggerated, but Goncourt's fictional perfume blend is in fact very much 'on trend', even prescient. Guerlain's 1889 *Jicky* included top notes of bergamot, rosemary, lavender and rosewood; heart notes of jasmine, geranium, and rose; and base notes of tonka bean, vanilline, coumarin, and opopanax (see description in de Feydeau 948–9).
- 41 On 27 April 1884, Guy de Maupassant's article 'La Jeune Fille' appears on the front page of *Le Gaulois*. Maupassant lauds Goncourt and Zola for their treatment of the delicate topic of the 'jeune fille' in *Chérie* and *La Joie de vivre*.
- 42 The four women whose letters and memoirs contributed to the volume were: Mlle Abbatucci, (daughter of a French Minister of Finance); Julia Daudet (see

- L'Enfance d'une Parisienne*); Catherine Junges (niece of Tolstoy); Pauline Zeller, lady-in-waiting to Princess Mathilde Bonaparte. See the discussion of these sources in Ashley (127–45). Bayle reprints letters that arrived in response to Goncourt's call in *Chérie d'Edmond de Goncourt* (84–93).
- 43 In a letter dated 21 April 1884, Huysmans thanks Goncourt for his copy of *Chérie*. He delivers his praise in detail, stating that the passage on menstruation amazed him ('Puis les règles me stupéfient'). The full letter is quoted in Lambert and Cogny (76–9). Apparently this passage was a source of rivalry between Goncourt and Zola, stirred up by Alphonse Daudet and documented in a fascinating exchange of letters. Daudet reported that Goncourt thought Zola had seen the passage from *Chérie* at some point and incorporated a similar episode in *La Joie de vivre*. Zola wrote to confirm that he had not seen Goncourt's chapter drafts. Goncourt in turn maintained that he understood the similarity in their pages on menstruation to be a coincidence, and that Daudet had been mistaken. His only concern was that since he worked more slowly than Zola (starting his own novel earlier, but finishing it later), and since Zola enjoyed more public favour, readers would think Goncourt had been 'inspired' by Zola's work (Lambert and Cogny 78–9).
- 44 The dangers and pathologies of women who read are topics treated in depth by Beizer (55–73) and Matlock (199–219).
- 45 As Cabanès and Hamon point out, protagonist *Chérie*'s lifespan (1851–1870) invites a meta-reading of the text. The years cover the Second Empire, and mark both the starting date of the brother's *Journal*, and the end of their collaboration, with the death of Jules in 1870 (7–8).
- 46 Giraud discusses *Chérie*'s illness in detail, linking the symptoms attributed to hysteria at the time to current etiologies of depression and anorexia nervosa.
- 47 *Chérie* visits a dress shop in which the dressmaker, M. Gentillat, is described as a victim of second-hand fragrance, suffering from exposure to the smells of perfumed women (108).
- 48 For discussion of Mucha's influence and influences see: Rennet and Srp (17–33); the artist's biography by Jiri Mucha; Gaillemin (11–16); Lipp (10–21) and Mucha's own *Lectures on Art*.
- 49 Note that use of the hyphen in *lance-parfum* is inconsistent: it appears in citations of trademark and patent applications, but not on the product label or advertisements. Both Alphons and Alphonse are used for Mucha's first name.
- 50 In *Alphonse Mucha: The Complete Graphic Works* (1980), *Lance Parfum* 'Rodo' is catalogued as poster A5. The Rodo itself is identified as 'a perfume spray', rather than a 'perfume sprayer' (152). The Rodo was, in a sense, both. The Mucha Foundation features a reproduction on its online gallery, along with a brief description: 'This poster advertises a perfume produced by the Société des Usines du Rhône in Lyon'. Stamelman's *Perfume* (on the cultural history of fragrance), includes a nearly full-page reproduction (80).
- 51 Mucha depicted other fragrances in this way. In an illustration for *Ilsée, Princesse de Tripoli* (1897) by Robert de Flers, Mucha shows fragrant breath wafting from

- the mouths of flowers (visually personified as women) who ‘comme un délicat encens exhalent [...] leurs parfums les plus subtiles’. The page is reproduced in Husslein-Arco (117). Stylized perfumed smoke trails in *Incantation/Salammbô* (1897) show fragrances rising from burning pans as mentioned in chapter 3 of the Flaubert novel. Mucha reused the Salammbô lithograph for a *Coryn Parfumerie moderne* poster in 1989 (reproduced in Rennert and Srp 115).
- 52 See Christina Bradstreet’s analysis of visual representations of women inhaling fragrance and the construction of gender in ‘Wicked with Roses: Floral Femininity and the Erotics of Scent’.
- 53 Dana’s 1995 ‘Blame it on *Tabu*’ campaign (printed in Reichert, 285) provides an example of equivocally eroticized images of women, as does the recent tongue-in-cheek print promo for Showtime’s series *The Borgias*, which parodies a perfume advertisement, complete with a scent strip insert for an as yet fictional Lucrezia perfume. The spoof advertisement appears in *Vanity Fair* (May 2012): 131. For commentary on depictions of women in Mucha’s advertisements, see Mitchell (4) and Thompson (161–4).
- 54 Mucha’s 1898 poster for printer Ferdinand Champenois shows a woman’s similarly posed right hand turning the page of a large book.
- 55 See Carol Rifelj’s discussion of immodesty and immorality associated with women *en cheveux* in the nineteenth century (68–74). For an analysis of hairstyles and their signification see especially chapter 1, ‘The Language of Hairstyles’ (32–82).
- 56 See Stamelman’s discussion of perfume-wearing and bottle and label design in *Perfume* (49–90). Along with the full-page reproduction (80), a cropped image of the Rodo is used to demonstrate its application to fabric (171).
- 57 A website created by Christian Richet presents a number of Rodo labels and a photograph of the sprayer itself: <http://richet.christian.free.fr/mode/modpat.html>.
- 58 Raynal and Lefebvre show labels for the Lance-parfum Rodo box designed in 1897 and 1912 (69).
- 59 See detailed information on the development and patenting of the Lance-parfum Rodo in Raynal and Lefebvre.
- 60 A account of how ethyl chloride tubes and ether cans were used together in surgery appears in the article ‘Ethyl Chloride-Ether Anesthesia by a Simplified Method,’ in *International Journal of Surgery* Mar. 1909: 75.
- 61 As Raynal and Lefebvre point out, the pharmaceutical and synthetic perfume industries have always been closely connected, their products often created in factories serving both sectors. Coumarin (synthesized by William Henry Perkin in 1867) was used both as a fragrance note and a venotonic; a synthetic musk produced in 1889 was used for its antispasmodic and emmenagogic properties (63).
- 62 See Harrington and Rosario.
- 63 In chapter 2 ‘Transgressions’ (27–50), Weber discusses the appeal of racy stories circulated in the popular French press. It is of course worth examining perfume

injection reports in the context of American cultural discourses as well.

64 I use the term smell culture as Jim Drobnick describes it in his introduction *A Smell Culture Reader* (1–2). Scents belong to a network of perception, reception, and interpretation that includes biological process and phenomenological immediacy, but also cultural and societal factors mitigated by individual attitudes and experiences. Constance Classen and David Howes explore the cultural diversity of the sensory world in *Worlds of Sense* and *Sensual Relationships*, respectively. Hans Rindisbacher (*The Smell of Books: A Cultural-Historical Study of Olfactory Perception in Literature*, 1992), Janice Carlisle (*Common Scents: Comparative Encounters in High-Victorian Fiction*, 2004) and Richard Stamelman (*Perfume. Joy Obsession Scandal Sin. A Cultural History of Fragrance from 1750 to the Present*, 2006) were among the first scholars to recognize the importance of smell culture in the field of literary criticism. More recently, Holly Dugan has analyzed cultural theories of smell in relation to Renaissance literature in *The Ephemeral History of Perfume: Scent and the Sense of Early Modern England* (2011).

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