



## Parisian Sketches (Dedalus European Classics)

*Joris-Karl Huysmans*

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## **Parisian Sketches (Dedalus European Classics)** Joris-Karl Huysmans

No one, not even Toulouse-Lautrec, was so tireless a tracker of Paris's genius loci as Huysmans. Like many of his radical contemporaries, he was obsessed by the idea of beauty within the ugliness of back-street Paris, by the thought that the distortions of depravity presented a truer picture of our spiritual nature than conventional religion or revolutionary excess. The excellent introduction to these cameos show how Huysmans saw his art as complementary to the painter's. As the stories themselves testify, however, the results were not always successful. Compare for example, the sharp impressionistic portrayal of 'A Streetwalker' with the hazy, self-regarding raptures of 'The Overture to Tannhauser', a hyperventilating review characterised by sonorous phrases which pile up and collapse. But his symbolist mode yields as many rockets as damp squibs: 'A Nightmare' is genuinely chilling and oddly exultant. A tale about the wandering Jew is a mini-masterpiece. In this and other pieces, Huysmans begins and ends his tale with the same description - giving the whole the air of a medieval chant. Murrough Obrien in The Independent on Sunday

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