

Jean-Philippe Imbert, *Dublin City University, Ireland*

**« Péhor » by Remy de Gourmont :  
Sacrilège and Sacrifice of a *Fin-de-Siècle* milkmaid**

Jean-philippe.imbert@dcu.ie

When Remy de Gourmont wrote the short-story « Péhor », the first sacrilegious text to appear in *Histoires magiques* (Paris : Mercure de France, 1894), French society was wallowing in the decayed pleasures of abandon. And Gourmont aimlessly probed the artistic, physical, moral and intellectual limits looming in the dark firmament of an entropic culture which mixed religion with magic, sensuality with sexuality and agony with ecstasy...

In writing these short and sharp odes to perversion, which vanished like so many nightmarish codas announcing the death of all passions, Gourmont attempted to deal with his own monsters. In so doing, he delved into the darkest recesses of his being, so as to wallow in the whirlwind of his painful woes, savouring sacrilege and flirting with sacrifice.

In the first part, we will see how the mechanisms of fantasy and dreamlike trance activate the workings of metamorphosis, thus allowing the arrival of the Demon. Then we will see how the Demon takes the protagonist, Douceline, into the realm of erotic ecstasy so as to enjoy religious transcendence. In the third part we will see how « Péhor » could also be read as a somber apologue by Gourmont, a lonely writer who realized the limits and limitations of his being, of his sexuality and of his art.

*Jean-Philippe Imbert lectures in French and Comparative Literature in Dublin City University. His research, informed by the fields of teratology, literary criticism and vegetal architecture often addresses the socio-cultural and aesthetic expressions of conflict, pain, evil, sexuality or taboo.*