



## *Contents*

Introduction	VII
A Fantasy of Dr Ox	I
<i>Note on the Text</i>	IO3
<i>Notes</i>	IO3

*A Fantasy of Dr Ox*



# 1

*Why it is pointless looking for the small town  
of Quiquendone, even on the best maps*

**I**F YOU TAKE A MAP of Flanders, old or new, and start looking for the small town of Quiquendone, it is quite probable you won't find it. So is Quiquendone a vanished town? No. A town of the future? Again, no. It exists in spite of the geographers, and has done so for between eight and nine hundred years. Indeed, it has a population of 2,393 souls, if you reckon one soul for each inhabitant. It is situated thirteen and a half kilometres north-west of Oudenaarde and fifteen and a quarter kilometres south-east of Bruges, in the middle of Flanders. The Vaar, a small tributary of the Scheldt, flows beneath its three bridges that are still covered by an old medieval roof, as at Tournai. One of the sights is an old castle, the first stone of which was laid in 1197 by Count Baldwin, the future Emperor of Constantinople, and a town hall with Gothic half-windows, crowned by a row of battlements and dominated by a turreted belfry, rising 357 feet above the ground. Every hour you can hear the peal of five octaves, a veritable aerial piano, whose renown surpasses that of the famous peal at Bruges. Strangers

– if any have ever come to Quiquendone – never leave this curious town without having visited its hall of stadtholders, decorated with the full-length portrait of William of Nassau by Brandon, and the rood screen of the church of Saint-Magloire – that masterpiece of sixteenth-century architecture – or the forged-iron well dug into the middle of the great Place Saint-Ernuph – the admirable ornamentation on which is the work of the painter and ironsmith Quentin Metsys – or the tomb provisionally erected for Mary of Burgundy, daughter of Charles the Bold, who now rests in the church of Notre-Dame in Bruges, etc. Quiquendone’s main industry is the large-scale manufacture of whipped cream and barley sugar. It has been administered for several centuries by the van Tricasse family, passing down from father to son. And yet Quiquendone doesn’t appear on the map of Flanders! Have the geographers forgotten it? Is it a deliberate omission? That’s what I can’t tell you: but Quiquendone really *does* exist, with its narrow streets, its fortified enclosure, its Spanish houses, its covered market and its burgomaster – the proof being that it was recently the scene of phenomena as surprising, extraordinary and improbable as they are true, as will be faithfully related in this story.

Of course, there’s nothing to be said or thought against the Flemish inhabitants of western Flanders. They’re decent people – sensible, a bit tight-fisted, sociable, even-tempered, hospitable, perhaps a bit slow in speech and

not very quick on the uptake – but that doesn't explain why one of the most interesting towns on their territory still has to make it into modern cartography.

This omission is certainly regrettable. If only history, or, if not history, then the chronicles, or, if not the chronicles, at least local tradition made some mention of Quiquendone! But they don't; neither atlases nor guides nor tourist routes refer to it. Even M. Joanne, always conscientious at ferreting out little towns, doesn't have a word to say about it.\* It's easy to imagine how much harm this silence does to the town's commerce and industry. But let us hasten to add that Quiquendone has neither industry nor commerce, and that it manages perfectly well without them. Its barley sugar and its whipped cream are consumed by the inhabitants and not exported. In short, the Quiquendonians don't need anyone. Their desires are limited, their way of life modest; they are calm, moderate, cold, phlegmatic – in a word, “Flemish”, of the kind you still encounter sometimes between the River Scheldt and the North Sea.

*In which Burgomaster van Tricasse  
and Councillor Niklausse discuss  
the affairs of the town*

“DO YOU THINK SO?” asked the burgomaster.  
“I do think so,” replied the councillor, after a few minutes’ silence.

“We mustn’t act without due consideration,” the burgomaster continued.

“We have been talking about this highly serious matter for ten years,” replied Councillor Niklausse, “and I must confess, my worthy van Tricasse, that I still cannot bring myself to make a decision.”

“I can understand your hesitation,” continued the burgomaster, after spending a good quarter of an hour mulling it over. “I can understand your hesitation, and I share it. The sensible thing is to not come to any decision before we’ve examined the question in more detail.”

“It’s certain that the post of civil commissioner is useless in a town as peaceful as Quiquendone.”

“Our predecessor,” replied van Tricasse gravely, “our predecessor never said – would never have dared to say



– that anything is certain. Every affirmation is subject to disagreeable second thoughts.”

The councillor nodded in agreement, then he remained silent for about half an hour. After this lapse of time, during which the councillor and the burgomaster didn't move so much as a finger, Niklausse asked van Tricasse if his predecessor – some twenty years previously – hadn't entertained, as he had, the idea of suppressing the post of civil commissioner, which, every year, cost the town of Quiquendone a sum of 1,375 francs and several centimes.

“He had indeed,” replied the burgomaster, with majestic slowness bringing his hand up to his limpid brow, “he had indeed; but the worthy man died before daring to make a decision on this or any other administrative measure. He was a sensible fellow. Why shouldn't I follow his example?”

Councillor Niklausse would have been incapable of imagining any reason for contradicting the burgomaster's opinion.

“The man who dies without ever having made a decision all his life long,” added van Tricasse gravely, “has come close to achieving perfection in this world!”

Upon these words, the burgomaster pressed, with the tip of his little finger, a bell which emitted a faint sound – less a sound than a sigh. Almost immediately, light footsteps were heard padding softly along the tiles of the landing. A mouse would have made less

noise trotting across a thick velvet-pile carpet. The door of the room opened, turning on its well-oiled hinges. A young blonde girl, with long plaits, appeared. She was Suzel van Tricasse, the burgomaster's only daughter. Without a word, she handed over to her father, together with his pipe filled to the brim, a little copper charcoal pan, and immediately disappeared, without her exit producing any more sound than her entrance.

The honourable burgomaster lit the enormous bowl of his smoking instrument, and was soon hidden in a cloud of bluish smoke, leaving Councillor Niklausse sunk deep in the most absorbing reflections.

The room in which these two eminent personages responsible for the administration of Quiquendone were talking was a parlour richly decorated with sculptures in dark wood. A tall fireplace, a hearth huge enough to burn an oak tree or roast an ox, occupied one entire side of the parlour, and faced a trellis window whose multicoloured stained-glass windows gently filtered the daylight. In an antique frame over the fireplace could be seen the portrait of some fellow or other, attributed to Memling; it was no doubt meant to represent an ancestor of the van Tricasse family, whose genealogy can be authentically traced back to the fourteenth century, a period in which the Flemish, and Guy of Dampierre, were involved in war against Emperor Rudolph of Hapsburg.

This parlour was part of the burgomaster's house, one of the most pleasant in Quiquendone. Built according to the Flemish taste and with all the eccentricity, whimsicality and picturesque fantasy that are essential to Gothic architecture, it counted as one of the most curious of the town's monuments. A Carthusian monastery or an establishment for deaf mutes couldn't have been more silent than this dwelling. Noise simply did not exist in the place – people didn't walk through it, they glided along; they didn't speak, they murmured. And yet there was no shortage of women in the house which, apart from Burgomaster van Tricasse, also accommodated his wife, Mme Brigitte van Tricasse, his daughter Suzel van Tricasse and his servant-woman Lotchè Janshéu. We must also mention the burgomaster's sister, Aunt Hermance, an old maid who still answered to the name Auntie Némance, which her niece Suzel had given her when still a child. Anyway, in spite of all these elements of discord, noise and chatter, the burgomaster's house was as calm as the desert.

The burgomaster was a fifty-year-old man, neither fat nor thin, neither tall nor short, neither young nor old, neither florid nor pasty-faced, neither happy nor sad, neither content nor bored, neither active nor passive, neither proud nor humble, neither good nor bad, neither generous nor mean, neither brave nor cowardly, neither too much nor too little – *ne quid nimis*\* – a man who showed moderation in all things. But from

the unvarying slowness of his movements, his somewhat drooping lower jaw, his invariably raised upper eyelid, his forehead as smooth as a sheet of yellow copper and perfectly unwrinkled, and his inconspicuous muscles, a physiognomist would doubtless have recognized that Burgomaster van Tricasse was the very model of a phlegmatic character. Never – either in anger or in passion – had any sort of emotion sped up the movements of this man’s heart or brought a flush to his face; never had his pupils contracted under the influence of a moment of anger, however fleeting. He was inevitably dressed in nice clothes, neither too wide nor too narrow, that he never managed to wear out. On his feet he wore big, square-toed shoes with triple soles and silver buckles; their longevity was the despair of his shoemaker. On his head he wore a broad hat which dated from the period when Flanders was decisively separated from Holland, which meant that this venerable headpiece could be estimated to be forty years old.\* But what do you expect? It is passions which wear out the body as much as the soul – they also wear out the clothes as much as the body; and our worthy burgomaster, apathetic, indolent, indifferent, could get passionate about nothing; he wore nothing out – certainly not himself – and for that very reason he was just the man needed to administer the city of Quiquendone and its tranquil inhabitants. The town, in fact, was no less calm than van Tricasse’s house. Now it was in this peaceful

dwelling that the burgomaster hoped to drink life to the lees, after seeing, of course, good Mme Brigitte van Tricasse, his wife, precede him to the grave, where she would certainly not find a repose any more profound than that she had been enjoying on earth for the last sixty years.

This merits an explanation.

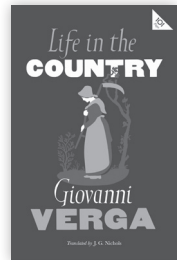
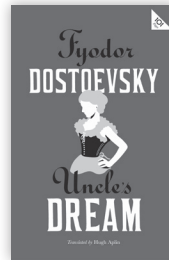
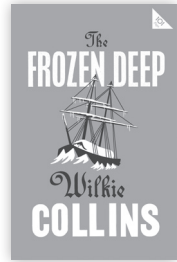
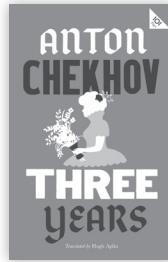
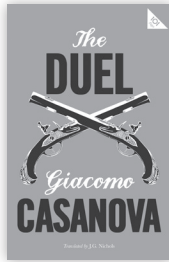
The van Tricasse family could have been called, with justice, the Jeannot\* family. Here's why:

Everyone knows that the knife of that typical character is just as famous as its proprietor and just as durable as he is, thanks to the endlessly repeated operation, which consists of replacing the handle when it is worn out and the blade when it has lost its edge. This was the absolutely identical operation that had been practised from time immemorial in the van Tricasse family – an operation to which nature had lent itself with a quite extraordinary indulgence. Ever since 1380, a newly widowed van Tricasse husband had invariably been seen to marry a van Tricasse wife younger than himself; when she in turn was widowed, she would remarry a van Tricasse man younger than herself; when he in turn was widowed... etc., without interruption. Each of them died in turn with mechanical regularity. Now the worthy Mme Brigitte van Tricasse was on her second husband, and unless she failed in all her duties, she would inevitably precede her spouse into the other world, as he was ten years younger

than she was, so as to make way for a new Mme van Tricasse. On this the honourable burgomaster was counting absolutely, so as not to break with the family traditions.

Such was this house, peaceful and silent, whose doors didn't creak, whose windows didn't shudder, whose polished floors didn't squeak, whose chimneys didn't rumble, whose weathervanes didn't squeal, whose furniture didn't groan, whose locks didn't jingle and whose hosts moved about as silently as their shadows. The divine Harpocrates would certainly have chosen it for his Temple of Silence.\*

## MORE 101-PAGE CLASSICS



FOR THE FULL LIST OF  
101-PAGE CLASSICS VISIT  
[101pages.co.uk](http://101pages.co.uk)

## ALMA CLASSICS

ALMA CLASSICS aims to publish mainstream and lesser-known European classics in an innovative and striking way, while employing the highest editorial and production standards. By way of a unique approach the range offers much more, both visually and textually, than readers have come to expect from contemporary classics publishing.

### LATEST TITLES PUBLISHED BY ALMA CLASSICS

- 317 Dante Alighieri, *Paradise*
- 318 James Joyce, *Chamber Music and Other Poems*
- 319 Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Lost World*
- 320 Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*
- 321 Anton Chekhov, *The Plays*
- 322 Johanna Spyri, *Heidi: Lessons at Home and Abroad*
- 323 Michel Butor, *Changing Track*
- 324 Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We*
- 325 Charles and Mary Lamb, *Tales from Shakespeare*
- 326 Émile Zola, *The Attack on the Mill and Other Stories*
- 327 Émile Zola, *Dead Men Tell No Tales and Other Stories*
- 328 Anne Brontë, *Agnes Grey*
- 329 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Eternal Husband*
- 330 Rudyard Kipling, *Humorous Tales*
- 331 Jane Austen, *Lady Susan, Sanditon, The Watsons*
- 332 Alexander Pushkin, *Lyrics Vol. 1*
- 333 Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*
- 334 Charlotte Brontë, *The Professor*
- 335 F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Crack-Up*
- 336 Leo Tolstoy, *The Forged Coupon*
- 337 E. Nesbit, *The Phoenix and the Carpet*
- 338 Jerome K. Jerome, *Three Men in a Boat*
- 339 Alexander Pope, *Scriblerus*
- 340 Franz Kafka, *The Trial*
- 341 Mary Mapes Dodge, *The Silver Skates*
- 342 Elizabeth von Arnim, *The Enchanted April*
- 343 Leonid Andreyev, *The Abyss and Other Stories*
- 344 Emily Brontë, *Poems from the Moor*
- 345 H.G. Wells, *The Island of Dr Moreau*
- 346 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The House of the Dead*
- 347 Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock and A Key to the Lock*
- 348 Joseph Conrad, *Tales of Unrest*
- 349 Jean Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*
- 350 Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*
- 351 Dino Buzzati, *Catastrophe and Other Stories*
- 352 Voltaire, *Candide*
- 353 Katherine Mansfield, *The Garden Party and Selected Short Stories*