Warning Concerning Copyright Restrictions

The Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted materials. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research. If electronic transmission of reserve material is used for purposes in excess of what constitutes "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement.
THE LEMOINE AFFAIR WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN LE FIGARO IN JANUARY, 1904 AND FEBRUARY-MARCH, 1908. THEY WERE SUBSEQUENTLY REVISED AND COLLECTED IN THE BOOK PASTICHES ET MÉLANGES (GALLIMARD) IN 1918.

TRANSLATION © CHARLOTTE MANDELL 2008

SERIES DESIGN: DAVID KONOPKA

MELVILLE HOUSE PUBLISHING
145 PLYMOUTH STREET
BROOKLYN, NY 11201

WWW.MHPBOOKS.COM

ISBN 978-1-933633-41-1

FIRST MELVILLE HOUSE PRINTING: MAY 2008

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

PRAUST, MARCEL, 1871-1922.
[PASTICHES ET MÉLANGES. ENGLISH]
THE LEMOINE AFFAIR / MARCEL PROUST : TRANSLATED BY CHARLOTTE MANDELL.
P. CM.
ISBN 978-1-933633-41-1
I. MANDELL, CHARLOTTE. II. TITLE.
P92031.R63P73 2008
843.912:DC22

PRINTED IN CANADA.
AUTHOR'S NOTE

The reader may have forgotten, since ten years have now passed, that Lemoine, having falsely claimed to have discovered the secret of making diamonds and having received, because of this claim, more than a million francs from the President of De Beers, Sir Julius Werner, who then brought action against him, was afterwards condemned on July 6, 1909 to six years in prison. This legal affair, which, although insignificant, enthralled public opinion at the time, was selected one evening by me, entirely by chance, as the common theme for a few short pieces in which I would set out to imitate the style of a certain number of writers. Even though offering even the slightest explanation of one's pastiches
risks diminishing their effect, nonetheless, lest one's own legitimate self-esteem be ruffled, I might remind the reader that it is the pastiched writer who is imagined as speaking, faithful not only to his particular mind, but also to the language of his time. In the piece by Saint-Simon for example, the words "good man, bonhomme" and "good woman" do not at all have the familiar, condescending slant they have today. In his Memoirs, Saint-Simon throughout says "good man Chaulnes" (le bonhomme Chaulnes) for the Duc de Chaulnes, for whom he had infinite respect, and likewise for many others.

—Marcel Proust
The Lemoine Affair by Mr. Gustave Flaubert! Especially so soon after Salammbô, the title is altogether a surprising one. What's this? The author has set up his easel in the midst of Paris, at the law courts in the Palais de Justice, in the very chamber of criminal appeals . . . : and here we thought he was still in Carthage! Mr. Flaubert—estimable both in his impulse and his predilection—is not one of those writers whom Martial so subtly mocked and who, past masters in one field, or with the reputation of being so, confine themselves to it, dig themselves down into it,
anxious above all not to offer any foothold for criticism, exposing only one wing at a time in any maneuver. Mr. Flaubert, on the contrary, likes to multiply his reconnaissance missions and his sorties, and confront the enemy on all sides—nay, he accepts all challenges, regardless of the conditions that are offered, and never demands a choice of weapons, never seeks strategic advantage from the lay of the land. But this time, it must be acknowledged, this precipitous about-face, this return from Egypt (or very nearly) like Napoleon, which no victorious Battle of the Nile can justify, has not seemed very fortunate; we have detected in it, or thought we did, a faint whiff of mystification. Some people have even gone so far as to utter, not without some semblance of justification, the word "gamble." Has Mr. Flaubert at least won this gamble? That is what we are about to examine in all candor, but without ever forgetting that the author is the son of a much to be lamented man whom we have all known, a professor at the Ecole de Medecine in Rouen, who left his mark and his influence on his profession and in his province; or that this likeable son—whatever opinion you may proffer about what our over-hasty young are not afraid, boosted by friendship, to hail already as his "talent"—deserves, in any case, every consideration for the renowned simplicity of his narrations, always sure and perfectly executed—he, the very opposite of simplicity as soon as he picks up a pen!—by the refinement and invariable delicacy of his procedure.

The narrative begins with a scene that, if it had been better directed, could have given us a rather favorable idea of Mr. Flaubert, in that immediate and unexpected genre of the sketch, the study drawn from reality. We are at the Palais de Justice, in the Criminal Court, where the Lemoine case is underway, during an adjournment of the hearing. The windows have just been closed by order of the magistrate. And here an eminent lawyer assures me that the magistrate would in fact not be sitting there, but would more naturally and properly have withdrawn to the council chamber during the adjournment. This of course is only a minor detail. But how do you, who have just told us (as if you had actually counted them!) the number of elephants and onagers in the Carthaginian army, how do you hope, I ask you, to have your word believed when, for a reality that is so nearby, so easily verifiable, so basic even and not in the least detailed, you commit such blunders! But we'll move on: the author wanted an opportunity to describe the magistrate, and he didn't let one escape him. This magistrate has "a clown's face" (which is enough to make the reader lose interest), "a gown too narrow for his girth" (a rather clumsy characterization that portrays nothing), "aspirations to wit." We'll again overlook the clown's face! The author is of a school that never sees anything noble or decent in humanity. Mr. Flaubert, however, a thorough Norman if ever there was one, comes from a land of subtle chicanery and lofty cunning that has given France quite a few prominent lawyers and magistrates, I don't want to single out
anyone here. Without even limiting ourselves to the boundaries of Normandy, the image of a magistrate such as Jeannin about whom Mr. Villemain has given us more than one delicate description, of a Mathieu Marais, a Saumaise, a Bouhier, even of the pleasant Patru, of one of these men who are distinguished by the wisdom of their advice and who are of such compelling merit, would be as interesting. I believe, and as true as that of the magistrate with "a clown's face" who is shown to us here. Enough about the clown's face! But if he has "aspirations to wit," how do you know about it, since he hasn't even opened his mouth yet? Similarly, a little later on, the author will point out to us, among the crowd he describes, a "reactionary." That is a common enough designation today. But here, I ask Mr. Flaubert again: "A reactionary? How can you recognize one at a distance? Who told you? How do you know about it?" The author evidently is amusing himself, and all these characteristics are invented on a whim. But that's nothing yet; we'll go on. The author continues portraying the public, or rather purely chosen "models" he has grouped together in his studio at his leisure: "Taking an orange out of his pocket, a black man . . . " Traveler! You use only words of truth, of "objectivity," you make a profession of it, you make a display of it, but, beneath this self-styled impersonality, how quickly we can recognize you, even if it's only from this black man, this orange, that parrot just now, who have just disembarked with you, all these accessories you have brought back with you that you hurry to slap onto your sketch—the most variegated, I declare, and the least authentic, the least lifelike one your brush has ever struggled with.

So the black man takes an orange out of his pocket, and by doing so, he "wins esteem"! Mr. Flaubert, I understand, means that in a crowd someone who can put himself to use and who shows off some advantage, even an ordinary one familiar to everyone—someone who takes out a goblet, for example, when someone else is drinking out of a bottle next to him; or a newspaper, if he is the only one who thought to buy one—that this person is immediately singled out, noticed and pointed out by others. But confess that when it comes down to it you don't mind, by risking this unusual and out of place expression of "winning esteem," insinuating that all esteem, even the highest and most sought-after, is not much more than that, that it is made of envy inspired by possessions that are at bottom without any intrinsic value. Well, we say to Mr. Flaubert, that is not true; esteem—and we know that the example will touch you, since it is only in literature that you belong to the school of insensitivity, of impassivity—is acquired by a whole life devoted to science, to humanity. Literature, once upon a time, could procure it also, when it was only the gauge and so to speak the flower of the mind's urbanity, of that entirely human disposition that can indeed have its predilections and its goals, but that allows, alongside images of vice and ridicule, those of innocence and virtue. Without going back to the ancients (who were much more "naturalist" than you will ever be, but who, on the painting we see in its material frame, always make a fully
divine ray of light appear clearly, as if it were in the open air, which shines its light on the pediment and illumines the contrast), without going back to them, whether they go by the name of Homer or Moschus, Bion or Leonidas of Tarentum, not to mention more deliberate portrayals, tell us if you please, is this something different from what these same writers have always done, writers you do not fear to claim as your own? Saint-Simon above all, next to the atrocious and slanderous portraits of a Noailles or a Harlay, what great brushstrokes doesn't he use to show us, in its light and its proportion, the virtue of a Montal, a Beaufilliers, a Rancé, a Chevreuse? And even in that “Human Comedy,” or the one so called, where Mr. de Balzac, with an almost mocking conceit, claims to outline “scenes” (actually entirely fabulous) “of Parisian and provincial life” (he, a man incapable of observation if ever there was one), compared with and almost making up for the Hulots, the Philippe Bondaus, the Balthazar Claes, as he calls them, and of whom your Narr’Havas and your Shahabarims have no reason to be envious, I admit, hasn’t he imagined an Adeline Hulot, a Blanche de Mortsauf, a Marguerite de Solis?

Indeed, it would have astonished, and rightly so, the Jacquemonts, the Darus, the Merimées, the Ampères, all those men of delicacy and scholarship who knew him so well and who did not think there was any need, for such a trifle, to make so many bells ring out, if someone had told them that the witty Stendhal, to whom we owe so many clear and fruitful views, so many apposite remarks, would pass as a novelist in our day. But finally, he is even truer than you are! And there is more reality in the smallest study by—I’Il say Sénac or Meilhan, by Ramond or Alphon Shée—than in yours, so laboriously inexact!—Don’t you yourself feel how wrong it is?

Finally the hearing is resumed (all that is quite stripped of detail and argumentation), Werner’s lawyer takes the stand, and Mr. Flaubert tells us that when he turns toward the magistrate he makes, each time, “such a profound bow that he was like a deacon leaving the altar.” That there were such lawyers, even at the Paris bar, “kneeling,” as the author says, before the court and the public prosecutor, is quite possible. But there are other kinds also—this, Mr. Flaubert does not want to know—and it wasn’t so long ago that we heard the estimable Chaix d’Est-Ange (whose published speeches have lost not indeed any of their impetus and wit, but only their forensic pertinence) proudly respond to a haughty summing-up by the public prosecutor: “Here, at the bar, the counsel for the prosecution and I are equal—except in talent!” That day, the amiable jurist who could not indeed find around him the atmosphere, the divine resonance of the last age of the Republic, could still, just like Cicero, shoot the golden arrow.

But action, held back for a while, is spurred and hastened on. The defendant is introduced, and at first, upon seeing him, some people seem to yearn (always more guesswork!) for the wealth that would have allowed them to leave for distant lands with a once beloved woman, and escape to those hours the poet speaks of, that alone are worthy of being lived and in which one becomes
inflamed sometimes for one's whole life, *vida dignior oetas*! This piece, read out loud—although it lacks some of that feeling of sweet and authentic impressions, in which a Monselet, a Frédéric Soulé have indulged with much charm—seems adequately harmonious and vague: "They would have known the cry of petrels, the coming of the fog, the rocking of ships, the formation of clouds." But, I ask you, what are petrels doing here? The author is again visibly starting to amuse himself—nay, we'll use the word—to mystify us. We don't need a degree in ornithology to know that the petrel is a very common bird on our shores, and that there is no need to invent the diamond and make a fortune just to meet one. A hunter who has often pursued it assures me that its cry has absolutely nothing special about it that could so strongly move someone hearing it. It is clear that the author had in mind only the felicity of the sentence. He decided the cry of the petrel would do the trick and so he quickly served it up to us. Mr. de Chateaubriand is the first person to have thus coaxed details added after the fact, and about whose truth he didn't trouble much, to appear in a studied framework. But he, even in his slightest annotation, had the divine gift, the word that made the image appear life-sized, forever, in his insight and his description; he possessed, as Joubert said, the talisman of the Enchanter. O ye descendants of Atala, descendants of Atala, we find you everywhere today, even on anatomists' dissection tables! Etc.

---

**BY HENRI DE RÉGNIER**

I do not like the diamond at all. I see no beauty. The little beauty it adds to that of human faces is an effect of its own than a reflection of theirs. It has the ocean clarity of the emerald, not the unbleuazure of the sapphire. I prefer the smoky glint of topaz to it, and above all the twilight charm of amethyst. They are emblematic and twofold, if moonlight half of their face iridescent, the other seems in the pink and green glints of sunset. We are not amused by the colors it presents to us, as we are by the dreams it conjures up. To one who can see nothing beyond himself except the form of his own they show an alternative and taciturn face.