

LETTERS TO TURGENEV

By Gustave Flaubert

Translated from *L'Europe Nouvelle*, Paris Political and Literary Weekly

THESE FOUR LETTERS from Flaubert to Turgenev have never before been published. The first of them was written soon after the two men became friends, the second almost certainly dates from some time in 1872, the third bears the date, July 2, 1874, and the fourth was written in the latter part of 1878.

MY DEAR CONFRÈRE,—

You have written me a very amiable letter and you are too modest. For I have just read your last book. I found you in it, and more intense, more rare than ever.

What I admire above all in your talent is its distinction—a supreme quality. You find a way of being accurate without banality, of being sentimental without affectation, of being comic without the least vulgarity. Eschewing theatrical tricks, you obtain tragic effects by composition alone. You have the air of being a good fellow and yet you are very strong. ‘The skin of the fox joined to that of the lion,’ as Montaigne says.

That is a beautiful story about Elena. I like her and I like Choubine and all the others. As one reads, one keeps saying, ‘I have passed by there.’ Furthermore, I do not believe that anyone will feel page fifty-one as I did. What psychology! But I should have to write many, many lines to express all I think.

As for your *First Love*, I understood it particularly well because it is the real story of one of my very intimate friends. All old romantics—and

I am one, though I have slept with my head resting on a dagger—all old romantics ought to be grateful to you for that little story that has so much to say to them about their youth! What a real girl Zinotchka is.

Knowing how to invent women is one of your outstanding qualities. They are both ideal and real. They attract one like a halo. But there are just two lines that dominate this whole story, this whole volume, even: 'I cherished no evil sentiment against my father. On the contrary he had, as it were, grown before my eyes.' That seems to me to possess a terrifying depth. Will it be commented upon? I don't know, but to me it was sublime.

Yes, my dear confrère, I hope that our relationship will not stay where it is and that our sympathy will become friendship.

A thousand handclasps from your

G. FLAUBERT.

Wednesday evening.

How I pity you, my poor dear friend. I did not need to know that you were suffering to be sad. The death of my old Théo has crushed me.

For three years now all my friends have been dying, one after the other without interruption! I now know only one person in the world to whom I can talk and that is you. Therefore you must care for me and not go back on me like the others.

Théo is dead, poisoned by modern vulgarity. Exclusively artistic people like him have no place in a society dominated by the plebeian element. That is what I said yesterday in a letter to Mme. Sand, who is very good, but too good, too full of benedictions, too democratic and evangelical.

I am like you, though I have no more taste for life. Existence is beginning to make me furiously angry. Voltaire said that life was a cold pleasantry. I find it too cold and not pleasant enough and try to ease myself of it as much as I can. I read about nine or ten hours a day, but a little distraction from time to time would do me no harm. But what form of distraction am I to go in for?

Your visit, on which I am counting, ought to be an exquisite distraction, or better still, a kind of happiness and certainly the only happy event of my year. *Crac!* In bed you suffer like a damned soul.

You will see me in Paris at the beginning of December. Until then, tell me your news and if you feel like coming, come. You will always be welcome at the house of your G. Flaubert, who embraces you.

Kaltbad, Rigi, Switzerland.

Thursday, July 2, 1874.

I too am hot and I possess that superiority or inferiority to you which makes me get angry on a gigantic scale. I came here to perform an act of obeisance, because I was told that the pure mountain air would make me lose my redness and would calm my nerves. So be it. But up to now I only feel an immense boredom due to solitude and laziness, for, since I am not a man of Nature, her marvels bore me more than those of Art. She crushes me without furnishing me with any 'great thought.' I should like to say to her inwardly, 'Nice of you, I'm sure! A little while ago I came out of you, in a few minutes I shall return, but meanwhile, let me alone, I want other distractions.' The Alps, moreover, are out of all proportion to us as individuals. They are too big to be useful to us. This is the third time they have had a disagreeable effect on me and I hope it will be the last. And then, my dear old friend, my companions! These foreign gentlemen who live in this hotel, all of them English or German, fortified with walking sticks and field glasses. Yesterday I was tempted to embrace three calves I met in a field out of pure humanity and the need of expansion. My trip began badly, for I had to have a tooth pulled at Lucerne by a local dentist. Eight days before leaving for Switzerland I made the rounds of the Orne and the Calvados and finally found the place where I shall have my two old codgers established. I have been slow about picking out the spot and the one that I have chosen already fills me with an atrocious terror.

You speak to me of *Saint Antoine* and say that the great public does not care for it. I knew that in advance, but I thought that the élite public understood me more widely than they do. If it hadn't been for Drummond and little Pelletan I should not have had one favorable criticism. I have nothing good from Germany, either. So much the worse! With the grace of God, what's done is done and from the moment I heard that you liked the book, I felt repaid. Big success has quit me since *Salammbô*, but what remains in my heart is the failure of *L'Éducation sentimentale*. I am astonished that people did not understand that book.

Last Thursday I saw the good Zola, who gave me news of you, for your letter did not catch me until the next day, the 27th, in Paris. Except for you and me, no one had mentioned to him the *Conquête de P.*, and he has had no article written about it one way or the other. It is a hard time for the Muses. Furthermore, Paris seems to me more unpleasant and flat than ever. People as detached from political life as you and I are cannot help groaning, if only out of physical disgust.

Ah, my dear, good, old Turgenev, how I wish that it was autumn, so that I could be having you with me at Croisset for a good fortnight!

You will bring your work, and I shall show you the first pages of *B. and P.*, which will, let us hope, be done, and then I shall listen to you. Where are you now, in Russia or Carlsbad? It would be sublime if you could return to France by way of Rigi, but the 'if's' are no longer of this world. I am resisting the temptation of embarking again on the lake and going to Venice by way of Saint Gotthard and spending the rest of the month there. There, at least, I should enjoy myself.

My niece ought to be beyond Stockholm by now and she is planning to return to Dieppe by the end of July. In order to occupy myself, I am going to attack two very obscure subjects, but I know myself well enough to realize that I shall do absolutely nothing here. In this place one ought to be twenty-five years old and go walking with one's sweetheart. The chalets standing one beside the other in the water look like love nests. How you could clasp your loved one to your breast on the brink of these precipices! What expansive moments you could have lying on the grass with the noise of waterfalls ringing in your ears and the blue sky in your heart as well as overhead. But all that is no longer for us, my old friend, and never was much to my taste.

I repeat that it is atrociously hot, but the snow-capped mountains are dazzling. Phœbus has released all his arrows while the tourists shut themselves in their rooms, dining and drinking. But the things that you eat and drink here in Switzerland are terrifying. There are little buffets everywhere—'restaurations,' they are called. R——'s servants dress irreproachably. From nine o'clock in the morning they wear black suits, making you feel that you are being waited on by a group of notary publics or by a crowd of people who have been invited to a funeral, but you think of your own affairs and it is all very nice.

Write me often and at length. Your letters are like water in the desert to me. About the fifteenth of the month I plan to leave Switzerland and shall undoubtedly be spending a few days in Paris. Adieu, my dear great friend, I embrace you with all my strength.

YOUR G. FLAUBERT.

Croisset, Saturday, the 25th.

I was beginning to worry about you, my dear, good old friend. I was afraid that you were sick. My own affairs are jogging along. Except for twenty-four hours I spent in V—— at M——'s house at the end of the last week, I haven't budged from here since your departure. My notes for *Hérodias* are written and I am working out my plan. I believe I have embarked on a little piece of work that is far from easy, because of the explanations which the French reader will need. To make it all clear and lively with so many complex elements presents gigantic

difficulties, but if there were no difficulties, where would the amusement be?

Are you reading the good Zola's dramatic criticisms? I recommend what he wrote last Sunday as a curious piece. He seems to me to have narrow theories and they end by irritating me.

As far as his success is concerned, I believe that it is dwindling with *L'Assommoir*. The public that used to come to him will depart and never return. That is where the mania for taking sides and adopting systems leads one. It is all very well to make blackguards talk like blackguards, but why should the author borrow their language for himself? Yet he believes that it is strong stuff and does not perceive that this trick weakens the very effect he wishes to produce.

To get along more quickly with my work I should like to stay at Croisset very late, either until New Year's Day or even to the end of January. Thus I should perhaps be able to get through by the end of February. For if I want to publish a book at the beginning of May, it would first be necessary for me to finish *Hérodias* promptly so that its translation could appear in your country by August. What is happening to that of *Cœur Simple*? And when shall I see *Saint Antoine*?

My niece is back again and she and her husband ask me to send you their most friendly regards.

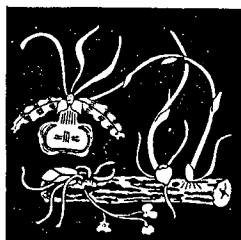
The young Guy de Maupassant has published in the *République des Lettres* a study that makes me feel ashamed. It is a real fanatic's article, but there is a nice line about both of us at the end.

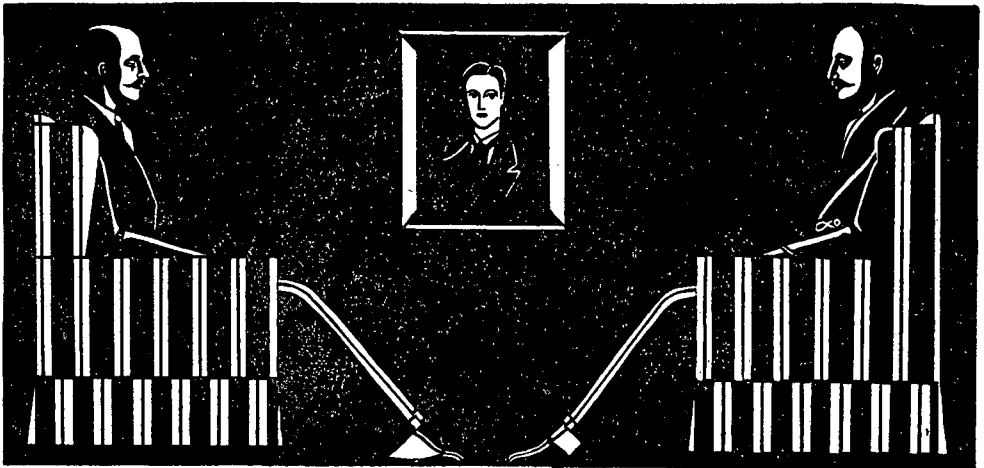
What else should I tell you? Nothing at all, unless it is that I love you, my dear great friend, but that you know already. I embrace you.

Your old friend,

G. FLAUBERT.

And your nephritis? Is it a form of your gout or is it a new affliction? No, it isn't, is it? Anyway, take care of yourself. I hope to start writing in about a week. At present I am in an abominable funk and fear that I ought to have devotions said for nine days, praying for the success of my enterprise!





THE PORTRAIT

By Luigi Pirandello

Translated from *Le Correspondant*, Paris Fortnightly

IS M. STEFANO CONTI at home?’
‘Yes, Monsieur. Come in, Monsieur, and sit down, if you please.’
The young servant girl led me forthwith into a luxurious little drawing room. The word, ‘monsieur,’ had a curious effect upon me, spoken thus on the threshold of the home of this friend of my early youth. In that far time, since both of us were named Stefano, he had been called simply Nuccio and I Naccio, because he was frail and I was strong. Now I was a ‘monsieur’ and could even lay claim to being a bald ‘monsieur’! I wondered about Stefano Conti. I did not yet know whether he was bald like myself, but in any case he was undoubtedly a respectable person thirty-five or thirty-six years old. In the little drawing room there was a damp atmosphere, like twilight, and every corner was permeated with the odor that hovers in places from which air and light are habitually shut out. I remained standing, and looked about me with an inexplicable feeling of discomfort and anguish at the elegant pieces of furniture, which were arranged in a circle as if they were never to be used and which seemed sad to be abandoned there without any share in life, completely excluded from the intimate activity of the house.

It was evident that these pieces of furniture never expected anyone in this small, shut-in room. The painful feeling which overwhelmed me as I looked at them gave me the impression that they were amazed to see me in their midst. If not actually hostile, they were not in a welcom-