

**THE COMPLETE MEMOIRES OF
JACQUES CASANOVA DE SEINGALT**

BY

JACQUES CASANOVA DE SEINGALT

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Childhood

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CASANOVA AT DUX

An Unpublished Chapter of History, By Arthur Symons

I

The Memoirs of Casanova, though they have enjoyed the popularity of a bad reputation, have never had justice done to them by serious students of literature, of life, and of history. One English writer, indeed, Mr. Havelock Ellis, has realised that 'there are few more delightful books in the world,' and he has analysed them in an essay on Casanova, published in *Affirmations*, with extreme care and remarkable subtlety. But this essay stands alone, at all events in English, as an attempt to take Casanova seriously, to show him in his relation to his time, and in his relation to human problems. And yet these Memoirs are perhaps the most valuable document which we possess on the society of the eighteenth century; they are the history of a unique life, a unique personality, one of the greatest of autobiographies; as a record of adventures, they are more entertaining than *Gil Blas*, or *Monte Cristo*, or any of the imaginary travels, and escapes, and masquerades in life, which have been written in imitation of them. They tell the story of a man who loved life passionately for its own sake: one to whom woman was, indeed, the most important thing in the world, but to whom nothing in the world was indifferent. The bust which gives us the most lively notion of him shows us a great, vivid, intellectual face, full of fiery energy and calm resource, the face of a thinker and a fighter in one. A scholar, an adventurer, perhaps a Cabalist, a busy stirrer in politics, a gamester, one 'born for the fairer sex,' as he tells us, and born also to be a vagabond; this man, who is remembered now for his written account of his own life, was that rarest kind of autobiographer, one who did not live to write, but wrote because he had lived, and when he could live no longer.

And his Memoirs take one all over Europe, giving sidelights, all the more valuable in being almost accidental, upon many of the affairs and people most interesting to us during two-thirds of the eighteenth century. Giacomo Casanova was born in Venice, of Spanish and Italian parentage, on April 2, 1725; he died at the Chateau of Dux, in Bohemia, on June 4, 1798. In that lifetime of seventy-three years he travelled, as his Memoirs show us, in Italy, France, Germany, Austria, England, Switzerland, Belgium, Russia, Poland, Spain, Holland, Turkey; he met Voltaire at Ferney, Rousseau at Montmorency, Fontenelle, d'Alembert and Crebillon at Paris, George III. in London, Louis XV. at Fontainebleau, Catherine the Great at St. Petersburg, Benedict XII. at

Rome, Joseph II. at Vienna, Frederick the Great at Sans-Souci. Imprisoned by the Inquisitors of State in the Piombi at Venice, he made, in 1755, the most famous escape in history. His Memoirs, as we have them, break off abruptly at the moment when he is expecting a safe conduct, and the permission to return to Venice after twenty years' wanderings. He did return, as we know from documents in the Venetian archives; he returned as secret agent of the Inquisitors, and remained in their service from 1774 until 1782. At the end of 1782 he left Venice; and next year we find him in Paris, where, in 1784, he met Count Waldstein at the Venetian Ambassador's, and was invited by him to become his librarian at Dux. He accepted, and for the fourteen remaining years of his life lived at Dux, where he wrote his Memoirs.

Casanova died in 1798, but nothing was heard of the Memoirs (which the Prince de Ligne, in his own Memoirs, tells us that Casanova had read to him, and in which he found 'du dyamatique, de la rapidite, du comique, de la philosophie, des choses neuves, sublimes, inimitables meme') until the year 1820, when a certain Carlo Angiolini brought to the publishing house of Brockhaus, in Leipzig, a manuscript entitled *Histoire de ma vie jusqu a l'an 1797*, in the handwriting of Casanova. This manuscript, which I have examined at Leipzig, is written on foolscap paper, rather rough and yellow; it is written on both sides of the page, and in sheets or quires; here and there the paging shows that some pages have been omitted, and in their place are smaller sheets of thinner and whiter paper, all in Casanova's handsome, unmistakable handwriting. The manuscript is done up in twelve bundles, corresponding with the twelve volumes of the original edition; and only in one place is there a gap. The fourth and fifth chapters of the twelfth volume are missing, as the editor of the original edition points out, adding: 'It is not probable that these two chapters have been withdrawn from the manuscript of Casanova by a strange hand; everything leads us to believe that the author himself suppressed them, in the intention, no doubt, of re-writing them, but without having found time to do so.' The manuscript ends abruptly with the year 1774, and not with the year 1797, as the title would lead us to suppose.

This manuscript, in its original state, has never been printed. Herr Brockhaus, on obtaining possession of the manuscript, had it translated into German by Wilhelm Schutz, but with many omissions and alterations, and published this translation, volume by volume, from 1822 to 1828, under the title, '*Aus den Memoiren des Venetianers Jacob Casanova de Seingalt*.' While the German edition was in course of publication, Herr Brockhaus employed a certain Jean Laforgue, a professor of the French language at Dresden, to revise the original manuscript, correcting Casanova's vigorous, but at times incorrect, and often somewhat Italian, French according to his own notions of elegant writing, suppressing passages which seemed too free-spoken from the point of view of morals and of politics, and altering the names of some of the persons referred to, or replacing those names by initials. This revised text was published in twelve volumes, the first two in 1826, the third and fourth in 1828, the fifth to the eighth in 1832, and the ninth to the twelfth in 1837; the first four bearing the imprint of Brockhaus at Leipzig and Ponthieu et Cie at Paris; the next four the imprint of Heideloff et Campe at Paris; and the last four nothing but '*A Bruxelles*.' The volumes are all uniform, and were all really printed for the firm of Brockhaus. This, however far from representing the real text, is the

only authoritative edition, and my references throughout this article will always be to this edition.

In turning over the manuscript at Leipzig, I read some of the suppressed passages, and regretted their suppression; but Herr Brockhaus, the present head of the firm, assured me that they are not really very considerable in number. The damage, however, to the vivacity of the whole narrative, by the persistent alterations of M. Laforgue, is incalculable. I compared many passages, and found scarcely three consecutive sentences untouched. Herr Brockhaus (whose courtesy I cannot sufficiently acknowledge) was kind enough to have a passage copied out for me, which I afterwards read over, and checked word by word. In this passage Casanova says, for instance: 'Elle venoit presque tous les jours lui faire une belle visite.' This is altered into: 'Cependant chaque jour Therese venait lui faire une visite.' Casanova says that some one 'avoit, comme de raison, forme le projet d'allier Dieu avec le diable.' This is made to read: 'Qui, comme de raison, avait saintement forme le projet d'allier les interets du ciel aux oeuvres de ce monde.' Casanova tells us that Therese would not commit a mortal sin 'pour devenir reine du monde;' pour une couronne,' corrects the indefatigable Laforgue. 'Il ne savoit que lui dire' becomes 'Dans cet etat de perplexite;' and so forth. It must, therefore, be realized that the Memoirs, as we have them, are only a kind of pale tracing of the vivid colours of the original.

When Casanova's Memoirs were first published, doubts were expressed as to their authenticity, first by Ugo Foscolo (in the Westminster Review, 1827), then by Querard, supposed to be an authority in regard to anonymous and pseudonymous writings, finally by Paul Lacroix, 'le bibliophile Jacob', who suggested, or rather expressed his 'certainty,' that the real author of the Memoirs was Stendhal, whose 'mind, character, ideas and style' he seemed to recognise on every page. This theory, as foolish and as unsupported as the Baconian theory of Shakespeare, has been carelessly accepted, or at all events accepted as possible, by many good scholars who have never taken the trouble to look into the matter for themselves. It was finally disproved by a series of articles of Armand Baschet, entitled 'Preuves curieuses de l'authenticite des Memoires de Jacques Casanova de Seingalt,' in 'Le Livre,' January, February, April and May, 1881; and these proofs were further corroborated by two articles of Alessandro d'Ancona, entitled 'Un Avventuriere del Secolo XVIII.,' in the 'Nuovo Antologia,' February 1 and August 1, 1882. Baschet had never himself seen the manuscript of the Memoirs, but he had learnt all the facts about it from Messrs. Brockhaus, and he had himself examined the numerous papers relating to Casanova in the Venetian archives. A similar examination was made at the Frari at about the same time by the Abbe Fulin; and I myself, in 1894, not knowing at the time that the discovery had been already made, made it over again for myself. There the arrest of Casanova, his imprisonment in the Piombi, the exact date of his escape, the name of the monk who accompanied him, are all authenticated by documents contained in the 'riferte' of the Inquisition of State; there are the bills for the repairs of the roof and walls of the cell from which he escaped; there are the reports of the spies on whose information he was arrested, for his too dangerous free-spokenness in matters of religion and morality. The same archives contain forty-eight letters of Casanova to the Inquisitors of State, dating from 1763 to 1782, among the Riferte dei Confidenti, or reports of secret agents; the earliest asking permission to return to Venice, the rest giving information in regard to

the immoralities of the city, after his return there; all in the same handwriting as the Memoirs. Further proof could scarcely be needed, but Baschet has done more than prove the authenticity, he has proved the extraordinary veracity, of the Memoirs. F. W. Barthold, in 'Die Geschichtlichen Personlichkeiten in J. Casanova's Memoiren,' 2 vols., 1846, had already examined about a hundred of Casanova's allusions to well known people, showing the perfect exactitude of all but six or seven, and out of these six or seven inexactitudes ascribing only a single one to the author's intention. Baschet and d'Ancona both carry on what Barthold had begun; other investigators, in France, Italy and Germany, have followed them; and two things are now certain, first, that Casanova himself wrote the Memoirs published under his name, though not textually in the precise form in which we have them; and, second, that as their veracity becomes more and more evident as they are confronted with more and more independent witnesses, it is only fair to suppose that they are equally truthful where the facts are such as could only have been known to Casanova himself.

II

For more than two-thirds of a century it has been known that Casanova spent the last fourteen years of his life at Dux, that he wrote his Memoirs there, and that he died there. During all this time people have been discussing the authenticity and the truthfulness of the Memoirs, they have been searching for information about Casanova in various directions, and yet hardly any one has ever taken the trouble, or obtained the permission, to make a careful examination in precisely the one place where information was most likely to be found. The very existence of the manuscripts at Dux was known only to a few, and to most of these only on hearsay; and thus the singular good fortune was reserved for me, on my visit to Count Waldstein in September 1899, to be the first to discover the most interesting things contained in these manuscripts. M. Octave Uzanne, though he had not himself visited Dux, had indeed procured copies of some of the manuscripts, a few of which were published by him in *Le Livre*, in 1887 and 1889. But with the death of *Le Livre* in 1889 the 'Casanova inedit' came to an end, and has never, so far as I know, been continued elsewhere. Beyond the publication of these fragments, nothing has been done with the manuscripts at Dux, nor has an account of them ever been given by any one who has been allowed to examine them.

For five years, ever since I had discovered the documents in the Venetian archives, I had wanted to go to Dux; and in 1899, when I was staying with Count Lutzow at Zampach, in Bohemia, I found the way kindly opened for me. Count Waldstein, the present head of the family, with extreme courtesy, put all his manuscripts at my disposal, and invited me to stay with him. Unluckily, he was called away on the morning of the day that I reached Dux. He had left everything ready for me, and I was shown over the castle by a friend of his, Dr. Kittel, whose courtesy I should like also to acknowledge. After a hurried visit to the castle we started on the long drive to Oberleutensdorf, a smaller Schloss near Komotau, where the Waldstein family was then staying. The air was sharp and bracing; the two Russian horses flew like the wind; I was whirled along in an unfamiliar darkness, through a strange country, black with coal mines, through dark pine woods, where a wild peasantry dwelt in little mining towns. Here and there, a few men and women passed us

on the road, in their Sunday finery; then a long space of silence, and we were in the open country, galloping between broad fields; and always in a haze of lovely hills, which I saw more distinctly as we drove back next morning.

The return to Dux was like a triumphal entry, as we dashed through the market-place filled with people come for the Monday market, pots and pans and vegetables strewn in heaps all over the ground, on the rough paving stones, up to the great gateway of the castle, leaving but just room for us to drive through their midst. I had the sensation of an enormous building: all Bohemian castles are big, but this one was like a royal palace. Set there in the midst of the town, after the Bohemian fashion, it opens at the back upon great gardens, as if it were in the midst of the country. I walked through room after room, along corridor after corridor; everywhere there were pictures, everywhere portraits of Wallenstein, and battle-scenes in which he led on his troops. The library, which was formed, or at least arranged, by Casanova, and which remains as he left it, contains some 25,000 volumes, some of them of considerable value; one of the most famous books in Bohemian literature, Skala's History of the Church, exists in manuscript at Dux, and it is from this manuscript that the two published volumes of it were printed. The library forms part of the Museum, which occupies a ground-floor wing of the castle. The first room is an armoury, in which all kinds of arms are arranged, in a decorative way, covering the ceiling and the walls with strange patterns. The second room contains pottery, collected by Casanova's Waldstein on his Eastern travels. The third room is full of curious mechanical toys, and cabinets, and carvings in ivory. Finally, we come to the library, contained in the two innermost rooms. The book-shelves are painted white, and reach to the low-vaulted ceilings, which are whitewashed. At the end of a bookcase, in the corner of one of the windows, hangs a fine engraved portrait of Casanova.

After I had been all over the castle, so long Casanova's home, I was taken to Count Waldstein's study, and left there with the manuscripts. I found six huge cardboard cases, large enough to contain foolscap paper, lettered on the back: 'Grafl. Waldstein-Wartenberg'sches Real Fideicommiss. Dux-Oberleutensdorf: Handschriftlicher Nachlass Casanova.' The cases were arranged so as to stand like books; they opened at the side; and on opening them, one after another, I found series after series of manuscripts roughly thrown together, after some pretence at arrangement, and lettered with a very generalised description of contents. The greater part of the manuscripts were in Casanova's handwriting, which I could see gradually beginning to get shaky with years. Most were written in French, a certain number in Italian. The beginning of a catalogue in the library, though said to be by him, was not in his handwriting. Perhaps it was taken down at his dictation. There were also some copies of Italian and Latin poems not written by him. Then there were many big bundles of letters addressed to him, dating over more than thirty years. Almost all the rest was in his own handwriting.

I came first upon the smaller manuscripts, among which I, found, jumbled together on the same and on separate scraps of paper, washing-bills, accounts, hotel bills, lists of letters written, first drafts of letters with many erasures, notes on books, theological and mathematical notes, sums, Latin quotations, French and Italian verses, with variants, a long list of classical names which have and have not been 'francises,' with reasons for and

against; 'what I must wear at Dresden'; headings without anything to follow, such as: 'Reflexions on respiration, on the true cause of youth-the crows'; a new method of winning the lottery at Rome; recipes, among which is a long printed list of perfumes sold at Spa; a newspaper cutting, dated Prague, 25th October 1790, on the thirty-seventh balloon ascent of Blanchard; thanks to some 'noble donor' for the gift of a dog called 'Finette'; a passport for 'Monsieur de Casanova, Venitien, allant d'ici en Hollande, October 13, 1758 (Ce Passeport bon pour quinze jours)', together with an order for post-horses, gratis, from Paris to Bordeaux and Bayonne.'

Occasionally, one gets a glimpse into his daily life at Dux, as in this note, scribbled on a fragment of paper (here and always I translate the French literally): 'I beg you to tell my servant what the biscuits are that I like to eat; dipped in wine, to fortify my stomach. I believe that they can all be found at Roman's.' Usually, however, these notes, though often suggested by something closely personal, branch off into more general considerations; or else begin with general considerations, and end with a case in point. Thus, for instance, a fragment of three pages begins: 'A compliment which is only made to gild the pill is a positive impertinence, and Monsieur Bailli is nothing but a charlatan; the monarch ought to have spit in his face, but the monarch trembled with fear.' A manuscript entitled 'Essai d'Egoisme,' dated, 'Dux, this 27th June, 1769,' contains, in the midst of various reflections, an offer to let his 'appartement' in return for enough money to 'tranquillise for six months two Jew creditors at Prague.' Another manuscript is headed 'Pride and Folly,' and begins with a long series of antitheses, such as: 'All fools are not proud, and all proud men are fools. Many fools are happy, all proud men are unhappy.' On the same sheet follows this instance or application:

Whether it is possible to compose a Latin distich of the greatest beauty without knowing either the Latin language or prosody. We must examine the possibility and the impossibility, and afterwards see who is the man who says he is the author of the distich, for there are extraordinary people in the world. My brother, in short, ought to have composed the distich, because he says so, and because he confided it to me *tete-a-tete*. I had, it is true, difficulty in believing him; but what is one to do! Either one must believe, or suppose him capable of telling a lie which could only be told by a fool; and that is impossible, for all Europe knows that my brother is not a fool.

Here, as so often in these manuscripts, we seem to see Casanova thinking on paper. He uses scraps of paper (sometimes the blank page of a letter, on the other side of which we see the address) as a kind of informal diary; and it is characteristic of him, of the man of infinitely curious mind, which this adventurer really was, that there are so few merely personal notes among these casual jottings. Often, they are purely abstract; at times, metaphysical '*jeux d'esprit*,' like the sheet of fourteen 'Different Wagers,' which begins:

I wager that it is not true that a man who weighs a hundred pounds will weigh more if you kill him. I wager that if there is any difference, he will weigh less. I wager that diamond powder has not sufficient force to kill a man.

Side by side with these fanciful excursions into science, come more serious ones, as in the note on Algebra, which traces its progress since the year 1494, before which 'it had only arrived at the solution of problems of the second degree, inclusive.' A scrap of paper tells us that Casanova 'did not like regular towns.' 'I like,' he says, 'Venice, Rome, Florence, Milan, Constantinople, Genoa.' Then he becomes abstract and inquisitive again, and writes two pages, full of curious, out-of-the-way learning, on the name of Paradise:

The name of Paradise is a name in Genesis which indicates a place of pleasure (*lieu voluptueux*): this term is Persian. This place of pleasure was made by God before he had created man.

It may be remembered that Casanova quarrelled with Voltaire, because Voltaire had told him frankly that his translation of *L'Ecossoise* was a bad translation. It is piquant to read another note written in this style of righteous indignation:

Voltaire, the hardy Voltaire, whose pen is without bit or bridle; Voltaire, who devoured the Bible, and ridiculed our dogmas, doubts, and after having made proselytes to impiety, is not ashamed, being reduced to the extremity of life, to ask for the sacraments, and to cover his body with more relics than St. Louis had at Amboise.

Here is an argument more in keeping with the tone of the *Memoirs*:

A girl who is pretty and good, and as virtuous as you please, ought not to take it ill that a man, carried away by her charms, should set himself to the task of making their conquest. If this man cannot please her by any means, even if his passion be criminal, she ought never to take offence at it, nor treat him unkindly; she ought to be gentle, and pity him, if she does not love him, and think it enough to keep invincibly hold upon her own duty.

Occasionally he touches upon aesthetical matters, as in a fragment which begins with this liberal definition of beauty:

Harmony makes beauty, says M. de S. P. (Bernardin de St. Pierre), but the definition is too short, if he thinks he has said everything. Here is mine. Remember that the subject is metaphysical. An object really beautiful ought to seem beautiful to all whose eyes fall upon it. That is all; there is nothing more to be said.

At times we have an anecdote and its commentary, perhaps jotted down for use in that latter part of the *Memoirs* which was never written, or which has been lost. Here is a single sheet, dated 'this 2nd September, 1791,' and headed *Souvenir*:

The Prince de Rosenberg said to me, as we went down stairs, that Madame de Rosenberg was dead, and asked me if the Comte de Waldstein had in the library the illustration of the Villa d'Altichiero, which the Emperor had asked for in vain at the city library of Prague, and when I answered 'yes,' he gave an equivocal laugh. A moment afterwards, he asked me if he might tell the Emperor. 'Why not, monseigneur? It is not a secret, 'Is His Majesty coming to Dux?' 'If he goes to Oberlaitensdorf (sic) he will go to Dux, too; and

he may ask you for it, for there is a monument there which relates to him when he was Grand Duke.' 'In that case, His Majesty can also see my critical remarks on the Egyptian prints.'

The Emperor asked me this morning, 6th October, how I employed my time at Dux, and I told him that I was making an Italian anthology. 'You have all the Italians, then?' 'All, sire.' See what a lie leads to. If I had not lied in saying that I was making an anthology, I should not have found myself obliged to lie again in saying that we have all the Italian poets. If the Emperor comes to Dux, I shall kill myself.

'They say that this Dux is a delightful spot,' says Casanova in one of the most personal of his notes, 'and I see that it might be for many; but not for me, for what delights me in my old age is independent of the place which I inhabit. When I do not sleep I dream, and when I am tired of dreaming I blacken paper, then I read, and most often reject all that my pen has vomited.' Here we see him blackening paper, on every occasion, and for every purpose. In one bundle I found an unfinished story about Roland, and some adventure with women in a cave; then a 'Meditation on arising from sleep, 19th May 1789'; then a 'Short Reflection of a Philosopher who finds himself thinking of procuring his own death. At Dux, on getting out of bed on 13th October 1793, day dedicated to St. Lucy, memorable in my too long life.' A big budget, containing cryptograms, is headed 'Grammatical Lottery'; and there is the title-page of a treatise on The Duplication of the Hexahedron, demonstrated geometrically to all the Universities and all the Academies of Europe.' [See Charles Henry, *Les Connaissances Mathematiques de Casanova*. Rome, 1883.] There are innumerable verses, French and Italian, in all stages, occasionally attaining the finality of these lines, which appear in half a dozen tentative forms:

'Sans	mystere	point	de	plaisirs,
Sans	silence	point	de	mystere.
Charme	divin	de	mes	loisirs,
Solitude! que tu mes chere!				

Then there are a number of more or less complete manuscripts of some extent. There is the manuscript of the translation of Homer's *Iliad*, in ottava rima (published in Venice, 1775-8); of the 'Histoire de Venise,' of the 'Icosameron,' a curious book published in 1787, purporting to be 'translated from English,' but really an original work of Casanova; 'Philocalies sur les Sottises des Mortels,' a long manuscript never published; the sketch and beginning of 'Le Pollmarque, ou la Calomnie demasquee par la presence d'esprit. Tragicomedie en trois actes, composed a Dux dans le mois de Juin de l'Annee, 1791,' which recurs again under the form of the 'Polemoscope: La Lorgnette menteuse ou la Calomnie demasque,' acted before the Princess de Ligne, at her chateau at Teplitz, 1791. There is a treatise in Italian, 'Delle Passioni'; there are long dialogues, such as 'Le Philosophe et le Theologien', and 'Reve': 'Dieu-Moi'; there is the 'Songe d'un Quart d'Heure', divided into minutes; there is the very lengthy criticism of 'Bernardin de Saint-Pierre'; there is the 'Confutation d'une Censure indiscrete qu'on lit dans la Gazette de Iena, 19 Juin 1789'; with another large manuscript, unfortunately imperfect, first called 'L'Insulte', and then 'Placet au Public', dated 'Dux, this 2nd March, 1790,' referring to the

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