



The Letters of Gustave Flaubert, 1830-1857

Gustave Flaubert, Francis Steegmuller (translator)

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Gustave Flaubert wrote to his mistress, Louise Colet: "An author in his book must be like God in the universe, present everywhere and visible nowhere." In his books, Flaubert sought to observe that principle; but in his many impassioned letters he allowed his feelings to overflow, revealing himself in all of his human complexity. Sensuous, witty, exalted, ironic, grave, analytical, the letters illustrate the artist's life--and they trumpet his artistic opinions--in an outpouring of uninhibited eloquence.

An acknowledged master of translation, Francis Steegmuller has given us by far the most generous and varied selection of Flaubert's letters in English. He presents these with an engrossing narrative that places them in the context of the writer's life and times. We follow Flaubert through his unhappy years at law school, through his tumultuous affair with Louise Colet; we share his days and nights amid the temples and brothels of Egypt, then on to Palestine, Turkey, Greece, and Rome. And the letters chronicle one of the central events in literary history--the conception and composition of what has been called the first modern novel, *Madame Bovary*. Steegmuller's selection concludes with Flaubert's standing trial for immoral writing, *Madame Bovary*'s immediate popular success, and Baudelaire's celebration of its psychological and literary power.

Throughout this exposition in Flaubert's own words of his views on life, literature, and the passions, readers of his novels will be powerfully reminded of the fertility of his genius, and delighted by his poetic enthusiasm. "Let us sing to Apollo as in ancient days," he wrote to Louise Colet, "and breathe deeply of the fresh cold air of Parnassus; let us strum our guitars and clash our cymbals and whirl like dervishes in the eternal hubbub of forms and ideas!"

Flaubert's letters are documents of life and art; lovers of literature and of the literary adventure can rejoice in this edition.

The Letters of Gustave Flaubert, 1830-1857 Details

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From Reader Review The Letters of Gustave Flaubert, 1830-1857 for online ebook

Michael Lisk says

Very enjoyable. Very funny.

Fenyuae says

O' how I've realized how "words" can express what sometimes can not be done with actions. I would love to write these words to someone that I know would appreciate them. But for now...that's my secret! What can I say...I'm a "romantic"! But wow! Was this guy out there! Hey!?!?

August says

Great insight into Flaubert's writing process. Highly recommend it to any writers familiar with his novels.

Max Frick says

Enlightening and truly inspirational. Some of the greatest and most famous quotes in all literature come from this volume of letters. Re-read it whenever you feel your writerly spirit waning.

Christopher says

The first collection of the letters to Louise are a record of two people happy and longing for each other. They are fond and sweet and utterly boring. The section must be got through, despite the sheer tedium of the slog. I think of Balzac's remark that "happiness has no story."

When Flaubert begins his whoring in Egypt, the book takes a turn for the better. Whenever he writes to a friend whom he loves and with whom he feels comfortable enough to be light and brash, the letters are hilarious and have the feel of good conversation. To wit:

"A week ago I saw a monkey in the street jump on a donkey and try to jack him off - the donkey brayed and kicked, the monkey's owner shouted the monkey itself squealed; apart from two or three children who laughed - and me, who found it very funny - no one paid any attention. When I described this to M. Belin, the secretary of the consulate, he told me of having seen an ostrich trying to violate a donkey. Max had himself jacked off the other day in a deserted section among some ruins and says he never enjoyed himself more...."

The second battery of letters to Louise are thankfully different from the first. They're filled with his ideas about art, his stylistic struggles and remarks about his method in writing *Madame Bovary*. So for the very reason we enjoy them, Louise finds them dull and heartless.

You can't help but feel the editor is unfair to Louise in setting up every one of his interlocutors (in the many asides and notes that stitch these letters together into a quasi narrative) as either an obstacle to the great genius or a midwife for his gift. He takes great care to showcase the litany Flaubert constantly retreads of the isolated mind, the great lonely monk of an artist writing for himself alone. The book becomes a monument to this vaunted idealistic view of the Master at work. These exhortations range from inspiring to tiresome depending on how many you read in one sitting. Flaubert successfully categorizes all writing that isn't his as gross. His opinions on criticism are typical and obtuse (he engages in some interesting criticisms himself).

But Steegmuller is right, the letters allow fans of Flaubert to see him in a more unrestrained, freer style, a style he wished he could bring to his books. This is the other half of the coin, the authorial perspective he hides from his published works. Looking forward to reading Vol. II.

India says

Wonderful! Elegant. Gracile and personal. Beautiful love letters so well written as to make a modern man wonder if he can write at all. I reread a letter or two every so often and leave this book within arms reach.

Wm says

Unpleasant and not as much of an insight into Flaubert's work as one would hope.

But I'm still glad I read it because it turned out to be good research for a potential writing project.

Craig says

I won't go so far as some to say that I would give up the novels to save the letters, but this is nonetheless an extraordinary collection of writing.

Kichi says

Flaubert was one of the world's foremost literary technicians and this compilation grants us rare access to his personality at an almost casual level. Such a rare privilege. It's as close as we can get to having coffee with a man of such literary significance.
