

GIACOMO CASANOVA (1725 1798) SEDUCER SEDUCED BY MEDICINE

Dr. André J. Fabre

Créteil Hospital, Paris, France

Autor corespondent: André J. Fabre, e-mail: a.fabre.fl @ google.com

Abstract:

Recognised for his adventurous existence throughout all Eighteenth century Europe but it should be stressed that, besides all of his gallant adventures, Casanova gives in his Memoirs a large place to medicine.

Three main chapters will detail this little known aspect of the master seducer: Casanova's diseases, Casanova and Medicine, Casanova and physicians.

Key-words: Casanova, history of medicine

On February 17, 1724, in Venice Gaetano Casanova and Giovanna Maria Farussi actress known under the stage name of "Zanetta" married at San Samuele Church. They went after their marriage, live at the third floor of an old house in Calle Malipiero behind Palazzo Grassi. A few months later, on April 2, 1725, a child was born, most likely son of a Venetian noble, Michel Grimani di Santa Maria Formosa, director of the theatre where Zanetta was actress.

The child, christened on April 5 at San Samuele, was named Giacomo: he was indeed promised to a flamboyant career, memorialist, secret agent, gambler but most of all, world-famous seducer. He left a detailed account of his love affairs in eight volumes of Memoirs published after his death with triumphant success, in 1825¹.

Abandoned by his parents (Zanetta kept,

most of the time, away from Venice and Gaetano died very early) Giacomo was raised by his beloved grandmother, Marzia, Corte delle Muneghe near San Samuele. All his life, Casanova kept a fervent attachment to his grandmother and no other woman could ever erase the memory of Marzia.

At age 17, Giacomo was sent to Padua, and he showed there as an earnest and serious student, ending with a doctorate in civil and canon law. Returning to Venice, Casanova entered in ecclesiastical career, receiving from the Patriarch of Venice the four minor orders which confer the title of "Abbot, but after some risky gambling adventures, he had to give up his primary vocation.

This was the beginning of his adventurous existence throughout all Eighteenth century Europe but it should be stressed that, besides all of his gallant adventures, Casanova gives in his Memoirs² a large place to medicine.

Three main chapters will detail this little known aspect of the master seducer: Casanova's diseases, Casanova and Medicine, Casanova and physicians

1. Casanova's diseases

A surprising aspect in Casanova's Memoirs is the place given, as he says himself, to his "health problems"

1a. Recurrent nosebleed

From the very first chapter of the

1 This first édition, Schütz translation (published between 1822–1828)[is a censored German translation for Brockhaus (the first half was translated by Wilhelm von Schütz, the remaining parts by an unknown translator). Its "original" title is: Aus den Memoiren des Venetianers Jacob Casanova de Seingalt, oder sein Leben, wie er es zu Dux in Böhmen niederschrieb. Nach dem Original-Manuscript bearbeitet von Wilhelm von Schütz. The Brockhaus-Plon reference (1960–1962). The manuscript remained hidden for a lot of time because Brockhaus didn't want to be pirated anymore. Then wars and economics crisis slowed their edition projects until the end of the 1950s. The first complete and authentic edition of the text was published between 1960 and 1962 (minus the four lost chapters, replaced by their Laforgue version, with the annotations by Schütz).

2 "The Memoirs of Jacques Casanova de Seingalt, 1725-1798." From "Project Gutenberg", Internet site <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2981/2981-h/2981-h.htm>

Memoirs Casanova complains of his recurrent epistaxis: "I was standing in the corner of a room bending towards the wall, supporting my head, and my eyes fixed upon a stream of blood flowing from my nose to the ground. My grandmother, Marzia, whose pet I was, came to me, bathed my face with cold water, and, unknown to everyone in the house, took me with her in a gondola as far as Muran, a thickly-populated island only half a league distant from Venice. Alighting from the gondola, we enter a wretched hole, where we find an old woman sitting on a rickety bed, holding a black cat in her arms, with five or six more purring around her. The two old cronies held together a long discourse of which, most likely, I was the subject. At the end of the dialogue, which was carried on in the patois of Forli, the witch having received a silver ducat from my grandmother, opened a box, took me in her arms, placed me in the box and locked me in it, telling me not to be frightened, a piece of advice which would certainly have had the contrary effect, if I had had any wits about me, but I was stupefied. I kept myself quiet in a corner of the box, holding a handkerchief to my nose because it was still bleeding, and otherwise very indifferent to the uproar going on outside. I could hear in turn, laughter, weeping, singing, screams, shrieks, and knocking against the box, but for all that I cared nought. At last I am taken out of the box; the blood stops flowing. The wonderful old witch, after lavishing caresses upon me, takes off my clothes, lays me on the bed, burns some drugs, gathers the smoke in a sheet which she wraps around me, pronounces incantations, takes the sheet off me, and gives me five sugar-plums of a very agreeable taste. Then she immediately rubs my temples and the nape of my neck with an ointment exhaling a delightful perfume, and puts my clothes on me again. She told me that my haemorrhage would little by little leave me, provided I should never disclose to anyone what she had done to cure me, and she threatened me, on the other hand, with the loss of all my blood and with death, should I ever breathe a word concerning those mysteries. After having thus taught me my lesson, she informed me that a beautiful lady would pay me a visit during the following night, and that she would make me happy, on condition that I should have sufficient control

over myself never to mention to anyone my having received such a visit. Upon this we left and returned home. I fell asleep almost as soon as I was in bed, without giving a thought to the beautiful visitor I was to receive; but, waking up a few hours afterwards, I saw, or fancied I saw, coming down the chimney, a dazzling woman, with immense hoops, splendidly attired, and wearing on her head a crown set with precious stones, which seemed to me sparkling with fire. With slow steps, but with a majestic and sweet countenance, she came forward and sat on my bed; then taking several small boxes from her pocket, she emptied their contents over my head, softly whispering a few words, and after giving utterance to a long speech, not a single word of which I understood, she kissed me and disappeared the same way she had come. I soon went again to sleep. The next morning, my grandmother came to dress me, and the moment she was near my bed, she cautioned me to be silent, threatening me with death if I dared to say anything respecting my night's adventures. This command, laid upon me by the only woman who had complete authority over me, and whose orders I was accustomed to obey blindly, caused me to remember the vision, and to store it, with the seal of secrecy, in the inmost corner of my dawning memory. I had not, however, the slightest inclination to mention the circumstances to anyone; in the first place, because I did not suppose it would interest anybody, and in the second because I would not have known whom to make a confidant of. My disease had rendered me dull and retired; everybody pitied me and left me to myself; my life was considered likely to be but a short one, and as to my parents, they never spoke to me. After the journey to Muran, and the nocturnal visit of the fairy, I continued to have bleeding at the nose, but less from day to day, and my memory slowly developed itself. I learned to read in less than a month."³

1b. Casanova's diseases

A long list of "health problems" is present in the Memoirs, among which:

Migraines

The first migraine attack is described with

³ Episode 1, Chapter I

high precision in the Memoirs: " An hour after I had left Castel-Nuovo, the atmosphere being calm and the sky clear, I perceived on my right, and within ten paces of me, a pyramidal flame about two feet long and four or five feet above the ground. This apparition surprised me, because it seemed to accompany me. Anxious to examine it, I endeavoured to get nearer to it, but the more I advanced towards it the further it went from me. It would stop when I stood still, and when the road along which I was travelling happened to be lined with trees, I no longer saw it, but it was sure to reappear as soon as I reached a portion of the road without trees. I several times retraced my steps purposely, but, every time I did so, the flame disappeared, and would not show itself again until I proceeded towards Rome. This extraordinary beacon left me when daylight chased darkness from the sky.⁴ "

Haemorrhoidal disease

Throughout his life, Casanova had problems with what he pompously calls "alvine secretions" (understand ..." intestinal transit "). Constipation and haemorrhoidal problems, as often expressed in the Memoirs, have been afflicting Casanova all his life, with a 1756 acme during the hellish stay at the "Piombi of Venice": "I had been in this hell-on-earth for fifteen days without any secretion from the bowels. At the end of this almost incredible time nature re-asserted herself, and I thought my last hour was come. The haemorrhoidal veins were swollen to such an extent that the pressure on them gave me almost unbearable agony. To this fatal time I owe the inception of that sad infirmity of which I have never been able to completely cure myself.⁵..

Many years later, in St. Petersburg, constipation turned worse: "I had a serious attack, and the daily pain and anxiety embittered my existence. A vegetarian doctor called Senapios, for whom I had sent, gave me the sad news that I had a blind or incomplete fistula in the rectum, and according to him nothing but the cruel pistoury would give me any relief, and indeed he said I had no time to lose. I had to agree, in spite of my dislike to the operation; but

fortunately the clever surgeon whom the doctor summoned pronounced that if I would have patience nature itself would give me relief. I had much to endure, especially from the severe dieting to which I was subjected, but which doubtless did me good.⁶"

Venereal diseases

No one will be really surprised by the repetition and the diversity of venereal diseases occurring during Casanova's life:

Gonorrhoea complicated by orchitis: in the first volume of memoirs, Casanova describes his misadventures in this area, explaining that "an old doctor, fully experienced on the subject, had promised to restore his health in only two months, and kept his word"

Chancroid: a first episode was treated by a surgeon in Palermo who was at the same time dentist: mercury was prescribed. Later on, occurred an "eighth attack" (according to Casanova's calculations): "When I reached my pretty house at Augsburg I took to my bed, determined not to rise till I was cured or dead. M. Carli, my banker, recommended to me a doctor named Cephalides, a pupil of the famous Fayet, who had cured me of a similar complaint several years before. This Cephalides was considered the best doctor in Augsburg. He examined me and declared he could cure me by sudorific without having recourse to the knife. He began his treatment by putting me on a severe regimen, ordering baths, and applying mercury locally. I endured this treatment for six weeks, at the end of which time I found myself worse than at the beginning. I had become terribly thin, and I had two enormous inguinal tumours. I had to make up my mind to have them lanced, but though the operation nearly killed me it did not to make me any better. He was so clumsy as to cut the artery, causing great loss of blood which was arrested with difficulty, and would have proved fatal if it had not been for the care of M. Algardi, a Bolognese doctor in the service of the Prince-Bishop of Augsburg. I had enough of Cephalides, and Dr. Algardi prepared in my presence eighty-six pills containing eighteen grains of manna. I took one of these pills every morning, drinking a large glass of curds after it, and in the evening I had

⁴ Episode 2, Chapter VIII

⁵ Episode 10, Chapter XXVI

⁶ Episode 25, Chapter XX

another pill with barley water, and this was the only sustenance I had. This heroic treatment gave me back my health in two months and a half, in which I suffered a great deal of pain; but I did not begin to put on flesh and get back my strength till the end of the year".⁷

Acute pneumonia

Besides venereal diseases, Casanova's Memoirs are scattered with lots of diverse diseases, as the "smallpox" ("variola") he contracted at the bedside of his first girlfriend, Bettina.

The most dangerous health problem occurred for Casanova in Aix en Provence, mosey likely an acute pneumonia. Symptoms were so alarming that pries taws called to deliver the last sacraments: "I went to bed with a pain in my side, and after six hours' sleep awoke feeling thoroughly ill. I had pleurisy. My landlord called in an old doctor, who refused to let me blood. A severe cough came on, and the next day I began to spit blood. In six or seven days the malady became so serious that I was confessed and received the last sacraments. On the tenth day, the disease having abated for three days, my clever old doctor answered for my life, but I continued to spit blood till the eighteenth day. My convalescence lasted for three weeks, and I found it more trying than the actual illness, for a man in pain has no time to grow weary. Throughout the whole case I was tended day and night by a strange woman, of whom I knew nothing. She nursed me with the tenderest care, and I awaited my recovery to give her my sincere thanks. She was not an old woman, neither was she attractive looking. She had slept in my room all the time. After Eastertide, feeling I was well enough to venture out, I thanked her to the best of my ability, and asked who had sent her to me. She told me it was the doctor, and so bade me farewell. A few days later I was thanking my old doctor for having procured me such a capital nurse, but he stared at me and said he knew nothing about the woman. I was puzzled, and asked my landlord if she could throw any light on the strange nurse's identity; but she knew nothing, and her ignorance seemed universal. I could not disco-

ver whence or how she came to attend me"⁸

One thing is certain, throughout his long life (he died at age 73), Casanova never accepted any help from physicians. He fully acknowledges his reticence "I always made my food congenial to my constitution, and my health was always excellent. I learned very early that our health is always impaired by some excess either of food or abstinence, and I never had any physician except myself. I am bound to add that the excess in too little has ever proved in me more dangerous than the excess in too much; the last may cause indigestion, but the first causes death"⁹

2. Casanova and Medicine - Casanova self-physician

Casanova has never trusted anyone else than himself to take care of his health, this is repeated in many passages of the Memoirs.

2.1. *In Schönbrunn, Austria*

In 1752 in Schönbrunn, Casanova, suffering from "severe indigestion", refuses help from doctors, "Although very much pleased with Vienna and with the pleasures I enjoyed with the beautiful frauleins, whose acquaintance I had made at the house of the baroness, I was thinking of leaving that agreeable city, when Baron Vais, meeting me at Count Durazzo's wedding, invited me to join a picnic at Schoenbrunn. I went, and I failed to observe the laws of temperance; the consequence was that I returned to Vienna with such a severe indigestion that in twenty-four hours I was at the point of death. I made use of the last particle of intelligence left in me by the disease to save my own life. Campioni, Roquendorf and Sarotin were by my bedside. M. Sarotin, who felt great friendship for me, had brought a physician, although I had almost positively declared that I would not see one. That disciple of Sangrado, thinking that he could allow full sway to the despotism of science, had sent for a surgeon, and they were going to bleed me against my will. I was half-dead; I do not know by what strange inspiration I opened my eyes, and I saw a man, standing lancet in hand and preparing to open the vein. "No, no!" I said. And I languidly

⁷ Episode 19, Chapitre XIII

⁸ Episode 27, Chapitre IX

⁹ Author's Preface

withdrew my arm; but the tormentor wishing, as the physician expressed it, to restore me to life in spite of myself, got hold of my arm again. I suddenly felt my strength returning. I put my hand forward, seized one of my pistols, fired, and the ball cut off one of the locks of his hair. That was enough; everybody ran away, with the exception of my servant, who did not abandon me, and gave me as much water as I wanted to drink. On the fourth day I had recovered my usual good health.¹⁰

2.2. In Warsaw

In Warsaw, Casanova received, from a duel with Count Branicki, vice-chamberlain at the Court of Poland, a bad injury to his left arm, but he did not allow any surgeon to dress his wounds. The whole story is indeed picturesque and is worth to be fully quoted: "General," said I, "you can bear witness that I have done all in my power to avoid this duel." The general went away with his head between his hands, and throwing off my cloak I took the first pistol that came to my hand. Branicki took the other, and said that he would guarantee upon his honour that my weapon was a good one. "I am going to try its goodness on your head," I answered. He turned pale at this, threw his sword to one of his servants, and bared his throat, and I was obliged, to my sorrow, to follow his example, for my sword was the only weapon I had, with the exception of the pistol. I bared my chest also, and stepped back five or six paces, and he did the same. As soon as we had taken up our positions I took off my hat with my left hand, and begged him to fire first. Instead of doing so immediately he lost two or three seconds in sighting, aiming, and covering his head by raising the weapon before it. I was not in a position to let him kill me at his ease, so I suddenly aimed and fired on him just as he fired on me. That I did so is evident, as all the witnesses were unanimous in saying that they only heard one report. I felt I was wounded in my left hand, and so put it into my pocket, and I ran towards my enemy who had fallen. All of a sudden, as I knelt beside him, three bare swords were flourished over my head, and three noble assassins prepared to cut me down beside their master. Fortunately, Branicki had not lost

consciousness or the power of speaking, and he cried out in a voice of thunder, "Scoundrels! have some respect for a man of honour." This seemed to petrify them. I put my right hand under the pistol's armpit, while the general helped him on the other side, and thus we took him to the inn, which happened to be near at hand. Branicki stooped as he walked, and gazed at me curiously, apparently wondering where all the blood on my clothes came from. When we got to the inn, Branicki laid himself down in an arm-chair. We unbuttoned his clothes and lifted up his shirt, and he could see himself that he was dangerously wounded. My ball had entered his body by the seventh rib on the right hand, and had gone out by the second false rib on the left. The two wounds were ten inches apart, and the case was of an alarming nature, as the intestines must have been pierced. Branicki spoke to me in a weak voice, — "You have killed me, so make haste away, as you are in danger of the gibbet. The duel was fought in the ban, and I am a high court officer, and a Knight of the White Eagle. So lose no time and if you have not enough money take my purse." I picked up the purse which had fallen out, and put it back in his pocket, thanking him, and saying it would be useless to me, for if I were guilty I was content to lose my head. "I hope," I added, "that your wound will not be mortal, and I am deeply grieved at your obliging me to fight." With these words I kissed him on his brow and left the inn, seeing neither horses nor carriage, nor servant. They had all gone off for doctor, surgeon, priest, and the friends and relatives of the wounded man.

I was alone and without any weapon, in the midst of a snow-covered country, my hand was wounded, and I had not the slightest idea which was the way to Warsaw. I took the road which seemed most likely, and after I had gone some distance I met a peasant with an empty sleigh. "Warszawa?" I cried, shewing him a ducat. He understood me, and lifted a coarse mat, with which he covered me when I got into the sleigh, and then set off at a gallop.

All at once Biniski, Branicki's bosom-friend, came galloping furiously along the road with his bare sword in his hand. He was evidently running after me. Happily he did not glance at the wretched sleigh in which I was, or else he would undoubtedly have murdered me. I

¹⁰ Episode 7, Chapitre X

got at last to Warsaw, and went to the house of Prince Adam Czartoryski to beg him to shelter me, but there was nobody there. Without delay I determined to seek refuge in the Convent of the Recollets, which was handy. I rang at the door of the monastery, and the porter seeing me covered with blood hastened to shut the door, guessing the object of my visit. But I did not give him the time to do so, but honouring him with a hearty kick forced my way in. His cries attracted a troop of frightened monks. I demanded sanctuary, and threatened them with vengeance if they refused to grant it. One of their numbers spoke to me, and I was taken to a little den which looked more like a dungeon than anything else. I offered no resistance, feeling sure that they would change their tune before very long. I asked them to send for my servants, and when they came I sent for a doctor and Campioni. Before the surgeon could come the Palatin of Polduchia was announced. I had never had the honour of speaking to him, but after hearing the history of my duel he was so kind as to give me all the particulars of a duel he had fought in his youthful days. Soon after came the Palatin of Kalisch, Prince Jablenowski. Prince Sanguska, and the Palatin of Wilna, who all joined in a chorus of abuse of the monks who had lodged me so scurvily. The poor religious excused themselves by saying that I had ill-treated their porter, which made my noble friends laugh; but I did not laugh, for my wound was very painful. However I was immediately moved into two of their best guest-rooms.

The ball had pierced my hand by the metacarpus under the index finger, and had broken the first phalanges. Its force had been arrested by a metal button on my waistcoat, and it had only inflicted a slight wound on my stomach close to the navel. However, there it was and it had to be extracted, for it pained me extremely. An empiric named Gendron, the first surgeon my servants had found, made an opening on the opposite side of my hand which doubled the wound. While he was performing this painful operation I told the story of the duel to the company, concealing the anguish I was enduring. What a power vanity exercises on the moral and physical forces! If I had been alone I should probably have fainted. As soon as the empiric Gendron was gone, the palatin's surgeon came in and took charge of the case, calling

Gendron a low fellow. At the same time Prince Lubomirski, the husband of the palatin's daughter, arrived, and gave us all a surprise by recounting the strange occurrences which had happened after the duel. Bininski came to where Branicki was lying, and seeing his wound rode off furiously on horseback, swearing to strike me dead wherever he found me. He fancied I would be with Tomatis, and went to his house. He found Tomatis with his mistress, Prince Lubomirski, and Count Moszczinski, but no Casanova was visible. He asked where I was, and on Tomatis replying that he did not know he discharged a pistol at his head. At this dastardly action Count Moszczincki seized him and tried to throw him out of the window, but the madman got loose with three cuts of his sabre, one of which slashed the count on the face and knocked out three of his teeth.

"After this exploit," Prince Lubomirski continued, "he seized me by the throat and held a pistol to my head, threatening to blow out my brains if I did not take him in safety to the court where his horse was, so that he might get away from the house without any attack being made on him by Tomatis's servants; and I did so immediately. Moszczinski is in the doctor's hands, and will be laid up for some time. "As soon as it was reported that Branicki was killed, his Uhlans began to ride about the town swearing to avenge their colonel, and to slaughter you. It is very fortunate that you took refuge here. "The chief marshal has had the monastery surrounded by two hundred dragoons, ostensibly to prevent your escape, but in reality to defend you from Branicki's soldiers.

"The doctors say that the postoli is in great danger if the ball has wounded the intestines, but if not they answer for his recovery. His fate will be known tomorrow. He now lies at the lord chamberlain's, not daring to have himself carried to his apartments at the palace. The king has been to see him, and the general who was present told his majesty that the only thing that saved your life was your threat to aim at Branicki's head. This frightened him, and to keep your ball from his head he stood in such an awkward position that he missed your vital parts. Otherwise he would undoubtedly have shot you through the heart, for he can split a bullet into two halves by firing against the blade of a knife. It was also a lucky

thing for you that you escaped Bininski, who never thought of looking for you in the wretched sleigh." "My lord, the most fortunate thing for me is that I did not kill my man outright. Otherwise I should have been cut to pieces just as I went to his help by three of his servants, who stood over me with drawn swords. However, the postoli ordered them to leave me alone.

"I am sorry for what has happened to your highness and Count Moszczinski; and if Tomatis was not killed by the madman it is only because the pistol was only charged with powder." "That's what I think, for no one heard the bullet; but it was a mere chance." "Quite so." Just then an officer of the palatin's came to me with a note from his master, whom ran as follows: "Read what the king says to me, and sleep well." The king's note was thus conceived: "Branicki, my dear uncle, is dangerous wounded. My surgeons are doing all they can for him, but I have not forgotten Casanova. You may assure him that he is pardoned, even if Branicki should die." I kissed the letter gratefully, and shewed it to my visitors, who lauded this generous man truly worthy of being a king. After this pleasant news I felt in need of rest, and my lords left me. As soon as they were gone, Campioni, who had come in before and had stood in the background, came up to me and gave me back the packet of papers, and with tears of joy congratulated me on the happy issue of the duel. Next day I had shoals of visitors, and many of the chiefs of the party opposed to Branicki sent me purses full of gold. The persons, who brought the money on behalf of such a lord or lady, said that being a foreigner I might be in need of money, and that was their excuse for the liberty they had taken. I thanked and refused them all, and sent back at least four thousand ducats, and was very proud of having done so. Campioni thought it was absurd, and he was right, for I repented afterwards of what I had done. The only present I accepted was a dinner for four persons, which Prince Adam Czartoryski sent me in every day, though the doctor would not let me enjoy it, he being a great believer in diet.

The wound in my stomach was progressing favourably, but on the fourth day the surgeons said my hand was becoming gangrened, and they agreed that the only

remedy was amputation. I saw this announced in the Court Gazette the next morning, but as I had other views on the matter I laughed heartily at the paragraph. The sheet was printed at night, after the king had placed his initials to the copy. In the morning several persons came to condole with me, but I received their sympathy with great irreverence. I merely laughed at Count Clary, who said I would surely submit to the operation; and just as he uttered the words the three surgeons came in together. "Well, gentlemen," said I, "you have mustered in great strength; why is this?" My ordinary surgeon replied that he wished to have the opinion of the other two before proceeding to amputation, and they would require looking at the wound.

The dressing was lifted and gangrene was declared to be undoubtedly present, and execution was ordered that evening. The butchers gave me the news with radiant faces, and assured me I need not be afraid as the operation would certainly prove efficacious. "Gentlemen," I replied, "you seem to have a great many solid scientific reasons for cutting off my hand; but one thing you have not got, and that is my consent. My hand is my own, and I am going to keep it." "Sir, it is certainly gangrened; by to-morrow the arm will begin to mortify, and then you will have to lose your arm." "Very good; if that prove so you shall cut off my arm, but I happen to know something of gangrene, and there is none about me." "You cannot know as much about it as we do." "Possibly; but as far as I can make out, you know nothing at all." "That's rather a strong expression." "I don't care whether it be strong or weak; you can go now."

In a couple of hours everyone whom the surgeons had told of my obstinacy came pestering me. Even the prince-palatin wrote to me that the king was extremely surprised at my lack of courage. This stung me to the quick, and I wrote the king a long letter, half in earnest and half in jest, in which I laughed at the ignorance of the surgeons, and at the simplicity of those who took whatever they said for gospel truth. I added that as an arm without a hand would be quite as useless as no arm at all, I meant to wait till it was necessary to cut off the arm. My letter was read at Court, and people wondered how a man with gangrene could write a long letter of four pages. Lubomirski told me kindly that I

was mistaken in laughing at my friends, for the three best surgeons in Warsaw could not be mistaken in such a simple case. "My lord, they are not deceived themselves, but they want to deceive me." "Why should they?" "To make themselves agreeable to Branicki, who is in a dangerous state, and might possibly get better if he heard that my hand had been taken off." "Really that seems an incredible idea to me!" "What will your highness say on the day when I am proved to be right?" "I shall say you are deserving of the highest praise, but he day must first come." "We shall see this evening, and I give you my word that if any gangrene has attacked the arm, I will have it cut off tomorrow morning." Four surgeons came to see me. My arm was pronounced to be highly aedematous, and of a livid colour up to the elbow; but when the lint was taken off the wound I could see for myself that it was progressing admirably. However, I concealed my delight. Prince Augustus Sulkowski and the Abbe Gouvel were present; the latter being attached to the palatin's court. The judgment of the surgeons was that the arm was gangrened, and must be amputated by the next morning at latest. I was tired of arguing with these rascals, so I told them to bring their instruments, and that I would submit to the operation. At this they went way in high glee, to tell the news at the Court, to Branicki, to the palatin, and so forth. I merely gave my servants orders to send them away when they came. I can dwell no more on this matter, though it is interesting enough to me. However, the reader will no doubt be obliged to me by my simply saying that a French surgeon in Prince Sulkowski's household took charge of the case in defiance of professional etiquette, and cured me perfectly, so I have my hand and my arm to this day. On Easter Day I went to mass with my arm in a sling. My cure had only lasted three weeks, but I was not able to put the hand to any active employment for eighteen months afterwards.¹¹

2.3. In London

In London, after a fall off his horse, just in front of Duke of Kingston's residence, Casanova had, once more, to fight vigorously with physicians" I began to ride towards Kingston

¹¹ Episode 25, Chapter XXII

and did not care for the motion of trotting, so I put my horse at a gallop, when all of a sudden he stumbled, and in an instant I was lying on the ground in front of the Duke of Kingston's house. Miss Chudleigh happened to be at the window, and seeing me thrown to the ground uttered a shriek. I raised my head and she recognized me, and hastened to send some of her people to help me. As soon as I was on my feet I wanted to go and thank her, but I could not stir, and a valet who knew something of surgery examined me, and declared that I had put out my collar-bone and would require a week's rest. The young lady told me that if I liked to stay in her house the greatest care should be taken of me. I thanked her warmly, but begged her to have me taken home, as I should not like to give her so much trouble. She immediately gave the necessary orders, and I was driven home in a comfortable carriage. The servants in charge would not accept any money, and I saw in the incident a proof of that hospitality for which the English are famed, although they are at the same time profoundly egotistic. When I got home I went to bed, and sent for a surgeon, who laughed when I told him that I had put out a bone. "I'll wager it is nothing more than a sprain. I only wish it was put out that I might have some chance of shewing my skill. "I am delighted," I said, "not to be in a position to call for that amount of talent, but I shall have a high opinion of you if you set me up in a short time."¹²

3. Casanova and physicians

Casanova "The number of patients killed by doctors by far exceeds the number of patients healed" notes Casanova in a 1793 letter to his friend Jean- Ferdinand Opiz¹³, adding: "I am not a doctor and do not believe in doctors".

In fact, all his life, Casanova has been a regular consultant, all over Europe, to physicians: most of the time for motives directly concerned by an intensive and diverse sexual activity

Thus, many physicians appear in Casanova's Memoirs:

¹² Episode 22, Chapter IX

¹³ Jean-Ferdinand Opiz (1741-1812) was father to a great painter of Prague. His correspondence with Casanova was published par Khol and Otto Pick (*Kurt Wolff Ed., Leipzig, 1913*)

Pietro Tabarani, Professor at the University of Siena, anatomist and specialist of hermaphroditism. Casanova, on a visit to Siena, received in present from Pr. Tabarini one of his books on written on a subject indeed fascinating for Giacomo...

Theodore Tronchin (1709-1781) was a famous physician, redactor of Diderot's Encyclopedia. Casanova met him on a visit to Ferney in 1760: "The famous Tronchin and The Duke de Villars came and joined us. The doctor, a tall fine man, polite, eloquent without being a conversationalist, a learned physician, a man of wit, a favourite pupil of Boerhaave, without scientific jargon, or charlatanism, or self-sufficiency, enchanted me. His system of medicine was based on regimen, and to make rules he had to be a man of profound science. I have been assured, but can scarcely believe it, that he cured a consumptive patient of a secret disease by means of the milk of an ass, which he had submitted to thirty strong frictions of mercury by four sturdy porters.¹⁴"

Albrecht von Haller (1708-1777): Casanova met him during a visit in Basel, and was very impressed: "M. Haller was a man six feet high and broad in a proportion; he was a well-made man, and a physical as well as a mental colossus. He received me courteously, and when he had read M. de Muralt's letter, he displayed the greatest politeness, which shews that a good letter of introduction is never out of place. This learned man displayed to me all the treasures of his knowledge, replying with exactitude to all my questions, and above all with a rare modesty which astonished me greatly, for whilst he explained the most difficult questions, he had the air of a scholar who would fain know; but on the other hand, when he asked me a scientific question, it was with so delicate an art that I could not help giving the right answer. M. de Haller was a great physiologist, a great doctor, and a great anatomist. He called Morgagni his master, though he had himself made numerous discoveries relating to the frame of man. While I stayed with him he shewed me a number of letters from Morgagni and Pontedera, a professor of botany, a science of which Haller had an extensive knowledge. Hearing me speak

of these learned men whose works I had read at an early age, he complained that Pontedera's letters were almost illegible and written in extremely obscure Latin. He shewed me a letter from a Berlin Academician, whose name I have forgotten, who said that since the king had read his letter he had no more thoughts of suppressing the Latin language. Haller had written to Frederick the Great that a monarch who succeeded in the unhappy enterprise of proscribing the language of Cicero and Virgil from the republic of letters would raise a deathless monument to his own ignorance. If men of letters require a universal language to communicate with one another, Latin is certainly the best, for Greek and Arabic do not adapt themselves in the same way to the genius of modern civilization.¹⁵"

Herman Boerhaave (1668 - 1738) botanist, physician and humanist of Leyden Casanova who visited him in Leyden, was fervent reader of all his books

3A. Casanova physician

Casanova was reluctant to trust any physician and showed only confidence in his own skills:

3.1. Casanova and diagnosis

Obviously, Casanova mainly exerted his diagnostic skills on female patients, among them

Bettina, first love affair in the memoirs, was subject, according to Casanova, to attacks of "hysteria" "I was in that state of mind when suddenly I heard outside of my door the gruff voice of Bettina's mother, who begged me to come down, adding that her daughter was dying. As I would have been very sorry if she had departed this life before she could feel the effects of my revenge, I got up hurriedly and went downstairs. I found Bettina lying in her father's bed writhing with fearful convulsions, and surrounded by the whole family. Half dressed, nearly bent in two, she was throwing her body now to the right, now to the left, striking at random with her feet and with her fists, and extricating herself by violent shaking from the hands of those who endeavoured to

¹⁴ Episode 15, Chapter XIX

¹⁵ Episode 14, Chapter XVIII

keep her down. With this sight before me, and the night's adventure still in my mind, I hardly knew what to think. I had no knowledge of human nature, no knowledge of artifice and tricks, and I could not understand how I found myself coolly witnessing such a scene, and composedly calm in the presence of two beings, one of whom I intended to kill and the other to dishonour. At the end of an hour Bettina fell asleep. A nurse and Doctor Olivo came soon after. The first said that the convulsions were caused by hysterics, but the doctor said no, and prescribed rest and cold baths.¹⁶

The Duchess of Chartres had ugly pimples disgracing her face, and Casanova acting as physician, successfully used common sense rather than drugs: "The Duchess de Chartres, daughter of the Prince of Conti, was twenty-six years of age. She was endowed with that particular sort of wit which renders a woman adorable. She was lively, above the prejudices of rank, cheerful, full of jest, a lover of pleasure, which she preferred to a long life. "Short and sweet," were the words she had constantly on her lips. She was pretty but she stood badly, and used to laugh at Marcel, the teacher of graceful deportment, who wanted to correct her awkward bearing. She kept her head bent forward and her feet turned inside when dancing; yet she was a charming dancer. Unfortunately her face was covered with pimples, which injured her beauty very greatly. Her physicians thought that they were caused by a disease of the liver, but they came from impurity of the blood, which at last killed her, and from which she suffered throughout her life. The questions she had asked from my oracle related to affairs connected with her heart, and she wished likewise to know how she could get rid of the blotches which disfigured her. My answers were rather obscure in such matters as I was not specially acquainted with, but they were very clear concerning her disease, and my oracle became precious and necessary to her highness. The next day, after dinner, Camille wrote me a note, as I expected, requesting me to give up all other engagements in order to present myself at five o'clock at the Palais-Royal, in the same room in which the duchess had already received me the day before. I was punctual. An elderly valet de chambre,

who was waiting for me, immediately went to give notice of my arrival, and five minutes after the charming princess made her appearance. After addressing me in a very complimentary manner, she drew all my answers from her pocket, and enquired whether I had any pressing engagements. "Your highness may be certain that I shall never have any more important business than to attend to your wishes." "Very well; I do not intend to go out, and we can work." She then showed me all the questions which she had already prepared on different subjects, and particularly those relating to the cure of her pimples. One circumstance had contributed to render my oracle precious to her, because nobody could possibly know it, and I had guessed it. Had I not done so, I daresay it would have been all the same. I had laboured myself under the same disease, and I was enough of a physician to be aware that to attempt the cure of a cutaneous disease by active remedies might kill the patient. I had already answered that she could not get rid of the pimples on her face in less than a week, but that a year of diet would be necessary to effect a radical cure. We spent three hours in ascertaining what she was to do, and, believing implicitly in the power and in the science of the oracle, she undertook to follow faithfully everything ordered. Within one week all the ugly pimples had entirely disappeared. I took care to purge her slightly; I prescribed every day what she was to eat, and forbade the use of all cosmetics; I only advised her to wash herself morning and evening with plantain water. The modest oracle told the princess to make use of the same water for her ablutions of every part of her body where she desired to obtain the same result, and she obeyed the prescription religiously"¹⁷

Esther (a girl in Amsterdam distressed by a large nevus on her chin): Casanova told her, with utmost seriousness that she possessed "In the midst of the dimple which added such a charm to her chin, Esther had a little dark mole, garnished with three or four extremely fine hairs. These moles, which we call in Italian "neo, nei"¹⁸, and which are usually an improvement to the prettiest face, when they

¹⁶ Episode 1, Chapter II

¹⁷ Episode 6, Chapter IX

¹⁸ "neo" is a familiar name in Italian for "naevus"

occur on the face, the neck, the arms, or the hands, are duplicated on the corresponding parts of the body. I concluded, therefore, that Esther had a mole like that on her chin in a certain place which a virtuous girl does not shew; and innocent as she was I suspected that she herself did not know of this second mole's existence."... " ¹⁹

"Mrs. F., star of Venetian society in Corfu resisted to all advances and, to achieve his plans, Casanova prepared what he calls "love potion ": " I cut with a pair of scissors all the small bits [of hair] which were left, and devoutly gathered them together. Then I reduced them into a fine powder, and ordered a confectioner to mix the powder in my presence with a paste made of amber, sugar, vanilla, angelica, alkermes and storax, and I waited until the comfits prepared with that mixture were ready. I had some more made with the same composition, but without any hair; I put the first in a beautiful sweetmeat box of fine crystal, and the second in a tortoise-shell box ²⁰."

3.2. Casanova and prognostic

Like any good physician, Casanova could state accurate prognosis, thus, when asked, in Bern, to give a statement on Lady of Saône's eczema, he expressed clearly, against all attending physicians, that there was no poisoning but chronic condition: "Next morning I got a letter from the worthy Madame d'Urfe, who begged me to call on Madame de la Saone, wife of a friend of hers—a lieutenant-general. This lady had come to Berne in the hope of getting cured of a disease which had disfigured her in an incredible manner. Madame de la Saone was immediately introduced to all the best society in the place. She gave a supper every day, only asking men; she had an excellent cook. She had given notice that she would pay no calls, and she was quite right. I hastened to make my bow to her; but, good Heavens! what a terrible and melancholy sight did I behold! I saw a woman dressed with the utmost elegance, reclining voluptuously upon a couch. As soon as she saw me she arose, gave me a most gracious reception, and going back to her couch invited me to sit beside her. She

doubtless noticed my surprise, but being probably accustomed to the impression which the first sight of her created, she talked on in the friendliest manner, and by so doing diminished my aversion. Her appearance was as follows: Madame de Saone was beautifully dressed, and had the whitest hands and the roundest arms that can be imagined. Her dress, which was cut very low, allowed me to see an exquisite breast of dazzling whiteness, heightened by two rosy buds; her figure was good, and her feet the smallest I have ever seen. All about her inspired love, but when one's eyes turned to her face every other feeling gave way to those of horror and pity. She was fearful. Instead of a face, one saw a blackened and disgusting scab. No feature was distinguishable, and her ugliness was made more conspicuous and dreadful by two fine eyes full of fire and by a lipless mouth which she kept parted, as if to disclose two rows of teeth of dazzling whiteness. She could not laugh, for the pain caused by the contraction of the muscles would doubtless have drawn tears to her eyes; nevertheless she appeared contented, her conversation was delightful, full of wit and humour, and permeated with the tone of good society. She might be thirty at the most, and she had left three beautiful young children behind in Paris. Her husband was a fine, well-made man, who loved her tenderly, and had never slept apart from her. It is probable that few soldiers have shewn such courage as this, but it is to be supposed that he did not carry his bravery so far as to kiss her, as the very thought made one shudder. A disorder contracted after her first child-bed had left the poor woman in this sad state, and she had borne it for ten years. All the best doctors in France had tried in vain to cure her, and she had come to Berne to put herself into the hands of two well-known physicians who had promised to do so. Every quack makes promises of this sort; their patients are cured or not cured as it happens, and provided that they pay heavily the doctor is ready enough to lay the fault, not on his ignorance, but at the door of his poor deluded patient. The doctor came while I was with her, and just as her intelligent conversation was making me forget her face. She had already begun to take his remedies, which were partly composed of mercury. It seems to me," said she, "that the itching has increased since I have taken your medicines."

¹⁹ Episode 13, Chapter X

²⁰ Episode 3, Chapter XV

"It will last," said the son of AEsculapius, "till the end of the cure and that will take about three months." "As long as I scratch myself," said she, "I shall be in the same state, and the cure will never be completed." The doctor replied in an evasive manner. I rose to take my leave, and holding my hand she asked me to supper once for all. I went the same evening; the poor woman took everything and drank some wine, as the doctor had not put her on any diet. I saw that she would never be cured." 21

In another passage of the Memoirs, a lover of Mlle Desarmoises has been injured by the girl's father : when questioned on the gravity of the wound, Casanova has a peremptory judgement : " the wound, although deep, is not dangerous, suppuration is present without any inflammation—in short, the young man only needs rest."²²

3.3. Casanova and therapeutic

In the field of therapeutic knowledge, the Venetian did not lack of discernment: he knew very well, when necessary, how to avoid the errements of the physicians of his time. Thus, in Venice, during an, famed Senator of Venice episode of "brain attack" occurring to Senator Bragadin. The whole story deserves to be related:

"On the third day, towards the end of the dancing, an hour before day-break, feeling tired, I left the orchestra abruptly; and as I was going down the stairs I observed a senator, wearing his red robes, on the point of getting into a gondola. In taking his handkerchief out of his pocket he let a letter drop on the ground. I picked it up, and coming up to him just as he was going down the steps I handed it to him. He received it with many thanks, and enquired where I lived. I told him, and he insisted upon my coming with him in the gondola saying that he would leave me at my house. I accepted gratefully, and sat down near him. A few minutes afterwards he asked me to rub his left arm, which, he said, was so benumbed that he could not feel it. I rubbed it with all my strength, but he told me in a sort of indistinct whisper that the numbness was spreading all along the left side, and that he was dying. I was greatly frightened; I opened the

curtain, took the lantern, and found him almost insensible, and the mouth drawn on one side. I understood that he was seized with an apoplectic stroke, and called out to the gondoliers to land me at once, in order to procure a surgeon to bleed the patient. I jumped out of the gondola, and found myself on the very spot where three years before I had taught Razetta such a forcible lesson; I enquired for a surgeon at the first coffee-house, and ran to the house that was pointed out to me. I knocked as hard as I could; the door was at last opened, and I made the surgeon follow me in his dressing-gown as far as the gondola, which was waiting; he bled the senator while I was tearing my shirt to make the compress and the bandage. The operation being performed, I ordered the gondoliers to row as fast as possible, and we soon reached St. Marina; the servants were roused up, and taking the sick man out of the gondola we carried him to his bed almost dead. Taking everything upon myself, I ordered a servant to hurry out for a physician, who came in a short time, and ordered the patient to be bled again, thus approving the first bleeding prescribed by me. Thinking I had a right to watch the sick man, I settled myself near his bed to give him every care he required. An hour later, two noblemen, friends of the senator, came in, one a few minutes after the other. They were in despair; they had enquired about the accident from the gondoliers, and having been told that I knew more than they did, they loaded me with questions which I answered. They did not know who I was, and did not like to ask me; whilst I thought it better to preserve a modest silence. The patient did not move; his breathing alone shewed that he was still alive; fomentations were constantly applied, and the priest who had been sent for, and was of very little use under such circumstances, seemed to be there only to see him die. All visitors were sent away by my advice, and the two noblemen and myself were the only persons in the sick man's room. At noon we partook silently of some dinner which was served in the sick room. In the evening one of the two friends told me that if I had any business to attend to I could go, because they would both pass the night on a mattress near the patient. "And I, sir," I said, "will remain near his bed in this arm-chair, for if I went away the patient would die, and he will

²¹ Episode 14, Chapitre XVII

²² Episode 18, Chapter XII

live as long as I am near him." This sententious answer struck them with astonishment, as I expected it would, and they looked at each other in great surprise. We had supper, and in the little conversation we had I gathered the information that the senator, their friend, was M. de Bragadin, the only brother of the procurator of that name. He was celebrated in Venice not only for his eloquence and his great talents as a statesman, but also for the gallantries of his youth. He had been very extravagant with women, and more than one of them had committed many follies for him. He had gambled and lost a great deal, and his brother was his most bitter enemy, because he was infatuated with the idea that he had tried to poison him. He had accused him of that crime before the Council of Ten, which, after an investigation of eight months, had brought in a verdict of not guilty: but that just sentence, although given unanimously by that high tribunal, had not had the effect of destroying his brother's prejudices against him. M. de Bragadin, who was perfectly innocent of such a crime and oppressed by an unjust brother who deprived him of half of his income, spent his days like an amiable philosopher, surrounded by his friends, amongst whom were the two noblemen who were then watching him; one belonged to the Dandolo family, the other was a Barbaro, and both were excellent men. M. de Bragadin was handsome, learned, cheerful, and most kindly disposed; he was then about fifty years old. The physician who attended him was named Terro; he thought, by some peculiar train of reasoning, that he could cure him by applying a mercurial ointment to the chest, to which no one raised any objection. The rapid effect of the remedy delighted the two friends, but it frightened me, for in less than twenty-four hours the patient was labouring under great excitement of the brain. The physician said that he had expected that effect, but that on the following day the remedy would act less on the brain, and diffuse its beneficial action through the whole of the system, which required to be invigorated by a proper equilibrium in the circulation of the fluids. At midnight the patient was in a state of high fever, and in a fearful state of irritation. I examined him closely, and found him hardly able to breathe. I roused up his two friends; and declared that in my opinion the

patient would soon die unless the fatal ointment was at once removed. And without waiting for their answer, I bared his chest, took off the plaster, washed the skin carefully with lukewarm water, and in less than three minutes he breathed freely and fell into a quiet sleep. Delighted with such a fortunate result, we lay down again. The physician came very early in the morning, and was much pleased to see his patient so much better, but when M. Dandolo informed him of what had been done, he was angry, said it was enough to kill his patient, and asked who had been so audacious as to destroy the effect of his prescription. M. de Bragadin, speaking for the first time, said to him—"Doctor, the person who has delivered me from your mercury, which was killing me, is a more skilful physician than you;" and, saying these words, he pointed to me. It would be hard to say who was the more astonished: the doctor, when he saw an unknown young man, whom he must have taken for an impostor, declared more learned than himself; or I, when I saw myself transformed into a physician, at a moment's notice. I kept silent, looking very modest, but hardly able to control my mirth, whilst the doctor was staring at me with a mixture of astonishment and of spite, evidently thinking me some bold quack who had tried to supplant him. At last, turning towards M. de Bragadin, he told him coldly that he would leave him in my hands; he was taken at his word, he went away, and behold! I had become the physician of one of the most illustrious members of the Venetian Senate! I must confess that I was very glad of it, and I told my patient that a proper diet was all he needed, and that nature, assisted by the approaching fine season, would do the rest."²³

Conclusion

Indeed, Casanova had a very complex, multifaceted personality, but, straight product of the "age of Enlightenment", eighteenth century; he kept a keen interest for all sciences and above all, medicine.

There is no reason to question this fascination for the noble Art of medicine

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Giacomo, when asked at a dinner with a famous actress of Venice, Elena Bassi, to reveal his

²³ Episode 4, Chapter XVII

profession, he confessed to be... physician: "The meal over, he proceeded to impart to me his adventures, which were ordinary enough, and like those which many a poor devil has to undergo; and while he talked his pretty daughter sat on my knee. Bassi brought his story to an end by saying that he was going to Venice for the carnival, and was sure of making a lot of money. I wished him all the luck he could desire, and on his asking me what profession I followed the fancy took me to reply that I was a doctor. "That's a better trade than mine" 24.

Maybe it was just another bragging from the king of all story-tellers but in his Memoirs, Casanova repeats with deep conviction that his vocation had always been medicine "My vocation was to study medicine, and to practice it, for I felt a great inclination for that profession, but no heed was given to my wishes, and I was compelled to apply myself to the study of the law, for which I had an invincible repugnance. My friends were of opinion that I could not make my fortune in any profession but that of an advocate and, what is still worse, of an ecclesiastical advocate. If they had given the matter proper consideration, they would have given me leave to follow my own inclinations, and I would have been a physician—a profession in which quackery is of still greater avail than in the legal business. I never became either a physician or an advocate, and I never would apply to a lawyer, when I had any legal business, nor call in a physician when I happened to be ill. Lawsuits and pettifoggery may support a good many families, but a greater proportion is ruined by them, and those who perish in the hands, of physicians are more numerous by far than those who get cured strong evidence in my opinion, that mankind would be much less miserable without either lawyers or doctors.²⁵"

André J. Fabre is a former physician of Créteil Hospital near Paris. His current interest is History of medicine and he has published several books in this fields at Harmattan Editions: "Great forgotten physicians", "Hashish, cannabis and hemp, an eternal return", "Axel Munthe, Wandering Physician of

Europe" and quite recently "Physicians of Venice"

All comments should be sent to <a.fabre.fl@ google.com>

²⁴ Episode 19, Chapter XIV

²⁵ Episode 1, Chapter III