Octave Mirbeau

Anarchist Novelist, Playwright, Journalist, and Pamphleteer from France

(1848 - 1917)

Description: By 1890 his political commitments were clearer: he showed a clear preference for the anarchist left, and became friends with Jean Grave and Camille Pissarro. He wrote at length on Impressionism, believing it to be the beginning of a cultural revolution in France. (From: Sharif Gemie Bio)

Tags: journalist, art critic, novelist, avant-garde, anarchist, french, impressionism, expressionism, playwright, pamphleteer.

Quotes:

"The press is mistaken. There are certain corpses that walk again, and certain voices that won't be stifled. And the void is filled with terrible enigmas." (From: "Ravachol," by by Octave Henri Marie Mirbeau.)

"I am horrified by the bloodshed, the ruins, and the death; I love life, and all life is sacred to me. This is why I'm going to ask for the anarchist ideal which no form of government can create: love, beauty, and peace between men. Ravachol [the Anarchist bombthrower] doesn't frighten me. He is as transient as the terror he inspires. He is the thunder
clap that is followed by the glory of the sun and the calm sky." (From : "Ravachol," by by Octave Henri Marie Mirbeau.)

"...each turn of the government machinery grinds the tumbling, gasping flesh of the poor..." (From : "Ravachol," by by Octave Henri Marie Mirbeau.)

"Capitalism is insatiable, and the wage system compounds the evils of ancient slavery. The shops are packed full of clothing, and there are those who go about completely naked; the indifferent rich are puking up food, while others perish from hunger in their doorways. No cry is heeded: whenever a single, louder complaint penetrates the din of sad murmurs, the Lebels is loaded and the troops are mobilized." (From : "Ravachol," by by Octave Henri Marie Mirbeau.)

"The patience of the downtrodden and the dispossessed has lasted long enough. They want to live, they want to enjoy, they want their share of all the happiness and sunshine." (From : "Ravachol," by by Octave Henri Marie Mirbeau.)

Biography :

INTRODUCING MIRBEAU (1848-1917)

By Sharif Gemie.

1998 is the 105th anniversary of Octave Mirbeau's birth. I have been asked by
Ronald Creagh to write a few paragraphs explaining his significance.

Mirbeau was an enormously productive writer, journalist and activist in late nineteenth and early twentieth century France. His politics were constantly evolving, and it is difficult to pin him down to a single political commitment. As a teenager in the 1860s he was an anti-clerical Republican; in the 1870s and early 1880s he worked as a journalist for the right-wing, particularly Bonapartist, press. During this period he wrote a number of openly anti-semitic and misogynist pieces. Then, in the mid-1880s, he had a dramatic change of heart, rejected the far right, condemned the Boulangist movement, and moved initially to a loosely defined Republican left. By 1890 his political commitments were clearer: he showed a clear preference for the anarchist left, and became friends with Jean Grave and Camille Pissarro. He wrote at length on Impressionism, believing it to be the beginning of a cultural revolution in France.

Despite his increasing physical frailty in the late 1890s, he toured the country trying to rally support for the Dreyfusard cause. In the 1900s he grew disillusioned. He worked with Jaures *Humanite*, but was skeptical about the future of parliamentary socialism. During the First World War he did not support the war effort, but was reluctant to condemn it while French troops were being killed.

During his life he wrote an extraordinary variety of pieces, including: plays, full length novels, travel-writing, political polemics, short stories, reviews of books, music, art and theater. Many of his shorter works were translated. His two best-known works are *Le Jardin des supplices* [the Torture Garden] and *Le Journal d un femme de chambre* [the Diary of Chambermaid], later to made into a film by Bunuel. One could say that these two works indicate the two sides of his personality: *Le Jardin des Supplices* being a pessimistic, over-lyrical, quasi-erotic novel, probably intended as an extended metaphorical representation of the Dreyfus Affair, while the *Le Journal d une femme de chambre* reveals a warm, humanism, sensitive and understanding of the fate of the powerless in French society.

The best French-language work on him is Jean-Francois Nivet and Pierre Michel, *Octave Mirbeau; l Imprecateur au coeur fidele* (Paris, 1990); the best
English-language work is Reg Carr, *Anarchism in France; the Case of Octave Mirbeau* (Manchester, 1977).

From: "Introducing Mirbeau (1848-19917)," by Sharif Gemie, from Anarchy Archives.

**Works:**

Author of *The Wall* (February 20, 1894)Author of *Ravachol* (December 31, 1969)Author of *Elections* (August 12, 1885)Author of *Before the Burial* (April 19, 1887)Author of *A Dog's Death* (December 31, 1969)Author of *The Baby* (October 21, 1885)Author of *The Justice of the Peace* (July 24, 1885)Author of *The Sacred Bird* (September 27, 1890)

**Chronology:**

- **February 16, 1848:** Octave Mirbeau's Birth Day.
- **February 16, 1917:** Octave Mirbeau's Death Day.

**Links:**

- **Anarchy Archives: Octave Mirbeau**
  http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bright/mirbeau/mirbeau.html

- **Anarchist Library: Octave Mirbeau**
  https://theanarchistlibrary.org/category/author/octave-mirbeau
• Wikipedia: Octave Mirbeau

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