

THE JUDGEMENT OF PARIS

LEONARD MERRICK

In the summer of the memorable year— but the date doesn't matter, Robichon and Quinquart both paid court to Mademoiselle Brouette. Mademoiselle Brouette was a captivating actress, Robichon and Quinquart were the most comic of comedians, and all three were members of the Theatre Supreme.

Robichon was such an idol of the public's that they used to laugh before he uttered the first word of his role; and Quinquart was so vastly popular that his silence threw the audience into convulsions.

Professional rivalry apart, the two were good friends, although they were suitors for the same lady and this was doubtless due to the fact that the lady favoured the robust Robichon no more than she favoured the skinny Quinquart. She flirted with them equally, she approved them equally—and at last, when each of them had plagued her beyond endurance, she promised in a pet that she would marry the one that was the better actor.

Tiens! Not a player on the stage, not a critic on the Press could quite make up his mind which the better actor was. Only Suzanne Brouette could have said anything so tantalizing.

'But how shall we decide the point, Suzanne?' stammered Robichon helplessly. 'Whose pronouncement will you accept?'

'How can the question be settled!' queried Quinquart

dismayed. 'Who shall be the judge?'

'Paris shall be the judge,' affirmed Suzanne. 'We are the servants of the public— I will take the public's word!'

Of course she was as pretty as a picture, or she couldn't have done these things.

Then poor Quinquart withdrew, plunged in reverie. So did Robichon. Quinquart reflected that she had been talking through her expensive hat. Robichon was of the same opinion. The public lauded them both, was no less generous to one than to the other— to wait for the judgement of Paris appeared equivalent to postponing the matter *sine die*. No way out presented itself to Quinquart. None occurred to Robichon.

Man vieux, said the latter, as they sat on the terrace of their favourite cafe a day or two before the annual vacation. 'Let us discuss this amicably. Have a cigarette! You are an actor, therefore you consider yourself more talented than I. I, too, am an actor, therefore I regard you as less gifted than myself. So much for our artistic standpoints! But we are also men of the world, and it must be obvious to both of us that we might go on being funny until we reached our death-beds without demonstrating the supremacy of either. *Enfin*, our only hope lies in versatility – the conqueror must distinguish himself in a solemn part!' He viewed the other with complacence, for the quaint Quinquart had been designed for a droll by nature.

'Right!' said Quinquart. He contemplated his colleague with satisfaction, for it was impossible to fancy the fat Robichon in tragedy.

'I perceive only one drawback to the plan,' continued Robichon, 'the Management will never consent to accord us a chance. Is it not always so in the theatre? One succeeds in a certain line of business and one must be resigned to play that line as long as one lives. If my earliest success had been

scored as a villain of melodrama, it would be believed that I was competent to enact nothing but villains of melodrama; it happened that I made a hit as a comedian, wherefore nobody will credit that I am capable of anything but being comic.'

Robichon mused. 'Since we shall not be allowed to do ourselves justice on the stage, we must find an opportunity off it!'

'A private performance? Good! Yes, if it is a private performance, how is Paris to be the judge?'

'Ah,' murmured Robichon, 'that is certainly a stumbling block.'

They sipped their aperitifs moodily. Many heads were turned towards the little table where they sat. 'There are Quinquart and Robichon, how amusing they always are!' said passers-by, little guessing the anxiety at the laughter-makers' hearts.

'What's to be done?' sighed Quinquart at last.

Robichon shrugged his fat shoulders, with a frown.

Both were too absorbed to notice that, after a glance of recognition, one of the pedestrians had paused, and was still regarding them irresolutely. He was a tall, burly man, habited in rusty black, and the next moment, as if finding courage, he stepped forward and spoke:

'Gentlemen, I ask pardon for the liberty I take - impulse urges me to seek your professional advice! I am in a position to pay a moderate fee. Will you permit me to explain myself?'

'Monsieur,' returned Robichon, 'we are in deep consideration of our latest parts. we shall be pleased to give you our attention at some other time.'

'Alas!' persisted the new-comer, 'with me time presses. I, too, am considering my latest part - and it will be the only

speaking part I have ever played, though I have been "appearing" for twenty years.

'What? you have been a super for twenty years?' said Quinquart, with a grimace.

'No, monsieur,' replied the stranger grimly, 'I have been the Public Executioner; and I am going to lecture on the horrors of the post I have resigned.'

The two comedians stared at him aghast. Across the sunlit terrace seemed to have fallen the black shadow of the guillotine.

'I am Jacques Roux,' the man went on. 'I am trying it on the dog' at Appeville-sous-Bois next week and I have what you gentlemen call "stage fright"—I, who never knew what nervousness meant before; is it not queer? As often as I rehearse walking on to the platform, I feel myself to be all arms and legs—I don't know what to do with them. Formerly, I scarcely remembered my arms and legs; but, of course, my attention used to be engaged by the other fellow's head. Well, it struck me that you might consent to give me a few hints in deportment. Probably one lesson would suffice?

'Sit down,' said Robichon. 'Why did you abandon your official position?'

'Because I awakened to the truth,' Roux answered. 'I no longer agree with capital punishment; it is a crime that should be abolished.'

'The scruples of conscience, *hein?*'

'That is it.'

'Fine!' and Robichon. 'What dramatic lines such a lecture might contain: And of what is it to consist?'

'It is to consist of the history of my life—my youth, my poverty, my experiences as Executioner, and my remorse.'

'Magnificent!' said Robichon. 'The spectres of your victims pursue you even to the platform. Your voice fails

you, your eyes start from your head in terror. Your gasp for mercy- and imagination splashes your out-stretched hands with gore. The audience thrill, women swoon, strong men are breathless with emotion.' Suddenly he smote the table with his big fist, and little Quinquart nearly fell off his chair, for he divined the inspiration of his rival. 'Listen!' tried Robichon, 'are you known at Appeville-sous Bois?'

'My name is known, yes.'

'Bah! I mean are you known personally, have you acquaintances there?'

'Oh, no. But why?'

'There will be nobody to recognize you?'

'It is very unlikely in such a place.'

'What do you estimate that your profits will amount to?'

'It is only a small hall, and prices are cheap.

Perhaps two hundred and fifty francs.'

'And you are nervous, you would like to postpone your debut?'

'I should not be sorry, I admit. But, again, why?'

'I will tell you why- I offer you five hundred francs to let me take your place!'

'Monsieur!'

'Is it a bargain?'

'I do not understand?'

'I have a whim to figure in a solemn part. You can explain next day that you missed your train - that you were ill, there are a dozen explanations that can be made; you will not be supposed to know what I personated you - the responsibility for that is mine. What do you say!'

'It is worth double the money,' demurred the man.

'Not a bit of it! All the Press will shout the story of

my practical joke. - Paris will be astounded that I, Robichon, lectured as Jacques Roux and curdled an audience's blood. Millions will speak of your intended lecture tour who otherwise would never have heard of it. I am giving you the grandest advertisement, and paying you for it, besides. *Enfin*, I will throw a deportment lesson in! Is it agreed?

'Agreed, Monsieur!' said Roux.

Oh, the trepidation of Quinquart! who could eclipse Robichon if his performance of the part equalled his conception of it? At the theatre that evening Quinquart followed Suzanne, about the wings pathetically. He was garbed like a buffoon, but he felt like Romeo. The throng that applauded his capers were far from suspecting the romantic longings under his magenta wig. For the first time in his life he was thankful that the author hadn't given him more to do.

And, oh, the excitement of Robichon! He was to put his powers to a tremendous test, and if he made the effect the better. Suzanne, to whom he whispered his project proudly announced an intention of being present to 'see the fun,' Quinquart also promised to be there. Robichon sat up all night preparing his lecture.

If you wish to know whether Suzanne rejoiced at the prospect of his winning her, history is not definite on the point, but some chronicles assert that at this period she made more than usual of Quinquart, who had developed a hump as big as the Pantheon.

And they all went to Apreville-sous-Bois.

Though no one in the town was likely to know the feature of the Execution, it was to be remembered that people there might know the actor's and Robichon had made up to resemble Roux as closely as possible. Arriving at the humble hall, he was greeted by the lessee, heard that a 'good house' was expected, and smoked a cigarette in the retiring-room while the audience assembled.

At eight o'clock the lessee reappeared.

'All is ready, Monsieur Roux,' he said.

Robinchon rose.

He saw Suzanne and Quinquart in the third row, and was tempted to wink at them.

'Ladies and gentlemen—'

All eyes were riveted on him as he began; even the voice of the 'Executioner' exercised a morbid fascination over the crowd. The men nudged their neighbours appreciatively, and women gazed at him, half horrified, half charmed.

The opening of his address was quiet enough—there was even a humorous element in it, as he narrated imaginary experiences of his boyhood. People tittered, and then glanced at one another with an apologetic air, as if shocked at such a monster's daring to amuse them. Suzanne whispered to Quinquart: 'Too cheerful; he hasn't struck the right note.' Quinquart whispered back gloomily; 'Wait; he may be playing for the contrast!'

And Quinquart's assumption was correct. Gradually the cheerfulness faded from the speaker's voice, the humorous incidents were past. Gruesome, hideous, grew the anecdotes. The hall shivered. Necks were craned, and white faces twitched suspensively. He dwelt on the agonies of the 'condemned,' he recited crimes in detail, he mirrored the last moments before the blade fell. He shrieked his remorse, his lacerating remorse. 'I am a murderer,' he sobbed; and in the hall one might have heard a pin drop.

There was no applause when he finished — that set the seal on his success; he bowed and withdrew amid tense silence. Still none moved in the hall, until, with a rush, the representatives of the Press sped forth to proclaim Jacques Roux an unparalleled sensation.

The triumph of Robichon. How generous were the congratulations of Quinquart, and how sweet the admiring trib-

utes of Suzanne ! And there was another compliment to come - nothing less than a card from the Marquis de Thevenin, requesting an interview at his home.

'Ah' exclaimed Robichon, enraptured, 'an invitation from a noble ! That proves the effect I made, hein?'

'Who may he be?' inquired Quinquart. 'I never heard of the Marquis de Thevenin !'

'It is immaterial whether you have heard of him,'; replied Robichon. 'He is a marquis, and he desires to converse with me ! It is an honour that one must appreciate. I shall assuredly go.'

And, being a bit of a snob, he sought a *fiacre* in high feather.

The drive was short, and when the cab stopped he was distinctly taken aback to perceive the unpretentious aspect of the nobleman's abode. It was, indeed, nothing better than a lodging. A peasant admitted him, and the room to which he was ushered boasted no warmer hospitality than a couple of candles and decanter of wine. However, the sconces were massive silver. Monieur le Marquis, he was informed, had been suddenly compelled to summon his physician, and begged that Monsieur Roux would allow him a few minutes grace.

Robichon ardently admired the candlesticks, but began to think he might have supped more cosily with Suzanne.

It was a long time before the door opened.

The Marquis de Thevenin was old- so old that he seemed to be falling to pieces as he tottered forward. His skin was yellow and shrivelled, his mouth sunken, his hair sparse and grey; and from this weird face peered strange eyes - the eyes of a fanatic.

'Monsieur, I owe you many apologies for my delay,' he wheezed. 'My unaccustomed exertion this evening took me, and on my return from the hall I found it necessary to see my doctor, Your lecture was wonderful Monsieur

most interesting and instructive, I shall never forget it.'

Robichon bowed his acknowledgements.

'Sit down, Monsieur Roux, do not stand! Let me offer you some wine, I am forbidden to touch it myself. I am a poor host, but my age must be my excuse.'

'To be the guest of monsieur le marquis,' murmured Robichon, 'is a privilege, an honour, which -er-'

'Ah,' sighed marquis. 'I shall very soon be in the Republic where all men are really equals and the only masters are the worms. My reason for requesting you to come was to speak of your unfortunate experiences- of a certain unfortunate experience in particular. You referred in your lecture to the execution of one called "Victor Lesueur." He died game, *hein?*'

'As plucky a soul as I ever dispatched!' said Robichon, savouring the burgundy.

'Ah! Not a tremor? He strode to the guillotine like a man?'

'Like a hero!' said Robichon, who knew nothing about him.

'That was fine', said the marquis; 'that was as it should be! You have never known a prisoner to die more bravely?' There was a note of pride in his voice that was unmistakable.

'I shall always recall his courage with respect, declared Robichon, mystified.

'Did you respect it at the time?'

'Pardon, monsieur le marquis?'

'I inquire if you respected it at the time; did you spare him all needless suffering?'

'There is no suffering,' said Robichon. 'So swift is the knife that-'

The host made a gesture of impatience. 'I refer to mental

suffering. Cannot you realise the emotions of an innocent man condemned to a shameful death?

'Innocent! As for that, they all say that they are innocent.'

'I do not doubt it. Victor, however, spoke the truth. I know it. He was my son.'

'Your son?' faltered Robichon, aghast.

'My only son- the only soul I loved on earth.'

Yes; he was innocent, Monsieur Roux. And it was you who butchered him- he died by your hands.'

'I-I was but the instrument of the law,' stammered Robichon. 'I was not responsible for his fate, myself.'

'You have given a masterly lecture, Monsieur Roux,' said the marquis musingly; 'I find myself in agreement with all that you said in it- "you are his murderer." I hope the wine is to your taste, Monsieur Roux? Do not spare it!'

'The wine?' gasped the actor. He started to his feet, trembling- he understood.

'It is poisoned,' said the old man calmly. 'In an hour you will be dead.'

'Great Heavens!' moaned Robichon. Already he was conscious of a strange sensation - his blood was chilled, his limbs were weighted, there were shadows before his eyes.

'Ah, I have no fear of you!' continued the other; 'I am feeble; I could not defend myself but your violence would avail you nothing. Fight, or faint, as you please- you are doomed.'

For some seconds they stared at each other dumbly - the actor paralysed by terror, the host wearing the smile of a lunatic. And then the 'lunatic' slowly peeled courtplaster from his teeth, and removed features, and lifted a wig.

And when the whole story was published, a delighted

Paris awarded the Palm to Quinquart without a dissenting voice, for while Robichon had duped an audience, Quinquart had duped Robichon himself.

Robichon bought the silver candlesticks, which had been hired for the occasion, and he presented them to Quinquart and Suzanne on their wedding day.

AUTHOR

LEONARD MERRICK (1864-1940) turned to story writing for a living and published several novels before he actually became well known through his short stories. His stories lead up to a climax with a surprise ending.

The story, "The Judgement of Paris" is about two actors, Robichon and Quinquart who are paying court to the same lady Mademoiselle Brouquette. She decides to marry the man who will prove a better actor than the other. Robichon gets an opportunity to impersonate an executioner. He plays the solemn role of an executioner and is able to dupe the public through his superb performance. In turn, he is duped by more versatile Quinquart who pretends to be a Marquis out to avenge the death of his innocent son at the hands of the executioner. He therefore proves himself to be a better actor and wins the hand of his lady love.

The title of the present story is based on a famous painting by Peter Paul Rubens, describing the scene of a beauty contest between three Greek Goddesses Juno, Venus and Minerva, with the Trojan prince Paris as the judge who is to award the prize. Here in the story, the city of Paris i.e. the general public is the judge between the two rival actors and lovers.

GLOSSARY

Paid court in a pet : wooed

in a pet : in a moment of irritation; in a fit of ill-temper.

Tiens : French word for 'Look.'

Tantalising : Teasing by the sight of something that is desired but cannot be reached.

reverie : musing; day-dreaming.

talk through the hate : bluff

sine die : indefinitely

Man vieux : old chap

enfin : in a word, finally

Quaint : odd; funny.

Droll : Jestng

Apertif : appetizer or alcoholic drink taken before a meal.

habited : dressed

grimace : twisted expression on the face expressing pain, disgust, etc., intended to cause laughter.

Trying it on the dog : testing for the first time.

deportment : behaviour, bearing.

hein : hey

debut : first appearance on the stage

wings : sides of the stage

trepidation : great worry or fear about something unpleasant that may happen.

Demurred : raised a doubt or objection

capers : antics as a clown on the stage

developed a hump : became depressed and bent as with a hump.

good house : full house

tittered : giggled; laughed in a restrained manner.

lacerating : painful

fiacre : four-wheeled carriage

scones : candle-sticks

died game : died pluckily
Burgundy : kind of red wine
palm : prize
dissèntient : disagreeing.

QUESTIONS

1. Justify the title of the story.
2. What was the promise made by Suzanne to her two rival lovers?
3. What did the two lovers agree upon to prove their versatility as actors and who did they accept as their judge?
4. Comment on Robichon's performance as an executioner and the public response to his performance.
5. How was Robichon outwitted by Quinquart in the end. Who do you think was a better actor of the two?
6. Why 'did Paris award the palm to Quinquart?
7. Discuss the plot of the story.

The Judgement of Paris

By: Leonard Merrick.

CLASSMATE

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⇒ The present story is about the French Capital, Paris which was called upon to decide who the better of the two actors was. Robichon and Quinquart were two French comedians. Both of them were equally popular. Robichon was fat. People used to laugh before he uttered the first word of his role. Quinquart was thin. His silence sent the people into a fit of laughter. In spite of their professional rivalry both the comedians were very good friends.

⇒ Robichon and Quinquart were in love with the same lady, Suzanne Broquette. She was a beautiful actress. All the three were members of the Theatre Supreme. The lady showed equal favour to both of her lovers. She flirted with both of them. When each of them requested her separately for marriage, she promised that she would marry the one that was the better actor.

⇒ Robichon and Quinquart were comedians of equal merit and the critics, the Press or other actors could not say who of them was better in this art. They therefore, asked Suzanne how the question could be settled and who would be the judge. Suzanne replied that the matter would be decided by the Public of Paris.

⇒ The two friends were in a fix. The public liked and praised them equally well. Left to the public of Paris, the matter would remain undecided for ever. They therefore decided to sort out things between themselves in a friendly manner. They sat in a cafe for a discussion on the point. Both of them agreed that as comedians each considered himself superior to the other and the public considered them as equals. They therefore decided that the one who proved his superiority in a serious role should be considered a better actor. However, the problem was that no professional theatre would offer them a serious role. No management would risk the performance by giving a serious role to a comedian. They considered the possibility of arranging a private show. But in that case the Public of Paris could not participate and it could not be the judge.

⇒ Robichon and Guiniquart were in deep anxiety. While they sipped their drinks, the other persons sitting in the cafe had a look at the two popular comedians. Meanwhile a passerby looked at and recognised the comedians. He was a tall and strong man, dressed in black. He needed some professional advice on stage performance. He was prepared to pay a moderate fee

also. He approached the comedians. He told them that he had been a Public Executioner and he had resigned his job. He was going to lecture on the horrors of his job in a hall at Apperville-sous-Bois next week. He had 'stage fear' and did not know how to overcome it. Even during lonely rehearsals his legs trembled and he did not know how he would face the audience. He never remembered his arms and legs shaking when he killed convicts. But the thought of delivering a lecture made him nervous.

⇒ Robichon got interested in the man. He asked him why he had left his job. The Executioner, named Jacques Roux replied that he no longer agreed with death-sentence; it was a crime and should be abolished. He added that he wanted to tell the people about his youth, his poverty, his experiences as Executioner and his repentance. Robichon imagined the serious impact that such a lecture would have on audience.

⇒ Jacques Roux told Robichon that the people of Apperville-sous-Bois knew him by name but they would not be able to recognize him. He had been offered 250-francs for this lecture. But, he said that he might have to postpone the lecture.

because he felt so nervous.

⇒ All this time Robichon was working out a plan in his mind. He felt that he could not get a better chance to play a serious role. He offered 500 francs to Jacques Roux if he allowed him to personate him and deliver the lecture. Roux readily agreed to this proposal.

⇒ Quinquart was alarmed at the outcome of this meeting. He would not be in a position to do better than his rival if Robichon's plan became successful. However, he could only wait and watch. Robichon on the other hand was very happy. When Suzanne came to know about Robichon's plan, she expressed her desire to be present to "see the fun". Quinquart also promised to be there.

⇒ Robichon, Quinquart and Suzanne went to Apperville - sous-Bois on the fixed day. Though no one in the town had seen the Executioner, people might recognize Robichon. He therefore made up to resemble Roux as closely as possible. Robichon in guise met the organizer of the lecture. Meanwhile, Quinquart and Suzanne went straight to the hall to be present among the audience.

⇒ Robichon was ultimately on the stage

of the hall to deliver the lecture. He saw Suzanne and Quinquart in the third row. All eyes were fixed on him as he began. He started his lecture in a humorous way, giving an account of his boyhood experiences. Soon his tone changed. He narrated horrible stories of how the condemned convicts behaved in their last moments. He confessed that he was a murderer. He began to sob. The audience shivered and were dumb-founded. Robichon had played his role well and was quite successful. Suzanne and Quinquart congratulated him. Another compliment was that he had received an invitation from a noble, Marquis de-Thevenin.

→ Robichon did not want to miss the opportunity of seeing the Marquis. He hired a cab and went to his house. He was shown in by a peasant. Marquis de-Thevenin was a thin, old man with yellow skin and sunken mouth. He apologized to Robichon that he had to wait. He praised his lecture and said that it was most interesting and instructive. He offered him wine which Robichon gladly took. He informed him that he himself was forbidden to touch wine by his doctor.

→ The old Marquis wanted to know the details of the execution of a person

named Victor Lesueur. Rabsichon had refused to him in his lecture. Rabsichon replied that the man had faced death like a hero. However, soon the tables were turned on the guest when he was told that Victor Lesueur was an innocent person put to death and he was the only son of the Marquis. The Marquis accused Rabsichon of the murder of his son. He told him that he had served him poisoned wine in order to take revenge on him for his son's death. Rabsichon felt that he was caught in his own net. He felt cold in his blood. He felt paralysed by fear. His condition was of a man going to die shortly.

At that time, Marquis de Thevenin removed his artificial features. It was Quingart Rabsichon had duped an audience. But Quingart had duped Rabsichon himself. The entire story was published in the papers. The public of Paris declared Quingart to be the better actor.

Quingart and Suzanne celebrated their wedding. On this occasion Rabsichon presented them silver candlesticks and humbly bowed out of the field.

⇒ The most dramatic moment in 'The Judgment of Paris':

The most dramatic moment in the story is when nobleman tells Robichon that the wine was poisoned and that he would die in an hour. The two (Robichon and Quinquart, both in disguise) look at each other dumbly. Robichon begins to feel coldness and stiffness in his limbs. He is almost paralysed. He fears that he would die any moment. There were shadows before his eyes.

But the nobleman remains cool. He has no fear of Robichon. He admits that he is physically weak. He adds that he would not be able to stand up to him if the latter were violent. But his violence would be of no use. He asks Robichon to fight or faint as he was doomed to die.

They stare at each other hard. Robichon is paralysed by terror. The nobleman wears the smile of a lunatic. And then the nobleman removed plaster from his teeth, and removed his denture and lifted a wig.

When the whole story was published, the newspapers of Paris declared that ~~the~~ Quinquart was the better actor.

Rolsichon could dupe a Paris audience by playing the role of an executioner but Quinquart outwitted Rolsichon by resorting to the disguise of an old Marquis and the poisoned wine.

⇒ Theme of the story -

The story is based on the theme that flirts are very intelligent women. They know whom to choose for marriage. Suzanne Bronette was such a clever flirt. She was in love with two comedians. She responded very enthusiastically to the affection of both. But when the comedians expressed their desire to marry her, she said that she would marry the better of the two comedians. The question of the superiority of each of them was to be decided by the people of Paris.

Another idea in the story is that the performance of an actor is acclaimed or criticised by a discerning public. An actor may say that he is the best at his art but it is the people who pronounce him to be the best. Both Rolsichon and Quinquart

were known to be very good actors. One was not willing to concede superiority to the other. Robichon played the role of an executioner and drew praise from the audience. Quinquart played the role of a Marquis and duped Robichon. The people of Paris declared that Quinquart was the better actor. Thus, Quinquart got the award by marrying the beautiful actress Suzanne Brunette.

⇒ Title of the story -

The title 'The Judgement of Paris' is very suitable. It tells us that sometimes it is the judgement of the people of a town that can tackle a ticklish problem. We normally refer a dispute to an arbitrator and then the parties to the dispute have to accept the decision of the arbitrator given on the dispute. In the present story, 'The Judgement of Paris', the question is to decide as to who will marry a beautiful actress who is loved by two actors. Both of them are madly in love with actress. The actress is a flirt. She responds to both but for marrying one of them she

fixes a condition. She declares that she will marry that actor or comedian who is judged to be a better actor by the people of Paris. The question of the superiority of either of them was to be decided by the people of Paris.

* For a detailed answer you can refer to the story, The Judgement of Paris.