

*The Diva and Doctor God –*

*Letters from Sarah Bernhardt to Doctor Samuel Pozzi*

*Caroline de Costa and Francesca Miller*

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The Old Town of Bergerac as it is today

## *Acknowledgments*

First and foremost, we must give our heartfelt thanks to Nicolas Bourdet, great-grandson of Samuel Pozzi and grandson of Catherine Pozzi. Nicolas holds in Paris an extensive archive of personal papers, diaries and correspondence left by Samuel Pozzi, as well as books, drawings and reports from newspapers and professional journals from 1878 until the 1930s. This rich source of material has been made freely available to Caroline who has made numerous visits to Paris to conduct research into the life of Pozzi. There is also a remarkable collection of photographs, some of which are reproduced in this book, as well as the invaluable family knowledge of Nicolas himself. We would also like to thank Mireille Cardot, who with Nicolas transcribed the Bernhardt letters in 2006 – a daunting task, given that more than 130 years have passed since the Divine Sarah hastily scrawled many of these messages, on frail sheets of perfumed paper, between scenes at rehearsal.

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## *Dramatis personae*

Introducing some of the people referred to briefly in our book who were friends, acquaintances, colleagues and/or lovers of Sarah Bernhardt and Samuel Pozzi.

**Bourget**, Paul – novelist, critic and poet, friend of Pozzi's

**Bulteau**, Augustine –journalist who wrote for the newspaper *Figaro* under the pen-name of Foemina, mostly columns about music and the arts and social commentary; divorced and with no children, she was hostess of a small and very intellectual salon which Pozzi frequented from 1899; with her close friend the Countess de la Baume she acquired a house in Venice often visited by Pozzi. Nicknamed 'Toche' , she had a close friendship with Pozzi that included a vast correspondence.

**Cazalis**, Henri – poet and physician, close friend of Pozzi's.

**Clemenceau**, Georges – medical doctor, journalist and politician who was Prime Minister of France during World War I; active supporter of the Dreyfusard cause; a friend of Pozzi's from their years in medical school onwards.

**Dastre**, Albert – Paris physician who pioneered anesthetic techniques; often anesthetized Pozzi's surgical patients

**De Chilly**, Charles – director of the Odéon Theater at the time Bernhardt played there.

**De Girardin**, Émile – journalist and politician, strong advocate of freedom of the press, founded and wrote for several newspapers and published memoirs and novels.

**De Kératry**, Émile – politician, soldier and author of several historical works. Supported the Franco-Prussian War of 1870; left Paris by balloon during the Siege to join Gambetta and attempted unsuccessfully to raise troops in Brittany to fight the Prussians.

**Doyen**, Eugène - Paris surgeon who established a large private clinic in which he performed both general and gynecological surgery. Responsible for several technical improvements and instruments still in use. A contemporary of Pozzi's but professionally and ideologically often opposed to him.

**Duquesnel**, Félix – associate director of the Odéon Theater at the time Bernhardt played there, he recognized her unique talent very early on in her career.

**Faure**, Felix – French politician, President of France from 1895 until his death in 1899 (which infamously occurred while he was engaging in sex in his office with a much younger woman). He was opposed to the re-trial of Dreyfus in 1899; his death and the subsequent election of Dreyfusard Émile Loubet as President helped bring about the release of Dreyfus later that year.

**France**, Anatole – novelist and poet, winner of Nobel Prize for Literature in 1921; strong supporter of Captain Dreyfus; friend of Pozzi's; dedicated a short story, *The Red Egg*, to Pozzi.

**Gautier**, Judith – daughter of Théophile Gautier, she was an Oriental scholar, poet and novelist, and is credited with acting as muse to composer Richard Wagner. Close friend of Pozzi; possibly had an affair with him in the late 1870s.

**Gautier**, Théophile – poet, novelist and highly-regarded critic of literature, art and the theater.

**Halévy**, Fromental – composer, father of Geneviève Halévy (later Geneviève Bizet and then Straus)

**Hervieu**, Paul – playwright, novelist and member of the French Academy; a close friend of Pozzi's.

**Jayle**, Felix – physician, intern at the Broca, assistant to Dr Thierry de Martel at the surgery that failed to save Pozzi's life.

**Lavallière**, Eve – actress, contemporary of Bernhardt's, who achieved great success in Paris but later abandoned her career to become a devout Catholic and recluse.

**Leconte de Lisle**, Charles - poet of the Parnassian movement who translated Homer, Euripides, Sophocles and Aeschylus among others but also wrote much original verse in the classical French mode. A longtime friend of Pozzi's, he bequeathed his literary work to him on his death in 1894.

**Pinard**, Adolphe – obstetrician and colleague of Pozzi's who cared for Thérèse during her pregnancies. His name was given to the small horn used for many decades by doctors to listen to the fetal heart in the womb.

**Proust**, Adrien – physician, father of Marcel and Robert.

**Proust**, Robert – physician; for ten years assistant to Samuel Pozzi at the Broca Hospital.

**Reinach**, Joseph - lawyer, journalist and politician; a defender of Dreyfus from the time of the first trial. Strong advocate of a free press; author of a seven volume history of the Dreyfus Affair.

**Réjane** - stage name of Gabrielle- Charlotte Réju, French actress who was a friend of Bernhardt's and whose greatest success was in comedy and light soubrette roles. Both she and Bernhardt served as models for the character of the actress la Berma in Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*.

**Rénaut**, Joseph – physician, professor of internal medicine in Paris, known to Pozzi since their intern years together.



**Robin**, Albert – physician with fashionable practice in Paris; close friend of Pozzi's since medical school.

**Sardou**, Victorien – playwright, author of major works designed for Bernhardt in title role including *Fédora*, *Théodora* and *La Tosca*.

**Schwob**, Marcel. Highly regarded writer of short stories; translator of Robert Louis Stevenson and Oscar Wilde, authority on philology and Oriental languages. Schwob suffered from a chronic intestinal complaint for which Pozzi performed surgery on several occasions.

**Sedelmeyer**, Charles – Parisian art dealer and father of Pozzi's longtime love Emma Fischhof.

**Sévérine** – pen name of Caroline Rémy, journalist, socialist and political activist in the cause of women's rights and of Dreyfus. First met Pozzi as a patient, later became a friend and co-Dreyfusard.

**Trélat**, Ulysse- French surgeon, friend and colleague of Pozzi, volunteered for war of 1870. An early convert to 'Listerism'.

**Verneuil**, Aristide – French surgeon, head of service at Lariboisière hospital. More conservative than Pozzi in his approach to surgical practice. Both Trélat and Verneuil displayed considerable courage in defending their hospitals and patients during the Paris Commune.

Cette chemise est  
douce et tres originale  
et l'on voit par la  
une grande attraction sur  
le regard  
J'augure ?  
que important.

Herminette de  
Lombardie

Sarah Bernhardt  
1878



Mais jete est le  
99 de la main d'oeuvre  
et tout bien louable  
est cette belle catene.  
qui est la fosse d'oubli  
et tout d'un coup j'ai  
mais siensent. J'ai  
surtout bien l'air de  
vont voir le loi. Et  
est pour l'ensemble  
de l'ensemble de la

Letter from Sarah Bernhardt to Samuel Pozzi.

## ***Introduction - Two “very brilliant creatures”***

*My much desired Sam, my beloved master, I am yours to die of love for, I am yours unto madness. What is all this about, then? Well anyway this evening I will see you...I slept, but badly. Lazarus\* and I were thinking of you, and we were consoled by talking of Samuel. My lips ring a wake-up kiss for you, your Sarah. Thank you for the respectable hors d'oeuvre!*

*Sarah Bernhardt, 1878.*

Within the confines of his golden frame, Doctor Pozzi looks very much at home. A tall and handsome man in his mid-thirties, attired with casual elegance in a scarlet dressing gown and frilled white dress shirt, the doctor stands in the privacy of his Paris apartment against a rich backdrop of crimson drapes. He directs the gaze of his dark eyes a little away from the observer. His right hand rests lightly against his chest, the left holds the gown's tasseled cord. Is he about to undo the gown?

For nearly a century, John Singer Sargent's ravishing portrait of Pozzi remained quietly in personal collections in central Paris. Initially it stood on an easel in the same Pozzi home in which it was painted in 1881. Upon Pozzi's death in 1918 the work passed to his son Jean, and it was not until Jean's death in 1967 that *Docteur Pozzi Chez Lui - Doctor Pozzi At Home* - made a brief public appearance at auction. The portrait was snapped up by Armand Hammer, oil magnate, philanthropist and art lover, who had it transported across the Atlantic. *Doctor Pozzi At Home* remained in his private collection above Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles for twenty-three years, so it was not until 1990 that an admiring public was finally able to lay eyes upon Pozzi, when he joined the eclectic group of paintings that Hammer bequeathed to become the permanent collection of LA's Armand Hammer Museum. Except when on loan to Sargent exhibitions elsewhere, *Doctor Pozzi* shares the large airy rooms of the Museum with works by Degas, Van Gogh, Cézanne and Gauguin— and most important to our story, a fine portrait of Sarah Bernhardt by Alfred Stevens, shown on our front cover.

Among the many Angelenos captivated by Sargent's work was one of the authors, Francesca: journalist, aficionado of the expatriate American painter, and devotee of Belle Époque France. Who, she wanted to know, was this Doctor Pozzi?

Meanwhile, Caroline, co-author, gynecologist and Francophile, was spending spare moments studying the history of gynecology – a specialty unknown before the latter part of the nineteenth century. Her reading – much of it in the warm embrace of London's Wellcome Library of the History of Medicine – led her to gynecological pioneers in England and Scotland, the United States and Germany, and finally to a certain flamboyant and gifted French surgeon. Dr Samuel Pozzi was discovered to be the author of a magnificent textbook of gynecology, first published in Paris in 1890 and within two years translated into English, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish. This was one of the first textbooks to bring together everything known up to that time about those diseases peculiar to the reproductive organs of women. Pozzi wrote clearly and sympathetically about gynecological treatments – of the diseases, and also of the women who suffered them, and his work was embellished by finely-drawn figures and diagrams. Pozzi also provided references to the work of every other gynecological surgeon of his day.

In 2003, Caroline published an article on the controversial American gynecologist James Marion Sims that included a reference to Pozzi. Francesca, by then an expert on many aspects of Pozzi's life, picked up the reference, Googled the article's author, and thus began the close friendship that culminated in the writing of this book.

Over the past six years we have discovered many answers to the question: who was Samuel Pozzi? He was a skilful and inspired surgeon who in his own lifetime was known as 'the father of French gynecology.' He was an accomplished writer who produced more than four hundred scholarly papers on a range of medical topics as well as the grand primer on gynecologic disorders used around the globe. He was a pioneer of the new science of anthropology, becoming both the friend and the translator of Charles Darwin. As Professor Pozzi of the University of Paris he trained generations of surgeons; as Senator Pozzi he represented his native Dordogne. A staunch opponent of anti-Semitism, he was one of the defenders of Captain Alfred Dreyfus in the '*Affaire*' that divided French society at the end of the nineteenth century. He was a world-renowned collector of antiquities and ancient coins and a patron of the arts. Finally, there was Pozzi the friend - friend of almost everyone in *fin-de-siècle* Paris, but particularly a friend of women. While undoubtedly he was the lover of a quite substantial number of *Parisiennes*, he also had many close intellectual friendships with women, women who

were often considerably older than himself and who had distinguished themselves in the arts or the theater. There were as well women with whom the initial attraction was sexual but who later became lifelong platonic friends. The most celebrated of these was the actress Sarah Bernhardt, the first international 'superstar'.

Sarah and Samuel became lovers around 1869 and this relationship continued on and off for ten years. As late as 1878 Bernhardt would dispatch passionate notes and telegrams to Pozzi, sometimes three or four a day. "Monsieur Samuel," she once reminded him in a telegram dashed off between scenes at rehearsal, "I am desperate to see you. What are you doing then, your lordship? I love you, Sarah Bernhardt." Later that day she penciled a note; more than 130 years on, the message still springs hot from the fragile perfumed sheet: "I am the one for Pozzi, I think of him, Madly, Sarah." An hour later she wrote another: "Sam, I'm yours to die for, I can't wait for this evening." This is a woman wildly, violently, in love. Recent musings on Sarah Bernhardt have speculated that despite her many lovers she was a woman who could not achieve orgasm.(1) It seems that in the hands of the young Doctor Pozzi at least, this was not the case.

Following Samuel's marriage in 1879, sexual ardor morphed into a deep and sincere friendship that lasted until his death in 1918. In 1915 Sarah wrote to him:

"How is it that my infinite love and gratitude over so many years have not actually taken root and blossomed in your heart? How is it that I feel the need to tell you again and again that there is no being dearer to me than you? I love you with all the vital and intellectual force of my being, and nothing, nothing could change this feeling, greater than friendship, more divine than romantic Love."

For Pozzi, Bernhardt was always 'the Divine Sarah' – and for her, he was *Docteur Dieu* – Doctor God. Throughout her life, wherever she was – and she traveled relentlessly, throughout Europe, to North and South America, and to Australia – she relied on him for medical advice for herself and her huge coterie of family and friends. In 1898, when a large ovarian cyst was diagnosed, she would allow no-one but Doctor God to operate – which he did successfully, though not without some trepidation. She invited him often to her many *soirées* and dinners, in Paris and at her country house in Brittany, especially those for her own birthday and for that of her son Maurice. She in turn was often in the Pozzi home. He attended every play in which she appeared when he was in Paris, on many occasions with tickets she provided. When he translated Darwin's work into French, she named her pet chimpanzee Darwin. She was a prolific correspondent, and even when she was traveling far

from France cards and letters in her sloping hand arrived regularly at the Pozzi front door on the Right Bank of the Seine.

Much of this correspondence survives in the Parisian archives of Pozzi's great-grandson Nicolas Bourdet – more than one hundred letters, notes and telegrams from Bernhardt to Pozzi, most of which have never been published. Yet though Pozzi is mentioned in some of the dozens of Bernhardt biographies that remain in print, these references are few and fleeting. In fact, Bernhardt's correspondence shows that he was perhaps her longest-lasting and dearest friend, outranking even "Jojotte", the painter Georges Clairin, who was also a close friend of Pozzi's, and that she was one of the great loves of his life. It is around this correspondence that we have based our story of the intertwined lives of the Diva and her Doctor God.

Though both were born in France and just two years apart, the early lives of Sarah and Samuel were very different. Bernhardt was a rare orchid, bred in muck, a barren twig that at first showed no promise then blossomed into an exquisite flower. She came mewling into the world in 1844, in a modest lodging in the heart of Paris – a city where her mother was to thrive in the *demimonde* of courtesans, but with no time for her unwanted daughter. Pozzi arrived in 1846, already a little prince in his own domain, welcomed as the eldest son of a Protestant pastor into a middle-class family farming outside Bergerac in south-western France. Bernhardt was a sickly baby who later grew into an enchantress of unconventional beauty, exotic and sinewy when voluptuous looks were the fashion. Pozzi was a stunner from the day he was born and cut a striking figure well into old age. Her religious training was accidental and piecemeal; her mother ignored their Jewish ancestry, giving her no foundation in Judaism before depositing her in a convent. Though she was proud of her ethnic heritage and never concealed her Jewish roots, her adopted Roman Catholic faith was the genesis of the fascination for ritual and religious iconology that was to serve her well both professionally and in her personal life. He was raised in a pious Huguenot family, reciting Bible verses by heart from the time he was a toddler, but as a young doctor he abandoned the faith of his childhood, becoming an atheist and a disciple of Darwin.

They met first in the Latin Quarter of Paris, when he was a student at the University's Faculty of Medicine and she was an actress just beginning her ascent to stardom. The sexual attraction was mutual, immediate and overwhelming and was to burn for ten years, sometimes simply smoldering as they each met other lovers, since the liaison was not exclusive, but then blazing up again with renewed desire. Both Bernhardt and Pozzi lived for romance, but crass assumptions about their

sexuality often overshadowed the emotional breadth of their love affairs. He had a number of discreet relationships with the most beautiful denizens of the Parisian theater, certainly before his marriage and probably later, when that marriage had proved a bitter disappointment. As a result, since his dramatic portrait by Sargent was unveiled in Los Angeles, writers in English have chosen to ignore the acclaim for his medical genius bestowed by his contemporaries, and instead have centered on rumors about his erotic life, mostly unsubstantiated or total fabrication. (2) Allusions to her free and easy relationships and seductive stage persona led a Bible-thumping American minister to brand her a harlot, then hang the moniker 'the imp of darkness' on her.

Both Sarah and Samuel were infants in 1848, the year which saw the end of the monarchy of Louis-Philippe, the last king to rule France. Louis-Philippe was a member of the Orléans branch of the Bourbon family and hence a relative of Louis XVI, who had been bloodily dispatched by the guillotine during the French Revolution. Sarah and Samuel were scarcely much older when the successor to Louis-Philippe, Louis Napoléon, who had been elected President of the Second French Republic by a sizeable proportion of the voting population, staged a *coup d'état* and declared himself Emperor at the end of 1852. They were adolescents in the first years of the Second Empire, when the Emperor, who was the nephew of Napoléon Bonaparte and therefore known as Napoléon III, rapidly tightened his grip on the country. Napoléon III's father was Napoléon Bonaparte's brother Louis (though this was much questioned at the time of his birth) and his mother was Hortense, Bonaparte's stepdaughter by his marriage to Joséphine de Beauharnais. (The one legitimate son of Napoléon Bonaparte, the result of his marriage to the Austrian princess Marie-Louise, though designated Napoléon II, ruled nothing and died young.)

The Emperor was a despot but a fairly enlightened one. He oversaw a period of dramatic industrial growth and increasing wealth in France, and both Sarah and Samuel benefited from the enhanced opportunities for education available under the Empire. When they reached young adulthood, they each changed their family names: Bernardt was transformed to Bernhardt and Pozzy to the Italian spelling Pozzi. Both became deities in their respective professions, although sometimes faced with the controversy and rancor that so often accompanies fame. Both matured during turbulent times in French history: closely involved in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and the Siege of Paris, they also survived the slaughter of the Paris Commune. Strongly republican in their politics, and believers in social justice, in the last decade of the nineteenth century they were united in championing the cause of Dreyfus and resisting French anti-Semitism. However both were also welcomed in many of the salons of the surviving aristocracy and upper bourgeoisie of Paris. Each was married once, ultimately unhappily. Though they found solace in the arms of other loves, their enormous mutual respect and

affection meant that Samuel Pozzi and Sarah Bernhardt would remain dedicated to each other until death separated them.

They lived in a world of glamor and political drama, war, intrigue, and scandal, but remained hard-working perfectionists throughout their professional lives. Bernhardt was a woman who liberated herself socially and sexually a century before Betty Friedan or Germaine Greer arrived on the scene, and danced to her own drumbeat, choreographing each step along the way. In Samuel Pozzi, we have discovered a man of great charm, intelligence, humor and compassion, not a saint but a thoroughly likeable and appealing personality. Henry James called him “a very brilliant creature” – we think this is an apt description of Bernhardt as well. (3)

In writing the story of Sarah and Samuel, we have been fortunate to have been given access to the Pozzi family archives containing the Bernhardt-Pozzi letters, and in addition a treasure trove of correspondence from dozens of other well-known figures of the time. Our book is not just another biography of the Divine Sarah. For a complete story of the life of this amazing woman, including her relationships with her many leading men, her disastrous marriage to the arrogant, abusive morphine-addicted Aristidis Damala, and her truly extraordinary extended theatrical tours of the Americas, Russia and Australia, the reader can consult our bibliography. However most recent biographers simply use information long in the public domain, interpreting, inventing and fictionalizing as they please; there is little that is new in most of these works. We have included new information on the Bernhardt family discovered by Dutch archivist Harmen Snel and have chosen to focus elsewhere only on what is relevant to the story of Bernhardt and Samuel Pozzi. Most of Bernhardt’s letters to Pozzi and other material available about their relationship have either not appeared in print or have not been used in biographies in English. Her correspondence with Pozzi shows a different Sarah from the exotic eccentric often depicted– a woman in love, and later a devoted and mostly careful mother, daughter and sister, a serious and hard worker at her profession, a witty, amusing woman often playing the role of great actress, and equally often impishly sending up that role. She was also deeply committed to her closest friends – it is clear the attachment between herself and Pozzi was profound.

The Pozzi family collection has also given us access to seven letters that illuminate Pozzi’s relationship with Madame Amélie Gautreau (‘Madame X’ of the well-known portrait now hanging in the New York Met) and several letters from John Singer Sargent to Pozzi, who remained Sargent’s friend until his death. *Doctor Pozzi At Home* has often been hung at Sargent exhibitions beside *Madame X*, and much has been made by critics of rumors that the two were lovers. Our research



shows that such assertions are baseless. Pozzi's reputation in the English-speaking world has suffered as a result of speculations about a liaison with Amélie Gautreau, a vapid and uneducated dilettante, while his much more interesting and substantial relationship with Bernhardt has been largely ignored. Here then to remedy this situation is the story of the Diva and her Doctor God.



Mme Sarah Bernhardt by Jules Bastien Lepage, 1879

## Chapter Two

# *La Bohème*

*I love you my Samuel and haven't seen you for a long while. Your letter makes me dizzy. When will I see you? When will your next letter arrive? I am yours, Sarah.*

*Sarah Bernhardt, 1878*

“Sam! Look! It’s her!”

In Paris it was midday, the hour of the *déjeuner*, the sacred French lunch. A clear blue sky lay above the capital, but the streets below were icy where the threads of winter sunshine could not reach. In the Luxembourg gardens a sharp-edged wind scattered the last leaves of the plane trees onto the gravel path by the duck pond and nurses hastily bundled up their charges for the walk home. At the top of the Rue Mouffetard, geese and chickens penned in for sale at the street’s markets squawked in protest at the cold, and huddled together. Housewives hurrying home from bakeries pulled their shawls about their shoulders and clutched the oven-warm bread against their breasts. Shopkeepers, seduced by the fragrance of bubbling casseroles that drifted from the apartments above them, pulled down their shutters. In the narrow lanes of the Latin Quarter near the Sorbonne, on the Montagne Sainte Geneviève and around the Place Maubert, shivering students let out from their morning lectures mingled with booksellers, knife grinders, rag pickers and pushcart vendors as they sought the welcoming heat of an inn or café.

On the other side of the Boulevard St Michel, beyond the imposing stone pile of the School of Medicine, the wind blew more insistently across the wide Place in front of the Odéon Theater. On both sides of the Boulevard, this area was home to the thousands of students who came every year with hopes of success in the University of Paris. The sixteenth century humorist Rabelais named the area the *Quartier Latin*, since Latin was the language of the University, but Rabelais was mocking the theological pedants who conversed socially in Latin rather than French, in a pompous display of their learning. The name stuck and by the mid-nineteenth century, the Quarter and the University were magnets to students from every corner of Europe.

In the early 1860s, under the direction of the Emperor, the genius of Baron Haussmann had transformed much of this part of the *quartier* around the Odéon from a picturesque sewer to a charming Parisian neighborhood of elegant six storey apartment houses in honey-colored stone, each one trimmed with lacy black balconies and white wooden shutters. Haussmann was responsible for limiting all city buildings and apartment houses to no more than eight floors, a regulation which gives a unique charm and character to inner Paris to this day. Beyond the Odéon, down towards the river, the streets were still the winding alleys of the Middle Ages, where quaint old lodging houses leant comfortably into each other as they settled into the Left Bank of the Seine. Students occupied the attics of the newer houses, or were crowded into lodgings in the medieval dwellings close to the river. These students of the nineteenth century were not the children of privilege but rather the gifted products of families of modest means who often made great sacrifices to keep their sons in Paris. Theirs was not the charmed existence of a twenty-first century frat boy. The young men (few women had yet been admitted to the university) often shared unheated attic rooms with bedbugs, fleas and lice, living on bread and soup and studying by candlelight. The old houses had no indoor plumbing, water had to be hauled from pumps in the street and baths were taken, very occasionally, in public bathhouses. Personal hygiene was not a virtue of nineteenth century France, and only the wealthy could afford to conceal this fact with perfumes.

On this cold November day of 1868, in a front room of the tiny Hotel Corneille at the corner of the Place de l'Odéon, a medical student named Gustave Schlumberger stood at a window, his eyes fixed on the stage door of the theater. Known to his friends as Schlum, he was a homely youth with enormous feet, a drooping moustache and round glasses that gave him the appearance of an intelligent owl.

“Sam! Yes, it’s her! Come quickly! It’s Sarah!”

A roar went up in the street and Schlum flung open the shutters. The wind rushing in almost blew out the fire burning in the grate as Sam bounded across the room, knocking down the pile of anatomy texts he’d been immersed in. Together the two peered down at the Place de l’Odéon, ignoring the gusts that whipped paper and pencils from their study table. A young woman had emerged from the theater, smiling around her as she stepped through the stage door.

The two stood riveted by the spectacle below them – the twenty-five-year-old Sarah Bernhardt leaving rehearsal. Mademoiselle Bernhardt did not possess the dark curvaceous looks that were much in favor at the time. She was slender and spirited, with a delicate, heart-shaped face framed by a mane of curly, strawberry-blonde hair that had been lightened from her natural auburn. Her eyes were an intense shade of blue and framed by heavy lashes. Unlike the faces of the women who cheered her, Sarah's was powdered and rouged, her lips painted carmine. Her reed-slim body was swathed in furs and scarves against the freezing weather. Despite the cold of the December day, an audience of devoted fans had gathered as she left the theater, a throng made up of students like Schlum and Sam, and of the writers, poets, and artists who also inhabited the warren of small hotels and rented rooms of the Latin Quarter. Sarah greeted everyone and waved prettily as she walked past her admirers. For the onlookers, her presence alone warmed the air about them and they watched adoringly as she climbed into a carriage harnessed to two lively ponies and drove herself away. As she rode off in her trap, she may have noticed a handsome, dark-haired youth watching intently from a window of the Hotel Corneille.

Throughout her long life, Sarah Bernhardt skilfully manipulated the circumstances of her infancy and childhood, embroidering the tale with panache but remaining just within the realm of credibility. For generations, the Sarah Bernhardt legend began with the tale of the teenaged daughters of a prosperous and respectable Dutch Jewish family fleeing the family home after their mother's death and their father's remarriage to a cruel stepmother. The runaways traveled throughout Europe seeking the pleasures of the flesh and finally settled in Paris where they quickly abandoned all middle-class morality and gleefully entered the sordid life of the Parisian *demimonde*. This fantasy was repeated and embellished in every Bernhardt biography until a twenty-first century wizard, Harmen Snel, the chief archivist for the city of Amsterdam, unlocked a cache of dusty records and uncovered the truth.<sup>(1)</sup> Our sorcerer began his work with the writing of Dutch historian Simon Koster and after a thirty-three year search was able to piece together the true story of Sarah Bernhardt's family. In untangling the mystery of Madame Sarah's ancestry, Snel not only discovered the Bernhardt family's dubious past but also delved into the psychology of this dysfunctional clan, one that spawned an unwanted ragamuffin who became immortal.

The saga began in the Jewish quarter of Rotterdam around 1798, when a wandering optician took in a one-year-old baby boy and taught the waif enough survival skills to make his way in the world. As opposed to the bleak ghettos of Tsarist Russia and Poland, the Jewish districts of the Netherlands were prosperous and vital, with clean streets and burgeoning commerce, but this child, who would become Sarah's maternal grandfather, found himself on the outside looking in, a rolling stone unable to bond emotionally, even with his adopted family. The orphan grew into a scrapper bent on survival. In 1817 the Utrecht police were investigating a series of church robberies

and detained a suspect: an elfin young man who called himself Elias Moris Bernardt but who also went by the name of Moritz Bernardt. The police blotter described him as being just over five feet in height, with brown hair and eyes. Despite his diminutive stature, he was a master manipulator with a genius for self-preservation and enough moxie for ten men. Life on the road had toughened him and he had received a powerful education in larceny as he drifted from place to place, grinding optical lenses and cutting glass for peasants who filled the public markets and fairs throughout the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium. He graduated to selling textiles and even picked up work as a juggler; however when the police detained their pint-sized suspect, they were convinced he was involved in more nefarious commerce than hawking spectacles and spinning rings in circuses. Bernardt deftly circumnavigated their questioning and magistrates turned to his companion, a young woman from a family of roustabouts who also worked the German fairs.

Like Bernardt, the young woman was Jewish and known by more than one name, Jeanette Hartog among non-Jews and Sara Hirsch in family circles. Though Moritz and Sara claimed to be man and wife, Snel was unable to unearth evidence of a marriage either civil or religious; however, in their ten years together Sara followed the same nomadic path as Moritz, traveling from pillar to post, surviving by her wits. She also managed to give birth to six children, a fact gleaned from her death notice. Each blessed event probably took place on the road in the threadbare comfort of an inn or hostel, with a midwife if she was lucky. Jetla, also known as Julie or Youle, and who would become Sarah Bernhardt's mother, was born in 1821; her sister Reizche or Resinne, later Bernhardt's Aunt Rosine, arrived in 1823. There were three other sisters: Jetka, also known as Henriette, Anja and Mathilda, and a brother, Baruch, later called Edouard.(2)

The six children all followed the same gypsy path as their parents, roaming throughout Europe while their father worked the fair circuit and achieved notoriety in Amsterdam, Brussels, Rotterdam and Marseilles as Moritz Bernardt, petty criminal. This transitory lifestyle deprived the Bernardt children of rudimentary stability and it is not a stretch to imagine that bonding with anyone outside the brood was difficult if not impossible. The Bernardts settled in Rotterdam in 1828 but permanence was short lived. Their mother was dead by 1829 at the age of thirty-one and within two weeks of posting the death notice, Moritz had married another Sara in Amsterdam. This "evil" stepmother went by the name Sara Abraham Kinsbergen, a member of clan of traveling Jews, a family of "carnies, musicians, equestrians and tightrope-walkers". It was surely no love match but Sara Kinsbergen was rooted in Amsterdam and in a bid for respectability, the Bernardts settled in a middle-class community there. Handbills announced Moritz, fairly improbably, as the "Distinguished Eye Doctor to the Courts of Saxony." The advertisements did bring new customers; unfortunately for his offspring, this new respectability was temporary.

Late in 1829, Moritz was ensnared in a daring jewel heist that took place at the palace of the Crown Prince of Brussels. He was questioned by police but the manipulative gnome managed to wriggle out of the charges when one partner died unexpectedly and the other left town. Of course, there were those who were not taken in by his flashy veneer or his faux sincerity. The leaders of the Jewish community in Holland held him in low regard when he attempted to join their ranks.

For another two years, Moritz was the consummate actor, appearing to walk the straight and narrow but his redemption was brief. The scrappy optician turned violent and pulled a knife on a creditor. The authorities were alerted but again he managed to wheedle his way out of trouble. In the ensuing years, as Sara Kinsbergen dutifully raised her six stepchildren, Moritz took to the road. He traveled throughout the Netherlands and Belgium, took side trips to Germany and France, keeping his nose clean and according to Snel, “playing at the top of his game”. Around 1833, Sara Kinsbergen and one of her stepdaughters, Henriette, tracked Moritz to Marseilles where he was yet again a practicing optician. At that time he was claiming to be a convert to Christianity and single, having supposedly divorced his second wife. There was no mention of his having abandoned his children. Youle seems to have remained all this time with her Kinsbergen grandparents in Holland, while the other sisters moved back and forth between Holland and France, and Edouard was deposited in a French boarding school. Sometime in the early 1840s, Youle, whom Snel noted had the most protracted “running away from home” in history, finally left the nest for warmer climes and joined her siblings in France, first moving to Le Havre. There is no record of Moritz contacting his children after casting them aside but it is possible he did. He continued his wandering ways until death claimed him in 1852 as he lay in a public hospital bed in Hamburg. Moritz Bernhardt’s story was over, but Sarah’s was just beginning.

In 1843 Youle arrived in Paris, unencumbered by bourgeois morality, and found a modest apartment in the Latin Quarter. Two of her sisters were already living in the city, Henriette and Rosine. Some Bernhardt biographers have suggested that Youle worked as a seamstress, then gave up that drudgery for the free and easy life of a courtesan, but there is no evidence that Youle was ever schooled for anything other than being a *fille de joie*. She made her living by playing the piano and singing ditties for her admirers, in French, Dutch, German and possibly Yiddish. In 1843 in Le Havre she had given birth to twin daughters who did not survive. Early in 1844, she found herself with child again, the baby conceived in either Le Havre or Paris.

Over the years there has been a great deal of conjecture as to who fathered Youle's third child and the name that crops up often is that of Paul Morel, scion of a prosperous Le Havre family. Morel has been variously described as a naval officer, a naval cadet, a wealthy notary and a law student, but until further archival evidence is produced, Morel's existence, and whether he fathered Youle's baby, remains unknown.

What is known is that in late October of 1844, Youle Bernardt gave birth to another baby girl. Although the place of birth is disputed, there is some evidence supporting number 5 rue de l'École de Médecine, on the edge of the 6<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement*, as Sarah Bernardt's birthplace. In 1944, the management of the Comédie Française was convinced enough by this evidence to mark the centenary of Bernardt's birth with a blue wall plaque by the front door of this modest house, which is almost directly opposite the School of Medicine attended by Samuel Pozzi some twenty years later.

Henriette Bernardt made an advantageous marriage to a well-to-do member of the bourgeoisie, and became the quintessential French wife, devoted to hearth and home. Rosine Bernardt, on the other hand, joined the ranks of the *demimonde*, the world of courtesans and kept women, in which she equally prospered. Though France's economy was on shaky ground through most of the 1840s, men of wealth always found money for pleasure. Rosine's lair was an opulent apartment on the rue de la Chaussée d'Antin.

By the time Sarah arrived in the world, Youle too had the support of a wealthy lover, Baron Larrey. The most complimentary statement about her maternal skills would be that she was an indifferent parent, but considering her family background it is no wonder that motherhood was not her forte. According to Bernardt's memoir, *My Double Life*, as an infant she was farmed out to live with a peasant couple in provincial Brittany. The portrait she painted of her early years as the child of a neglectful party girl was one of extreme deprivation, but as an adult Brittany became the retreat from the cares of the world to which she most often turned.

Her later childhood and early teenage years are fairly well authenticated and receive much attention from all her biographers. Suffice it to say here that she attended a small boarding school for girls run by a Madame Fressard, and later the convent school of Grandchamps in Versailles, where she participated in school plays and caught a glimpse of the celebrated actress Rachel, who died young in 1858. She was

also baptized as a Catholic, and toyed briefly with the idea of becoming a nun. However in 1860, following the intervention of the Duc de Morny, a client of her mother's and the illegitimate half-brother of the Emperor, she was accepted into the Conservatoire, the drama school of the Comédie Française. She was then aged sixteen. While she scored some modest success there, her unpredictable and sometimes tempestuous behavior led to her departing in disgrace from France's leading theater company in 1863.

For a while she lived by whatever means she could find, close to the *demimonde*. Determined to succeed as an actress, she took what bit parts she was offered in small theaters, music halls and vaudeville. In 1864 she became the single mother of a son she doted upon, Maurice, born when she herself was just twenty years old. She also supported several other relatives including her younger sisters Jeanne and Régine. Then in 1866 an old friend from the Conservatoire, Camille Doucet, arranged a meeting for her with the associate director of the Odéon, Felix Duquesnel. Located as it was in the Latin Quarter, in the heart of bohemian Paris, the Odéon attracted a sophisticated, politically-leftist audience of students and intellectuals. It was the ideal environment for Sarah's budding genius and she began by mesmerizing Duquesnel, who was smitten after his first meeting with the luminous exotic: "She was more than pretty, much more dangerous than that!" Sarah was engaged at the Odéon in 1866 despite the disapproval of the director, Charles de Chilly, who disliked her looks, found her talent wanting and her reputation for tardiness and petulance off-putting. Luckily for Sarah and the world, Duquesnel prevailed, and by the winter of 1868, Sarah Bernhardt's looks and talent were finally starting to attract notice

It was at the Odéon that Sarah transformed herself from a peevish child into a woman. She acted despite *le trac*, the paralyzing stage fright that would bedevil her until the day she died. She worked with the writer George Sand, a woman she idolized, a giant of letters who initially regarded Bernhardt as an empty-headed flirt, but Sarah relished every moment. She soon found herself a favorite of the students who crowded the gods, the cheapest seats near the rafters of the theater. "The Odéon! It is the theater that I most liked and that I left only with regret..." she wrote, undoubtedly truthfully, in her memoirs. "I remember the months I had spent previously at the Comédie-Française, such a stiff, gossipy, jealous little group... At the Odéon I was happy. We thought only of putting on plays. We rehearsed in the morning, the afternoon, all the time. I loved that..." She drove herself to rehearsals in a small carriage pulled by two ponies, given to her by her Aunt Rosine who had been thoroughly frightened when the horses had once bolted at the sight of a fairground – Sarah was not one to be put off by such a trifle.



Samuel Pozzi first arrived in the Latin Quarter in 1864. Born into a family that was Huguenot on his mother's side and descended from Italian Protestants fleeing to France on his father's, he was the son of a pastor ordained into the ministry at Bergerac in South-west France. Pastor Benjamin Pozzy was a man who took quite an evangelical view of the world. At family meals the pastor, wearing steel-rimmed glasses and a white tie and cap, read aloud from the Bible to his children, and verses from the Old Testament decorated the walls of the family home. All his life Samuel was noted for his remarkable ability to insert into a conversation an appropriate Biblical quotation – remarkable in part because of the atheism he adopted in his late teens and always adhered to. However his father's religious views were tempered by a sympathetic personality, and a strong belief in the value of education.

Benjamin was also an ardent republican, as his own father and grandfather had been before him. His father Dominique Pozzy was a pastry cook in the town of Agen on the River Garonne, where he was awarded a certificate during the Revolution for “having always served the Republic with zeal and given proof of his public-spiritedness and patriotism.” Notions of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* were therefore in Benjamin's, and in Samuel's, blood: freedom, equality and brotherhood for all French citizens, at least all male French citizens.

Though Samuel was to lose his mother, Inès, at the age of ten, he was cared for tenderly by her in his infancy, and after her death his grandmother, a capable woman affectionately called ‘Old Lady’ by all her family, took on the role of mother to Samuel and his four siblings. Mélisse was her name and she was clearly a woman of strong principles and character but also with a great sense of humour. Mélisse was widowed not long after the death of Inès but she kept on the family farm outside Bergerac. The young Pozzis lived between the farm, known as La Graulet, and the pastor's households in the towns of Pau and then Bordeaux as Benjamin moved from one parish to another. Samuel was expected to study hard and work hard at home and on the farm but there was also much laughter and gaiety in the households at La Graulet, Pau and Bordeaux. Mélisse was immensely proud of Samuel's achievements at school and in his medical studies in Paris. “My end is approaching and I'm in my eighty-fourth year,” she wrote to him in 1877, “but to see you now, a professor and surgeon in the hospitals of Paris, what happiness that gives me.”

In addition to the Old Lady, her unmarried daughter Mélide lived all her life with the family, the two women greatly compensating for the missing Inès. Samuel later remembered them both at La Graulet as “ladies of great sweetness, simple but with great good sense, always laughing, singing, never thinking of themselves but always

acting according to their deep Protestant faith.” Then, in Pau, after a suitable period of mourning, Benjamin met and married a young English woman, Marie-Ann Kempe, fifteen years his junior. Marie-Ann, who was only ten years older than Samuel, would provide him with a half-sister, H el ene, and a half-brother, Adrien. Adrien would later study medicine in Paris and assist at Samuel’s surgeries. Marie-Ann taught her step-children English, to the point that they were bilingual, and was a refreshing and youthful presence in the household throughout Samuel’s teenage years.

At the *lyc ee* in Bordeaux, Samuel had done brilliantly in the *bac*, the final examination for all students in the secondary schools of France. His mind was set on studying medicine – perhaps as a result of the death not only of his mother but also that of his older sister Marie, from typhoid fever, at the age of sixteen.

While Benjamin had hoped that Samuel would follow him into the church, he was supportive when his oldest son succeeded in gaining a place in the Faculty of Medicine in the University of Paris. Also enrolled in the Faculty was Schlum, who like Sam came from a Protestant family from the southwest; the two had known each other since childhood. To reach Paris they traveled by coach for a day and a half, from Bordeaux to Orl ans, where they took a steam train on the newly-opened railway for the fifteen-hour journey to the capital, Sam writing to the Old Lady of his arrival: “I am fine apart from a pain in the backside from sitting so long on those hard railway seats!” He added, full of anticipation of what Paris had in store for him: “Now I sit in the dining room of the H otel du Pas-de-Calais awaiting the perfect cooking of my beefsteak.” Once established in the city, Sam in the rue des Saints P eres and Schlum in “a small and modest room” in the Hotel Corneille overlooking the Od eon, the two saw a great deal of one another, eating and studying together.

Unlike Samuel, who had chosen his career, Schlum detested medicine, having been pushed into it by a father determined to have a surgeon for a son. He later wrote: “The daily visits to the hospital, the sight of the patients, distressed me horribly. The practice of medicine terrified me with its responsibilities.” Though he did well in his exams, soon after qualifying he abandoned clinical practice for a stellar career in Byzantine history.

In his rambling autobiography *Mes Souvenirs*, dictated in his old age in the 1920s, Schlum reminisced about his student days in the Latin Quarter. He wrote of squalid hotel rooms, streets teeming with humanity, and the exhausting study for the dreaded *internat*, the make-or-break examination at the end of the third year of study, which controlled the destiny of all medical students. Each year, thirty or forty golden boys were selected from

among the hundreds presenting for the exam and awarded internships in the hospitals of Paris. Students who failed had been known to throw themselves into the Seine. Hundreds more faced the drudgery of a provincial practice or with luck, repeating the whole damnable process the following year. The anointed ones still had years of rigorous medical training in front of them but could then be assured of coveted appointments as the élite of the Parisian medical profession.

In the last months of 1868, Samuel, while studying hard for the *internat*, was also working by day on the wards of the Lariboisière hospital in Montmartre, where a certain Professor Gallard took an interest in the diseases of women that so many other physicians and surgeons treated with complete indifference. Here Samuel first saw cysts of the ovary that had grown so enormous they appeared like huge pregnancies, cancers that had eaten away the wombs of young mothers, and the constantly-dripping fistulas of the bladder caused by prolonged and agonizing childbirth in an era before safe cesarean was available. Wearing an apron over his oldest suit, Samuel daily made rounds of the wards where these women suffered. ‘Gynecology’ was not yet a medical discipline, since there was little in the way of cures to offer women with these ailments, but as he learnt how to drain the liters of yellow fluid from the cysts, and found his hands sticky with the pus of bursting abscesses, the young Pozzi was thinking that this was an area of medicine in which he might make a contribution. “In the service of Gallard,” he later reflected, “I saw the consequences of pleasure, and the consequences of maternity.”

But he also took time off for the entertainments that Paris could offer even to students of modest means, and these included the cheap seats of the theater. In January 1869, Bernhardt was cast as the lead in *Le Passant*, a rather slight one-act play written by a young poet named Francois Coppée, in which she played an early ‘trousers’ role, that of a wandering troubadour who falls in love with an aging courtesan. Having an actress play the role of a young man was perfectly acceptable in the theater of the times, and although *Le Passant* was intended as a vehicle for Madame Agar, the buxom leading lady of the Odéon, it was Sarah, garbed in form-fitting tights that showed her lithe body, who received the lion’s share of the acclaim. Critics adored her and audiences called her back again and again. Instead of the one showing that was promised, *Le Passant* went on to have one hundred and forty performances. When she left the Odéon each night, mobs of cheering students surrounded her carriage, detached the horses and pulled her through the snowy streets of Paris. Among those students was Samuel Pozzi.

For Sarah, it was her first taste of real fame, and she was showered with gifts, poems, flowers and proposals (some respectable, others less so!) culminating in a performance of the play for Napoléon III. Though she was at

heart a republican, she was won over when the Emperor caught her behind stage practicing her royal bow, then alleviated her embarrassment by applauding her attempts – undoubtedly he was not immune to her charms.

Sarah and Sam first met in 1869, although there is no detailed description of that encounter remaining to us. Bernhardt herself was to write, in closing a letter to Pozzi in January of 1916: “There, now I embrace you, as I have loved you for more than forty-six years, with even more memories of our past and the eternal gratitude of Sarah Bernhardt.” Schlum was the first person to write about a Bernhardt/Pozzi connection and in *Mes Souvenirs* he refers to Pozzi as “quite a young medical student” at the time of their meeting. The events of Bernhardt’s life support the date being around the time of the opening of *Le Passant*.

While there are the famed Felix Nadar photos of a twenty-year-old Sarah swathed in crinoline, there are few photos from the late 1860s through the early 1870s.<sup>(3)</sup> Likewise, though Pozzi was often photographed in his later years, particularly at the height of his surgical career when postcards of him were sold on the streets of Paris, there are relatively few images of a very young Samuel. The sole photograph of Pozzi taken at the time he was studying for the *bac* shows a somber-faced sixteen-year-old clad in a velvet jacket. The youth in the photo is an unsettling mix of the masculine and the feminine, his wavy hair carefully parted to frame a clean-shaven face that can almost be called pretty. His upper torso however is powerful, perhaps from the physical exertion of grape harvests on the family property in wine-growing Bergerac, or from hours of fencing, a sport he always loved, or even from wielding a cricket bat with the many English students at his *lycée* in Pau. By nineteen, he had taken a cue from the dandies who strolled the boulevards of Paris and adopted a more urbane look: he cut his hair and grew the elegant black beard that became his trademark for the rest of his life. Schlum described his youthful friend at twenty-two in glowing terms: “Samuel Pozzi, the brilliant, spirited, charming and delightful Pozzi, the favorite of the gods and of the fairer sex, the most joyful of companions in pleasure and at the same time, the most furious worker when we were students; later, the surgeon with such interest in the arts, literature and in the theater.” He might have also added “and in actresses”. Soon Samuel would meet the greatest of them all.

A *carte de visite* from 1868 shows the twenty-two-year-old Pozzi with his fellow medical students, his face tilted at an angle similar to his pose in the Sargent portrait painted thirteen years later. Since he was well over six feet tall and would have towered above the others, he was hunched over with one arm draped across a friend’s shoulder. There is a second young man on the opposite side of the grouping, a stocky youth staring straight into the camera, a handsome fellow with piercing eyes, a full beard and abundant wavy hair. His name was Paul

Mounet. Paul had known Samuel since they chased each other through the cobbled streets of Bergerac as children. Paul had an older brother, a bellicose young man with a powerful body, booming voice and beautiful face, Jean-Sully Mounet, who was a member of the troop of actors at the Odéon that included Sarah Bernhardt and who worked under the professional name of Mounet-Sully. Mounet-Sully was five years older than Samuel Pozzi, who had barely known him in Bergerac. He possessed a rough-hewn masculinity that contrasted greatly with Samuel's elegant beauty. Like Pozzi and Schlum, Mounet-Sully was Protestant and it was through an introduction from Mounet-Sully that the two young medical students were to meet Bernhardt.

According to Schlum, when Sarah finally met Samuel, the attraction was both instant and electric: "A great history of love, as theatrical as one could wish, marvelously interpreted by two incomparable actors; one later known throughout the world, the other her Doctor God, resting in her shadow. Young but not too young – she was two years older than he was – beautiful, courageous, hard workers." By twenty-five, Sarah had already acquired vast amorous experience – her early lovers are said, without much evidence, to have included journalist Emile de Girardin and the Comte de Kératry, who was at one stage the Prefect of Police in Paris. Both these men became good friends of Bernhardt's. Certainly she had a whirlwind affair in 1864 with a minor member of the Belgian aristocracy, the Prince de Ligne, who later acknowledged paternity of Bernhardt's son Maurice. However, we know nothing of Samuel's sexual initiation. Although he was surely a willing pupil, as a gentleman of the nineteenth century, Pozzi would have found it inappropriate to write about his introduction into erotic life and Schlum never mentioned his friend's early peccadilloes. In the mid-nineteenth century it would have been social suicide for a respectable woman to mingle casually with members of the opposite sex, making it unlikely that Samuel had social contact with the few female students at the university. In later years however, he became friends with Madeleine Brès, the first Frenchwoman to become a doctor and the only woman studying medicine at that time he was in the University. Only one woman, an English apothecary, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, had at that time graduated from the Paris Faculty of Medicine and aside from Mademoiselle Brès, female students were equally rare in all parts of the University. The Latin Quarter, however, was filled with widows, serving women and shop girls, many of whom would have been happy to extend a warm embrace to a good looking student - and there was as well as a free-spirited young actress who was overjoyed to add him to her collection of admirers.

Just as Sarah was to find success at the end of the decade, by 1869 things had fallen into place for Pozzi, the ambitious medical student. He passed the *internat*, scoring beyond his expectations and having succeeded, obtained a place as an intern in the Hospital of St. Louis, the oldest hospital in Paris, on the banks of the Saint Martin Canal. Barges laden with coal chugged steadily past the windows of the small rooms where the interns

lodged. The ardent student was now a handsome young medico busy embarking on a career in surgery. He performed his first operations – amputations and the drainage of abscesses – and proved very popular with the sisters of St Augustine who ran the hospital and who beneath their veils were quite susceptible to the charm, good looks and enthusiasm for work that Pozzi displayed. Despite the demands of the nuns and the professors, he did not neglect his social life. He became a frequent visitor to Sarah's apartment when not on call at the hospital, and Schlum often accompanied him when he dined there with Sarah and Maurice, then aged about five. There was another child living in the Bernhardt residence, Sarah's niece, Saryta, the daughter of Sarah's sister Jeanne by Oscar Planat, a member of the glitterati grown wealthy from his father's cognac business. Like her mother and her Aunt Rosine, Jeanne became a courtesan although she did not develop the flair for this profession that the older women displayed, and she had nothing whatever of the intelligence or *savoir-vivre* of Sarah. Schlum wrote admiringly of Sarah having rescued Saryta from the sordid world of paid sex and drug abuse in which Jeanne lived. Interestingly, the acting talent that escaped Jeanne was passed on to her daughter. When Saryta grew into adulthood, she was accepted by the Comédie Française under the name of Saryta Bernhardt, and eventually joined Sarah's own company.

Schlum detailed provocative glimpses of the Bernhardt/Pozzi liaison. The children were sent to bed at nine in the evening, allowing Samuel to remain alone with his idol. Sarah's furniture included a velvet-lined rosewood coffin that has been much celebrated by her biographers, and at this time it already occupied a prominent spot in her garishly-appointed apartment. Despite much speculation to the contrary, the coffin, which was located in the drawing room, served simply as a receptacle for correspondence. Photos of Sarah feigning eternal sleep cemented her persona as a Goth bohemian, but the coffin was for publicity and not a ghoulish lair for sexual encounters - as Pozzi could attest, she used her bed for those.

Sarah had been raised by a *lorette* and was no housewife. Her concept of housekeeping was an artful rats' nest, something she probably inherited from her mother, although the gas lighting of the period probably masked the disarray...at least at night. Pierre Berton, an actor who had worked with Sarah at the Odéon, and who is said to have been another of her lovers, dropped by her apartment one afternoon and was shocked by the disarray. There were discarded plates and empty wine bottles scattered among pages of manuscript, ornaments and photographs, thick layers of dust on shelves and carpets, and a baby wailing from an inner room. The baby was undoubtedly Saryta. But when Sarah emerged, "her wide-set eyes sparkled with fun."

It is obvious from his memoirs that Schlum too was quite in love with her. “I have in these *Souvenirs* often spoken of Sarah Bernhardt,” he wrote. “For several years during my youth I saw her often. I was never her lover, she was simply a charming friend, and you could never get bored with her. Whenever by chance she had nothing to say, she would recite for you in her magnificent voice the most beautiful verses from her repertoire.”

The year 1870 began well enough for Sarah, for she was working with George Sand in *L'Autre* (The Other), a play Sand had written and was planning to direct. Born Aurore Dupin in 1804, lover of such luminaries as Chopin and the writers Alfred de Musset and Prosper Mérimée, George Sand by the time Sarah met her was the chain-smoking, crinoline-wearing, sixty-five year old *grande dame* of French letters, well past her years of sexual passion and cross-dressing. Sarah admired her tremendously, to the point of infatuation, and wrote of the older woman in the most flattering terms. “Madame George Sand, a sweet and charming creature, was extremely shy...I would watch this woman with a romantic tenderness...I would sit very close to her. I would take her hand and hold it as long as possible in mine. Her voice was gentle and charming.” Apparently Sand wasn't so enchanted by Sarah, seeing her as a perpetual coquette who used her female wiles on every man she met. Certainly she underestimated both Sarah's intelligence and her sense of compassion. On one occasion, Sand, perturbed at Bernhardt for being missing in action, noted that Jeanne had miscarried during a rehearsal for *L'Autre* - something Sarah herself didn't include in her memoirs - and that Sarah didn't seem to be concerned about this event. In fact, given that Sarah was already involved in rearing Jeanne's daughter, she was no doubt relieved that her wayward, drug-addicted sister hadn't brought yet another child into the world only to ignore it.

*L'Autre* was a further milestone in Sarah's acting career, successful enough to bring to the Bernhardt bandwagon Théophile Gautier, a renowned writer and theater critic. Théophile was also the father of Judith Gautier, for a while the wife of poet Catulle Mendès, and for a number of years muse to Wagner. Judith was a writer and scholar and had a deep knowledge of Oriental literature and culture. She was probably at some time in the late 1870s involved in a liaison with Samuel; certainly they became life-long friends.

1870 saw Samuel transferred as an intern to the Necker Hospital, in the rue de Sèvres in the affluent sixth *arrondissement* of the city. His boss or *patron* was the physician Alexandre Laboulbène, who also happened to be a distant cousin of his. Since Samuel's arrival in Paris, Alexandre had often welcomed him at his home in the rue de Lille, visits much enjoyed by the medical student living on the modest income his father could provide. Alexandre was a bachelor some twenty years older than Pozzi, who observed his cousin's opulent apartment with some interest, noting the exquisite polished furniture, the thick Oriental carpets, the excellent *cuisine* and service at table and the vast library. It was also through Alexandre that Samuel was invited to the evening *salons* of the Princess Mathilde, niece of Napoléon Bonaparte and cousin of the Emperor, and a great patron of the arts and of artists. Laboulbène was the family's physician. The glamor and sparkling conversation of these occasions greatly impressed Pozzi, who would later become much sought-after himself in Paris salons although he would always stick strongly to the republican convictions he had absorbed in his childhood.

At the Necker, Samuel received no particular favors from Professor Laboulbène. The Faculty of Medicine and its teaching hospitals were essentially democratic. Students and young doctors were judged strictly on merit. Advancement up the ladder to tenured posts in Paris hospitals depended not on name or family or wealth but on hard work and success in examinations. Samuel Pozzi had the determination and the talent to succeed.

But neither Bernhardt or Pozzi could immediately enjoy the fruits of their labors. The gates of hell were opened in the summer of 1870, sucking them both into a vortex that began with heady optimism and ended in crushing defeat.



Insert the following images over several pages between these two chapters



Samuel Pozzi at the age of 16



Samuel Pozzi at the age of 22, medical student in Paris



Samuel Pozzi with fellow medical students, 1868. Pozzi in back row, far right; Paul Mounet in back row, second left.

## Chapter Three

### *La Guerre*

*“War! Infamy! Shame! Pain! Theft and crime sponsored, pardoned and glorified!”*

*Sarah Bernhardt, My double life - Mémoires*

The Franco-Prussian War of 1870 started innocuously enough, a diplomatic tiff between the French and the Prussians over the succession to the Spanish throne. This position became vacant when the Spanish queen, Isabella II, was booted from her perch during the revolution of 1868. Since virtually the only prerequisite for any job applicant was to be of royal birth, the King of Prussia nominated a relative, a bewhiskered member of a minor royal house, Prince Leopold de Hohenzollern. The proposal was roundly supported by the Prussian Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, and by most of the crowned heads of Europe; alas for Hohenzollern, there was a fly in the ointment, the French. In Paris the Spanish-born Empress Eugénie stuck her pretty nose into the fray and opposed the nomination, which was unfortunate since her influence on her husband, Napoléon III, was considerable. It was said of Eugénie, who was twenty years younger than the Emperor and a striking blue-eyed redhead, that “she knew very little - but she knew that little in four languages and uttered it with conviction.” However French politicians and journalists of all shades of opinion were also opposed to Leopold’s appointment, seeing France potentially caught in a vice between an increasingly powerful Germany and a German-born Spanish king. By July of 1870, more than just the weather was heating up. The French Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Duke of Gramont, was sent to the spa town of Ems, where the King of Prussia was taking the waters, to push for a withdrawal of Hohenzollern’s candidature. The Duke was aggressive in the extreme, and successful in removing Hohenzollern from the list of aspirants, but the ensuing maneuvering by a crafty Bismarck, who leaked an edited version of Gramont’s demands, the infamous Ems Dispatch, fanned xenophobic fervour on both sides and led to a French declaration of war on the Prussians on July nineteenth.

Schlumberger wrote in his memoirs of the massive hysteria that overtook the Latin Quarter on the outbreak of the war: “I can hardly describe how excited and feverish Paris seemed then, nor the Latin Quarter where I was living at that time and where I had many friends. The streets had an extraordinary aspect, being full of people overcome with emotion, crying out news both true and false, shouting, selling newspapers.” The press on both sides of the Rhine fanned the emotions of the populace with

increasingly strident and nationalistic cry. On the streets of Paris crowds shouted “Hurrah for the war! On to Berlin!”

In the provinces there was much more caution. For many years the division had been widening between the radical and republican Parisians and the conservative country peasants; the latter constituted the vast majority of the French population in the nineteenth century. Of eighty seven French prefects (heads of French administrative departments) seventy-one accepted the declaration of war with great hesitation – and with good reason. As a young man the Emperor had been considered liberal and progressive but he had spent much of his life in exile in England. He had little experience for the job of France’s leader and when he came to power at the age of 45, elected as a President who quickly morphed into an Emperor, his rule was an uneasy combination of the liberal and the dictatorial. His decision to fight the Germans was a catastrophic blunder. He ignored the fact that Bismarck had transformed Prussia into an armed state with a force of eight hundred thousand enthusiastic warriors, lathered into an orgiastic frenzy and keyed up to descend on the French. By contrast France could call upon just three hundred thousand men, many of them reservists, who were no match for the Prussians in training or zealotry.

Conscription had been introduced in 1868 in France in a belated attempt to catch up with Prussian might but the French army was hopelessly outmanned. While it was true that the French had invented the first machine-gun, they were inept in battlefield logistics and despite a strong sense of allegiance, their chauvinistic fire was tepid compared to the Germans’. Krupp’s Prussian armament factories had nurtured a deadly crop of new products: massive cannons cast from steel and fifty-ton guns. The Prussians also had a vast network of railroads that crisscrossed Europe and could rapidly deliver men and a fantastic array of weapons. France had far fewer railroads, a mobilization plan that was chaotic, and poorly organized supply systems. Food, ammunition, ambulances and transport for both provisions and men were all lacking. Most important of all, the Prussians had a great military leader in the person of General von Moltke; by comparison the French generals were ignorant and outdated. Bismarck, determined to forge a powerful, united Germany, licked his chops at the prospect of battle with the French. Unfortunately, most Frenchmen – particularly Parisians - failed to realize the folly of battling the Prussians and were convinced of an easy victory by the end of the summer.

As her family milled about her, Sarah looked out from the window of her apartment onto the rue de Rome, and watched the madness of war as it traveled through Paris: “War has been declared! And I hate war! It maddens me. It makes me shiver all over. And from time to time I would start in fear, overwhelmed with grief at the voices crying in the distance.”

Though theaters were closing right and left, Sarah was determined to stay in Paris but just as determined that her family find shelter out of France. She bundled the whole Bernhardt clan - her mother, Aunt Rosine, Maurice and Saryta along with her sisters Jeanne and Régine - and sent them all to safety in Le Havre. As she waved them off, handkerchief in hand, she must have prayed that the headline predictions would come to fruition, a quick victory for the French army within weeks. Sadly, this was not to be.

In the early months of 1870, Samuel Pozzi, like every intern or humble student of anatomy, was enthusiastic about the upcoming war, devoured every bit of news and looked towards the Emperor's Tuileries Palace for the latest revelations. The majority of medical students were republicans at heart and even those who refused to get involved in political agitation were fierce opponents of the Empire, but their loyalties above all were to France. Pozzi himself had been brought up in a household where republicanism was hereditary, and he would remain a republican throughout his life. In his first years as a student he had a commitment to work and study that seemed to muzzle any latent rebel zeal, but once it was a question of defending France herself he was immediately ready to set aside his surgical aspirations and volunteer for the front. When war was finally declared, Samuel was interning in the gas-lit wards of the Hospital Necker. He heard the shouts coming from the boulevards and the cries of "Berlin!" as the cavalry galloped through the streets. In the Faculty of Medicine, the students left their classes and rushed into the hallways and the same jubilation and jingoism that held Paris captive was suddenly unleashed among them.

Within days, the Gare de l'Est, the railroad terminal leading to Eastern France, overflowed with troops embarking for the border and the masses cheering them on. The Dean of the Faculty, Professor Adolphe Wurtz, a renowned chemist with a fondness for mutton-chop sideburns, announced the immediate closure of the Faculty. Wurtz, a native of Alsace, one of the two provinces imperiled by the advancing German army, optimistically predicted the Faculty's re-opening on November 1<sup>st</sup> after the French had annihilated the Prussian forces and crushed their imperialistic ambitions. After sharing his rosy forecast, Wurtz announced that all examinations were postponed. Samuel, who as well as completing his internship had been studying for five years to obtain a place as an Assistant in Anatomy, a paid post that would speed his rise towards the top of the surgical hierarchy, was momentarily crestfallen. He wouldn't be able to take his examinations as planned and would have to postpone his dreams, at least for the next two months. Still, his personal ambition was nothing compared to the future of France.

Since the time of the first Napoléon, although the victory parades after every military skirmish, with their flag waving, blaring trumpets and pounding drumbeats, had nonchalantly concealed the terrible suffering of the dead and wounded, among much of the medical profession no amount of jingoistic platitudes about the ‘glorious dead’ could prevent a growing awareness that many of those dead might have been saved if they had received organized medical help. There had been unsuccessful efforts on the part of the Paris Faculty of Medicine to create a military medical service ever since 1859, following the experiences of the Crimean War, but by 1870, the service consisted only of a handful of nurses and ambulance wagons attached to troops en route for the front. With the outbreak of war however there was massive enthusiasm for the task. At the Necker, Pozzi’s boss, Professor Laboulbène, soon donned the uniform of a surgeon major of the military service. Now nothing could keep Samuel from the fray, and by the end of July, he had enlisted as an assistant major 2nd Class with the caduceus, the sign of his medical knowledge, attached to the red collar of his snappy new uniform. His regimental outfit was similar to that of a hussar: striped pants and braided tunic and a kepi cap turned at a rakish angle in the style of the times. Many of his fellow students including Schlum, Paul Mounet and Georges Clemenceau, who would later be Prime Minister of France, had also joined the army medical service and were ready for battle.

“We were organized militarily, in all we were twelve hospital interns, having the rank of captain, in dark blue uniforms with golden buttons and kepi caps,” wrote Schlum. “We had too a number of nurses also dressed in blue with round hats; two cooks in uniform, two auxiliaries, two Catholic chaplains and two priests, a Protestant chaplain and a paymaster who completed our troops. We were all together thirty people. Two horses pulled a regimental vehicle that carried medicine, instruments and tools. Each of us had a back pack for a change of clothes and indispensable toiletries”. Other medical students joined forces with the newly formed Red Cross who were also organizing teams of ambulances, doctors and nurses.

Samuel, in a different unit from Schlum, waited impatiently in Paris for nearly a month before he was ordered to move to a military hospital closer to the front, while watching those of his colleagues who had joined the Red Cross depart more speedily. While a large number of doctors, nurses and much equipment went with the Red Cross teams, there were no effective arrangements to return the wounded to Paris. The teams did as well as they could in the limited circumstances, doctors performing hasty amputations on wounded soldiers in the most unsanitary conditions imaginable. Open wounds quickly filled with malodorous pus, and gangrene was common, since medics were forced to operate on farm tables and the altars of churches. Post-op, patients were placed close to each other so that infection inevitably spread to all. Since no effective transportation had been set up, none

of the recently-wounded reached Paris and the ghastly miasma of certain death hung over the filthy, disease-filled tents and wagons in which the wounded men lay.

In Paris, after the company at the Comédie Française converted part of their theater into a hospital for the wounded, Sarah was determined to use her contacts to help transform the foyer of the Odéon into an *Ambulance* - a receiving station for the wounded. Two old friends, de Girardin and de Kératry, encouraged her efforts – de Kératry literally gave her the coat off his back, an elegant fur. She also turned to the vintner de Rothschild, department store owner Félix Potin and Menier, a chocolate maker, amongst others. Raising funds was a natural for someone with Sarah's vivacity and she wasn't shy about tapping for assistance everyone of means whom she knew in Paris. Soon the Odéon overflowed with tins of sardines, barrels of brandy, crates of eggs and boxes of tea as Sarah prepared to minister to her patients. Pozzi's French biographer, gynecologist Claude Vanderpooten, is sure that the young intern was one of the voices who pushed her forward with her plans.(1) In the time before Samuel was sent to the front and with the closure of the Faculty, Bernhardt undoubtedly would have utilized his considerable medical talents.

When the French forces under Generals MacMahon and Bazaine finally mobilized towards the borders of Alsace and Lorraine, they faced an army of five hundred thousand Prussians who had already set their jackbooted feet on French territory thanks to their judicious use of the railway system. Under von Moltke, German forces goose-stepped easily into France while one half of the French army under Bazaine was holed up in the city of Metz. The other half of the army, under MacMahon, suffered a crushing defeat at the town of Sedan on September 1st and the Emperor was seized as a hostage, on September 3<sup>rd</sup> sending a telegram to Paris: "The army is defeated and captured; I myself am a prisoner."

Schlum wrote to his family from close to the frontline and could not shield them from his days in hell: "I am all right in spite of the torrential rain which has been falling on us for the past three days. We have been here since yesterday at one o'clock, right in the middle of this terrible tragedy that will be called the disaster of Sedan. To describe the horrors to you would be impossible. Imagine a tranquil and smiling little town of perhaps a thousand inhabitants, in the streets of which are crushed at the moment ten or fifteen thousand people seeking refuge at any price, begging whoever they can find for a bit of straw on which they can lie. Just when I am writing to you there are passing by incessantly enormous carts filled with wounded German soldiers. On the roadway and on the footpath are sitting in the hundred our poor, unhappy captive soldiers, their officers very depressed and with their heads

tied up with bloody bandages, together with hundreds of refugees, half-mad with terror and anguish. Everything we see and hear in this place, above all from the Belgian officers, however full of sympathy they are for France, is simply desperate. As for news, we scarcely have any and we are living in the deepest anguish. Right now lying in front of me is a poor foot soldier, wounded at Sedan, dead yesterday evening. All we have here at our disposition is a tiny room with enough straw to sleep and rucksacks as pillows. It was a good forty-eight hours ago, under this beating rain, that I was able to get changed. The weather is appalling, the paths disgusting, but we have done all the amputations we can...Our chiefs have been in Sedan since yesterday trying to get a German safe-conduct that will allow us to go”

Pozzi had been kept waiting in Paris by the Army prior to the defeat at Sedan. He finally left the city on August 26<sup>th</sup>, as part of a convoy of sixty-six trains that were intended to move two thousand trucks carrying men, horses and munitions to the relief of those bottled up at Sedan. The journey took an interminable five days and the maneuver was too late; by the time they arrived, the Prussians were victorious. Pozzi's regiment was ordered to return to Paris but their departure was delayed and Samuel was able to involve himself directly in the care of the wounded. He observed the military debacle first hand and was forced to watch young men dying from sepsis, their dressings pouring pus. He saw the brilliant fixed stares of those expiring from peritonitis after abdominal wounds and heard the screams of men writhing in the last stages of tetanus. These monstrous scenes would haunt Pozzi and affect his practice of surgery for the rest of his life. Yet he did what he could, working non-stop draining infected wounds and amputating shattered limbs. Later he would learn that Prussian doctors were saving many more of their wounded by using the methods of a Scottish surgeon named Joseph Lister, techniques described in an article Lister had published three years earlier, entitled *Address on the Antiseptic Principle of the Practice of Surgery*.

The Emperor's regime was too weak to survive the defeat of his army and when the news reached Paris on September 4<sup>th</sup>, crowds of Parisians converged on the Tuileries Palace and demanded the proclamation of a Republic. Sarah noted that the fashion-setting Empress Eugénie had already fled to England “in her American dentist's carriage.” This was the last day of the Empire and the first day of the new Republic, a revolution that was the most bloodless in French history. A provisional government was set up with the task of continuing to fight the invading Prussians. One of its most charismatic leaders was a young lawyer, Léon Gambetta, a staunch enemy of the Emperor and of all monarchists, who had carved out a career by defending the enemies of Napoléon III. Stocky, with a head that was disproportionately large, and missing an eye, Gambetta was no beauty but was possessed of a wonderfully engaging personality. Emile de Girardin, long a friend of Sarah's and a



helper with the *Ambulance*, introduced Gambetta to her and he became one of the few male friends of Bernhardt's never linked to her romantically. She met him often at Girardin's home and there seems to have to be a mutual respect between the two. She wrote of him with great admiration: "It was a joy for me to listen to this wonderful man. What he said was so wise, considered and persuasive... Gambetta was never common or ordinary."

Gambetta was appointed Minister of War as the Prussians steadily advanced on Paris. On September 23<sup>rd</sup>, they began the Siege of Paris, intending to starve the French into surrender. With the Prussians surrounding him, Gambetta left Paris in the most dramatic fashion imaginable, by hot air balloon, and joined other members of his government in their temporary headquarters in the town of Tours to the south of Paris. For four months the ragged French armies battled with the Prussians, who were not only well-armed but also well-fed, in the countryside around Paris. A desperate Gambetta sent a group of envoys on a tour of Europe to seek assistance against the Prussians. At their head was Adolphe Thiers, a canny politico who had been at the heart of French government since the 1830s and was an outspoken critic of the Emperor and his foreign policy. The envoys traveled through every European capital seeking help but they returned empty-handed. Despite the disaster that Napoléon III had wrought upon France, and although Bernhardt always remained a republican, she disliked Thiers whom she referred to as "a little rascal with a perverse bourgeois soul."

Meanwhile the situation in Paris grew increasingly desperate as food supplies ran out and people subsisted on cats, dogs and rats, and wolves' meat brought in by local hunters. The price of rats became so high that not everyone could afford this delicacy, which was considered of the highest quality since the rats themselves had fed on cheese and grains. The star attractions at the Paris zoo, two baby elephants, Castor and Pollux, were slaughtered for their meat along with the other mammals; only the lions, tigers and monkeys were spared. People soon forgot what meat was and subsisted on roots or leaves. Disease was rampant, people were dying of starvation and the death toll reached twelve thousand. Sarah wrote that on Christmas Eve of 1870 "the temperature was fifteen degrees below freezing". Supplies of wood and coal disappeared as temperatures continued to plummet, and people pulled public buildings apart to salvage fuel. The staff at the Odéon nursed women and children who had been displaced from their homes and were suffering from frostbite. Her hospital was overflowing with the injured and there was talk of a final bombardment of the city.

Pozzi had returned to Paris with his regiment in late September, filthy and half-dead with fatigue after a month of unceasing care of the wounded. He found his adopted city seething with activity. Crowds

of angry citizens, refusing to accept defeat, had torn down the Imperial eagles and then invaded the Tuileries, and were now preparing for the siege by the Prussians. Members of the previously defunct French National Guard had been called into service and the Guard reconstituted. Returning soldiers and National Guardsmen worked together with Parisians, young and old, piling mounds of earth against all the important monuments. Large red crosses were painted on the roofs of the military hospitals - the Invalides, the Val-de-Grâce and the Salpêtrière – and also on Sarah's *Ambulance*, the first time this sign had been used in a war to identify hospitals. There were hastily-built wooden sheds everywhere, flocks of sheep and goats on the lawns of the Tuileries Palace and the Luxembourg Gardens, and two and a half million people hoarding food, provisions, coal and wood for the coming siege. Very soon after Pozzi's return, the city gates were locked and cannons assembled on the ramparts. Soldiers from many different battalions mingled with the masses preparing to defend Paris. Samuel was directed to work in a temporary receiving station in the 7th *arrondissement* although only a few wounded were now reaching the capital.

As grim as the conditions were, Samuel was delighted when he was befriended by an esteemed man of letters, the poet Charles Leconte de Lisle, who lived close to the receiving station. Leconte de Lisle was fifty-three and childless when he volunteered for the war, posted as a humble National Guardsman. He and his wife virtually adopted Pozzi and they became fast friends. This was a relationship that after the war would result in Pozzi's entry into a large circle of writers and artists and last until the poet's death, when he bequeathed all his written works to Samuel.

By day, in addition to his medical duties, Pozzi took part in military reconnaissance missions: each morning detachments of troops would venture out of the city accompanied by medics, engage the enemy in a skirmish or two then return to the city by nightfall. On October 21<sup>st</sup>, during one of these expeditions, Pozzi was wounded, though not by enemy fire.

A group of Breton recruits delivered him on a stretcher to the door of the Necker hospital where the nursing sisters ministered by lamplight to the wounded. The nuns looked down at the soldier lying on the stretcher and recognized the pallid face of their favorite intern. "No, not a bullet," he explained weakly. "I was knocked down by the runaway horse of an ambulance wagon, and the wheel ran over my leg." His ankle was clearly broken but the surface wound was not contaminated. The nuns bandaged Samuel and gave him a welcome dose of morphine. The following morning Désormeaux, the chief surgeon of the Necker, diagnosed a fracture involving both malleoli, the prominent bones at each side of the ankle, but no other damage. This diagnosis was to be confirmed thirty-five years later

with the advent of x-rays and the acquaintance of Pozzi with radiology pioneer and Nobel Prize winner Marie Curie.

Samuel's ankle ached like the devil and left him with a permanent scar though he was fortunate the injury was not worse. However, he was furious at being sidelined from the action. Since this was the nineteenth century, long before the days of orthopedic intervention and the use of metal pins and plates, fractures were treated with bed rest. Pozzi was confined to bed in the Necker with little to do to end his frustration, unable even to contribute to Sarah's efforts at the Odéon. He submitted to the discomfort of repeated bandaging (vowing always to be gentle in the future with his own patients!) then passed the rest of the long day devouring whatever books and newspapers could be found in the besieged city. He was distressed to realize that the siege was growing worse. He had no news from home for three months; he sent a letter to Bergerac by carrier pigeon but received no reply. After Christmas the bombardment of Paris by the Germans began.

By Christmas of 1870, Sarah was sleeping at the Odéon then spending her days foraging for food for the wounded. When a ration of meat from the government was too rotten to eat, she contracted with a butcher who supplied horsemeat at an exorbitant price. "If it was well prepared and well seasoned, it was very good." No matter how optimistic she attempted to be, no smile or sunny disposition could disguise the horror around her. She wrote of the despair and the state of suspense that filled everyone around her, although they did not know exactly what they were waiting for. It was almost a relief when the bombardment started on December 27<sup>th</sup>. At last something new was happening.

Unfortunately, the Prussians were no respecters of red crosses and Bernhardt realized too late that the Odéon's identification made them sitting ducks. The hospital sign in fact seemed to serve as a target for the enemy, who fired with great accuracy and corrected their sights as soon as a bomb fell outside the area of the Luxembourg Palace next to the Odéon. In just one night Sarah's hospital received more than twelve bombs. "These shells looked like fireworks when they exploded in the sky. Then the bright flashes fell, black and murderous." The bombing transformed Paris from the glittering hub of European sophistication into a crater-filled ruin. Shells fell across the city without regard for a civilian population that was already demoralized. Bodies littered the streets. Sarah was a bystander and completely powerless against monstrous cruelty when she witnessed the death of a child who ran errands for her ambulance station. "Ah, the horror, the horror! When we reached the child his poor entrails were spilled on the ground, his whole chest and his poor little rosy doll face were stripped of skin, no more eyes, no more nose, no more mouth, nothing, nothing except

some hair at the end of a bloody rag a yard away from his head. It was as though two tiger's paws had opened the belly and skinned the poor little skeleton with refined ferocity."

In early January of 1871, Sarah received a note from her mother to alleviate her anxiety about her family. "We are all leaving for The Hague...Everyone well...Have courage...Much love – Your mother". Nothing however, could assuage her fears about the wounded and suffering who were still in Paris.

The bombardment raged on, most cruelly and viciously on the hospitals. The Val-de-Grâce, the Pitié, the Salpêtrière, the Lourcine-Pascal (the hospital that Samuel would later make his own) were all bombed and the Necker was not exempted. One day after lunch, a shell landed directly in the duty room, bringing down the ceiling and temporarily burying the maid in debris, but she was pulled out unharmed, though screeching and shaken, and fortunately no one was killed. The bombing continued for a month. Towards the end of January Sarah received further news from her mother and wrote of it in the most theatrical fashion. She had arranged to bury the child whose death she had watched and then returned to Odéon. "I came back to the hospital sad and tense. Joy was waiting for me there however: a friend holding a tiny little piece of frail paper on which were written two lines in my mother's hand: 'We are very well and in Hamburg.' Then I was seized with anger. In Hamburg! All my family was in Hamburg settled tranquilly on enemy soil!"

Bernhardt was split, furious at her mother's disregard at the position it put her in yet overjoyed that her family was safe. She continued to throw herself into the war effort, including traveling with two monks to pick up the dead on the battlefield of Châtillon on the outskirts of Paris. She worked throughout the remainder of the Siege; the intensity of the bombing forced her to move her patients into the cellars of the theater where they stayed until flooding and rat infestation obliged her to shift them to temporary wards at Val-de-Grâce hospital. There were no more soldiers to nurse but Sarah worked on, ferreting out supplies and charming the wounded with personal appearances.

On January 28, 1871 Paris surrendered and to Gambetta's chagrin, an armistice was arranged by Thiers with the Prussians. The French lost all of Alsace and half of Lorraine and were forced to pay huge reparations to Prussia. The combined German armies staged a victory march through the Arc de Triomphe and down the Champs-Élysées in central Paris. Enraged Parisians took buckets and brushes and scrubbed the streets following the parade. A condition of the armistice was that elections would be held; the vote took place hastily on February 8<sup>th</sup>. While Paris was solidly republican, most voters

still lived in the conservative countryside and voted against the republicans such as Gambetta who had vowed to continue the war for France. A majority of monarchists was returned – these were the supporters of the Bourbons and the Orléanists, whose ancestors' extravagances had brought about the French Revolution, and Parisians were incensed by their success. After the new government ratified the Treaty of Frankfurt with Bismarck's government, Gambetta and other republicans resigned their seats in disgust.

With the coming of an uneasy peace, the restrictions on travel were relaxed. Sarah used her connections and arranged a meeting with that "little rascal", Thiers, now the head of the provisional government. After lecturing her about the dangers of crossing enemy lines, Thiers signed the pass that allowed Sarah to leave Paris and begin the long journey to retrieve her family.

Her return with her family set tongues wagging in the city even though Sarah had remained in Paris throughout the war and the siege and devoted herself to her work at the Odéon. Her early life and her years as a single mother had hardened her to the snickering of gossipmongers but she couldn't dismiss the fact that Paris was now a tinderbox of über-patriotism. Xenophobes questioned how the family of an upstart guttersnipe could abandon the City of Light while their betters were forced to face down the Prussian cannons. Even more insidiously, questions about Sarah's origins also arose; it was rumored, and not for the last time, that Bernhardt was in reality a German Jew and not truly a daughter of France. Though her valiant work at the Odéon had made her a *bona fide* heroine of the war, there was public criticism of her family's journey to safety. She reacted as she was to do for the rest of her life: dabbed her temples and wrists with scent, pushed back her dainty shoulders and pointedly ignored her critics as if they didn't exist. What did a little malicious blather matter when she and her beloved son were reunited? Besides, she had collected a coterie of powerful friends, including Léon Gambetta. She draped her lithe form in the elegant lines of the new bustle fashion, perfumed her apartments and played the mistress of her salon all the while attempting to dismiss a nagging realization: her beloved Paris was still in peril.

In mid-February of 1871, Pozzi was delegated to accompany a group of convalescent soldiers heading to the southwest and two days later he arrived in Bordeaux, temporarily the capital of the provisional government, who had established the National Assembly in the town's Grand Theater. The town was brightly lit, swarming with fashionable women and well turned-out officers who dined and danced in hotels and restaurants, their gaiety in sharp contrast to the grimness of Paris. Bordeaux was just a short train journey from Bergerac so the entire Pozzi family set out to join Samuel. Garbed in his regimental finery, he must

have cut a dashing figure when he was finally reunited with them all. Fifty years later, his half-brother, Adrien, recalled that though he needed a cane for support, a uniformed Samuel joined the family on their afternoon strolls along the wide boulevards of Bordeaux. They were also accompanied by Georges Clemenceau who like Pozzi had been posted to Bordeaux. The older Pozzis must have noticed the changes in their adored eldest child. His seven years of study, his internship, the war and the siege had not only matured him but had given him a set of values that he would hold to for the rest of his life. From his Protestant upbringing and schooldays he had acquired remarkable self-discipline and an appetite for work but his experiences since leaving home had led him to renounce any Christian beliefs. Three years earlier, his father had opened the 11th Synod of the Union of Evangelical Churches in France with fiery attacks on the rampant secularism and materialism of the times, but no amount of arguing, cajoling or pleading for his soul on the part of Pastor Benjamin Pozzy could bring his son back to the fold. Samuel was now a humanist and, to his father's consternation, an atheist. Though throughout his life he would draw on his knowledge of the Bible in conversation, Samuel Pozzi could no longer believe in a God who could wreak upon men the havoc that he had seen during the previous months.

By the beginning of March, he was back in Paris, his fracture now healed. He was still at the Necker, in the surgical service of Laboulbène. There had not been the usual change-over of interns at the beginning of January because of the war, and the Medical Faculty remained closed. Cautiously Professor Wurtz partly re-opened the Faculty, mainly to allow some of the interns and students who had completed their training before the war to receive their precious diplomas. They included a young doctor named Ferdinand Faneau who had worked as an extern with Samuel and then served in the ambulance corps during the Siege of Paris.

The Prussians now occupied the whole of the French capital, and the Parisians still seethed with resentment at the rest of France for returning a conservative and anti-republican government. They were even more angered by the new government declaring Versailles the capital instead of Paris, abolishing the war-time moratorium on rents and debts and attempting to disband the National Guard which had been resurrected in Paris during the Siege, and whose anti-government republican sympathies were well-known.. On March 18<sup>th</sup> Thiers, aware that Parisian hostility was at boiling point, sent regular soldiers from Versailles to the hill of Montmartre in the north of Paris to seize weapons from the stores of the Parisian National Guard.

Later that morning, during one of the hasty graduation ceremonies arranged by Wurtz in the Faculty of Medicine in the Latin Quarter, the new doctors raised their right hands to proclaim the Hippocratic

Oath: “I swear to be true to the law and to the reputation of my profession in the practice of medicine...My tongue will keep secret all information confided to me and I will not use my position to compromise morals or assist with a crime.” At that moment news reached the Faculty of the killing of two French generals, Lecomte and Thomas, on Montmartre. The generals had been shot by their own men in the course of a confrontation with Parisians infuriated by the actions of the Versailles troops; the soldiers involved were carried down the hill on the shoulders of an exultant crowd.

Violence spread quickly through the city. Thiers immediately withdrew from Paris all regular troops still loyal to his government and began to assemble a larger army which would in turn lay siege to the city – this time Frenchmen would be besieging Frenchmen! He persuaded Bismarck to release French prisoners of war to assist these endeavors. He assembled all his ministers and officials in Versailles, together with as much cash as they could gather from Paris as they fled. Meanwhile within Paris initial chaos gave way to an experiment in municipal self-government. The Paris Commune had begun.

The Commune consisted of workers’ groups, radical republicans, liberals, socialists, anarchists, feminists, intellectuals and free-thinkers of many kinds. The Communards, as they called themselves, were joined by a motley crew of the impoverished rabble of Paris, as well as members of the radicalized National Guard and other individual soldiers, and they marched under a scarlet flag. Propelled by heady optimism, the Communards pushed forward determined to defeat the Versailles government and eradicate all vestiges of the debased élite that had nearly destroyed France. For many Communards, nothing short of overthrowing the entire social order would be tolerated and in the nineteenth century, their demands, including the separation of church and state, universal suffrage, recognition of common law marriage and unionized collectives for workers, were radical in the extreme. The Communards had their own muse, Louise Michel, known as the Red Virgin of Montmartre, and marched to the beat of their own anthem, the *Internationale*.

At the Faculty Wurtz once again closed the doors and prudently departed for the countryside, along with a number of other professors, but most students and junior doctors remained, including Pozzi at the Necker. Before long a group of pro-Communard students broke down the doors of the Faculty, took over the main auditorium and began reforming the medical course. Their leader, Paul Reclus, was a young extern, who like Samuel was the son of a pastor from southwest France and who had been raised with the same Huguenot fervor that had been instilled in Samuel. However, although Samuel followed the events with all the passion of a republican, both his throbbing ankle and a natural

caution stopped him from participating in marches. He spent the two months of the Commune entirely within the Necker treating the hundreds of wounded Communards and citizens arriving day and night at the hospital.

From the very beginning of the Commune, internal divisions among the Communards, plus a lack of support from the rest of France, prevented any sustained or coherent experiments in social reform, as well as interfering with efforts to continue the armed struggle against the regular forces of Thiers. At the end of May these forces struck back and street by street and house by house fought their way through Paris. For the last two weeks of May, the hospitals of Paris lived shut off from the rest of the world, opening their doors only to take in more bleeding victims. At Saint-Antoine Hospital, shells fell so close to the on-call room that the staff was forced to transfer the patients to the cellars. The situation at Hospital Lariboisière was even worse because it was close to the Montmartre hill; while the drums of the army beat unrelentingly, bullets crashed through the windows. Staff at the Lariboisière treated a huge number of wounded Communards including Dombrowski, the Polish ‘general’ of the Commune, who was shot in the stomach and died two hours later as shells fell in the kitchen, the laundry and close to the on-call room. The head of Lariboisière, Professor Aristide Verneuil, later a surgical colleague of Pozzi’s, had already gained the admiration of his staff when he refused to abandon his hospital and slept in the duty room on a camp bed.

The slaughter of men, women and children continued throughout Paris. European governments considered the Communards to be hotheads and traitors so no country would intercede on their behalf. The brutality of the army and the escalating body count converted dozens of students to the Communard cause, and many interns and students performed individual acts of valor. At the ancient Hôtel-Dieu hospital, next to Notre Dame Cathedral, medical students rushed to put out a fire that had started in the Cathedral, while at the Salpêtrière, Doctor Ulysse Trélat, later a colleague and friend of Pozzi’s, refused to allow the Versailles troops who were searching for Communards into the hospital. When the army threatened him with execution, Trélat successfully faced down their guns, replying: “It is you who should be executed!” At Beaujon hospital, the entire staff resigned when they discovered that their chief had handed over a Communard to the army, while at Saint-Martin Hospital troops rampaged through the wards in search of Communards who they shot at will. The newly-graduated young doctor, Faneau, was executed in the courtyard of Saint Sulpice hospital when he refused to identify Communards to the Versailles troops, who also killed seventy-six unarmed



Communards who were patients. For three days Faneau's body lay in the courtyard in the May sun because no one dared to touch it. Finally his mother arrived and took the corpse away.

For Sarah, fear of the inevitable violent clash between the Communards and the army of Versailles was such that soon after the Commune began she departed temporarily for Saint-Germain-en-Laye in the country outside Paris. This little town, pretty in peacetime, was packed with refugees from Paris, who gathered by day and night on a terrace above the town to watch the city burning in the distance.

Bernhardt's feelings about the Communards were ambivalent. She understood their frustration with the government and their anti-bourgeois fervor, remarking on these in her memoirs, but a huge swath of anarchy colored the movement and some Communards expressed a hatred of Jews: "Down with the Throne! Down with the Republic! Down with the rich! Down with the Church! Down with the Jews!"

She remained in Saint-Germain-en-Laye as the situation in Paris continued to deteriorate. Then on May 21<sup>st</sup> the brutal recapture of Paris by the troops from Versailles began and the bloody repression of the Commune, during days and nights of fire, continued unchecked as popular celebration died in an apocalypse of explosions, fires, barricades and summary executions. Samuel in the surgical service at the Necker was operating on all comers – Communards and members of the National Guard as well as regular soldiers. Years later, his younger brother, Adrien, recounted how Samuel had saved the life of a condemned man who had faced a firing squad but received all the bullets in one side of his body and escaped because they failed to deliver the *coup de grâce*.

The defiant Communards burnt the Tuileries Palace that had housed the Legislative Body of Napoléon III, and the town hall, the Hôtel de Ville. By late May, the Commune headquarters by the Hôtel de Ville were destroyed. Rotting bodies of Communards were stacked in coffins about the city and the stench was overwhelming. There were stories, probably true, of Communards being buried alive, of clenched hands seen protruding from piles of recently-disturbed soil.

By June the Commune was destroyed. The bravado of the Communards was for naught – though it was to inspire Karl Marx and generations of socialists -and the Commune doomed from the beginning. Thiers' government, with its ministers and bureaucrats, returned from Versailles, resuming their duties as if nothing had happened. The actual death toll is still debated, with estimates

running from 20, 000 to 50,000 souls. There were also 7,000 Parisians banished to New Caledonia and South American penal colonies, including Louise Michel. This repression left an indelible mark on the new young republic: the workers and socialists were leaderless. Thiers, whom Karl Marx later called a “monstrous gnome” returned to power, triumphant after his rout of the Communards. However he was a canny and effective leader who cleverly changed horses mid-stream, moving from being a conservative and monarchist to an acceptance of republicanism, and numerous by-elections in the two years following the crushing of the Commune increased the number of republicans in the government.

Wurtz reopened the Faculty. The *Assistance-Publique*, the Paris public health department, appointed a new Director who moved ahead with the reorganization of the interns. On 1<sup>st</sup> July Pozzi was transferred as intern to the Hospital des Cliniques, and in August he was appointed to the coveted post of Assistant in Anatomy to the Faculty, with a sizeable salary attached. This was the dream he had postponed at the outbreak of the war.

The shell-shocked citizens of Paris began slowly to rebuild their lives amid mounds of still-smoldering debris, abandoned armaments, rotting animal carcasses and dead rebels. The hundred thousand Parisians who had deserted the city during the Prussian occupation returned, Sarah among them. It was Springtime, chestnuts were in leaf and jonquils and narcissi bloomed but their fragrance could not obliterate the reek of putrifying flesh and scorched earth. “Finally” wrote Sarah, “it was possible to return to Paris. With the abominable and shameful peace signed and the wretched Commune crushed, apparently everything was restored to order. But what a lot of blood! What a lot of ashes! What a lot of women in mourning! What a lot of ruined buildings!” Still, she was an actress, that was her career, and her career was in Paris. Paris was where both she and Samuel Pozzi belonged.

## Chapter Four

### ***Read me a thesis, my darling man!***

*Much loved man! It was a great joy to see you! When will you read me a thesis again?*

*Sarah Bernhardt to Samuel Pozzi, 1878*

Over the latter months of 1871, life in Paris gradually returned to something resembling normal. The ambitious program of rebuilding begun by Haussmann under the Emperor, and temporarily interrupted by the war, recommenced. More boulevards and parks were laid out and elegant public buildings constructed. In particular the fantastic Palais Garnier, better known as the Opéra de Paris, began to take shape at the junction of three of Haussmann's new boulevards. This giant birthday cake sits today in the center of the bustling Place de l'Opéra, adorned with Roman pillars, statues of Greek gods and famous composers, elegant marble friezes and lavish sculptures glorifying poetry, music and dance. (The dancers, the work of sculptor Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux, are a wildly sensuous and naked group who were criticized as "an offence to common decency" by the more prudish citizens of the 1870s; the rest of Paris loved them). Inside, the Opéra is a riot of richly colored marble, molded nymphs and golden cherubim— the lot overhung by a monstrous glittering chandelier weighing more than six tons (from which in 1906 one of the counter-weights fell, killing a spectator and inspiring the writing of *The Phantom of the Opera*). More than any other building in Paris, the Opéra epitomized the flamboyance of France's Belle Époque, into which Parisians now threw themselves as they put the horrors of the war behind them.

On the hill of Montmartre where the Commune had begun, the brilliant white spun-sugar Basilica of the Sacré-Coeur was built between 1876 and 1912, by public subscription, supposedly as a means of atoning for the "crimes" of the Communards and honoring the dead of the war. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, artists had gravitated towards Montmartre, partly because, being outside the city limits, it did not attract city taxes, and partly because the nuns in the Montmartre convent made excellent wine. Now with the building of the Basilica came rapid development of the area, with many more cafés and nightclubs, a further influx of painters and sculptors, and a Bohemian ambience equal to that of the Latin Quarter on the other side of the Seine. Montparnasse, adjacent to the Latin Quarter, was also becoming a

neighborhood attracting artists and intellectuals. The most *chic* area of Paris was to the north-west, where huge townhouses were being constructed around the new Parc Monceau.

It was in this Paris of the 1870s, a city buzzing with life and creativity - in art, architecture, music, literature, theater, fashion - that for nine years Samuel Pozzi and Sarah Bernhardt conducted a passionate on-and-off sexual relationship .

Rekindling her liaison with Samuel after her return from St-Germain-en-Laye, Sarah found him much changed from the young intern who had helped her set up the *Ambulance* at the Odéon the year before. He turned twenty-five in October of 1871 and in those few months after the war had transformed himself into an elegant man of the world when he stepped out in Paris, beautifully clad in English frock-coats, his black hair pomaded in place and his beard immaculately trimmed. As fluent in English as in his native French, he could compose poems and ditties with ease. Women from every strata of society – and not a few men- grew pink at his approach and were captivated by his soft south-western accent. Pozzi was by now well-accustomed to such adoration and handled it calmly.

Sarah, returning to the rue de Rome in the north of the city, found that her apartment, with its eccentric mélange of furnishings, paintings and sculpture, had fortunately escaped the destruction of the Commune, though a stench of smoke still hung about it. She dealt with this by dousing furniture and drapes with the heady scent she always used (applying it generously to her person, to the day's choice of silk and satin costumes, and to the stationery festooned with a silver devil's head and her personal motto, '*quand même*', which roughly translates as 'whatever it takes' or 'no matter what' or perhaps the currently used 'whatever'). She moved her family, many pets including dogs, parrots and tortoises, and a not-inconsiderable number of servants back in, and when Monsieur Chilly of the Odéon came calling, was happy to accept a leading role in a new production, a short piece called *Jean-Marie*. In this she played opposite the actor Paul Porel, who had been one of the wounded she had nursed at the Odéon and who later married the exquisite and talented actress Réjane, a lifelong friend (and friendly rival) of Sarah's. The play was a success, Sarah was a success, her reputation was enhanced, both as a talented performer and a hard worker, and she loved being back at the Odéon.

Among Sarah's many friends in the Latin Quarter at the time were the Mounet brothers, Paul and Jean (the actor Mounet-Sully), and Gustave Schlumberger, who with other medicos, writers and artists formed a group that included Samuel Pozzi. Schlum often met Sarah at dinner with Pozzi in late 1871 and 1872, and he gives a detailed account of one particular dinner, when an honored guest was the poet Leconte de Lisle, who had continued his close friendship with Samuel after the war. Sarah was dressed in "clinging black, extremely elegant, in a cloud of lace, with long pleated gloves reaching the length of her arms," and she was keen to win the approval of the elderly poet. The dinner continued long into the night, as "for hours, in her magnificent golden voice, she declaimed for the aged eagle his most beautiful poems, which she knew by heart, utterly charming him. Leconte de Lisle, moved to tears, kissed the hands of his beautiful interpreter," calling her "a fine-looking girl." No doubt she was well rewarded later that night by Pozzi.

It was also about this time that Sarah made the acquaintance of another icon of French literature. In 1871, following the fall of the Second Empire, Victor Hugo, the venerable man of letters, a diehard republican and opponent of the Emperor, returned to Paris after a political banishment of twenty years. Though he was seventy and paunchy, Hugo was still a roué, with twinkling eyes and a mane of white hair; in addition, he was brilliant, witty, and the proud possessor of a very active libido. For her part, despite a will of iron and an intellect that belied her humble roots, Bernhardt could not stop playing the flirt. The coquette that lurked beneath the surface responded to attention even from a man old enough to be her grandfather. Hugo must have been flattered when the ravishing Bernhardt, over forty years his junior, seduced him, dangling her sexuality and her talent, simpatico political views and intellectual prowess in front of him, and working her wiles on the old genius as he directed her in the revival of his classic play, *Ruy Blas*. Once at a rehearsal he chided her for exposing her beautiful ankles but privately, he undoubtedly enjoyed viewing them. Bernhardt was ecstatic; after starring in a string of minor offerings, she was now in a production of substance, and one that showed her to advantage. *Ruy Blas*, staged early in 1872, was a great triumph. It was Hugo who first described her as having a "voice of gold" – *une voix d'or* – although others who heard her felt that it would be better be called "silvery" – the silver of flowing streams in forest glades.

*Ruy Blas* proved to be her swan song with the Odéon. Later in 1872, she was offered a contract to move back across the river to the Comédie Française, becoming one of the leading members of the company, gifted with a diva's salary and grand billing. Though the management of the Odéon was not pleased, this was an offer she could not refuse. It was once she was back at the historic theater that she began an affair

with Mounet-Sully, a liaison much touted by most of her biographers. At the same time, however, she continued her relationship with Pozzi.

Though he is largely unknown in the modern English-speaking world, Mounet-Sully was a grand tragedian of the French theater, the greatest actor of his day, and while he lived, his fame almost equaled Bernhardt's. He was five years older than Samuel, who knew him only slightly in Bergerac, although both came from similarly strict Protestant families. His brother, Paul, was a year younger than Samuel and the two had become close since they both pursued medical careers although Paul would later also turn to acting. Initially Mounet-Sully lacked the discipline of his younger brother and couldn't decide if his future was behind a pulpit, gripping a gun in battle, dressed in the robes of a jurist, or on stage...the theater won, and so it should have. This lion of a man, barrel-chested with masses of dark hair surrounding a spectacularly handsome face, was born to be a *matinée* idol. He had entered the Conservatoire at the age of 21, two years later than Sarah, and on graduation took first prize for tragedy. In 1868 he made his debut at the Odéon, without attracting much attention. His career, like those of Sarah and Samuel, was interrupted by the war, and in fact the liking he felt for the military life had almost decided him to give up the stage when in 1872 he was offered a part in Racine's *Andromaque* at the Comédie Française, with a three-year contract. His striking presence, his booming voice, and the ardent manner of his acting made an immediate impression, and he went on to become one of the leading performers of the Comédie Française, distinguishing himself particularly in tragic roles. Back at the legendary theater, he was in close contact with Sarah on a daily basis. Though he lacked Pozzi's elegance and refinement, Mounet-Sully more than made up for any deficiency with pure animal magnetism. As he pursued his affair with Sarah, he continued his close friendship with Pozzi, a friendship that was to last until his death in 1916 and that is demonstrated by many letters between the two. In 1913 Samuel was to recall old times with Jean to the newspaper *Indépendant de Bergerac* when Mounet-Sully played *Oedipus Rex* in the open air theater of the park of la Beaume in Bergerac.

According to Mounet-Sully's memoirs, Sarah had all but ignored him during the years before the war when he was a student at the Conservatoire. "Sarah Bernhardt was already being talked about, on her way to becoming famous. I admired her passionately. She didn't know me, never even

noticed me. I was nothing. She passed before me like a distant star.” Years later however, Schlum remembered Mounet-Sully’s early relationship with the Divine Sarah somewhat differently: “I made the acquaintance of Jean Mounet-Sully through my childhood friend, Samuel Pozzi. This magnificent product of the Conservatoire was a beautiful and naïve boy. He had naturally fallen immediately in love with his comrade from the Conservatoire, Sarah Bernhardt, who was at the peak of her youthful beauty. Very credulous, very gullible, he fully believed in the purity of the morals of his idol. He knew that she had a son but he just regarded this as a reason to admire her maternal tenderness and was saddened that such a beautiful and pure person had once been seduced. (Once their affair had begun after the war) Sarah after the theater would go and pass the night with him at his place in the Rue Gay-Lussac but she always took an hour or so to go off to kiss her son goodnight first and only rejoined Mounet afterwards. In fact, she would be passing this time with her lover of the moment.” Often the lover of the moment was Samuel Pozzi.

Whatever its origins, the affair with Mounet-Sully involved such passion and volatility that violent confrontations were inevitable. Sarah had been conceived in the murky environs of the *demimonde* and had learned survival by using her talent and feminine wiles with unapologetic abandon. She would ensnare any man who came within her reach with her “pretty pink claws”, as Mounet called them, lure him into rapturous adoration, then gradually pull away until devotion became obsession. In their first months as lovers, Mounet wrote missives in the most purple of prose, made violent love to her, then lectured her on scripture. They fought over his jealousy and furious outbursts. Sarah wrote to him: “This is not a love letter, my dear friend, but a sensible letter. I’ve just seen our director who spoke to me about your incredible stubbornness and the trouble it makes for all of us...Several of your friends, aware of my great affection for you, have taken me aside to tell me that you frighten them by your determination to contradict, no matter what the circumstances, and that they dread the violent arguments that inevitably begin whenever there is a discussion.”

They continued their provocative dance into 1873, working together on the stage in that year when Sarah played the title role of Racine’s *Phaedra* for the first time – this was to become one of her greatest roles. Sarah appears by then to have tired of his caveman sexuality and had begun to make excuses to avoid sleeping with him. “Oh, don’t be angry, I beg you, Jean my beloved. I must absolutely be good. If you want to be kind, come to kiss me. But after that you must go home to sleep.” His provincial ways began to wear thin as did his inability to divorce himself from his Bible-thumping past and by July of that year

his fury had turned to violence. Apparently she forgave him; certainly she continued the increasingly muddled relationship intermittently into 1874.

1872 was the fourth year of Pozzi's internship and for this he was given a coveted post at the Pitié hospital in the rue Lacépède, in the middle of the Latin Quarter and close to the vibrant rue Mouffetard, with its picturesque markets and popular cafés. At the Pitié the surgical service was led by Paul Broca, a brilliant surgeon with the same Bergerac Protestant origins as Pozzi. Broca had risen rapidly through the Paris medical hierarchy, and had as well established a reputation in another major scientific area: the brand new discipline of anthropology. Fascinated by the working of the human brain and its mysteries, Broca founded both the French Anthropology Review and the French Society of Anthropology. Interestingly, Samuel Pozzi's name appears on the list of members of the Society from April 1870. Clearly the two men knew each other at least from that time, and Pozzi was as excited as Broca by the possibilities of this new area of research, which Broca called "the study of man, his nature, and his relationship with his environment."

In Broca and Leconte de Lisle, Pozzi now had scientific and cultural 'godfathers' who provided rich sources of intellectual stimulation to the young intern. In his bed he had (undoubtedly among others) the exotic and sexually captivating Bernhardt, who was also proving herself his intellectual equal. Then at the end of 1872 he was awarded the Gold Medal of the Faculty of Medicine, for which all the Paris interns competed each year. He must certainly have felt that Paris was fulfilling his dreams.

One morning in 1872, Broca arrived at the Pitié exultantly brandishing a book newly published in England: Charles Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. Darwin was a shining beacon for Broca's anthropologists - the Society had been founded in 1859 expressly as the result of the publication of *The Origin of Species*, a work that had a profound influence on Pozzi and contributed to his renunciation of the Protestant faith of his childhood. Reading Darwin, Pozzi discovered a more complex and credible view of the world and its origins than he had found in the teachings of the Christian church and in his father's belief in an all-seeing, all-powerful God who responded capriciously to human prayer. Darwin's writings provided him with a completely new framework for his understanding of the functioning of the human body, and of the causes and cures for human disease.



Now Broca proposed a French translation of the new work, a task which was promptly handed to his gifted assistant. Samuel's English was near-perfect as a result of his upbringing by his English step-mother. He and his colleague, the physician René Benoit, set to work. *Expressions of Emotion* was comprised of unused material from Darwin's *The Descent of Man*, and stoked more flames in the fiery debate regarding human evolution. The book examined the ways in which humans and animals communicate feelings through facial expressions and gestures and most importantly, outlined a shared evolution between species. To bolster his arguments Darwin included photographic images that enhanced his observations, making the book one of the first to be illustrated by photography. *Expressions of Emotion* was already a runaway success in Britain by the time Pozzi began the translation. Though much of the correspondence concerning the translation has been lost, some hand-written notes from Darwin remain. The French edition of his work, *L'expression des émotions chez l'homme et chez les animaux*, duly appeared at the end of 1874 and was well received by the French scientific community; it has since been reprinted many times. At the same time new editions of Darwin's earlier works were published in France. While Samuel worked on the translation Sarah lay on his bed, eating apples and avidly reading the hand-written pages. When in 1878 she added a chimpanzee to her extensive menagerie she named the chimp Darwin.

In the first weeks of January 1873, Samuel passed three of the major examinations for his doctorate in surgery and in March successfully submitted the thesis on certain types of chronic infections around the lower bowel which completed his requirements to be certified as a surgeon. Its acceptance marked the end of his formal surgical studies and his entry into the surgical profession. Bernhardt was delighted that these long hours of study were over. "My darling man," she wrote archly to him following one of their subsequent trysts, "it was a great joy to see you! When will you read me a thesis again?"

He celebrated his success with a move from hospital lodgings to a modest apartment on the fifth floor of 131 Boulevard St Germain, on the border of the Latin Quarter with Montparnasse; its windows overlooked the ancient church of St Germain-des-Prés. "My dear Old Lady," he wrote to his grandmother in Bergerac, thanking her for her congratulations, "laurel wreaths and glory are all very well, but now I need to earn my living, for my purse is nearly empty and no inheritance awaits me!" She responded by dispatching one of the fine turkeys for which the Bergerac region is famous. Nine close friends were invited to share a house-warming dinner *chez* Pozzi, including Paul Mounet and Mounet-Sully, whose invitation, poetically crafted and

handsomely decorated by Pozzi himself, is preserved in the Mounet-Sully archives in the French National Library:

*The Bird*

*She's from Bergerac, she is young, she is fair*

*Come and see her, friends, and have your share*

*Her ample breasts are covered with a tasty skin*

*Her well-rounded belly has a healthy sheen*

*Her thighs are plump and soft, a treat you'll adore*

*Come climb the stairs then, up to my fifth floor*

*We will be nine in all but nothing will we lack*

*Nine is not too many - for she's from Bergerac!*

This first dinner given in his own home, by a man for whom entertaining friends was to become a pillar of his existence, marked the start of a ritual of Thursday 'at homes' that would continue for nearly thirty years. In addition to the Mounet brothers, Schlum and two other interns, Doctors Robin and Renaut were present; the names of three guests are unknown but probably Sarah was one of the three- mischievously directing her attention from Pozzi to Mounet-Sully and back again. If Schlum is to be believed, Pozzi was well aware of the Sarah/Mounet-Sully liaison – as was most of the theater-going Paris public – but his own relationship with Sarah was more discreet as far as the volatile actor was concerned. Certainly the Bernhardt/Pozzi relationship continued throughout 1873, and she was a frequent visitor to the Boulevard St Germain.

Professionally, Samuel spent 1873 in the Charité hospital, close to the Faculty, at the very heart of the Latin Quarter. All teaching hospitals had a tradition of socializing in the duty rooms, where the young doctors and medical students took their meals and also gathered in idle moments. The duty room of the Charité was considered the liveliest and most interesting of all the Paris hospitals, and the one that gave the best dinner parties, attended not only by doctors from other hospitals but also by aspiring young writers, artists and musicians, including in Samuel's time writer Edmund de Goncourt, later a literary

critic, publisher and founder of the prestigious Prix Goncourt, and composers Jules Massenet and Leo Delibes, who thumped out tunes on an old piano in the corner of the room. Samuel's colleague Joseph Renaut, who became a professor of internal medicine, remembered Pozzi at the Charité as a Renaissance man, "a powerful and irrepressible force of life whose exuberance nevertheless blended well with a natural grace and courtesy that made him a model for all of us who worked with him." He had a vast knowledge not only of medicine but of many other sciences and of literature and history, which he would happily share with his friends while smoking "never more than three or four cigarettes." Then, said Renaut, he would knock us out with witty and spontaneous triolets, a French verse form of eight lines, for "he was a master of rhyme."

Now coming towards the end of his intern years, Samuel also had more free time to go about town, including to the theater where he saw Sarah in all her roles. His Charité contacts also drew him to the theater – to Leconte de Lisle's *Eyrinnies*, a tragedy along Greek lines with music by Massenet, which received a standing ovation, and to Victor Hugo's *Le roi s'amuse*, (in English translation *The King's Fool*, and later to become the opera *Rigoletto*) orchestrated by Delibes. There is no doubt too that, as Schlum noted, Samuel at this time had a taste for thespian vamps. Sarah was the greatest of them all, and a breed apart; in the same years that Samuel was working towards a permanent surgical post in a Paris hospital, Sarah was working in serious roles at the Comédie – Andromache, Zaire, and Phaedra again, memorizing long classical speeches. It was said she had only to read a play four times to know her lines by heart. However as Samuel discovered, there were other, lesser, enchantresses of the theater who flirted alluringly through eyes outlined with kohl, created the illusion of youth with careful applications of rice powder and rouge, and recited from poetry and classical literature then offered passionate kisses from lips painted carmine red. But apart from Schlum's memoirs there is no contemporary account of the early amorous adventures of the country pastor's handsome son.

In late fall of 1873, Sarah was forced to add the role of rescuer to her resumé. Her youngest sister, Régine, had been transformed from a plump *lorette* into an eighteen-year-old consumptive. Sarah moved the frail girl to her apartment and watched helplessly as tuberculosis ravaged her body. Though she may have rightly felt some guilt for her inability to protect her beloved sister from her mother's indifferent parenting, she could not have shielded her from the ghastly disease that carried off so many of the inhabitants of Paris in the nineteenth century. There would not be an effective cure for tuberculosis for another eighty years. Régine died in December and was buried in Père-Lachaise Cemetery, and a

despondent Sarah turned to Samuel for comfort during this horrendous period. Schlum details a sensational story of their affair that dates from the end of 1873.

As a student, Samuel had always had the habit, when an important exam was coming up, of denying himself the pleasures of the flesh for some days in order to study, shutting himself up day and night. In the winter of 1873, he decided to prepare for the formidable entrance tests for the paid post of Prosector in Anatomy in the Faculty of Medicine. This was a step up from the Aid in Anatomy position; gaining such a post could eventually count in his quest to become a consultant surgeon in a Paris hospital. So in late December of 1873 he took up his pen and wrote a short note to Sarah to tell her he wouldn't be seeing her for a while, and dispatched it with a servant. He needed to spend time quietly with his textbooks, refreshing the knowledge of his early student days, and anticipating the crafty questions the professors might try to stump him with.

He had not counted on Sarah's reaction. Still in mourning for her sister, she was in her drawing room when she received the note, surrounded by the friends who often graced her five o'clock salons – including the journalist de Girardin and other writers and an army general - all gathered around a roaring fire, for it was deep winter and snow was falling heavily outside. She immediately recognized the writing of her beloved Samuel, tore open the envelope, and rapidly scanned the contents. She uttered a single cry of fury, then, abandoning her guests, she rushed from the room, across the hallway and out into the snowy street, where she found the waiting carriage of one of her guests – de Girardin, as it happened. Her head bare, and without a coat or shawl, she jumped into the carriage and ordered the bewildered coachman to drive her to the Boulevard St Germain. Arriving at the house, she rapidly climbed the five flights of stairs to Samuel's apartment, only to find that her lover had not yet come home. No matter – she would wait, and seating herself on the window ledge planned her moves. Some time later, he too climbed the stairs – and she flung herself directly into his arms. There was a tender reconciliation that led quickly to the bedroom, where his study plans for the evening completely evaporated...

When she opened the door of Samuel's house late the following morning, the carriage was still there, the coachman not daring to leave the spot for more than sixteen hours. The examiners waited in vain for Pozzi, who never would become a Prosector in the Paris Faculty of Medicine, something he probably never really regretted.

Admittedly, Bernhardt continued to involve herself in other affairs apart from those with Pozzi, Hugo and Mounet-Sully, passionate liaisons with young and beautiful men, fellow actors, journalists, writers and artists, and more calculated flirtations with older men, who paid her considerable bills and kept her in jewels and clothes. In early 1874, she broke completely with Mounet-Sully, apparently after offending him with “an infamous sexual proposal” that Mounet-Sully found “unspeakable” - something which has led to heated discussions by her biographers (a threesome? sodomy? ) that are completely lacking in facts. Certainly she continued her relationship with Pozzi after the break with Mounet-Sully, and he was also involved in ensuring that, when she was diagnosed with anemia at this time, she followed the regimen and diet prescribed and retreated to the country for several weeks of rest.

During the latter part of the 1870s Samuel pursued his social and professional trajectory with the force of a steam locomotive, yet he never strayed too far from Sarah. The extensive collection of letters from her to him that is held in the Pozzi archives by his great-grandson Nicolas Bourdet begins in 1878. It seems likely that large caches of earlier letters were simply destroyed or abandoned during one of Samuel’s frequent moves. He only began to keep meticulous records of his daily life and organize his correspondence after he married in 1879 and settled into domestic life in the Place Vendôme. As far as Bernhardt is concerned, it is known that she burned much of her personal correspondence, so it would seem that his letters to her are completely lost to us. But there is no doubt that during 1878 the two were still pursuing a passionate emotional and sexual affair that had lasted for a very long time. In the course of that year, Sarah sent Sam more than forty letters or telegrams, often writing several times in a day. Many are simple billets-doux. “Can you come Doctor on Wednesday? You will give joy to your Sarah Bernhardt ...and you will spoil me!” she wrote in early January, “I am yours, yours, (always) yours, Sarah.” And later that same week: “My adored Doctor, Sarah Bernhardt loves you.” She added in English, “Oh, forget-me-not!”

There were arguments between them. On the morning of January 15, 1878, no doubt following some indiscretion discovered by Pozzi, Sarah wrote: “I should give you a lot of grief, Sam, for having the hide to send me such a letter. I’d really like to know what my crime is. I am innocent... I am in despair. I love you, you have taken me completely and I am unable and unwilling to remain without seeing you.”

A little later that day she took up her pen again. Somewhat on the back foot, she protested, “I am paler than this paper. Your letter makes me cry! From abandonment? Rage? Or shame? So now I know my crime. Does it really warrant such grief and such hard lessons? I will come this evening, Tuesday, at 11 o’clock. Oh, don’t say no. I will come, that’s decided. I will come because I have need of your embrace. I beg you Sam, write to me that you love me and above all that you are waiting for me. Your crazy toy, Sarah Bernhardt.” There were two more notes that day – in an age well before email, both the frequent postal services in Paris and the sending of letters directly by servants ensured rapid communications: “I will come this evening at 11 o’clock, please wait for me. I will come after leaving the Théâtre Français.” And then, fervently, “I will come this evening, don’t say no...” Evidently the meeting was fruitful, for the next day she wrote, “You spoil me, Doctor Samuel, I accept it all and madly, more than five months ago, yours, your Sarah Bernhardt.”

They were always reconciled after arguments– Schlum describes those years of their sexual relationship as filled with ruptures “in their profound love” followed always by tender reconciliations. Following their meeting that Tuesday evening she dispatched another note: “Monsieur Samuel, your lordship. I am in pain at not seeing you. I love you, Sarah Bernhardt.” Followed later that day by a simple: “I adore you, my Samuel, your Sarah.”

There were also explanations, of the kind Sarah was wont to give to others of her lovers. On 11<sup>th</sup> March of 1878 she wrote: “I lied to you, it’s true, but I never deceived you. Remember that, it’s the truth, Samuel. Death is the point of life, I have lived, I can die...” But by the 22<sup>nd</sup> she was dispatching a telegram: “I count on you absolutely for Sunday 10 o’clock” and later: “My Sam I love you I love you and I am yours. What a sad night you have made me pass. Until this evening. Come and take me, if it can be done great will be my joy, Sarah Bernhardt.” There is no doubting the very carnal appeal Pozzi had for Bernhardt.

However there were calmer occasions, when she passed on tidbits of news: “I’m missing you, I haven’t seen you...what are you doing? My Maurice has been sick. He’s better now but I am not back to normal yet. Yes my dear Sam, I’m in haste to chat with you. Leconte de Lisle has written me an adorable letter

which gave me a lot of pleasure. I have two new dogs....Amuse yourself well...affectionately, Sarah Bernhardt.” And other occasions in which she freely exposed her anxieties to him. In October of 1878, after he had sent her a rare piece of Chinese silk, she wrote: “My birthday is the 23<sup>rd</sup> of this month, Doctor, I am a bit confused at being so delightfully spoilt by you! I have been very unwell these last couple of days but I would be very happy to see you from afar.... I’d be very pleased to see you this evening but what I really want is to have you at my table for 23<sup>rd</sup>. The *chinoiserie* is superb and very original. Nervously and obsessively, Sarah Bernhardt.”

If she was separated from him for a few days, she sent passionate telegrams: “I’ve been grief-stricken, darling, since I haven’t seen you. Doctor Darling, I have a great desire to see you. I am bored by traveling, Sarah.” There were also times when she seems keener to pursue the relationship than he was: “Did you come here? Or did you not come? I got home at half past eleven and having no servant I could not get in. I stayed in my carriage at my door until ten past midnight and during that time nobody came to ring at my door. Everything was against me yesterday evening. And you beloved, are you against Sarah too? That would be too much. I had hoped for you until ten o’clock. If you are free this evening will you dine with me and if you are not free would it suit you to come after dinner? I have a great need to learn about the thesis that cures love sickness. Feeling blue, Sarah Bernhardt.” And later: “Sam do you no longer love me? Have I caused you trouble? Why would I never see you, my adored lord. Sadly, Sarah.”

She depended utterly on his medical skills. Firstly, for herself: “Sam! I’ve lost my voice completely! There’s blood, and you must understand my darling Doctor that it’s essential I have my voice back for this evening. Therefore please send your mad mistress via Elise a script for some aconite. At once, at once! Sarah. Oh, I embrace you!” But also for others, her fellow actors, her family, her servants and their families: “Doctor God, here is my little cousin Lili from Chile. I am counting on you absolutely to put this adorable and interesting young woman back on her feet again.” After which she sent him tickets for her current performance: “Here they are then Doctor dear! The seats are excellent. Your devoted Sarah Bernhardt.”



By the end of 1878 and certainly by 1879, it appears that Samuel's ardor may have cooled somewhat. He was 32, rapidly establishing his reputation as a surgeon – and friends and family were urging him to think of marriage, a suitable marriage, preferably with a young woman of good family and hopefully well-endowed financially. These were all reasonable expectations in the Paris of the times. A close friend, physician and poet Henri Cazalis, proposed an introduction to his cousin, Thérèse Loth-Cazalis, the only child of a family from Lyon who under the Empire had grown wealthy from railroad speculation. Samuel agreed to meet her.

At 22, Thérèse was “very, very beautiful”, and had inherited a huge fortune - a capital of some two million francs, which provided very comfortable annual dividends. The meeting was, in that inimitable French phrase, a *coup de foudre*, a lightning strike, apparently for both parties. Samuel was “totally dazzled” and Thérèse “very much in love.” In October 1879 he wrote to her: “I do have friends, but I must make an effort now to remember their names and faces, since you so completely fill my mind and my heart. And this seems to me to be absolutely normal! It seems now that before I loved you, I lived a different life, an incomplete life, as if I hadn't really taken possession of my soul until the two of us met and came together. I don't know whether you feel the same way, my darling.” Did Pozzi write so freely of his affection toward Sarah, letters that sadly are lost to us? It must be assumed that he did.

On 9<sup>th</sup> November 1879, at ten in the morning, in the town hall of the 8<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement* of Paris, Thérèse Loth-Cazalis, “born 12 July 1856 in Lyon, with her mother Madame Marie-Félicie Loth-Cazalis, married Jean-Samuel Pozzi, professor of the Faculty of Medicine of Paris, born 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1846” in the presence of four witnesses including Henri Cazalis. Thérèse was a practicing Catholic, Samuel a lapsed Protestant and self-confessed atheist. He agreed to her request that their children be brought up in the Catholic faith; from the southwest, Pastor Pozzi without a word of criticism gave his blessing to the union of his eldest son with the young heiress. But the seeds of eventual marital discord were already being sown – the widowed and wealthy Marie-Félicie had every intention of moving soon to Paris to live close to her daughter.

From late 1878 the tone of Sarah's notes and letters to Samuel changes. On 21<sup>st</sup> December of that year she invited Pozzi to join her the following day: “Dear good Doctor, Tomorrow is the birthday of my son Maurice. I'm getting together all my dearest and oldest friends. Will you come and dine with us? That would make us very happy, you know it my dear Doctor. Therefore until tomorrow! Friday. A thousand tender wishes.” The passionate has been replaced by the platonic. There would have been no

sexual relationship between Samuel and Thérèse before the honeymoon, but it would seem that during the courtship Samuel was completely preoccupied by her person and her personality.

Were there later sexual trysts with Sarah, after the flames of Samuel's love for Thérèse had cooled to ashes? There is no suggestion of it in the letters after 1879 and Sarah was a woman who always and passionately spoke her mind. Their friendship from 1879 onwards appears always to have been one between social and intellectual equals. Throughout their later lives he found her as fascinating and attractive intellectually as she had been sexually exciting in the first years of their relationship. His friendship with Sarah was the first of Samuel's *amitiés* with women – it was also the most enduring, and in many ways the model for all those that followed. He was always at least as interested in the minds of his female friends as in their physical charms (and in this respect Thérèse, much younger, naïve, less well-educated and less well-read than many of the women he knew, was from the start at a disadvantage). Sarah too, throughout her life, was more interested in liaisons with men involved in creative or intellectual activity than in those simply with power or money. Though the theater was still not considered quite a 'respectable' profession, it is clear that Pozzi always had great respect for Bernhardt's career, even though he was in his early years opposed to the idea of equal rights or medical careers for women.

He continued to provide medical advice for her family and friends as well as for herself. Bernhardt would on many occasions accept care from no-one but Pozzi, telling him in 1880: "My dear Doctor, I have confidence only in you; you know it. I need you; you know it. From she who holds you in eternal gratitude, Sarah." She kept a watchful eye on her relations and friends even when traveling abroad, writing from Florence in 1882: "My good dear Doctor God, Thank you for the care you have given my son. I have him near me and I am happy. Would you kindly see the young woman who brings you this note .Her husband is part of our company. He is so concerned about his wife's condition that he wants to give up his commitments here and return to Paris to be near her. Would you without alarming her see the young woman and work out whether it is serious or not, and send a few words. Your grateful and devoted friend, Sarah Bernhardt."

Back in France, she always rewarded him with seats for her performances and parties afterwards.

"Dear Doctor, Does it please you to remember that you had promised me to come to listen to my little play tomorrow? Friday. We are the same actors as on Tuesday as well. I write with my best wishes, Sarah Bernhardt, 1882."

Might they have married? Emphatically no and in all probability, marriage was never discussed. It would never have worked. Nineteenth century Parisian society demanded that a medical man have a prim wife and 'prim' could never be used to describe Sarah Bernhardt. She was an *artiste* and the ways of mere mortals were simply not her ways. Pozzi accepted her lifestyle and would have been in full agreement with Balzac's comment about another great artist: "One cannot expect the pleasures, ideas, and morality of a Byron to be those of a haberdasher". Though on the one hand, as her letters to Pozzi attest, she was caring and committed to those in her life whom she loved, on the other she was unpredictable, emotional, extravagant, self-involved and wouldn't have lasted a month as Madame Pozzi. Equally, with his social and professional aspirations, Samuel could never have become Monsieur Bernhardt. Both were enormously ambitious, both were determined, even ruthless, in the pursuit of their careers. Sarah liked to sleep in late then lie in bed while she learnt her lines; around midday she perfumed herself, dressed alluringly, went to rehearsals, met a lover or two, then prepared for the evening's performance. She had a wanderlust that led her to travel the world with her troop of thespians. Despite the caprices of her personal life, Sarah drove herself unrelentingly as she perfected her craft. In contrast, Pozzi was an early riser, made his rounds and performed his surgeries then left the evening free for pleasure and amusement. He operated on his private patients on Saturdays, even Sundays. He studied foreign languages so he could read medical journals in other tongues, and wrote a prodigious number of carefully researched articles for French journals as well as his major textbook. He was as committed to perfection in his surgical practice as she was on her stage. At home, he needed a wife who would run his household and his social life, and bear him children; he would have liked intellectual and sexual stimulation as well but when these were absent he could, and did, find them elsewhere. Sarah could run her own household and manage her work too; she needed independence and craved sexual diversity as much as any man. She was always destined to live as she did, with a combination of younger lovers embraced for weeks or months at a time, and a succession of steadier older men who, while they might initially have been lovers, became then trusted friends and companions. Samuel was one of these, but as her Doctor God he was also much more. He was a beacon of love and security in the permanent tempest in which she lived. For him, despite his many clinical and intellectual commitments, she was always his first great love, and possibly the greatest of the three great loves he would know in his life.



Sarah Bernhardt by Alfred Stevens

## Chapter Five

### *I treat my patients with beauty*

*Dear Friend,*

*Sarah is convalescing, cutting corners as usual. Decisive, courageous, firm and obedient...she will recover sooner than most. Having played every other role, from Phaedra to Joan of Arc, she now wants to play the role of surgical patient, which she has done to perfection! Her cyst was no common one... elegant, with multiple buried extensions into the broad ligament, which I had to dig out (excuse the vocabulary), it was the size of a child's head...it was quite a struggle... Phew! I felt as 'delivered', as operated upon as my dear friend...*

*Samuel Pozzi to Robert de Montesquiou, February 20 1898*

By 1875, Samuel had completed his studies in both medicine and surgery. In 1872, for his doctorate, he had produced a thesis on a general surgical subject, chronic infections in the tissues around the lower bowel and their treatment, and with this he won the Gold Medal of the Faculty of Medicine. In 1875 he presented a second thesis to attain the title of *agrégé*, which meant that he was now a professor in the Faculty, and the topic of this thesis, the treatment of the common condition of fibroids of the womb, showed exactly where his interests and career were heading. Fibroids are common benign tumors that can cause many problems for women – pain, heavy bleeding and infertility among them.

At the time Samuel graduated from medical school there was as yet no 'gynecology.' Interest in the scientific study of women's reproductive health was only just beginning, there were few drugs available having any truly beneficial properties, and surgical cures for the common diseases women experienced had yet to be fully developed. In an era before safe and effective contraception, the fate of most women was a large number of pregnancies and many births. Even when births were uncomplicated, wear and tear to the pelvis meant many women developed bladder incontinence and prolapse of the womb in later life. Many births were in fact complicated: often by death, and in women who survived, by infection, hemorrhage, anemia, tears into the bowel and bladder, and many other conditions that today's good prenatal care prevents or treats. Before safe cesarean section was available it was common for women to have very long labors ending with the birth of a dead baby, and with permanent damage to the woman in the form of a fistula, a hole in her bladder which

constantly leaked urine. Even the Empress Eugénie, the First Lady of France at the time Samuel began his medical studies, had just such a fistula. Before Pap smear screening, cancers of the cervix and the womb were only too common, as was ovarian cancer. Radiology and radiotherapy had not yet been thought of, and only surgery seemed to hold out any hope of a cure for cancer. Samuel was fortunate to have teachers interested in the emerging specialty of women's health, and their enthusiasm and dedication inspired him. In his first years in practice in Paris he soon became recognized as an extraordinarily skilful young surgeon, with a keen interest in all forms of surgery, but most of all in surgery for women.

As an *agrégé* he was now also Professor Pozzi of the University of Paris. However this title did not come with a steady job. Despite the Gold Medal, despite the brilliant dissertation of his theses, like other *agrégés* he spent his first seven years, from 1876 to 1883, "in the desert" - moving from one Paris public hospital to another, performing locums for surgeons on leave. Surgeons then were expected to provide their own instruments, basins, sponges and other material and when his time at one hospital was finished Samuel had to load all this equipment into a cart and walk behind as the horse and driver conveyed his gear to his next engagement. Not until 1883, when he was appointed Chief of Service at the Lourcine-Pascal Hospital (later renamed the Broca Hospital) was he able to settle in one place.

The Parisian system did allow him to establish a private practice in addition to his public hospital work. This was very necessary, since surgeons received only a pittance for their work in the public service. He took rooms in the eighth *arrondissement*, in the rue Boissy d'Anglas which joined the two prestigious areas of the Place Concorde and the Place de la Madeleine, a good address even if he found the building "rather gloomy." Later, after his marriage, he moved his rooms to the much more appealing Place Vendôme, adjacent to his own apartment. Each morning his valet, the "intelligent Célestin," who remained many years with Pozzi, would polish the brass plate at the front door that established Samuel's status, and in the afternoon and evenings wait for private patients to arrive at appointed hours. When a peal at the bell announced an arrival, Célestin would discreetly open the door, inquire with deference the purpose of the visit, and politely escort the patient to the consulting rooms. Should minor surgery be required, this could be done using cocaine, then the local anaesthetic of choice, in the consulting rooms. More major operations would be performed in the patient's home, with the assistance of another physician to give a general anesthetic. Pozzi would take with him his cases of instruments, drugs and dressings, and the silver wire used at that time for closing wounds. But while it was the private patients who provided the income and the social status, it was the public hospital appointment that established the career and the reputation of an aspiring surgeon.

Pozzi's first hospital consultant post was in fact a locum for Professor Paul Broca, at the Pitié, during August, September and October of 1876. Before Samuel began in this post he took a few days leave and crossed the Channel to attend the annual meeting of the British Medical Association, held that year in Edinburgh. This was partly because for some time he had wanted to see the England he'd heard so much about from his step-mother. But he had a more urgent purpose - he was now hoping to realise a project that had been on his mind for seven years, ever since his first year as an intern. He wanted to meet Joseph Lister, professor of surgery at the University of Edinburgh, and to see with his own eyes the details of Lister's antiseptic methods. He'd first heard of Lister just prior to the war of 1870, in an article written by Justin Lucas-Champonnière. At that time an intern in his third year, Champonnière, like Samuel, was soon to enlist in the Army and depart for the front, and he was the first French doctor to go to see for himself what Lister was preaching. Both he and Samuel learned firsthand in 1870 how wounded men presented on the battlefield with injuries that in themselves were not life-threatening, but which rapidly became infected. French Army doctors regularly performed amputations and bullet extractions in the filthiest conditions imaginable, often taking pride in the amount of gore and pus that accumulated on their scalpels and saws. The result was soldiers dying in agony from infected wounds and septicemia. Florence Nightingale had saved many lives during the Crimean War by insisting that both wounds and patients should be cleansed, bedding changed and medical tents aired and sanitized, but years later, in both the American Civil War and the Franco-Prussian War, her findings were totally ignored by military surgeons.

In formulating his theories, Lister digested every medical article and journal he could get his hands on, including the writings of Scottish physician Alexander Gordon and the brilliant original thinking of French chemist Louis Pasteur, who first demonstrated the link between bacteria and disease and introduced the idea of 'germ theory' to the world. Lister also utilized abstracts that detailed the work of Ignác Semmelweis, a gifted but contentious Hungarian obstetrician whom medical historians now credit with being a linchpin in the discovery of the germ theory of disease. Semmelweis worked in the maternity hospitals of Vienna during outbreaks of puerperal (childbed) fever, a plague brought on by doctors who went directly from dissecting cadavers to performing pelvic examinations on pregnant women without washing their hands. Childbed fever is a benign term: the realities were horrific. Young, vibrant women, the mothers of newborns, were transformed into reeking, pus-filled corpses in two or three days. Unfortunately, while he realized how to combat this plague, Semmelweis was reluctant or unable to put his methodology on paper. When he finally wrote his treatise, it was an angry, disjointed, irrational work that labeled his fellow doctors as murderers and was ignored by the medical establishment in both Austria and Hungary. Even when the truth about bacteria and infection

of wounds was unequivocally revealed by Lister, many physicians were resistant to accepting it as fact. Lister determined that carbolic acid was the medium that could be used to prevent wounds from being infected, that hands washed with phenol were less likely to spread disease and that stitching with catgut rather than silver wire prevented infection. He wrote his findings in a series of papers that were published by the *British Medical Journal* and adopted by English-speaking surgeons in the Prussian army in 1870.

What Samuel knew, from Championnière's article, was that the death rate among Lister's patients undergoing amputations had fallen from 50% to 15%, due totally to a reduction in the incidence of infection. Despite the evident success of Lister's approach, many of his colleagues in Britain, and elsewhere, were reluctant to convert to 'Listerism' – which continued to be regarded by many practitioners almost as a religious belief, rather than a body of scientific evidence. It would be thirty years before the importance of hygiene and antisepsis would be fully accepted by the medical profession. Lister visited the United States in the late 1870s, and apart from those in Boston and New York City, was met with an indifference from physicians that was almost hostile. American hospitals were not to adopt Listerism completely until Johns Hopkins did so in 1889.

Pozzi arrived in Edinburgh, notebook in hand, to wards that were crowded with visitors eager to witness Lister's methods in action. Pozzi's fluency in English and his position as a professor in Paris meant he would be welcomed by physicians across the Channel, and Joseph Lister greeted him warmly. In this man of Quaker appearance, rather solemn and quite modest in demeanor, the pastor's son saw something of his own father, and immediately understood the conviction, almost fanatical in its intensity, that inspired Lister's work and perhaps contributed to the aura surrounding Listerism. Less gifted than Pastor Pozzi as an orator, Lister nevertheless spoke clearly and persuasively. He operated slowly and meticulously, doing everything himself, and finishing with the dressings with which he took the utmost care, because "it is better not to do it at all than to half do it."

Samuel was fascinated, impressed by everything he saw and heard, and converted to the doctrine. He wrote in his journal that he thought "the Bible" of the Listerians "quite a liturgy" but he could see its truth. On his return journey, on the boat across the Channel and the train to Paris, he could think of nothing else, making copious notes, and completely ignoring the views of the sea and countryside passing outside. "I well understood what they were saying," he wrote, "that all the maneuvers were essential parts of a logical whole, of a successful method, and that to miss out a single one of the



prescribed procedures would detract from the whole.” He did though find the dogmatism of Listerism a little off-putting.

He decided to establish a rigorous personal operating method for himself and put it into place without deviating from it. This way he could see how Listerism could work in practice outside Scotland. He would begin in fact in the Pitié, where he was about to start his locum for Broca, who gave him full support for the project before departing for a vacation in the Dordogne.

“Start by washing the hands,” Lister said. Doctors should wash their hands? About the same time, across the Atlantic, a prominent American surgeon named Charles Meigs had been infuriated at this suggestion. “Doctors,” said Meigs, “are gentlemen, and gentlemen’s hands are clean!” In fact in Paris, as elsewhere, “it *was* a difficult action for a chief of service, almost impossible for his juniors,” Champonnière had written, in hospitals without running water, without handbasins. After washing, the hands must be soaked, like the instruments, the sponges and the suture materials, in weak solutions of phenol. (Surgical gloves had yet to be thought of. In 1890 at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, surgeon William Halsted, a friend of the Goodyear family, used their expertise in rubber goods to help devise gloves for his theatre nurse, who later became his wife. She had irritating dermatitis from scrubbing her hands with phenol. Halsted realised the potential benefits of sterile gloves for surgeons but like Lister he found opposition from his colleagues, who claimed the gloves detracted from their surgical touch!).

Next came the “spray”, a fine fog of phenol drops in which Lister bathed his operating theatre. He had first demonstrated this method in front of members of the British Medical Association in 1871, and had been using it ever since in Edinburgh. “At present nowhere in Paris can I find the apparatus to produce the spray,” wrote Pozzi, and “to my great regret I cannot get hold of any catgut” – a pure product then being produced only in England, from the intestines of English sheep and cats. Pozzi waxed lyrical about the properties of catgut: “this remarkable thread that can be used in the depths of the body to hold wounds together, and then is digested by the tissues in a few days.” Silver wire tied over the wound was painful and each individual stitch had to be removed, often an excruciating ordeal for the patient. Eventually spray and catgut were imported from England at Pozzi’s own expense.

“There is nothing to change in the techniques of my surgery,” Pozzi decided, “but I must bathe the wound in a solution of phenol, even though that gives all the tissues a rather disagreeable colour quite like that of gangrene! Then the dressings -a crucial step.”

It had been the practice, in France as elsewhere until that time, to leave wounds uncovered, or relatively so, enabling the almost inevitable infection to form pus which could then drain away over a period of weeks. This made recovery protracted – and often fatal. It also spread infection to other patients. Lister completely changed all this. Immediately his operation was finished he applied a series of sterilized dressings, soaked in phenol, to prevent bacteria entering the wound, thereby stopping infection before it began. He also used sterilized rubber tubes leading from below the surface of wounds, to allow blood and other body fluids an exit, a practice which helped minimize infection. The dressings were kept in place for three days, then changed under the most antiseptic conditions possible, with further applications of phenol. Lister was absolutely emphatic about the need to perform every step of his technique in order to get the best possible results. All of this seems eminently reasonable now, even to those without any medical training, but Lister’s directions were considered revolutionary at the time, and to many of his colleagues he was quite mad.

Pozzi rigorously applied these techniques in his wards over the summer and fall of 1876, to the great interest of Broca’s interns. On his return, it was clear to Broca that what he dubbed “the Scottish rite” was definitely having a good effect, and the practice of antiseptics continued. Samuel set about the publication of a short pamphlet –*Some observations on Lister’s methods of wound dressing applied to amputations and the excision of tumours* - which appeared in the last months of 1876 and which included his own experience at the Pitié. “I am resigned in advance to criticism,” he wrote in conclusion to this pamphlet. “I will without doubt be told that my experience is not sufficient and that my conclusions are hasty. I admit my weaknesses, and agree that I have added nothing new (to Lister’s directions). I can only say that this is what I have seen and this is what I have understood.”

What he had seen was an unarguable improvement in surgical results. But he knew that long-established habits are difficult to change – especially among conservative surgeons. Despite Louis Pasteur having been a Frenchman working in Paris, for years following the gradual introduction of Listerism in France Samuel would watch with terror as his colleagues, though having washed their hands in the prescribed phenol, would scratch their heads mid-operation, wipe the scalpel on a dirty apron or handkerchief, or even, for a moment, hold the knife between their teeth in order to have the hands free to explore a wound! Gradually however the acceptance of the truth of ‘germ theory’ and of

the need for antiseptics spread in France. Pozzi continued to correspond with Lister and was delighted to meet him again when he came to Paris in 1892 to take part in a jubilee conference honouring the work of Louis Pasteur.

In late 1876, while working as a locum at the Hospital des Cliniques, Samuel wrote, slightly tongue-in-cheek, to his grandmother and family at La Graulet:

“So, dear Old Lady, dear friends, you say I don’t write to you often enough, and that when I do I don’t give you any details, and you want to have more? I’ll try to give you all the details!

“For the past fortnight, every morning at nine o’clock I climb the stairs of the hospital, passing the concierge who greets me warmly and with all the deference due to my rank! He then hastens to ring a bell announcing my arrival to the entire establishment. I take off my hat and coat and put on an old jacket, and make my way to the wards.

“A male nurse comes to greet me, holding out a white apron that I put on and which he ties in place with a belt. The Matron then joins us, with a gracious smile. Interns, externs and visitors assemble, and I gravely commence my ward rounds.

“However tragic the illnesses of those I see, I can assure you I find nothing repugnant in them, quite the contrary. I immerse myself in my work. I am conscious that I am in fact being useful to these poor people and I find that, after having had to make them cry out under my knife or hot iron, I see them finally smile and see the success of their treatment, in a way that they don’t see the rest of the world.

“So the study of the sufferings of Man is one of the best, the highest callings that I could have undertaken and my soul is as compensated as my heart in accomplishing this mission!

“My dear Old Lady, I have not ‘bled’ anyone but I have done many operations that would make you tremble! I do the major stuff on Mondays and Fridays. On average, on each of these days I do three major procedures. All my patients are doing well. I even had a result which was quite brilliant for two of them, and I think I am starting to have some recognition from the members of my service.

“So - farewell holidays, farewell La Graulet! And you see, dear Old Lady, dear aunt, and dearest sisters, that I am an important and busy man! Imagine how I feel the injustice of your accusation of not having written enough or at length! Your loving Samuel.”

In 1883 Samuel emerged from “the desert” when he took up the permanent position of director of surgical services at the Lourcine-Pascal Hospital on 1<sup>st</sup> January. The first thing he did was to make a tour of his new domain, accompanied by his intern and several medical students. Paul Berger, the retiring director, did not hide his relief to be leaving this decaying building in the poor quarter of Gobelins in the 13<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement*. A far cry, he remarked to Samuel, from the Place Vendôme, to which Pozzi had by then transferred his consulting rooms. Clearly Berger expected that Samuel too would stay the shortest time possible.

Samuel, however, had other plans. He inspected the walls of ancient stone, unchanged since the reign of Good King Louis in the thirteenth century. Within them two dank wards awaited him, filled with women suffering syphilis and other chronic sexually-transmitted infections. It was clear that his predecessors had little interest in the diseases of the reproductive organs of women.

In the hospital garden Samuel discovered three hastily constructed shacks. “The temporary hospital,” explained Berger, put up the previous year to cope with a typhoid epidemic.

Within a matter of days, with persistent applications to the Paris Health Department, the *Assistance-Publique*, Samuel obtained the use of one of the shacks, with 20 beds. He also got the services of a second intern, whereupon he boldly declared: “This will be the first specialist gynecological service in Paris!”

To begin with there was no operating theater and practically no instruments apart from Pozzi’s own. He and his juniors simply operated in the wards, in the patient’s bed, as in many other hospitals in the Paris of the time. Gradually however he made improvements. He had some of the walls removed and glass set in to form bay windows that brought in light, taps with running water installed and porcelain basins purchased, to contain the phenol necessary for sterilizing instruments and hands. He brought in more of his own instruments. The manager of the hospital, unused to such a whirlwind of activity,

was every day faced with new demands, exacting and urgent, but always presented with a smile and great courtesy. Soon a separate section of the ward was walled off to form Pozzi's first operating room at Lourcine-Pascal. Drawings from the time show a room with plenty of natural light, and surfaces of metal and tile which could be hosed out daily, but the operating table was a simple board on legs, and the surgeon sat between the patient's spread thighs on a dining chair, wearing an apron over street clothes – there were no 'scrubs'.

Lourcine-Pascal was to be Pozzi's first and last post as director of a public surgical service in Paris. He would have a career of thirty-five years in the care of diseases of women in this hospital, which later was renamed for his old boss Paul Broca, and which continued to provide gynecological services until 1953. His contribution to the health of the poorer women of Paris was well-recognized by Parisians – for many years postcards of Pozzi were sold on the streets of the city. Today the new Broca, an unexciting 1950s building still in the 13<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement*, off the Boulevard Port-Royal, receives only gerontology patients.

Pozzi also sought to teach the new discipline to medical students of the University, and consulted the Dean of the Faculty with a view to initiating a course in gynecology. He got no support. "Monsieur, I am completely opposed to your plan which might actually lead to the creation of a new Chair; you already have the title of professor, that should be enough for you!" the Dean said. Samuel gave his course anyway, for free, and did so every year up until the First World War. In 1901 he was himself appointed to the first Chair of Gynecology in the University of Paris.

The demands of work still left time for leisure in the evenings – dinners, parties and visits to the opera and theater. Many of the latter were to see Bernhardt in her latest productions, and it was often Pozzi who made certain that the star was at her best. In November 1885 Sarah penned a note:

"Doctor, please be good enough to see me as soon as you possibly can. I am suffering horribly and I am afraid that I may not be able to play this evening..."

Which was followed a couple of days later by:

“My dear good Doctor, here are places in the best seats...I am very well thanks to your kindness, I am happy to say.”

Sarah never hesitated to turn to Samuel professionally for her friends: “Doctor God. Here is my poor little Countess of Najac who has a lump in her breast that I believe is extremely serious. The doctors tell her she should be operated on immediately and she can only weep. ..I beg you to see her at once; I suffer from seeing her suffer. I embrace you Doctor God with infinite gratitude, Sarah.”

This was soon followed by: “Doctor God this child was sent from England to France to be operated on for appendicitis and two doctors here have told her it’s only fatigue. She asked me for a note to see you Doctor God. Will you visit her and give her your opinion? I am your ever devoted Sarah,” and not long after by: “Here you are dear Doctor, the seats are excellent for you, Your Sarah.”

Pozzi also used his appreciation of art and his connections in the art world in his professional life. He believed that his patients would recover more quickly if they were in pleasant surroundings. He commissioned Georges Clairin and other artists to come to the hospital and paint a series of delightful murals on the walls of the wards. “I treat my patients with beauty,” he remarked to Clairin, whose dramatic work *Health Restored to the Sick* was painted, in what was by then the new Broca hospital, in 1898. The model for the central figure of ‘Health’ – a vision in white tulle – was none other than Bernhardt herself. This beautiful mural was removed from the Broca when it was demolished in 1953, and transferred to the Museum of the *Assistance-Publique* on the Left Bank opposite Notre-Dame Cathedral; sadly all the other artworks appear to have been destroyed along with the old hospital.

Despite the many social distractions Samuel was meticulous in his attention to his surgical practice. Once established at the Lourcine-Pascal, his surgical skills and reputation grew so that colleagues would come from all over Europe, Asia, and North and South America to learn his techniques. He was greatly interested in the cancers of women: cancers of the womb and the cervix, the ovaries, vulva and vagina. Before the advent of Pap smears, X-rays and ultrasound, women presented to doctors only when cancers were well advanced and causing symptoms – pain, heavy vaginal bleeding, and weight loss, so that in many cases surgery, however skilful, could only be palliative. Pozzi also performed hysterectomies for more benign conditions such as fibroids of the uterus, and repaired fistulas and prolapse, both conditions that followed prolonged and frequent childbirth.

By the latter years of the nineteenth century all these operations were being performed in major centers across Europe and North America. There were many surgeons experimenting with new techniques and devising new ways of dissection, suturing and post-operative care in an effort to improve their outcomes for women. Pozzi took part in a constant exchange of information, both by personal correspondence and articles published in journals, and by visits to other centers of excellence, particularly in Germany and Vienna. This feverish exchange of ideas and information laid the foundations of our modern practice of gynecology. The steps by which many operations are performed today are identical with those pioneered and polished by Pozzi and his European and American colleagues, even though today we may perform them as ‘minimally invasive’ surgery via a laparoscope. Pozzi’s technical abilities, however, were outstanding, earning him the title of “the father of French gynecology.” (It must be said that there were few women physicians around in France or indeed anywhere in the world in the late nineteenth century, and almost none in the practice of surgery, so unfortunately there were no contenders for the “mother of gynecology” title.)

Pozzi was also much occupied with improving the treatment of benign cysts of the ovary, another common condition in women. Today these fluid-filled cysts are usually diagnosed very early, when they are quite small, by the medium of ultrasound, and treated before they grow larger, but up until the nineteenth century they would often grow to enormous size before women sought medical help, and they could give the impression of an advanced pregnancy. It was simple enough to put a drain through the skin into such a cyst and remove the fluid, with temporary relief for the woman, but the cyst usually enlarged again.

In 1809, Ephraim MacDowell of Kentucky had been the first to successfully remove and completely cure an ovarian cyst, an operation that became known as an ovariectomy although today it would be called an ovarian cystectomy. His patient, a courageous lady named Jane Crawford, aged 47, had traveled more than 100 miles by horseback on Christmas Day to undergo the operation – preceded by her cyst, which contained 15 liters of fluid. Anesthesia having yet to be invented, MacDowell had two solid farmers hold her down in an armchair in his parlor for the 25 minutes in which he drained the fluid, cut out the cyst wall and closed the wound. Jane is said to have coped with all this by singing psalms – certainly she survived, living to the age of 79.

By the time Samuel Pozzi was practicing gynecological surgery, good anesthesia with ether or chloroform was readily available and understood, and was given by a second physician so that the surgeon could concentrate completely on the operation itself; the science of anesthesiology had been

born. As well, as a devotee of Listerism Pozzi took the greatest care to prevent infection of the wound. He also perfected surgical techniques that enabled even those cysts that had attained enormous size and attached themselves to the bowel or bladder to be safely removed and the woman completely cured, and he published numerous papers on this surgery. All of this experience was put to good use when Sarah became ill towards the end of 1897.

In October of that year, he had been at her house for her annual birthday dinner on 23<sup>rd</sup> - always a celebration where Sarah wanted her closest friends. In her invitation she had written: "If you could come and join with those whom I love you would make me very happy...your Sarah Bernhardt." But soon after that party she wrote in a different tone: "Doctor God, here are the places in the box. What I would like is to see you for an instant one morning or evening when I am either not yet dressed or have undressed. I am suffering and anxious. Whenever you can make it. Your very grateful friend Sarah."

Samuel came – and diagnosed a cyst of the ovary. Observed over a few weeks, it was clear that the cyst was enlarging rapidly, and needed to be removed. Sarah had confidence in no-one except Samuel – only he could perform the surgery. He agreed with some trepidation. The writer Marcel Schwob sent him a note the day before the surgery: "I would like to wish you all the best before the big operation you are undertaking for Madame Sarah Bernhardt. You know it is said that eventually all of us will pass through your hands!" Holidaying in the south of France, Pozzi's friend Count Robert de Montesquiou, like Pozzi very far from being a devout Christian, arranged for a special Mass to be said for the Divine One at the hour of her surgery, just in case...

In early January of 1898 Pozzi was elected to the French Senate for his native province of the Dordogne. Following the election at Bergerac, he traveled back to Paris, and took on his political duties while continuing a busy surgical practice. Paris was in ferment – on 13<sup>th</sup> January Emile Zola, enraged by the treatment meted out to the Jewish army captain Alfred Dreyfus, had published his scathing commentary *J'accuse*, in which he accused the army of a cover-up in the case, and much of the French Catholic *haute-bourgeoisie* of anti-Semitism and hypocrisy – rightly in both cases, as it turned out. Both Pozzi and Bernhardt were ardent Dreyfusards – supporters of the Dreyfus cause - and Pozzi was soon involved with the efforts to arrange a second trial for the disgraced captain that bore fruit the following year. But he found the time to care for Sarah.



In mid-February he operated and removed the cyst which was “the size of the head of a fourteen year old child.” Under chloroform anesthesia he opened her abdomen with a long vertical cut, and carefully dissected out the cyst, the “elegant branches” of which had extended into the broad ligament, a wide fold of tissue on each side of the uterus. Afterwards, as he wrote to Montesquiou, Sarah “played the part of the surgical patient to perfection. In six weeks she will be on stage again.” During her convalescence, he visited her frequently at home, where he sat on her bed after his professional formalities were concluded and acted as her external ambassador to the world, bringing news of the ‘Affaire’ – the Dreyfus case which was tearing apart French society - and political gossip from the Senate. Letters and telegrams flowed in from all corners of the world once the news of her surgery spread. He read selected parts of her mail out loud to her, including some comments addressed to himself:

“What a terrible time for her,” telegraphed the Italian actress Eleanora Duse, for years both rival and friend of Sarah, and who the previous year had met and much admired Samuel. “But,” said Duse, “she is strong and brave. All will be well with your help, I know. I send her my very best wishes direct, from my heart, and the same for you who knows how to cure her.”

“The bitch!” spat out Bernhardt from under her bedclothes.

“Is that the reply you want me to send her?”

“All right! Then tell her that I embrace her,” answered Sarah smoothly.

She insisted that he come to Belle-Île, her holiday house in Brittany, later in the year, and this he did, in the company of de Montesquiou: “two days of sun and sea, food and wine and vivid conversation in the company of many friends.” Pozzi conducted a final examination of the operation scar at Belle-Île: it was well-healed. Despite her entreaties he could not stay longer; he departed with a photograph of his patient lounging on her bed, on the back of which she wrote: To my Doctor God, to the Being I adore and admire and to whom I would happily give my life. Sarah Bernhardt.”

Although by the 1890s his practice was increasingly turning towards gynecology, Pozzi continued to have an interest in a wide range of surgical procedures throughout his career. Private gynecological

patients included writers, actresses and singers, the hostesses of the salons of Paris and the guests who frequented them; private surgical patients included de Maupassant, Alexander Dumas, the literary Goncourt brothers and composers Delibes and Massenet. And somehow, in addition to his demanding professional work and his extensive social life, Pozzi found time to write: dozens of papers for surgical journals, and the preparatory notes for what was to become for many the seminal text of women's healthcare– the *Treatise of Gynecology* that would bring together everything known at that time about the diseases of women and their treatment.



Georges Clairin, 1898 *Health Restored to the Sick*, fresco painted in the Broca Hospital Paris. Now in the possession of l'Assistance Publique, Paris. The model for 'Health' was Sarah Bernhardt.

## ***Dr. Pozzi at Home***

*Dear Madame and Friend, I accept with the greatest pleasure your kind invitation for lunch today, and send with my thanks my kindest regards. Paul Hervieu.*

In 1880, soon after their marriage and using Thérèse's money, the young Pozzis moved from the Boulevard St Germain to a new apartment in the Place Vendôme, in the fashionable 1<sup>st</sup> *arrondissement*. The Place is a superb example of French 17<sup>th</sup> century architecture, lined on all four sides by elegant buildings that today contain hotels (including the Ritz), upmarket boutiques and apartments for the very well-heeled. At its center stands the Austerlitz column, a statue of Napoléon Bonaparte atop, although it must be said that Napoléon had been up and down the column on several occasions by the time Pozzi arrived in the Place, as the victors of the various wars, rebellions and insurrections of nineteenth century France changed their idols around. Number 10 is in the south-east corner of the Place. For 17,000 francs per year, the Pozzis rented an apartment on the second floor which was not only their residence but also included Samuel's consulting rooms. Resplendent though the house may have been, the rooms were huge, draughty and hard to heat in winter.

Once installed, the newly-weds embarked on an ambitious round of social occasions that was to last twenty years. Thérèse quickly showed herself to be an excellent mistress of her household, managing a large staff that included Samuel's valet Célestin, a butler, a cook and many maids. The rosewood writing desk in the boudoir of Madame Pozzi contained, as well as the essential *cartes de visite*, three kinds of invitation to number 10, Place Vendôme – for luncheon (at half past midday), dinner (at 7 pm), and “after-dinner” (9.30 pm), all ready to be filled in by the hostess and dispatched to the four corners of Paris several times each month.

The guests came from a wide range of *milieux* – Thérèse was staggered at how many people her husband knew, and the list was to grow with every passing year. Medical men of course, but also lawyers, scientists, writers, painters and musicians, actors and actresses, all of whom accepted with *le plus grand plaisir* the invitations to Place Vendôme. The regular Pozzi dinners and *soirées* on Thursdays were soon considered among the most amusing in Paris, and invitations to their small luncheon parties were keenly sought. Each Thursday morning Samuel would lean over the perfumed

shoulders of his wife as she planned the table seating of their guests for that evening. On Tuesdays Thérèse held her *'jour'* – her day for receiving in the afternoon those of their friends and acquaintances who wished to drop by. Between the hours of two and four, liveried staff served tea, sweet wines, finger sandwiches and *petit fours* on fine silver and porcelain. Convention demanded that the hostess oversee the conversation of the *jour* and wit was considered more important than the catering. Many of those who presented themselves made only a brief visit, passed on a morsel of gossip then set out for other calls.

Two of the most notable guests at lunches and dinners were Bernhardt and Mounet-Sully. The actor came sometimes alone, sometimes with his wife Georgette. He filled the room with his presence and his magnificent voice, and often treated guests to impromptu recitals of verse or scenes from French classics. Bernhardt also came regularly, something Thérèse found very flattering, and she too would recite, especially from the works of Leconte de Lisle, also a frequent guest. Among artists who visited in the early years, the most prominent was “Jojotte” – Georges Clairin. Apart from Sarah, women often present, who may or may not have had past trysts with Samuel, included the actresses Réjane and Eve Lavallière, writer Judith Gautier and Geneviève Straus. Pozzi’s friend Robert de Montesquiou was an important male guest; other men often at the Place Vendôme included Clemenceau, journalist, politician and future Prime Minister of France; Joseph Reinach, also both politician and journalist and later to be one of the most prominent supporters of Alfred Dreyfus; composers Massenet and Delibes, and writers Paul Bourget, Anatole France and Paul Hervieu – the latter a particular friend of Pozzi’s.

Special mention should be made of the Proust family. Dr Adrien Proust was a colleague and good friend of Samuel; he and his wife were often guests of the Pozzis. Their son Robert studied medicine, graduating in 1893, and taking up surgery. For ten years he was attached to Pozzi’s service at the Broca as his first assistant. It was at the Broca that in 1910 he performed the first open-heart surgery in France, and in 1932 he became director of the hospital. His brother Marcel took his first dinner “in town” as an adult at the Place Vendôme, something which served him well in his later descriptions of such events in his literary masterpieces. He is said to have drawn on Pozzi to some extent in creating the character of Doctor Cottard in *Remembrance of Things Past*, but given the essentially unpleasant nature of Cottard, and the affection Marcel always held for Pozzi, it is likely that many other influences went into the making of this character. The Prousts were also very close friends of Émile and Geneviève Straus.

As the Pozzis themselves entertained, many of the salons of Paris in turn became open to them. Physicians and surgeons were appreciated in the drawing rooms of all the notable salon hostesses of late nineteenth century Paris. To “have” a professor for one’s salons was considered very smart; to be received in return at his home equally so.

It was the clever and outrageous woman novelist, Germaine de Staël who in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century gave the name of ‘salons’ to these hubs of conversation that were a feature of European high-society for more than one hundred years. Though she was no beauty, de Staël was one of the great hostesses of her era and held Parisian society captive by sheer force of will and intellectual brilliance. Women were second-class citizens in French society, and even those born into the nobility and upper bourgeoisie were largely excluded from the universities and restrained by the church and the law, so this uniquely French institution allowed them social and intellectual release. The salon became the primary outlet for witty conversation well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, probably because it was the one place in society where men and women could mingle without raising eyebrows. While Voltaire adored them, the great voice of the Enlightenment, Rousseau openly declared his contempt for salons because he felt they feminized males: “Every woman in Paris gathers in her apartment a harem of men more womanish than she.” History proved Rousseau wrong, and ambitious men continued to flock to perfumed rooms that gave charmers like Samuel Pozzi the opportunity to watch their social fortunes rise. Polite conversation moved from discussion of literature to art, music, science, philosophy and eventually, politics. Beyond the potted palms, the lace fans, the rouge and rice powder, the salons were also important centers for political activism, especially during the Belle Époque.

By the 1880s, memories of the excesses of the Second Empire and the agonies of the war were fading. The Third Republic was a time of increasing affluence as France industrialized and colonized and the City of Light had never glittered as brightly as under the influence of *mondaines*, the society women who hosted *jours* and salons during the Parisian ‘Season’. In this period of the year, from January to June, *Le Tout Paris* – a term attributed to Montesquiou and roughly translated as ‘everyone who was anyone’-engaged in intensive socializing in the capital before departing to their country estates for summer vacations and the autumn hunting season. The Season was a whirlwind of dinners, *soirées*, balls, opera and

theater. Through intricate rites, the men and women of *'all of Paris'* flaunted an array of social capital which demonstrated their privilege and power within French society.

Pozzi had become a guest at salons well before his marriage. In early 1870 his cousin, physician Alexandre Laboulbène, had invited him to his first *soirée* at the home of Princess Mathilde Bonaparte. Samuel was fascinated to meet the infamous Mathilde, then aged 49, a woman renowned both for her caustic wit and her scandal-ridden life. (Having married a rich Russian businessman, Anatole Demidov, she fled to Paris with another man, taking a considerable quantity of jewelry which Anatole claimed as his; the ensuing arguments raged for years across Europe.) Mathilde was the daughter of Napoléon Bonaparte's youngest brother Jerome, and once confided to Marcel Proust that if it were not for Uncle Napoléon, "I'd be selling oranges on the streets of Ajaccio." She was also the cousin of Napoléon III. She was the only member of the Bonaparte family to remain in France after the war of 1870, and she continued her salons throughout the 1870s and 80s, receiving such guests as Flaubert, George Sand and de Maupassant. Her house on the rue de Berri was a veritable Bonaparte museum crammed to the rafters with Napoléonic memorabilia and gilded imperial eagles and her table overflowed with hothouse flowers, Russian caviar, oysters and champagne. Samuel's upbringing had made him a fervent republican but he enjoyed the conversation and opulence of the salon. Through his meeting with the zaftig Princess and their subsequent friendship, he was to make connections that would last a lifetime.

There were two other salons that the Pozzis attended frequently. In 1877, through the Proust family, Pozzi met a young woman who would eventually become the reigning *salonnière* of Paris, Geneviève Halévy, widow of composer Georges Bizet. Geneviève was born in 1849 into a family of middle-class, assimilated Jews. Her grandfather was a Talmudic scholar and Hebrew poet, her uncle Léon a man of letters, and her father Fromental a talented composer whose opera *La Juive* was the first work performed in the new Paris Opera in 1875. Though Geneviève's practice of Judaism was more cultural than religious, she resisted all suggestions that she convert to Catholicism. While not a classical beauty, she possessed an intensity that captivated the men in her social circle. At twenty she wed Bizet and the couple had one child, Jacques. Bizet fought in the war of 1870; on his return he devoted himself to his masterwork *Carmen*, which was completed early in 1875. Critics savaged the opera, declaring it to be vulgar, sensational and overly sexual. Bizet was devastated and died of a heart attack in June 1875, aged 36.

Fate was much kinder to Geneviève. Bizet's body was barely cold when critics revised their opinion of the work and *Carmen* became a financial success. Geneviève suddenly found herself a wealthy widow and much sought-after. Writers including de Maupassant were among those who admired her wit and unusual looks and Degas begged to draw her combing her hair. Gustave Schlumberger wrote of a woman of incredible charm and culture in *Mes Souvenirs*: "Without being beautiful, she had the most striking eyes that lit up her intelligent features, often altered by a nervous tic from which she suffered almost constantly. All my contemporaries remember the magnificent portrait that was made of her, dressed as a widow, after the death of Bizet, by her friend, the painter Delaunay. She was certainly one of the most charming women of her generation, high spirited, affectionate and adored by her friends. This admirable widow began to surround herself with distinguished friends, men of letters, artists of merit, men of the world, people from the theater... Her Sunday dinners became celebrated." Eventually she married banker Émile Straus and moved to a sumptuous apartment on Boulevard Haussmann, where she held court in a circular drawing room crammed with fine art. Up until the outbreak of the First World War her salon attracted a wide range of Parisian artists and intellectuals and was a focus for the activities of the supporters of Captain Alfred Dreyfus from 1897 onwards. Pozzi became a life-long friend; he may also have been her lover although there is no evidence for this. Marcel Proust, who was a friend of her son Jacques, used her as a model for the Duchess of Guermantes in *Remembrance of Things Past*.

Something of a rival to Madame Straus was Madame Lydie Aubernon, who was already in her fifties by the time Pozzi and Thérèse began to attend her salon. Short and squat, dressed in frilly gowns embellished with bows and pom-poms, Madame Aubernon exercised autocratic control over her salon. She alone determined what topics would be discussed, decided who should speak and for how long, and enforced her guests' attention by ringing a little handbell. Surprisingly, most of her guests submitted willingly to this conversational tyranny, but there were occasional rebellions. One day the delightful Madame Baignières arrived rather late. Before she had time to catch her breath, Madame Aubernon rang her bell and said: "We are discussing adultery, Madame Baignières. Will you give us your opinions?" Madame Baignières replied, "I'm so sorry. I've only come prepared with incest." Madame Aubernon continued her salon until the late 1890s, when Pozzi was called to treat her; somewhat ironically she developed cancer of the tongue, from which she subsequently died.

It was Madame Auberon who gave Pozzi a nickname that followed him for the remainder of his life: she was the first to call him “the Love Doctor” – a name she borrowed from Molière. She also referred to Thérèse as “Pozzi’s mute”, probably because Thérèse, many years younger than her husband, was initially overawed by the surroundings of the salons.

There was just one tiny chink in the otherwise shining armor of the Pozzi marriage as it was presented to the world in those early years. In 1880, Thérèse’s mother, Marie-Félicie Loth-Cazalis, left Lyon for good, and set herself up in the rue Saint-Honoré, five minutes walk from the Place Vendôme, in a house that had once belonged to the family of Madame Pompadour. Soon Thérèse was spending much time with her mother, at the rue Saint-Honoré or the Place Vendôme, or shopping, except on Tuesdays when she held her *jour*, which was always attended by her mother. Thérèse looked forward as well to the moment when the third floor apartment at 10 Place Vendôme would become vacant, so that her mother would be able to move even closer to her daughter and son-in-law. Madame Loth was a deeply religious Catholic who disapproved of many things, including the theater. She was particularly critical of the publicity surrounding the departure of Bernhardt for America in 1880. Undoubtedly her views did not pass unnoticed by Samuel’s friends. Some time in 1881, Sarah sent Pozzi theater tickets with a note: “My dear Doctor, here are three places in the front row, they are for Monday 1<sup>st</sup>”, adding tongue-in-cheek that there were three because “I was thinking of your beautiful Mama!” Undeterred by his mother-in-law’s opinions, Samuel himself went often to the Opéra and to concerts and the theater, never missing a play featuring Sarah when he was in Paris. Sometimes Thérèse accompanied him, sometimes not.

Samuel was also a member of the Mirlitons. This was the nickname for the all-male club of the Circle of the Union of Artists, whose members included writers, painters and musicians, and they met at number 18 in the Place Vendome, just across from Samuel’s new apartment. Other patrons of the club included lawyers, bankers and businessmen – membership being by invitation only. Samuel was accepted into the club in 1877. Membership was highly prized – at the Mirlitons could be found some of the most interesting men in Paris, and the atmosphere was much less stuffy than that at the rival Jockey Club. Though the club took its name from the word for a toy flute, there was nothing chintzy about the Mirlitons - the rooms brimmed with the free spirits of the city, who devoured the canapés and quaffed the free-flowing champagne as they sought patrons to fund their art. Lunch and dinner could be taken at the club, and plays and concerts were presented in the small black and white theater. It is not recorded who originally proposed Samuel for membership – two existing members were required, and there was a secret ballot, in which one ‘no’ vote could outweigh six ‘yes.’ However



finding supporters cannot have been difficult for Pozzi – intelligent and cultivated, he was the very model of the young Parisian bachelor clubman. He would remain a Mirliton all his life, never joining any other club.

In the early summer of 1881, before the sizzling heat had sent the gentry out of the city to summer estates or fashionable beach resorts, Samuel received a note from the painter Carolus-Duran, inviting him for dinner at the Mirlitons that evening, in order to meet one of his students. Though now a busy surgeon in hospitals across Paris, Samuel continued to be fascinated by every aspect of the arts. That evening he crossed the threshold of the Mirlitons to a burst of applause as a group of young musicians struck up a spirited gypsy tune. Beneath the soft glow of gasoliers, the club was crowded with guests sweating in evening dress in the warm summer's night, sporting boutonnières of gardenias whose heavy fragrance mingled with the plumes of tobacco smoke. As a poet enthralled a small crowd with his newest piece, Samuel heard his name shouted above the din and spotted Carolus-Duran.

Ostentation was a vital part of social success for Carolus-Duran. Originally from the North of France, he had re-invented himself in the private salons of the City of Light, fashioning his image into that of the ultimate bohemian artist and taking great pains to conceal his bourgeois roots. Even his name was an affectation; he had been baptized Charles-Auguste-Emile Durand in Lille, an industrial city on the Belgian border of France. Bond Street fashions and conventional grooming were out of the question for a man who wanted to make his mark as an eccentric: he sported a huge moustache, had grown out his curly hair and was arrayed in bohemian garb with rings flashing from every finger.

Samuel maneuvered his way towards the beckoning painter who stood next to a tall, bearded young man. At well over six feet in height, Pozzi was normally the tallest man in the room but this evening he shared the honor with Carolus-Duran's guest, an American expatriate named John Singer Sargent, who had recently joined the artist's studio. The two men greeted each other, Pozzi in English, Sargent in French and after a moment of confusion, Carolus-Duran jumped in and made the introduction, in French. Though his prize student had already begun to outshine him with a spectacular array of paintings that were being heaped with honors in Parisian exhibitions, Carolus-Duran was apparently not jealous of his success,

indeed he was keen to push Sargent toward fruitful social contacts and juicy commissions. On this particular evening he had in mind a portrait of Pozzi.

At the time of this eventful meeting, Sargent was twenty-four and as much of an ambitious outsider as the beauty from provincial Bergerac. Like Samuel Pozzi, by the time Sargent strolled into the Mirlitons he had already cut quite a swath through Parisian social circles, his talent having opened doors that would have been closed to a man of lesser ability. He had been acclaimed for his French portraiture, and for his exquisite studies of Spanish and Italian subjects. Carolus-Duran knew that Samuel was fluent in English and, most importantly, was already an aficionado of Sargent's work, having attended all the annual Paris Salons.

Formally dressed that evening, Sargent was slim with long legs, chestnut-colored hair, a full beard and lively grayish-blue eyes that glittered from a suntanned face. Though he was almost ten years younger than Pozzi, he possessed a gravitas that belied his youth and the two men appeared to be of the same age. However it took all of Samuel's social skills to put him at ease; the young painter was shy around strangers, especially beautiful strangers. He was not slick or verbally adroit and was often at a loss for words, turning red-faced when uncomfortable and stuttering uncontrollably. The artist W. Graham Robertson noted Sargent's bashfulness during social encounters in his memoirs. "Sargent talked little and with an effort; why he 'went everywhere' night after night often puzzled me." In spite of Sargent's initial shyness, the artist and the surgeon bonded that evening and an invitation was issued for the painter and Carolus-Duran to take lunch at the Pozzi apartment a few days later.

Upon encountering Doctor Pozzi 'at home' for the first time, Sargent was immediately struck by his appreciation of the exotic and the beautiful in the decoration of the apartment. Red in all its varied permutations was a predominant color in interior design in the nineteenth century and at 10 Place Vendôme the hue was everywhere, in the carpets, wallpaper and draperies; red was also much in evidence in all the many Bernhardt establishments. The moldings were gilded, the furnishings the finest that Thérèse's vast fortune could buy. Already Samuel had commenced collecting paintings and antiquities, and every room contained exquisite *objets d'art*. In the music room Sargent, an excellent pianist, regaled his hosts by tinkling the keys before lunch. He also remarked on a portrait of Thérèse, painted by

Blanchard in 1878, a conventional likeness showing her as a young flower girl. Sargent noted the lack of a complementary portrait of the master of the house, and suggested he remedy this. Pozzi was immediately enthusiastic.

At this first meal together, Pozzi and Thérèse were amazed at the sheer ferocity of Sargent's appetite and marveled at the amount of food the younger man could consume. Thérèse made a mental note to have her chef doubly stock the larder since Sargent was to be a frequent guest in their home. Between bites, Pozzi waxed poetical about Bergerac then listened attentively as the young artist recounted his life's story. Sargent was descended from an English family that had first settled in Gloucester, Massachusetts in 1678. His father, FitzWilliam, was from the Philadelphia branch and had worked as a physician until he was forced to abandon practice to keep his family together. His wife, Mary, Sargent's mother, had been infected by wanderlust after losing her firstborn child. The Sargents came to Europe for a short visit; she refused to return home and it was FitzWilliam's fate never to see America again. The Sargent family subsisted on a small annuity, traveling about Europe, living in hotel rooms and rented villas, never growing roots anywhere. Sargent was born in Florence and in spite of his family's meager finances was immersed in the cultural largesse of a cosmopolitan émigré community. From the time he took his first steps, Sargent had been exposed to the finer aspects of European culture – art, music and literature. He was largely home-schooled but when he began his artistic studies in 1874, he was already an accomplished musician and linguist.

Pozzi showed Sargent an elegant pencil sketch that Jules Bastien-Lepage had made of him two years earlier. The artist, who had painted the Divine Sarah to great acclaim in 1879, had drawn Pozzi in a simple jacket and trousers, a shy smile on his handsome face. Though the work was appealing it did not reveal the extraordinary personality of the subject. The doctor possessed the panache and charisma of a modern rock star and to the unconventional Sargent it seemed that a staid, conventional portrait in the traditional physician's costume of a black jacket, against a brown background, was out of the question. In Pozzi, Sargent recognized a fellow aesthete who would want an exciting portrait and so he gave much thought to how to pose him.

There was also the problem of where to actually paint the portrait. Sargent's biographer, Stanley Olson described Sargent's old studio in the rue Notre-Dames-des-Champs as "remarkable for its untidiness and filth" and from the moment the fastidious Doctor Pozzi walked into the untidy atelier, he realized it would not do. Sargent visited Pozzi in the Faculty of Medicine, where his garb as a lecturer may have provided some inspiration. The young professor cut a dashing figure in his scarlet robes, but a portrait in his professorial gown would be too formal. Early one morning, the painter called to the Place Vendôme to peruse Pozzi's wardrobe, something he did with all his subjects, and was greeted by his patron still in his dressing gown. Through the haze of smoke from his ever-present cigarillo, Sargent examined the contours of his subject's face, noting how the brilliant red silk offset Pozzi's dark good looks, and suddenly understood how best to portray his subject. He would paint him dressed in that same robe, with its echoes of his professorial scarlet, against the crimson drapes of his drawing room. Sargent had already completed at least two commissioned portraits – of the poet Edouard Pailleron and his wife – in which the sitters were shown at ease at home, and these had been well received. He now proposed the same setting to Pozzi, who readily agreed. Doctor Pozzi would be painted at the Place Vendôme apartment. At home.

There began a regular routine of Pozzi returning late morning from hospital rounds to pose for Sargent, who would then join his subject and Thérèse for lunch. Madame Pozzi in fact became as much a friend of Sargent's as did Pozzi himself. During their luncheons together, Sargent shared with the Pozzis his passion for all things Spanish, a fascination that verged on obsession. When he had finally journeyed to Madrid in October of 1879, the trek had become a spiritual pilgrimage that allowed him to worship at the altar of his personal god, Velasquez. His adoration of the Spanish school came to fruition when he enrolled as a copyist at the Prado. Sargent immersed himself in the music, the folk culture and the dance of Spain; he assailed the language, plucked out flamenco melodies on his guitar and swore to all who would listen that he was half-Spanish. The sensuality of Spanish painting continued to enchant Sargent throughout his life. Happily, Pozzi's dark looks and aristocratic manner gave him the bearing of a Spanish grandee and he was the perfect subject for what Sargent proposed, a magnificent study in red. The result was a remarkable likeness of the flamboyant doctor and everyone who saw the portrait commented that it was as if Pozzi had stepped into the frame. One of Pozzi's students, visiting his professor at home and coming suddenly upon the painting, was

overwhelmed at the visual power of the portrait, remarking that it was “the face of Cardinal Richelieu clad in a red dressing gown, the costume of the Professor of the Faculty”.

In the portrait Pozzi stands erect, with one hand at the cord of his gown, the other placed across his chest. His fingers are long and slender, the fingers of a man adroit with his hands, and exactly as in life, according to many of his colleagues. His feet are shod in Moroccan-style beaded slippers. The crimson background has been described as both a “womb” and a “bed” by some observers, but in fact it is simply the velvet drapes of the Pozzi drawing room as seen by Sargent. Pozzi would have been shocked at the pronouncements of modern writers on the painting. Carnality, corruption and even cruelty have been read into Pozzi’s character. Critics have asked whether Sargent’s underlying reason for posing Dr. Pozzi in such a provocative manner may have been an allusion to his medical specialization and “allegedly winning bedside manner”. The thought is wonderfully poetic, but has no basis in reality. At the time Sargent painted him, Pozzi was a general surgeon not long in private practice and without a permanent public hospital appointment. Gynecological surgery had yet to be developed and the profession of ‘gynecologist’ was unknown. Though his marital situation would later change drastically, Pozzi was at the time happily married and his social credentials were pristine. While Sargent’s portraiture and his placement of his subjects is still fodder for psychological conjecture, the late Stanley Olson, author of the definitive Sargent biography, summed it up best when he said that although Sargent himself always professed visual content to be his only concern, to his critics that had never seemed to be quite enough. When asked by one admirer about bringing out the “inner veil” of the external man, Sargent answered with customary terseness: “If there were a veil, I should paint the veil; I can paint only what I see.” And it seems that with the portrait of Pozzi, Sargent did just that: he painted what he saw, no less and no more: Pozzi in his red dressing gown, at home.

A friend of Sargent’s, James Carroll Beckwith, viewed the portrait in September of 1881 and was much taken with its beauty. Unfortunately Beckwith was one of the few at that time who liked the portrait - a volcano of visual fire that engendered strong emotion from all who saw it, either admiration or extreme distaste. Art historian Trevor Fairbrother quoted an anonymous friend of Pozzi’s who said that the handsome surgeon “regarded his body and his personality as a work of art.” It’s interesting that the quote is anonymous. The statement would suggest that Samuel had an exhibitionistic streak, but such tendencies were never noted by any of his many friends, and his portrait was never shown at the Paris Salon or publicly displayed elsewhere in France. He kept the finished painting in his drawing room, standing on an easel, concealed from the light most of the time under the cover of an elegant drape. This was probably mostly from modesty and not for the reason given by the acerbic Montesquiou, who found the picture impossibly vulgar: “There was...a portrait of our learned friend, Dr. Pozzi, which was kept covered, and not without good reason. The painter

had, for I know not what reason, dressed him completely in red.” Years later Count de Montesquiou added the final insult. “Taste is a very special thing...Mr. Sargent, who is a great painter, does not have any.”

Sargent first showed *Doctor Pozzi At Home* in London at the Royal Academy in 1882, where his English friends praised it. Years later, Sargent’s chum Henry James wrote a glowing critique of the portrait, calling it “splendid” and comparing it favorably with the work of Van Dyck. Unfortunately, Sargent had no friends within the stuffy British art establishment, who completely ignored the painting, as did the English public. The portrait’s icy reception in London contradicts all those writers who have since declared that the painting received a warm embrace at every public outing. Others have written that Oscar Wilde saw the painting and was so impressed that he wrote *The Picture of Dorian Gray* based upon it. Even the most cursory glance at the novella shows that the effete adolescent protagonist was the antithesis of Pozzi’s masculine persona. Moreover, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was not published until 1890, and Wilde never wrote of seeing Sargent’s portrait when it was exhibited in London, although he and Sargent were well acquainted. Wilde had a complicated and mercurial relationship with everyone who crossed his path and Sargent was no exception. While in Paris in 1882, Wilde gifted Sargent with a volume of poetry that he inscribed “To my friend, John S. Sargent with deep admiration of his work.” By 1883 Wilde’s appreciation of Sargent’s talent had evaporated; during a lecture he called Sargent’s art “vicious and meretricious.” Even if he had seen *Doctor Pozzi At Home*, it is unlikely that he would have found the doctor’s manly charms alluring; Oscar was wild about pubescent blonds.

The chilliness of the English Old Guard could not have prepared Sargent for the vicious response from the Belgians when the painting was shown in the *Les XX Exhibition* in Brussels in February of 1884. Brussels was freezing that winter but the reviews *Doctor Pozzi At Home* engendered were so nasty that the air surrounding the exhibition hall must have been heated by the flames of condemnation. Critics ignored the painting’s beautiful composition and Sargent’s artistry with the brush while severely criticizing him for his use of color. Léon Leguime, writer for *Le Journal de Bruxelles*, detested the painting. “It would seem that Sargent thinks all the paintings in the Louvre are brown and holds them in contempt. God preserve this famous museum from red tones, especially if, like Sargent’s, they are gaudy, common, unbearable and atonal!” Poet and critic Émile Verhaeren found the portrait disturbing: “Sargent’s red is noisy, it agitates, it shouts and is angry, and it rants! There is in all this too much stylishness, this art that, at bottom, lacks substance, lacks solidity and foundation; it sets out to surprise and shock; it is theatrical and assumes a pose; in the end it tires one out; it contains, like a champagne glass filled too quickly, more foam than golden wine.” Almost the entire Belgian art

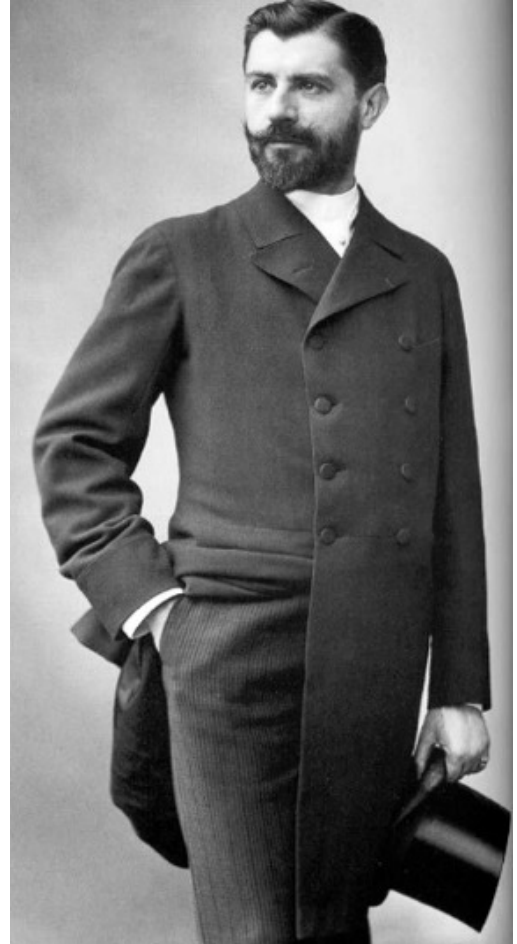
establishment agreed with Montesquieu's assessment of Sargent's taste. The only quotation approximating a positive review was published on February 11<sup>th</sup> in the *Echo de Bruxelles*. "Sargent is American by birth but his technique is all French. He shows this once again by exhibiting a portrait of a man in a red dressing gown, a memento of Carolus-Duran. Its execution is of the first order and it shows great qualities of handling but the portrait makes the mistake of clamoring for success and attention with no concern for good taste. It is a complete example of the flashy stuff dear to some young members of the French school."

Pozzi completely ignored the naysayers who pooh-poohed Sargent's talent, and obtained other works by the young artist. He acquired the charming *Madame Gautreau Drinking a Toast* around the mid 1880s, and Sargent gave him the watercolor, *Incensing the Veil*, a painting that was clearly influenced by the beautiful Sargent painting *Fumée d'Ambre Gris*. After Pozzi's death in 1918, the grand old lady of Boston philanthropy, Isabella Stewart Gardner, tried to purchase *Doctor Pozzi At Home* but Pozzi's son, Jean, refused to part with it. Sargent arranged for Gardner to acquire the other two paintings and both are part of the permanent collection of the Gardner Museum in Boston. Unfortunately, another painting that Sargent had given to Pozzi, *Conversation vénitienne*, completed somewhere between 1880 and 1882, is now apparently lost to the world. In the complete catalogue of Sargent's works compiled by Richard Ormond, *Conversation vénitienne* is described as "one of those mysterious and stunning Venetian interiors". This painting was of a more revolutionary nature than Sargent's other works and Pozzi fully appreciated its daring. According to Ormond, *Conversation vénitienne* "shows the radical aesthetic links between the two men for Pozzi lent *Conversation vénitienne* to an avant-garde exhibition of paintings at the Mirlitons in 1883." Ormond also noted that Samuel was not the only Pozzi to admire and collect Sargent's works; his son, Jean, owned one of Sargent's studies of Judith Gautier that he purchased from her personal collection in 1934.

Pozzi never permitted negative assessments of his portrait to affect his friendship with Sargent and the two remained close, corresponding and visiting after Sargent's move to London. Years later, toward the end of the century, Samuel ignored the potential of another barrage of nasty reviews and allowed Sargent to display his portrait in the Venice Biennale of 1897. Pozzi's endorsement convinced Isabella Stewart Gardner, whom he had charmed on a visit to Boston, to lend Sargent her portrait for the Biennale; Sargent wrote to her that "Pozzi sent me his and you would be in good company".

*Doctor Pozzi At Home* was not sold when Pozzi's formidable collection of art and antiquities was auctioned after his death. It was kept privately by Jean Pozzi until he too died in 1967. Acquired by

Armand Hammer, it was not on permanent exhibition to the public until 1990. Since then it has sparked the discussion and speculation that has virtually eclipsed all knowledge of the subject himself from the English-speaking world.





## Chapter Seven

*Friend lend me 1500 francs until Friday. You would do me a real service. I've been seeking contributions since yesterday from all my friends. I have to save myself this morning from taking a false step. I give you my word that I will return it to you on Friday. I thank you with all my heart. Sarah Bernhardt to Samuel Pozzi (year unknown)*

Since Bernhardt and Pozzi moved in numerous overlapping professional and social circles in the Paris of the Belle Époque, there were many residents of the city who were well known to both of them. Some were the close friends whose stories form an important part of our book; some have mention in our list of *dramatis personae*. There were however several others who deserve special mention, most of them lifelong friends, and one who though at first a friend later became an enemy, at least of Bernhardt's.

Marie Colombier was initially a colleague and bosom buddy of Sarah's, an actress who worked in some of the same troupes as the emerging star, although Marie's acting talent seems to have been minimal by comparison. The circumstances of her birth were not unlike Sarah's – Marie's mother was a country girl from the poverty-stricken and rocky Creuse region, and her father possibly a passing Spanish army officer who never acknowledged her existence. Her mother Annette soon moved to Paris with her daughter. Nothing is known of Marie's early life but by her teens, she was working as a courtesan and may have met Youle Bernhardt in *demimonde* circles. Plump, with dark hair and a hint of a moustache, Colombier was never a beauty but certainly had a talent for survival, possibly honed by the bleakness of her upbringing. Perhaps she found a benefactor among the men who frequented her flat because in 1862 she was accepted by the Conservatoire. Most accounts claim that she met Sarah there although by 1862, Sarah had moved on to the Comédie Française. Marie eventually joined Sarah at the Odéon, at the time of the triumph of *Le Passant*, and though Colombier had less success as an actress than Bernhardt, her life had by then expanded far beyond that of her mother. By 1871 she was apparently living in some style in a good hotel in the Rue de Roche: she gave balls and receptions and socialized extensively, and Bernhardt continued to be a friend and confidante throughout the 1870s. On one occasion in 1878 she sent a telegram to Pozzi on Colombier's behalf: "I ask you please to go and see Marie before coming to take me, I find she's not very well. I thank you in advance and am all yours, Sarah Bernhardt."

For a while François Coppée was smitten with Marie and in 1872 wrote a short play called *Le Rendezvous*, with her in mind. This however had none of the success of *Le Passant*, and within weeks Coppée's passion had evaporated as well. As the 1870s advanced, it seems that while Bernhardt's star continued to rise, that of Colombier was disappearing below the horizon. She found it increasingly difficult to get engagements in any theater, was obliged to move to very modest lodgings, and eventually abandoned Paris for the precarious existence of an actress stuck in the provinces.

Knowing of her friend's straitened circumstances, Sarah in 1881 proposed to take her to America as part of the first Bernhardt tour to the United States. This should have been a golden opportunity for Marie. However she quickly made the galling discovery that the only actress the American public was interested in was the great Sarah Bernhardt. They turned out in their thousands, eagerly preparing to be "shocked" by the free and easy 'French' acting style they had only previously been able to read about. It was during this tour that a Protestant minister who was "scandalized" by Bernhardt's open sexuality nicknamed her "the imp of darkness, a female demon sent from modern Babylon to corrupt the New World." Sarah responded with an ironic note: "Why attack me so violently? Actors ought not to be hard on one another." The tour lasted six months and was an unmitigated triumph. However there were hiccups along the way, at least for Colombier. Sarah briefly replaced her in some roles with her morphine-addicted half-sister, Jeanne, who had also come on the tour and whom Sarah was trying to launch on a stage career (unsuccessfully as it soon turned out, Jeanne dying of her addiction in 1884). Colombier took revenge by missing performances, fluffing lines and according to one contemporary account, attempting to upstage Sarah with an "alarmingly generous anatomical display."

By the time the tour ended the two women were not speaking and Colombier had squandered her main source of revenue. On the return of Sarah's troupe to Paris, Marie gave a series of lectures on the American visit which were collected in a memoir entitled *The Voyage of Sarah Bernhardt In America*. While the book was benign in tone, Sarah was furious because she herself had engaged the true author, a young journalist named Jehan Soudan, to write the Bernhardt version. On November 17, 1881 a *New York Times* reporter interviewed Bernhardt when she was touring Hungary. When the conversation turned to *The Voyage of Sarah*

*Bernhardt in America*, Sarah was adamant: Colombier never wrote a word of the book published under her name.

American caricatures and cartoons festooned the pages of *The Voyages of Sarah Bernhardt In America* and a pastel drawing of Colombier by Monet became the front plate. (Colombier later found herself in debt and sold the drawing which is now in a collection in Scotland.) The book failed to sell, Colombier was once again broke, and was now both bitter and friendless. She continued complaining about her treatment by Bernhardt to all who would listen, but to no avail.

In 1883, Bernhardt announced that she was writing her own memoirs. Colombier decided to beat Sarah to the punch but not to make the same mistake as she had with the previous book. Instead of a bland travelogue, Colombier collaborated with writer Paul Bonnetain (he was seventeen years younger and her lover at the time) to fashion the most vicious tome imaginable, *The Memoirs of Sarah Barnum*. It was a vile, anti-Semitic piece of trash masquerading as fiction and like offal on the bottom of a shoe, the stench lingered. This work presented Sarah as the avaricious, sex-crazed offspring of a mendacious Jewish courtesan and depicted her family as a monstrous clan who forced little Régine into a life of prostitution. Sarah, together with her leading man (and lover) of the moment, Jean Richepin, broke into Colombier's Paris apartment and beat her with a horsewhip. She sued Colombier for libel, and was successful, Marie being given a fine of two thousand francs and a suspended three-month sentence. However Colombier also benefited from the attention: *Sarah Barnum* was for a time a world-wide sensation and quickly translated into several languages.(1) Colombier used her ill-gotten gains to pull herself out of debt and wrote a drama entitled *The Lady in Black*, alluding to Bernhardt and produced for a short run at the Gaiété Theater in Paris.

It is easy to dismiss *The Memoirs of Sarah Barnum* in its entirety except for the fact that Bernhardt biographers have so often based their chapters dealing with Sarah's young adulthood, the conception and birth of Maurice and her early romances on the largely false and scurrilous claims of the book. In particular Colombier is responsible for the trite speculations on Sarah's sexual function that still attract sly attention in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, for example the mistranslated "...a piano out of tune, an Achilles reversed, vulnerable

everywhere but in her heart” which has become the very different “an untuned piano, an Achilles vulnerable everywhere except in the right place.” (2)

Colombier’s moment in the sun was brief. Bonnetain turned against her and Colombier’s life after the *Memoirs of Sarah Barnum* was another series of small triumphs and dismal failures. She became the mistress of an industrialist, was involved in more legal squabbles and authored a three-volume autobiography which nobody read. When she died in 1910, her obituaries mentioned only that she was the woman who had been horsewhipped by Sarah Bernhardt, a fitting epitaph.

In complete contrast to Colombier was Louise Abbéma, a petite dynamo who painted and sculpted and would remain Sarah’s steadfast comrade for fifty years. Sarah and Louise met as fellow artists and became playmates who used the media to create costumed scenarios that fed a Bernhardt-hungry public. Their relationship developed into a fifty-year friendship that may or may not have included an erotic component.

Louise was born in Étampes, a town in northern France where her father, Viscount Abbéma, was stationmaster, an interesting career mix. As a child she was an artistic prodigy, doted upon by parents who encouraged her to exploit her talent. Perhaps they realized that the determined child was not interested in marriage and would have to fend for herself in life. Certainly they allowed her a level of independence unusual for a girl of the time, especially one from an upper-class family.

She was not conventionally attractive; her features were plain but arresting. With her severe upswept hairstyle, spectacles and forthright personality, she resembled the quintessential nineteenth century suffragette. It is not surprising that she credited her earliest artistic influence to another woman, Rosa Bonheur, a nineteenth century painter celebrated by Queen Victoria for her masterful animal studies. Roaming around the rugged French countryside in crinolines and satin slippers as she hunted wild beasts to paint would have been unrealistic for Bonheur, and since cross-dressing was prohibited by law, Bonheur had to get written permission from her local magistrate to wear men’s clothing when she painted. Bonheur’s grit and commitment were catalysts for Louise’s determination to pursue a career in art, and they also dictated her clothing, workmanlike jackets and tailored skirts..

As a teen, Louise picked up her brushes and began painting scenes of her native Étampes. By 1872, she had produced several highly acclaimed works and in 1873, at a time when it was almost unheard of for women to be accepted into the art academies, she traveled to Paris to study with painter Charles Chaplin. The following year she became a student of Carolus-Duran, who in 1875 encouraged Louise to exhibit her work at the Paris Salon. In 1876, Bernhardt sat for her and the portrait was shown and admired at that year's Salon.

This positive reception was a remarkable coup for the young artist from Étampes. Louise quickly became both a friend and artistic mentor of the actress, who herself showed rare talent and enthusiasm for sculpture. While it must have been a heady experience for the brash girl in spectacles and tailored suits to be best friends with the woman rapidly becoming the most celebrated actress in the world, Sarah too was elated. Louise was unlike the women in her immediate sphere, untouched by both the seedier aspects of the *demimonde* and the cathouse atmosphere of the theater. She was intelligent, possessed of a sense of humor and game to exploit her talent. Jeanne and Régine were both flawed characters who depended on Sarah emotionally and financially; in Louise Sarah finally had a “sister” who was physically and emotionally healthy and didn't require a savior. Abbéma became a confidante who refused to judge Bernhardt and never betrayed her.

Contrary to the negative critiques of her *oeuvre* by some Bernhardt scholars, Louise was a first-rate artist who ventured into painting, sculpture, engraving and murals. After the success of the Bernhardt portrait, Abbéma made a cast of Sarah in a bronze medallion which she exhibited at the Salon in 1878. In return, Bernhardt exhibited a marble bust of Abbéma at the same Salon. In April of that year she wrote to Pozzi: “The bust of Louise will soon be finished (maybe even tomorrow)” adding that she was also getting on with work on his own bust. Abbéma herself would be a friend of Pozzi's for more than forty years, a visitor to the Place Vendôme, and often encountered at Bernhardt's homes.

Abbéma's long friendship with Bernhardt, her boyish appearance and the fact that she never married has led to the assumption by many Bernhardt biographers that she was lesbian. Since she never outed herself in letters or by behavior, it is impossible to know the truth of this. While it is possible that the Bernhardt/ Abbéma relationship may have strayed into sexual intimacy, no contemporary, not even Colombier, suggested a lesbian affair. While Louise

was not the most feminine of women she was not the cigar-chomping, fire-breathing suffragette in men's attire that some writers have liked to portray. In fact, like Bernhardt she had issues with feminism and disagreed with the views of early women's rights leaders, declaring in 1911 that: "first of all, woman must prove her worth; then she may talk of her rights." In her own case she proved that worth by becoming a respected society painter and member of the Legion of Honor, while remaining welcome in every drawing room in Paris. She was also a devoted companion to Bernhardt in Paris, at Belle-Île and abroad; whatever else the relationship contained should be left as entirely a matter for the two of them alone.

There was another artist who became a life-long member of Sarah's entourage, the suave and urbane portraitist, Georges Clairin. Together with Abbéma and Madame Guérard, an older woman who for many years acted as a kind of companion, secretary and aunt to Bernhardt, Clairin formed one of the trio who were the actress's most constant companions. He was also, with Czech painter Alphonse Mucha, the artist most actively involved in creating Bernhardt's diva image.

Clairin was born in Paris in 1843 but information on his early years is scant. However at the age of eighteen he was accepted into the prestigious École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and by 1866 his work was strong enough to be submitted to the Salon. Two years later, Clairin and another talented young painter, Henri Regnault, set off to Spain where for two years they absorbed Moorish art and Spanish culture. They later traveled to Tangier where they built a studio but the Franco-Prussian War aborted their stay. Both young men returned to France and enlisted in the army; unfortunately, Regnault was mortally wounded at the age of twenty-seven. His friend's death and the experience of the Paris Commune following the war proved a dark period in Clairin's life, producing the painting *The Burning of the Tuileries* that is one of his least romantic works.

As Paris patched itself back together after 1871, the handsome artist began to make a name as a society painter and muralist. His works became colorful, airy and seductive, but still with some of the exotic influence of North Africa. The dark and bearded Clairin was soon a welcome guest of the hostesses of the Paris salons and at some time prior to 1875 made Sarah's acquaintance. Many biographers have assumed he was her lover but there is no correspondence or other evidence to support this, and a strong belief handed down in the Pozzi and Bourdet families that he was not. At the probable time of their first meeting, Bernhardt would still have been involved with Mounet-Sully, and certainly with Samuel Pozzi. Madame Pierre Berton, who wrote a Bernhardt biography on the strength of her own husband's supposed affair with Bernhardt, claimed that Clairin had a brief fling

with Bernhardt in 1879, after which the two became firm friends. Since Sarah and Samuel ended their sexual relationship in the fall of 1878, it is possible that she may have turned her attention to Clairin. However, Schlumberger, a regular attender in every salon in Paris, knew Clairin well and never mentioned an affair. "At Sarh Bernhardt's house," he wrote, "I came across Georges Clairin, almost as celebrated as his friend and travel companion Henri Regnault had been. Clairin was the most amiable of companions, without great talent perhaps but loved by all and known by all as well for his great fidelity."

Whatever their initial relationship, Clairin and Sarah became irretrievably linked when in 1876 Clairin painted what is still the most famous portrait of Bernhardt, now in the gallery of the Petit Palais in Paris.<sup>(3)</sup> He is widely noted as having declared to a friend that on his first sight of Bernhardt he had found his new muse: "It used to be absinthe, now it's Sarah!" Clairin's portrait is stunning; the beautiful seductress stares out from the canvas, her sinewy body clad in a form-fitting dressing peignoir as she reclines on a chaise longue covered in red velvet that has definite echoes of the harem. A final touch is the Russian wolfhound at her feet. One shapely ankle is covered in blue stocking and peeks out from the folds of her dressing gown. It was Clairin, too, who accompanied Bernhardt on her flight in a hot-air balloon, painted in gold letters, across the skies above Paris at the time of the 1878 Paris Exposition.

Pozzi may have met Clairin through friends who socialized with him in the duty room of the Charité hospital in 1873; certainly the two were friends by 1875, and remained so until Pozzi's death. Clairin was one of the most frequent visitors to the Pozzi homes in both the Place Vendôme and the Avenue d'Iéna as well as being a beneficiary of Samuel's patronage. Soon after the move to the Place Vendôme, Pozzi invited Clairin for a two week stay in the house while the family were on vacation. Clairin was commissioned to paint a ceiling and wall murals and he preserved his memories of this stay in a series of notes and drawings that he left for Samuel, reproduced at the end of this chapter. Later Pozzi would commission a series of works for the new Broca hospital that starred Bernhardt as the model for the central figure of 'Health'.

Like many of Clairin's friends, Sarah and Samuel called him by the pet name "Jojotte"; he in turn nicknamed her "Dame Jolie". He was constant in his attention to her in her later years, particularly at the time of the amputation of her leg in 1915; many letters survive from this time in which he details her suffering to Pozzi, who was caring for her. She in turn was unswerving in her devotion to him, and when he died in 1919 it was in her house at Belle-Île.

Bernhardt's sculpting may have had its detractors but she was in fact a serious artist, studying hard, working to improve her technique and receiving commissions. One of those who helped her in this regard was the artist Gustave Doré, known principally for engravings in wood and steel and book illustrations, including some for elegant editions of the works of Cervantes, Rabelais, Byron and Balzac. Like many of the men Bernhardt knew or worked with, he has been designated as her lover, although no correspondence exists to support this supposition. Certainly though he was a friend of Pozzi as well as of Bernhardt.

Doré was a child of poverty, a small man with the face of a child and a body as muscular as a common laborer. He never set foot inside any one of Paris's prestigious art academies and lacked the façade of gentility that accompanied a formal education. His family came from Alsatian peasant stock and spoke French with the Germanic inflections of Strasbourg natives. Despite every obstacle in his path, Gustave Doré exploded onto the Parisian art scene at the age of fifteen when he strode into publisher Charles Philipon's office, sketches in hand and demanded an audience. Dubbed the 'boy genius' by Theophile Gautier, by sixteen Doré was the highest paid illustrator in France. Doré's celebrity opened doors that remained closed to those of lesser talent. He became a sought-after guest at the salons and a frequent visitor at the spacious atelier of photographer Félix Nadar.

Doré met Bernhardt, and through her Pozzi, before the war of 1870, and made a charming portrait of her at the time she was at the Odéon. When after the war he became one of Bernhardt's art teachers, he found the Doré/Bernhardt connection to be mutually advantageous and both used the notoriety of the other to their advantage – Doré had relationships with divas Adelina Patti and Christine Nilsson. Bernhardt was able to finagle a sculpting commission from architect Charles Garnier by persuading Doré to sculpt a companion piece to her own work. Even famed chef, Auguste Escoffier, got into the act. He met Bernhardt at Doré's Rue Bayard studio and catered for small dinners for the artist from his restaurant kitchen, preparing in particular a dish of veal with noodles, served with foie gras and embellished with thinly sliced truffles, that he knew the actress was particularly fond of.

Following Régine's death, while Sarah was much supported by Pozzi, she was also helped by Clairin and Doré, who took her on a sketching trip to the country, where she also stayed for some time to recover from anemia. The group continued to be close friends for the ensuing ten years; tragically Doré died from a massive stroke in 1883 at the age of fifty one, heartbroken over the death of his own mother.



A little surprising at first sight is the very strong friendship that Pozzi enjoyed with the homosexual aesthete and poet Count Robert de Montesquiou. Largely forgotten now in France and (apart from his portrait by Whistler in New York's Frick Gallery) even more so in the English-speaking world, where his poetry has been called "untranslatable", Montesquiou was a central figure in the Paris high society of his time. From his late teens he was a dandy, an arbiter of taste and a sharp critic of art and literature, a welcome guest in all the salons and a favorite of their hostesses, but also a favorite of many writers and painters and especially of Proust, who used him for the character of Baron de Charlus in *Remembrance of Things Past*.

Probably Pozzi met Montesquiou through Leconte de Lisle, and their friendship would have been cemented by their mutual regard for Bernhardt. Certainly the two were on close terms by 1880 and for three decades Montesquiou was one of the most frequent guests at the Pozzi home; from 1885 the man who became his most adored partner, Gabriel de Yturri, also accompanied him. Montesquiou also engaged in a prolific correspondence with Pozzi. Some of this was of a professional nature, since Samuel was Robert's doctor as well as his friend. But much of it was both personal and highly cerebral, written using references and a kind of code known only to the two of them; Montesquiou's letters were in a unique and flowery hand that matched their contents. Two examples of Samuel's messages to Robert in 1884:

"Can you dine on Thursday at Ledoyen's? I will be there... Can you wait until the 8<sup>th</sup> for your consultation, privileged, psychological etcetc, from 2pm. You make the choice. S. Pozzi."

"My dear sick friend, I completely mistook the date. Please excuse me. I can't come tomorrow or Tuesday or Wednesday, not being free. As I really want to see you and to give you my wisest counsel (which will put up my stocks in your eyes!) can you perhaps come and pass fifteen minutes with me on Tuesday between 2 and 4? You come directly into the salon reserved for those who don't have to wait, having already a high enough opinion of me that they don't require this treatment, I will make sure that the painting by Bayard and the majority of the lamps have been put away, so that you don't have to suffer seeing them. Best wishes. S. Pozzi."

Montesquiou wrote of Pozzi after his death: "Never have I met a man so seductive, never did I see him when he was not smiling, affable, incomparably himself. What an example for someone as

devoted as myself to the aristocratic pursuit of scorning, mocking everything, to see the ever-present smile of a being who made such good use of it and would take it to the grave, with an art of pleasing that nobody could exercise like he did!”

Samuel was beautiful, which attracted Montesquiou as it had attracted Sarah; Montesquiou loved passionately everything and everyone beautiful. Samuel was intelligent, witty and charming – all characteristics that Montesquiou admired. He was also unequivocally heterosexual, and a doctor – both of which intrigued Montesquiou.

In 1884, Samuel and Robert took a trip to London together, in company with the Prince de Polignac , a worldly and sophisticated man ten years Robert’s senior, and probably involved in a liaison with him at the time (this was the year prior to Montesquiou’s first meeting with Yturri). Pozzi seems to have taken it all in his stride. The three underwent extensive retail therapy in Jermyn and Bond Streets and Savile Row; Robert was particularly taken by Liberty’s grand store, by William Morris fabrics and wallpapers and by the paintings of the Pre-Raphaélites. Through Polignac, he and Pozzi were introduced to Whistler and to Henry James, with whom they dined at the Reform Club. The whole trip was a wild success.

Pozzi was also on hand when in 1897 Montesquiou fought a duel with writer Henri de Régnier, following a tiff at a party in which his sexuality was allegedly referred to slightly. Swords were the weapon of choice; Montesquiou received a minor wound to his hand, and treated by Pozzi. “I have a magnificent doctor, the most handsome of all, our dear and great Pozzi,” Montesquiou told the press. The following day he was very chuffed to read a report by Marcel Proust on the duel that appeared on the front page of *Figaro*, in which he was described as “the wittiest man I ever knew, with a princely air like no-one else.”

In 1905, Yturri became ill with the complications of diabetes and came under Pozzi’s care. In the days before the discovery of insulin, such care could only be palliative, and Montesquiou’s longtime partner slowly succumbed. His last words to Robert were: “I thank you for having made known to me those beautiful things which have so much charmed me.” Pozzi comforted his friend as well as he could, writing: “My dear friend, I know that you have suffered a great loss in losing this faithful companion from your life. I must tell you again of my very deep sympathy for you, your devoted Pozzi.”

Montesquiou from the moment of meeting Bernhardt adored her. They recited poetry together, dressed up in costumes, laughed and joked together for hours. On just one occasion Bernhardt is said to have made a sexual advance to Robert, which led to them rolling about together, and allegedly to his vomiting for the following 24 hours; whatever the truth of this story, they remained lifelong friends. Like all her friends, he was often a guest at her dinners and *soirées*, and at Belle-Île in Brittany. He and Pozzi were also invitees to the huge fiftieth birthday celebration given in Sarah's honor in 1896, when, following lunch at the Grand Hotel opposite the Opéra, the actress regaled her guests with fragments from *Phaedra* and the playwright Edmond Rostand read a sonnet he had composed for the occasion. *Le Tout Paris* applauded and covered the star and the stage with flowers.

Being friends with Sarah could also bring its obligations. On several occasions she asked Pozzi for loans, as she clearly did other friends. While she had commanded a fitting salary at the Comédie Française, after leaving the national theater in 1880 she managed her own company and tours. While she could demand high fees, her running costs and personal extravagances meant that money simply slipped through her fingers – throughout her life she veered from debt to wealth and debt again in the space of weeks.

In 1910 she wrote to Pozzi: "My Doctor God your friend is in a slump for a few days only. Will you lend me a thousand francs. In eight days I will return them to you. Tenderly, your Sarah. 4<sup>th</sup> March 1910."

By July the situation had obviously much improved. "My Doctor God, I am in Paris and certainly won't leave during the summer. I would really like to see you. Give me a day when you can come and dine with me.. Make it a day close to today so that I can have the pleasure of seeing you soon. Devotedly yours, Sarah." Then in August: "My Doctor God, my son has asked me to send you tickets. I think you'll be present at a good performance. I love you, Sarah."

A little later that month she wrote: "Doctor God, I'm asking you for an early appointment for my first cousin Madame Vernet who I believe has need of your science. All my grateful heart, Sarah."

And in December: “Doctor God I would be very happy to have you for supper on Thursday evening for the party for my son Maurice, you know how much I love to have you there. Devotedly, Sarah.”

Clearly there was much given and much received between them.

## ***Dr Pozzi and the art of vaginal examination***

*Samuel loved women, loved them passionately, like everything which is beautiful... ..he devoted his life to them.*

*Claude Vanderpooten, 1993*

Doctor Pozzi, it is clear, was often not 'at home' but instead was hard at work. As his reputation grew as one of the most accomplished surgeons in Paris, he was more and more in demand in the operating room and for consultations. While mostly performing gynecologic surgeries, he maintained an interest in general abdominal surgery, and was responsible, among other feats, for the first successful gastroenterotomy in France, in 1889. This is an operation in which part of the stomach is removed, usually because of cancer, and the remaining part re-connected to the intestine so that normal digestive function can continue. This surgery offered, for the first time, the possibility of a cure for cancer of the stomach and bowel.

Pozzi's medical training had instilled in him the understanding that medicine is both an art and a science. His very detailed knowledge of human anatomy led him to realize that in order to practice gynecology effectively it was necessary, first, to take a thorough history from the woman, and then to make an accurate diagnosis, and that this diagnosis depended on the inspection and physical examination of the female genital organs. He also understood that social mores meant that women in the nineteenth century (and indeed at most times in history) were understandably reluctant to discuss 'women's problems' with male physicians and even more reluctant to undergo intimate examinations. Until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century there were few women specialist gynecologists anywhere in the world. Madeleine Brès had received her degree from the Paris Faculty of Medicine in 1882 but she did not specialize in gynecology. There were several women externs and interns on Pozzi's gynecology service at the Lourcine-Pascal from 1883 onwards; none however chose to continue on and specialize in the discipline. For a large part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century most gynecologists in Europe and North America were male. Not all of them were as sympathetic to the concerns of their women patients as was Pozzi.

A full gynecological examination in clinical practice today involves examination of the abdomen, inspection of the vagina and cervix using a speculum, and bi-manual examination with one hand of the physician on the woman's lower abdomen and two fingers of the other hand placed within the vagina, palpating the uterus, fallopian tubes and ovaries of the woman so that these are outlined between the two hands. That we now use these methods universally is in large part due to the writings and teaching of nineteenth century French physicians, of whom the most important was Samuel Pozzi. However his contribution was not the invention of radical new methods of examination. It was rather the development and re-introduction of techniques that had been around for nearly 2000 years but had fallen out of favor.

Through much of the nineteenth century argument raged between French and English-speaking physicians over whether speculum or digital examination was most appropriate for the diagnosis of diseases of the female reproductive system, and there continued to be some who questioned whether examination was needed at all. Some British surgeons took the view that in France the vaginal speculum was used with a "pertinacity" for which there was no medical reason, one writing of its use: "We are told that in France there is quite a furore in its favour, and that ladies of rank write notes to their surgeon requesting him to call and bring his speculum. ...yet I trust, and I cannot help believing, that some time will elapse before *our* wives and daughters will distinguish themselves in this free and easy style." American physician Charles Meigs, who in 1854 published a handsome monograph entitled *Acute and chronic disease of the neck of the uterus*, demonstrated a common attitude of male physicians towards their women patients when he warned that vaginal examination might induce "a lax moral sense in the patient" and should not be performed "except out of some direful necessity to the woman." In complete contrast and with great good sense, Pozzi taught his students and interns of the need to put women at ease before embarking on any kind of gynecologic consultation. Then once the history had been fully obtained, something he believed to be essential to the proper practice of medicine, a physical examination should be performed. Pozzi advocated use of bi-manual examination, which he described as "the most admirable method of investigation that perhaps exists in gynecology," followed by the passage of the speculum, citing "the great services this instrument has rendered to gynecology." By carrying out a gynecologic consultation in this way Pozzi demonstrated that a very good idea of the diagnosis of the woman's problem could be obtained; that he was correct is borne out by the fact that these are still the techniques used in gynecologic practice today.

The vaginal speculum was known in ancient Rome – a metal instrument with three blades was found in the ashes of Pompeii. This was quite sophisticated, with a mechanism that enabled the blades to be inserted into the vagina of the patient and then separated to give a good view of the woman's cervix.

During the Middle Ages, physicians of the Arabic schools of medicine described speculums made of wood and consisting of two blades. The eminent 16<sup>th</sup> century French surgeon Ambroise Paré developed a version made of pewter with an adjustable screw to open the blades, but for several hundred years following Paré the vaginal speculum was not widely used in Europe. It was French physician Joseph Récamier who at the beginning of the nineteenth century re-introduced the speculum to practice, experimenting with a number of models including some made of ebony, which was more comfortable for women than cold metal, and varying the number of blades and their width. By the time Pozzi commenced practice there were in use several types of speculum along the lines of Récamier's.

There was also the Sims' speculum, based on the original design of the controversial American physician James Marion Sims, who hit on the idea of bending a pewter spoon to make a single-bladed instrument. The Sims speculum, which like versions of the Récamier is still widely used in practice today, is meant specifically for looking at the front wall of the vagina, rather than at the cervix, so that the condition of fistula between the bladder and the vagina can be diagnosed. Sims spent three years in France, from 1863 to 1866, as surgeon to the Empress Eugénie, who developed such a fistula following a long labor and the difficult birth of her only child, Prince Napoléon Eugène, in 1856. Sims operated on her several times, using ether anesthesia. This surgery pre-dated Listerism and history does not record how successful it was. Very possibly Sims advised the Empress to avoid conjugal relations following the surgery; certainly she had no further pregnancies and spent much time endowing institutions for the education of young Catholic women and other good works, while the Emperor was renowned for the number of his affairs. During the war of 1870, Sims spent time as a military surgeon attached to the French forces but there is no contemporary record of his meeting Pozzi, who was at the time a very junior doctor. Sims returned to America following the war and died there in 1883 so Pozzi never met him once his own career was established, although he would have been very familiar with the techniques Sims had developed for the treatment of fistula.

Throughout the 1880s, as Pozzi perfected his surgical skills and set up "the first gynecological service in Paris", he was gathering together material and observations on the practice of this new discipline, gynecology. Each year there were visits to Germany, Austria and Britain for conferences and to observe the surgical techniques of others; there were publications in surgical journals and a constant exchange of letters between Pozzi and his colleagues. Yet there existed no unifying and up-to-date textbook of gynecology. "The great treatises of surgery are all in German," wrote Pozzi in 1889, "and there is nothing devoted exclusively to gynecology." Quietly, an idea had been growing in his mind

– he would write such a book, containing everything known up to that point about the diagnosis and treatment of the diseases of women.

It would be impossible to do this in Paris – the demands of patients, invitations to dinner, the possibility of theater visits, *soireés* with friends, would be constantly present. He would need to practice what he had done as a student – and which had so upset Sarah – lock himself away and concentrate on nothing but the work. He could set himself up in Bergerac, La Graulet was still the family home, but even there he would find the distractions of the farm. It was Thérèse who came up with the suggestion of Montpellier, where her mother had a house. Samuel would be assured of absolute and undisturbed tranquillity, while a household of servants would look after his every need. So in 1888 and 1889, Samuel packed several trunks with the mountain of documents he had amassed and headed for Montpellier to spend six months.

Today, medical textbooks are usually written by a number of physicians, each a specialist in a particular area, and the whole work is overseen by an editor. In 1888, Samuel Pozzi decided to do it all himself. Day and night he wrote with pen and ink, cut and pasted in an era when that meant literally cutting with scissors and pasting with glue, and appended detailed references to every statement he made. By the end of 1889 he had more than 1100 pages of precise but fluent text completed – a Tolstoyan achievement.

*Traité de gynécologie clinique et opératoire* was published in Paris in 1890 in two volumes. A second edition appeared in 1892, by which time the work had been translated into English as *Treatise on Clinical and Operative Gynaecology*, as well as into German, Russian, Italian and Spanish. This superb work, still accessible in many European and American libraries, displays Pozzi's meticulous attention to scientific detail and the breadth of his knowledge in his chosen field. In it Pozzi also pays appropriate homage to previous pioneers of abdominal and gynecological surgery on both sides of the Atlantic.

The treatise commences with an extensive discussion of the principles of surgical asepsis and anesthesia and deals thoroughly with anatomy, before turning to surgical techniques and post-operative management. The text is enhanced by more than 500 exquisitely hand-drawn diagrams, the majority based on Pozzi's own drawings of specimens and operations. Pozzi's *Treatise* rapidly



became the pre-eminent text of gynecology of its time and remained so up until the 1930s, two decades after its author's death.

Most interesting to the non-gynecologist is the tone Pozzi adopts in writing the *Treatise*. Respectful and informative, it claims the rightful place of women and women's particular health needs in the panoply of medical specialties. He acknowledges the importance of listening carefully to the history provided by each woman of her particular problem. "Certainly," he writes, "while I would not go so far as to say that one can make a diagnosis on the basis of history alone, one can definitely get a very good idea of the possibilities with precise questioning about particular symptoms." For vaginal examinations, the physician should thoroughly wash his hands in an antiseptic solution (rubber gloves had yet to be popularized). If speculums made of metal were to be used they should be warmed with sterilized water, for the woman's comfort. The most appropriate position and speculum should be selected for the particular case. "It is important that the woman understands the nature of any vaginal examination and its purpose, and that her modesty is preserved," he wrote. For this reason, during bimanual examination "eye contact with the woman should be avoided." Following these principles, the physician will achieve an examination "of the highest rank" providing very accurate clues as to the diagnosis.

In addition to dealing with all known gynecological maladies, Pozzi makes several references in the *Treatise* to therapeutic abortion, performed when there was a serious threat to the woman's life if the pregnancy continued. Abortion was illegal in France at the time but there was a clear recognition among some medical practitioners that there were situations in which it could be life-saving for the woman, and Pozzi was one of these. His opinions on the possibility of abortion for social or economic reasons seem to have been conservative. At one stage his friend, the novelist Paul Hervieu, suggested that eventually abortion might be decriminalized in France. "I simply put forward the idea that abortion might cease to be a crime, and that the family doctor might proceed uncontroversially with providing the service," he wrote to Pozzi in 1881. "In regard to criminality, it's worth noting that there have been instances where laws have been rescinded; thinking changes, just as certain diseases are wiped out by modern medicine." Pozzi seems to have been unconvinced, although he would undoubtedly have seen the consequences of unsafe illegal abortion on his service at the Broca hospital— women dying or damaged by severe infections or hemorrhage following crude attempts at abortion by untrained practitioners. It would be more than ninety years before Hervieu's prediction came to pass in France.

The *Treatise* was widely admired throughout Europe and North America, something it well deserved. “The Bible of French gynecology!” exclaimed one reviewer. It also served another purpose: reinforcing Pozzi’s determination to establish gynecology as an important medical discipline in its own right. He was still arguing with the Faculty of Medicine about his wish to establish a course and a Chair of Gynecology. The course he gave free for students and interns every year was still organized entirely by himself, although the large numbers attending showed clearly that it was considered valuable by young doctors. It must also be said that the publication of the *Treatise* did no harm to his private practice or to his reputation in Paris. In the Place Vendôme the staff was obliged to install extra chairs in the waiting room.

While he lived during the day with one group of women – his patients – Samuel Pozzi lived by night with quite a different group – the actresses, artists, writers and hostesses of salons who were his friends. Pozzi’s French biographer, Claude Vanderpooten, himself a gynecologist, wrote in 1993 that: “Samuel loved women, loved them passionately, like everything which is beautiful...blonde or dark, slender or voluptuous ...he devoted his life to them.” As well as Bernhardt, Vanderpooten singled out Judith Gautier, Geneviève Straus and actresses Réjane and Eve Lavallière as women who probably were initially lovers, and later close friends of Samuel. In another category altogether are poet Louise Ackermann, who though 33 years his senior dedicated an intellectually erotic poem, *A Man*, to him, and journalists Séverine and Augustine Bulteau, with both of whom he had long and close friendships; in none of these cases were the relationships ever sexual in nature. Finally, there was Emma Fischhof, his most constant companion in his later years, whom he wished to marry, but could not, as Thérèse consistently refused a divorce.

While Samuel’s introduction to Thérèse had been set up for him by Henri Cazalis, this was in no sense an arranged marriage – he had at the time of their meeting, and for several years afterwards, been very much in love with her. But he was not in love with her mother, who very soon became a constant presence in the young couple’s household. In 1881 he wrote to Cazalis: “From the day on which my wife coldly balanced me against her mother my love has been mortally wounded...Ah, if only Thérèse loved me. But she simply cherishes me, and she also greatly cherishes her mother, whom she knew for twenty years before she knew me.” This was written just before Samuel departed on a journey of several weeks to Tunisia, partly on an inspection of the medical services of the French Army but also to see the ruins of Carthage – he was developing an interest in ancient history and antiquities that was soon to become a major passion. This was the first of many journeys that he would make without Thérèse.

However when he returned to Paris it was to find his wife pregnant, and for much of 1882 he was solicitous and caring towards her. Their daughter Catherine, who was to become wellknown in her own right as a poet and diarist, was born at home on 30<sup>th</sup> July of that year, delivered by Pozzi's colleague Adolphe Pinard. Throughout her childhood she would have a complicated relationship with her father. As the distance between Samuel and Thérèse grew, Catherine found herself having to take sides – and while she adored and admired her father, the side she took was usually that of her mother and grandmother. Samuel had agreed that his children would be brought up as Catholics; Thérèse and especially Marie-Félicie were practicing Catholics, and her grandmother was a strong influence on Catherine in her early years. This was less the case for Catherine's brothers, Jean, who arrived in 1884, and Jacques, the son born in 1896 when Samuel was 50 and Thérèse 40. Also impacting on the Pozzi marital relationship was the fact that although Pozzi was in demand as a surgeon and could charge private patients ample fees, he very much relied on the enormous wealth brought by Thérèse to the marriage for his purchases of paintings, furniture, sculpture and antiquities – purchases which gradually filled the Place Vendôme apartment and enhanced his reputation as a serious collector. This reality was undoubtedly alluded to frequently by his mother-in-law, and must have further inflamed the situation.

By the time of Jacques' birth, life 'at home' had settled irrevocably into a pattern of frequent reproaches from the two women, and irritability and occasional bursts of anger from Samuel. Yet outwardly the Pozzis continued their social rounds; the façade was intact. All this weighed heavily on their children, but particularly on Catherine.

Catherine Pozzi drew on her remembrance of her childhood in her 1927 novella *Agnes*, a work recently republished, and much embellished with a preface by Professor Lawrence Joseph, who explains: "The family structure of *Agnes* is also that of Catherine Pozzi. Like Count Vincent (*Agnes*'s father in the novella), the seductive Doctor Samuel Pozzi, eminent surgeon, senator, collector, poet and traveler, led a life independent of his family, who separately occupied two floors of an elegant apartment building in the Avenue d'Iéna. Neglected by her father, Catherine feels that this was also true of her relations with her mother – any image of a maternal figure is completely absent from *Agnes*. Looking back, it is the figure of her grandmother who stands out most forcefully. But for Catherine, the presence of her grandmother in the Avenue d'Iéna household did not compensate for the absence created by the social whirl in which her parents lived."

In *Agnes*, Catherine Pozzi describes her brief encounters with her father at family meals in the Avenue d'Iéna. "Papa's work had been showered with honors. But Grandmother and I had no part in this life of his; it all took place two floors below us. Fifty six steps below us...Down there was a country covered with rich carpets, filled with books, enlivened by all sorts of objects and curiosities... but as inaccessible to us as the Sun. Never did any of the famous people he met with come upstairs, climb the fifty six steps, ring at our door. But when he came to have Sunday lunch I would hear the names of these people who called him on the telephone. His face would light up when the phone was brought to the table and he would speak into the receiver: 'Ah! It's you, my dear friend!'"

In perhaps the most telling scene of the story, Agnes loses her Catholic faith, as Catherine did. Agnes is instructed by her grandmother to get herself ready to go to confession at the fashionable Church of the Madeleine, exactly as Catherine had once been.

Agnes replies: "I'm not going. I don't want to take communion. I have religious doubts." She is filled with anxiety as she says this, fearing that the shock to her grandmother may bring on some crisis causing her death. But the elderly lady simply responds: "Put on your blue outfit, my dear, that suits you best."

At lunch that day, Agnes's grandmother brings up the problem with the Count, and Agnes, filled with passion, tries to articulate her arguments against the dogma and intransigence of the Church. However her father, preoccupied throughout the meal with his own affairs, leaves the table and departs the room, pausing only briefly to tell his daughter: "Don't upset your grandmother, Agnes, go to confession, go to communion, go on, there's still a heaven that your heart can find."

Given his domestic arrangements, it seems inevitable that during the later 1880s and early 1890s Samuel, like most Frenchmen of his time and social standing, conducted affairs and kept mistresses on a short-term basis, although no details remain either in the journal he kept intermittently or in letters. Certainly he made many more journeys alone— to other parts of Europe and to North America — and who he may have met abroad is open to speculation. However at some time in the early 1890s he met Madame Emma Fischhof, and his life took on a new, and happier, turn. She was to hold his heart in her hands for more than twenty-four years.

Emma, who was neither actress, painter or society hostess, remains an enigma. After Pozzi's death, on instructions from Thérèse, Jean Pozzi burned the letters she had written to Samuel, correspondence that may have shed light on a long-standing relationship of great intensity. Nor have any of the letters he wrote to her remained in the possession of her descendants still living in Paris.

She was born Emma Sedelmeyer, the daughter of Charles Sedelmeyer, well-known as an art dealer and gallery owner in nineteenth century Paris. The Jewish Sedelmeyer, born in Vienna in 1837, was a natural showman who launched the international careers of a number of artists. With a flawless eye for trends across Europe, and fluency in French, German, Hungarian, English and Italian, Sedelmeyer first moved among the élite of Vienna, going from estate sale to drawing room, compiling several collections, but his ambitions went far beyond Austria.

In the nineteenth century, Paris was the capital of the art world and despite his Jewish roots and status as an outsider, the ambitious Sedelmeyer determined to conquer the City of Light. He made forays into the French art scene for several years, finally settling in Paris in the 1870s in Montmartre, which was by then home to increasing numbers of aspiring artists. He wed Theresia Brunner who provided him with six daughters, of whom Emma was the fourth. As Sedelmeyer's career prospered, he was able to open a smart gallery in a beautiful *hôtel particulier* on the rue de La Rochefoucauld, and he became known as an art-marketing genius who directed sensational sales of works from masters like Rembrandt as well as newcomers like Sargent. He was a consummate showman whose exhibitions became theatrical events. This sort of stage-management was the best kind of publicity possible for an artist trying to break into the sophisticated Paris art world.

Sedelmeyer's daughters, including Emma, worked with him and were schooled in appraising fine art. In 1885, Emma married Eugène Fischhof, who worked for her father and was also a dedicated horse breeder. Fischhof owned the prize winning stallion, Dandolo, a legend in French racing in the early 1900s.

Samuel was a friend of Sedelmeyer's and often visited the gallery, so he may have encountered Emma earlier than 1894, but he certainly met her in that year during a Sedelmeyer showing of the works of English landscapist, Joseph Mallord William Turner. Emma was 32 and the mother of three children

including one born in New York; Samuel was 48, with children aged 12 and 10. It was probably Emma who sold Samuel the illustrated manuscript of Byron's *Pilgrimage of Childe Harold*, a work he greatly treasured. Emma was by all reports tall, slim, darkly beautiful and a shrewd judge of painting, sculpture and old manuscripts, and she captivated Samuel.

She lived with her husband and children in the rue Dumont d'Urville, close to the apartment on the Avenue d'Iéna where the Pozzi family moved in 1899. While it is likely that Emma and Samuel met frequently in Paris, no documents survive to support this. She did however accompany him on numerous trips to Italy, Spain, Germany and the Near East and shared hotel rooms with him. At first the two were discreet but as the years passed, and Samuel and Thérèse's marital woes became more pronounced, and Thérèse continued to refuse Samuel a divorce, he and Emma appeared more frequently abroad in public, at tourist sites and at the opera and theaters where Emma met Samuel's many friends. Emma was the perfect travel companion for Samuel – though in France she lived between a luxurious Paris apartment and a country chateau, abroad she was happy to sleep in trains, cope in doubtful hotels without a personal maid and walk for hours through the rain, all the while enthralled by everything she saw and did with her lover. She brought her deep knowledge of painting and sculpture to the museums and classical sites of Europe and the Near East, was widely read, and enjoyed concerts and chamber music. This was in contrast to Thérèse who could not travel without a retinue of servants and who did not enjoy moving constantly from place to place.

In 1899, Emma and Samuel visited Venice where in the convent of the tiny island of Saint Lazzaro, they sealed their union with the blessing of an elderly Armenian priest, Father Mimikian, despite Samuel's avowed atheism. On at least twelve occasions from 1900 onwards, the two kept diaries of their travels in small bound books of rose-colored paper, which remarkably have been preserved in the Pozzi archives, having escaped the flames lit by Jean Pozzi. In 1900 they went to Germany and Austria, then to Venice again for a further benediction from Father Mimikian. Later trips were to Spain, Sicily, Greece, Turkey and North Africa. Two different hands have written the diaries together – mostly there is the calm flowing cursive of Emma, interspersed with the more nervous irregular longhand of Samuel. Occasionally a third hand appears – direct, rounded, soft. It belongs to a Samuel on holidays, liberated for a while and relaxed. The diaries, labeled 'Inimitable Voyages' simply describe where the two have been and what they saw in the way of sights, museums, galleries and performances. The couple also recorded the many purchases they made – of antique coins and objects, paintings, and on one occasion a Tiepolo ceiling which Samuel had installed in the Avenue d'Iéna apartment. His collection of ancient coins became one of the most admired in Europe. But there are few hints in the diaries of the personal relationship behind the travels, although in 1908 Emma wrote

of Venice: “Here we are back again in our dear Venice. Indispensable to our love, this visit which has taken place every year now gives us the maximum number of delightful experiences and sensations. Our first stop is always the Armenian convent on Saint Lazzarro, this is our pilgrimage of love. This evening, despite the heat, we went for a while to the Goldoni Theater, but we didn’t stay long, having so many other things to do.”

Clearly Emma’s husband was acquiescent to his wife’s travels, and no doubt had romantic interests of his own. Eugène Fischhof’s main interest continued to be horse-racing. Claude Vanderpooten notes that when on the afternoon of Easter Sunday of 1908, Monsieur Fischhof was at the races at Auteuil in Paris, happily receiving the trophy for the President of the Republic’s Prize following another epic run by Dandolo, he was well aware that his wife Emma was in Majorca with Samuel Pozzi. Apparently Eugène would have been willing to divorce Emma; the block to marriage between the two was Thérèse.

Thérèse became pregnant for the third time in 1896, and gave birth to Jacques, but this in no way improved the relationship between herself and Samuel. However it took until 1906 for her to realize that her husband was irretrievably lost to her. She remained throughout this time an excellent mistress of her household and an impeccable hostess, a woman still much admired in Parisian society although the state of the Pozzi marriage and Samuel’s relationship with Emma had become widely known. The Pozzis met together only to discuss family matters, and regrettably, to argue— in front of the servants, and in front of their children and of Thérèse’s mother, who continued to live with her daughter. By 1906 Catherine was 24, Jean 22 and beginning what would be a stellar career as a diplomat. Jacques was just ten years old. Thérèse was well aware of Emma’s identity and of the travels abroad. After a further argument that year, Samuel departed once more with Emma without hiding his purpose at all — he and Emma traveled again to Venice, again received the blessing of Father Mimikian, then went on to Bayreuth where they openly attended the opera with several Parisian friends including Augustine Bulteau. Thérèse demanded a separation, and Samuel agreed. He would remain in the Avenue d’Iéna apartment and consulting rooms while paying rent to Thérèse, who was the sole owner of the property. Interestingly it appears that Emma did not visit him there even after his separation from his wife. In a letter she wrote to Jean Pozzi after Samuel’s death, she stated that she had only ever been to the Avenue d’Iéna apartment once.

Thérèse moved herself, her mother and her children to a new apartment on the Avenue Hoche, and made financial arrangements that reduced Samuel’s income. Jacques was sent to boarding school — at

the *École Alsacienne* in the 6<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement*. Thérèse promised Samuel that she would leave him undisturbed. Surprisingly, once the couple had parted, their relationship seemed to improve. Samuel went quite often to the Avenue Hoche to see his children and found Thérèse “very amiable,” according to his grandson Claude Bourdet, who also remembered trips with his mother to La Graulet where both Thérèse and Samuel were present. There would never however be any change in her refusal to give him a divorce.

Catherine was married in 1909, at the age of 27, to Edouard Bourdet, who was then aged 22. Bourdet went on to become a highly-regarded playwright; his 1930s comedies of manners and morals were as well-known in the United States as in Europe. However this marriage was also unhappy, the couple soon separated and in 1920 Catherine met the poet Paul Valéry, with whom she had a turbulent eight-year relationship.

The only child of Catherine and Edouard, Claude Bourdet, was born later in 1909. Bernhardt wrote to Pozzi: “Doctor God, every happiness that could come to you beats in my heart, that wishes Claude to be illuminated by the rays of his father’s brilliance and his mother’s. I love you deeply Doctor God, Sarah.” Claude grew up with the legend of his famous grandfather, who died when he was not quite nine. Much later, Claude wrote of Samuel that he was “both a great seducer and a great doctor extraordinarily devoted to his profession and his patients.” There is no suggestion, however, from any French source, that he ever mixed these two aspects of his life. Recent publications in the US have suggested that Pozzi was a cold libertine who took advantage of his patients’ vulnerability, applying his skills in gynecological examination to the achievement of personal sexual success. These allegations have been made without a shred of evidence being produced. On the contrary, there are hundreds of letters, publications and other documents which demonstrate that Pozzi was held in very high regard by the French medical profession. It is also clear that his social connections were extensive and provided a rich and stimulating environment for the development of his many non-medical interests. While Pozzi led a full and active professional life and a full and active social life, the two were clearly demarcated.



## Chapter Nine

### *Belle Époque Bimbo*

Following the painting of *Doctor Pozzi At Home*, Sargent rapidly became the darling of the Parisian art scene, achieving great success at the Salon of 1882 with two works - *El Jaleo* (Spanish Dance), and *Portrait of Louise Burckhardt*, a portrait which, like that of Pozzi, owed a great deal to his Spanish infatuation. His career continued to burgeon, with several commissions from wealthy and well-placed patrons, until the late Spring of 1884, when he entered a stark portrait of a woman in a seductive black gown into the Salon of that year.

The unveiling of the image of this Créole society wife, her skin a ghostly white and with one glittering shoulder strap falling down her arm, sent the throngs attending the Salon into a tailspin. The ensuing scandal helped end Sargent's Parisian career; the fat commissions dried up and within a few years he relocated permanently to London. It also gave birth to a legend that continues to intrigue all who have seen the portrait at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, where it eventually found a home. In spite of his many successes, no painting by Sargent has engendered such emotion and enduring speculation as the image of Louisiana-born expatriate, Virginie Amélie Gautreau, known to the world as *Madame X*. (1)

We mention this portrait because exhibiting *Madame X* together with *Doctor Pozzi at Home* has become *de rigueur* for curators of Sargent exhibitions throughout the world, a practice which has linked Pozzi's name with that of Madame Gautreau. In 1999, in an article in *Time Magazine*, art critic Robert Hughes, an enthusiastic supporter of the Sargent revival then taking place, trumpeted an assumed liaison between the two when he noted that the curators of the Sargent retrospective at Washington's National Gallery had hung the two portraits together. Hughes stated, erroneously, that both portraits were shown at the 1884 Paris Salon. Not only was *Doctor Pozzi At Home* not at the Salon, it was never on any occasion publicly shown in France. But as a result of the hanging of the two portraits together at several Sargent exhibitons, Pozzi's name has been linked with that of Madame Gautreau so often that allegations of an affair between the two have attained the status of established fact.

A novel and popular history used the supposed affair as centerpieces and the much-heralded *Madame X* Ballet depicted Dr Pozzi as a scoundrel and vile seducer; however, there is no evidence that Samuel Pozzi and Amélie Gautreau ever performed an erotic *pas de deux* in real life. This linking of their names, however, appears to be a large part of the reason for the extensive denigration of Pozzi's reputation in the United States ever since the first public appearance of his portrait at the Hammer Museum in the early 1990s.

In May of 1884, the chestnut trees lining the boulevards of Paris were newly in leaf, while the streets beneath them teemed with a prosperous and smartly-dressed citizenry. The wars, revolutions and financial chaos of the previous decades were largely forgotten, France had again blossomed as an international power and Paris was rightly feted as the cultural capital of Europe.

The first day of May saw the opening of the Salon, the official exhibition of the Académie des Beaux-Arts. This spectacle and the accompanying partying were the last major social events of the Paris season before the summer heat compelled the art-loving classes to abandon the city for the country or the fashionable beaches. The Salon was a huge exhibition with every inch of wall space covered with the work of contemporary European artists. The galleries were packed with *fashionistas* who wanted to see and be seen. The bustle had re-emerged as the fashion of the day and the belles of Paris rouged and powdered themselves with abandon. Perfumed and pomaded dandies donned top hats and frock coats, strutting through the corridors of the Salon like peacocks in mating season. The air was thick with the fumes of varnish and turpentine: the first day of the Salon, the *vernissage*, or 'varnishing', followed immediately upon the hanging of the exhibits, many still damp from the final brush strokes. Sargent arrived early and scanned the crowd, nervously awaiting public reaction to his entry and the arrival of his exotic model. At well over six feet, he would have towered above most of the men in the room.

Interestingly, Pozzi, usually a regular at the Salon, was absent in 1884. He and Thérèse were awaiting the imminent arrival of their second child so perhaps, wanting to be close by, he curtailed social engagements. The bundle of joy that was Jean Pozzi popped out of his mother's womb on May 30, 1884, four weeks after the Salon. Nor did Bernhardt attend the

Salon that year so neither she nor Pozzi witnessed the startling events involving John Singer Sargent and Madame Amélie Gautreau.

Virginie Amélie Avegno, known to her friends as Amélie, was born in the steaming heat of New Orleans in 1859. She was the elder daughter of Marie Virginie de Ternant, who came from a Créole family claiming aristocratic French connections. Marie Virginie hailed from Parlange, a sugar plantation still situated outside Baton Rouge. Amélie's father, Anatole Placide Avegno, was a member of the New Orleans gentry. When the Civil War broke out, Anatole formed his own regiment of Louisiana Zouaves, fighters who adopted the flamboyant regalia and fierce maneuvers of warriors from Algeria and Tunisia: unfortunately for his family, he was a casualty of the Battle of Shiloh in 1862 and succumbed to wounds he received on the field. Anatole's death was followed four years later by another family tragedy when five-year-old Valentine, the younger Avegno daughter, died.

A once-vibrant New Orleans was a devastated shell after the war and the extended Union occupation. When Amélie was eight, her widowed mother abandoned the Crescent City and emigrated to Paris. Amélie and Marie Virginie were accompanied by Julie de Ternant, Marie Virginie's younger sister. Once in Paris, the Avegno family joined a close-knit community of Louisiana expatriates who banded together in an alien and often hostile environment. Louisianans were not warmly embraced by French society. Their colonial accents were considered boorish, their customs and cuisine vulgar and most importantly, they were faced with nagging questions about their pedigrees.

Amélie blossomed into an adolescent, cosseted and undereducated like most daughters of the Créole bourgeoisie. Nature gifted her with a voluptuous body, swan-like neck and the Avegnos' wavy auburn hair which almost, but not quite, compensated for her oversized nose and thin lips, a legacy from her father's family, and a prominent chin inherited from the de Ternant side. Her features had a hard-edged, witchy quality but Amélie concealed her lack of conventional beauty with elaborate make-up and extravagant gowns. Perhaps she aped the elaborate maquillage of the most determined style setter in the French capital, Sarah Bernhardt, for it was Sarah who first brought theatrical make-up to the drawing rooms of Paris. With her pale skin, auburn hair and off-center beauty, Sarah was a prime example of someone who made the best of their unusual looks and convinced the world they were beautiful. Very likely Amélie followed suit.

Marie Virginie had groomed her little girl for the role of trophy bride and her work was rewarded in August of 1878 when nineteen-year-old Amélie wed banker Pierre-Louis Gautreau, who was more than twice her age. She settled into married life and at twenty became the mother of a daughter named Louise. Marie Virginie lived in close proximity to her daughter and took an inordinate interest in the daily life of Amélie and Pierre.

The Gautreau marriage received scant mention in the society pages of the time but by the early 1880s, Amélie's provocative looks had elicited some attention from contemporary gossip columnists. Modern writers have portrayed her as a nineteenth century *femme fatale* and a breath-taking international beauty, but there is little basis for those claims. Amélie Gautreau seems to have been rather vapid and naïve young woman. Despite the biography, ballet and novel based on her life, there is scant evidence that before meeting Sargent she was a celebrity and most importantly, no proof that she had a string of lovers.(2)

For a woman of her class, the wife of a banker, adultery, like divorce, would have been social suicide. There are no *billets-doux*, no incriminating entries in journals hinting at erotic trysts, no juicy tidbits planted in contemporary tabloids. Except for a few snippets in the society columns of the time and Sargent's notations about her to his friends, there is very little actual information about her Parisian existence prior to the Spring of 1884. She hosted no salons, left no witty diaries, was never noted for her gifts in repartee and tellingly, she is virtually unknown in France. Sargent's biographer, the late Stanley Olson, did an exhaustive search on her life and found her largely ignored by the society leaders of the day.

Sargent, however, was captivated by Amélie's unusual looks. He had seen her around town and found her elaborately-contrived appearance intriguing. Amélie dusted her face and body with rice powder, rouged her lips bright carmine then blushed her ear lobes a soft coral. She enhanced her eyebrows with auburn crayons and may have even imitated young women of fashion who accented the veins on their arms with blue crayon. The effect was as artificial as a Kabuki dancer and, at least for Sargent, just as exciting.

Sargent had continued his friendship with Pozzi ever since their meeting in 1881. He had been a frequent guest for lunches and *soirées* at the Place Vendôme; he also often met Pozzi for functions at the Mirlitons, where Pozzi had supported his membership. Thérèse too was a great admirer of

Sargent's work, especially of the portrait of her husband which stood in her drawing room. She was also aware of Sargent's large appetite and happily had her staff cater to it. Sargent, however, was not first introduced to Madame Gautreau by Pozzi or his wife, as has been suggested, since neither Samuel nor Thérèse had yet met her.(3) The introduction was left to Sargent's childhood friend Ben del Castillo, who was distantly related to the Avegno family and moved in her social circle. It was del Castillo who convinced her to pose for him. Amélie must have been thrilled at the prospect of having her portrait displayed at the Salon – certainly she agreed immediately to Sargent's request, although she did not commission the portrait..

Sargent gave himself three weeks to complete the portrait for the Salon of 1883 but it was not to be. With one interruption after another preventing sittings, the picture would have to be exhibited at the 1884 Salon. The work finally began in Paris, then at the end of the season continued at the Gautreaus' Brittany estate, where Amélie was isolated from the busy social scene of the capital. Ever mindful of propriety, she scheduled her sessions with the young painter only when her husband was on the premises. Sargent found her restless and lazy, not really prepared for the ordeal of sitting (or as was the case, standing) for her portrait. Though he made several sketches of her, he could not find the correct pose and she infuriated him with an attitude of boredom that he attributed to self-centeredness. She amused herself by tinkling the notes on her pianoforte, which he found equally maddening. His made numerous sketches of her, most of the time dressed provocatively in a dark evening gown, the famed Madame X dress.

This gown has been copied through the years by many couturiers and versions of it have been worn by celebrities from Nicole Kidman to Beyonce. Even by the time he was painting Pozzi, Sargent was displaying intense interest in what his sitters wore, and he re-arranged clothing, accessories and even jewelry to achieve his vision of the subject. The cut of the Madame X dress appears to have been from an earlier season, probably 1880 when the bustle briefly lost favor and the Princess line sheath became popular.(4) The gowns of 1879 and 1880 were more form-fitting than those of the traditional bustle but soon went out of vogue since they were unflattering to the average woman. The gown's designer is unknown though the name, Felix Poussineau, has been bandied about as the creator. Without sketches or samples of other designs, who knows? Paris in the Belle Époque was awash with seamstresses and fashion houses.

Amélie's evening gown or *toilette de soirée* was created from black velvet with a *decolléage* low enough to display her abundant cleavage. Since the bra had yet to be invented, women relied on

corsets to support their breasts and push them up. The gown was in two pieces, a separate skirt and a bodice or *cuirasse* which would have been boned and lined. Since Amélie's shoulders were bare, she couldn't wear a camisole and the effect was pure seduction. After the Salon, there were salacious inquiries as to whether the hussy in the painting had bothered to don a petticoat but Amélie Gautreau was the most conventional of women. In addition to her corset, she would have worn a simple petticoat and split drawers, the crotchless underpants favored by Victorian women. The final pose showed her standing in profile, the paleness of her skin in contrast to the dark folds of her gown. Sargent continued to make changes until the last moment, slathering on paint and almost ruining the nearly-completed portrait - but finally it was ready.

On the opening day of the Salon of 1884 it was indeed Amélie's portrait that captured the most attention - but what attention! "Detestable! Boring! Curious! Monstrous!" were the comments heard and recorded by critic Louis de Fourcauld at the unveiling of the painting; he was one of the few to review it positively. Patrons were scandalized by the provocative likeness of the banker's wife with skin as pale as a cadaver's, clad in the unadorned black dress with the slender strap slipping from her right shoulder. Even though the portrait was entitled *Madame X* \*\*\*\* everyone knew exactly who she was. (Sargent would later repaint part of the portrait with the strap primly back where it belonged.)

Sargent had made no attempt to soften her features or show her in a rosy light, and the crowd was both transfixed and repulsed. De Fourcauld wrote of women who became "professional beauties" or "idols" - this is exactly what Sargent had depicted. Amélie, dressed to the nines and made-up in her inimitable fashion, arrived at the Salon with her family in tow only to be greeted by jeers and snickers - the poor girl literally fell apart.

The painting continued to be attacked in the days that followed and though Amélie was the target of most of the vitriol, the brouhaha ultimately caused Sargent to decamp to London. Ironically, three years later Sargent's mentor, Carolus-Duran, painted an almost identical portrait, that of Madame Edgar Stern. The Stern painting hangs now in Paris and depicts another voluptuous society matron in a clinging gown, bright crimson rather than black, her dark hair piled high and adorned with the same crescent-shaped comb that Amélie wore. The main difference is that Madame Stern is painted full-faced without the Gothic touches of *Madame X*. No one batted an eyelash when Madame Stern was exhibited and perhaps after her initial disgrace, some Parisian women chose to imitate Amélie.

By placing *Madame X* and *Doctor Pozzi at Home* next to each other at recent Sargent exhibitions, curators have added a *frisson* of scandal for the viewing public. The three years that separate the creation of the two paintings are ignored and hints of a supposed tryst are rife. The handsome doctor appears about to remove his robe in concert with the haughty society girl dropping her gown for an afternoon of *amour*.

The chef who originally cooked up the Pozzi/Gautreau romance was the late Charles Merrill Mount, artist, writer, purveyor of stolen art and archival documents and biographer of Sargent. It was Mount who first wrote of Madame Gautreau's supposed social success. He suggested that Pozzi had an affair with Gautreau, and that he later introduced Sargent to her. Mount published in 1955, thirty years after Sargent's death, and his research was poor. He had no idea that Pozzi was married and he referred to Amélie as "Judith Avegno". It would appear that he confused her with writer Judith Gautier, with whom Pozzi probably had an affair prior to his marriage – they were certainly friends. The similarity of the names 'Gautreau' and 'Gautier' may be the simple explanation of this entire story. Decades later, when Pozzi's portrait was exhibited in the States, Sargent admirers wanted to know more of the "real" Doctor Pozzi and American art critics dusted off their frayed copies of Mount. A romance was born.(5)

The late Stanley Olson used Mount as his source when he mentioned a rumored relationship in his 1989 work, *John Singer Sargent, the Portrait*. He too found no proof beyond conjecture; unfortunately for Pozzi's reputation, others seized on this notion and presented it as fact.

Certainly the Pozzis did become socially acquainted with the Gautreau family. This is confirmed by the seven letters from Amélie Gautreau to Samuel Pozzi that are in the possession of Nicolas Bourdet. In 1884, Thérèse, partway through her second pregnancy, invited Amélie to tea, possibly at the request of Sargent himself. (6) Pozzi made casual mention of the invitation in a note to Montesquiou. The note is preserved in the papers of Montesquiou for 1884 held by the National Library of France. Pozzi tells Montesquiou that Madame Gautreau "of the swan's neck" is invited to take tea at Thérèse's *jour* on "Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup>", adding that "if you do want to see her again, come." The invitation is also extended to the Prince de Polignac. On Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup>, adds Pozzi, there will be another *jour*, to which Montesquiou is also invited, as are other friends well known to him.

Only two Tuesdays in 1884 fell on the 5<sup>th</sup> of the month, one in February and the other in August. Since the Parisian social season ended in June, the tea must have occurred in February, three months prior to the May 1<sup>st</sup> debacle. At the time, Sargent was still working on the portrait and this may have been discussed at the tea, but if it was there is no mention of it between Pozzi and Montesquiou in any of their subsequent correspondence and no reference to Madame Gautreau in any of the Montesquiou letters held by Nicolas Bourdet. In the flesh, with no scintillating conversation or artistic insight, it seems there was little intellectual attraction to the lady. Nor does she figure in letters from other friends Pozzi corresponded with in the early months of 1884, including Bernhardt.

Thérèse would have organized the tea and acted as hostess, but her mother would also have been present at this February *jour*. Madame Loth-Cazalis was living in the Rue St Honoré, attended all her daughter's *jours*, and in particular would have done so when Thérèse was pregnant. Madame Gautreau usually went out in society during the day with her own mother, who was probably also present. Very likely Madame Gautreau and her mother, as convention dictated, had previously called at the Pozzi residence to leave a card. In return they had been invited to tea. Possibly Sargent had mentioned to Pozzi that he was painting Amélie at this time although it would be another three months until the Salon and the lady's fall from grace.

Following the tea, the Pozzi and Gautreau families saw each other socially to some extent. Pozzi, who always got on well with children and was much liked in return, saw Amélie's daughter Louise as a patient on several occasions; in the 1880s he was as much a general physician as he was a surgeon developing the specialty of gynecology. The Gautreaus were one of many upper-class families whom the Pozzis knew in this way both personally and professionally – in no sense were they close friends. It is clear from the note that Pozzi sent him that Montesquiou had seen or met Amélie Gautreau elsewhere, probably only once, and had joked with Samuel about her "swan neck". It is also clear that Samuel attached little importance to her presence at his wife's afternoon tea party. Included among the regular guests at the Tuesday *jours* were many people who interested him much more: Leconte de Lisle, Mounet-Sully, Anatole France, the Prousts, Judith Gautier, Geneviève Straus and of course Sarah herself. It is worth adding also that the guest lists *chez Pozzi* would have been overseen by Thérèse's mother, and Amélie would certainly not have been welcomed in the Place Vendôme if there had been any hint of a liaison between herself and the son-in-law of Marie-Félicie.

Of the seven letters from Amélie to Samuel Pozzi, most of them are also addressed to Thérèse. Four are little more than notes. Only one is dated and shows any depth and this was written from the



country estate of the Gautreau family in Brittany on September 12, 1885, over a year after the drama of the Salon. From their contents and the dates of preservation, most appear to have been penned in Paris that year or later. They are written in a childish hand largely devoid of punctuation, suggesting that Amélie was not too familiar with the written word. Indeed she herself confessed that: “I have not forgotten that I have some of your books excuse me for keeping them I read so slowly.”

A couple of notes are merely acceptances or regrets for invitations and make it clear that the Gautreaus and the Pozzis continued as social acquaintances after the initial tea party. In one note Amélie recommends a mutual friend, Henri Darcel, asking Pozzi to help with a place for him in the Ministry of Fine Arts: “I would be particularly grateful if you could speak to Monsieur and I send with my thanks my best wishes.” In another missive, she praises Samuel’s “sympathetic and attractive personality” then goes on immediately to talk of Louise, whom she is bringing to his consulting rooms in a few days time. A letter from Brittany, slightly longer than the rest and probably written in the summer of 1886, details a recent illness of Louise’s and there are a few trivial references to mutual acquaintances and social functions. She addressed Pozzi as “my dear Doctor”, never as Samuel or Sam as his friends did, including Sarah, and finishes by sending “regards to you and Madame Pozzi from the Gautreau household.”

The longest letter was sent from the Brittany estate possibly that same year or in 1887. Amélie spent much of her time in Brittany in the years following the Salon débacle, and she detailed her loneliness and the melancholy that often overtook her:

“We live in the greatest solitude no-one having come this year to share it I go to bed at 10 pm, I get up at 9, I read I walk on the edge of the sea I think and I dream of my friends I make a few visits in the afternoons and I pass the evenings studying my singing, I would emerge from this solitude if you came to enliven it with your wit and cheered me up with the variety of your conversation. My husband and I only dare hope that you will come to share it, the season of summer being well advanced. It is too much to expect you to impose on yourself two ten-hour train journeys. However, if your work permitted and you wanted to give me great pleasure you would come but I do not dare insist. I hope for a favorable response.... Good-bye and a thousand good wishes to yourself and Madame Pozzi, kisses to the children, Amélie Gautreau.”

Pozzi often took the overnight train to Brittany to stay with Sarah and her guests of the moment at Belle-Île but there is no record anywhere of his ever taking up this invitation *chez* Gautreau.

Elsewhere Amélie brought up the depression that eventually caused her to retire from society completely: "...I will try to get over the sadness which for several days has overwhelmed me and which makes me depressed enough to die..." However she lived on until 1915.

There are also in existence two short notes from radical journalist Joseph Reinach to Pozzi, undated but seemingly written in 1886 or later, congratulating Pozzi for having successfully performed some surgery for Amélie Gautreau. Reinach, who was to play a leading role in the defence of Dreyfus in the 1890s, was a long-time friend of the Pozzis and also knew the Gautreau family. The letters do not specify what the operation was for, but surgery in the 1880s was a serious matter and would have required a lengthy recuperation.

The absence of contemporary accounts of Madame Gautreau's life has encouraged fabrications and tall tales. English society writer Diana Phipps shared an eyebrow-raising story with Stanley Olson when he was researching his biography of Sargent. This fantastic yarn was undoubtedly amplified when the Metropolitan Museum purchased *Madame X*. It was said that Amélie was horrified by the thought of sexual relations between husband and wife and repeatedly rejected Gautreau's proposals of marriage. He became so obsessed by her that he stated he was willing to marry without any claim upon his conjugal rights. He asked only to enjoy the chaste pleasure of being her legal spouse. Soon however she started to show the unmistakable signs of pregnancy; unsurprisingly an angry Gautreau refused to believe her continuing protestations of virginity. She went to "her gynecologist" who operated and removed "her unborn twin sister" from inside her. Monsieur and the now healthy Madame Gautreau went on to have normal sexual relations and a baby daughter.

Olson writes that "her gynecologist" was "presumably Dr Pozzi" thereby encouraging the idea of an attachment. The most superficial look at well-established facts shows that the story is absolute fiction. Amélie was married to Gautreau in August of 1878 when she was nineteen, and was pregnant three months later, giving birth to Louise in August of 1879. In 1878 Samuel was not yet a gynecologist and gynecology itself had yet to become a specialty. He was still doing locums for other Paris consultants and would not have his own hospital and department until 1883. The *Treatise on Gynecology* would not appear for another twelve years and his ascent to the Chair of Gynecology, the

first in Paris, did not take place until the new century. At the time of the Gautreau marriage, Samuel was a general surgeon whose interests were turning towards surgery for women but whose practice was still largely confined to the Paris public hospitals. His small private practice was in general surgery. The concept of women having gynecologists whom they consult with regularly is a modern American one that has been anachronistically imposed on the Pozzi legend by writers ignorant of nineteenth century medicine.

However, with the knowledge of modern gynecology, it is possible to look back at the story and extract what may be the truth. Amélie Gautreau may well have suffered, some years after the birth of Louise and after she had made the acquaintance of the Pozzis, from the quite common condition of dermoid cyst of the ovary. Part of the tissue of the ovary, normally destined to produce the eggs that give rise to the next generation, develops instead into a fluid cyst containing bone, teeth, hair and other body structures, mimicking, it could be said, an unborn child; the cyst accumulates more fluid, and the abdomen swells as in pregnancy. In the late nineteenth century, little was known of the origins of dermoid cysts, and it is easy to see how such a story might have arisen. It is possible that Amélie Gautreau developed such a cyst in the mid 1880s and that Pozzi operated to remove this – he certainly performed similar surgery for Sarah although her cyst was of a different type. It would have been major surgery, and might well have been quite a difficult operation –justifying Reinach’s congratulations. Unfortunately, no medical or other records about Gautreau survive, although there are many letters like Reinach’s from grateful patients who benefited from Pozzi’s skills throughout his professional career.

It was also at some time in the 1880s that Pozzi acquired the beautiful Sargent painting *Madame Gautreau Drinking a Toast* that now hangs in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. Sargent completed the work quite quickly in 1883 and originally it hung in the home of Amélie’s mother. It is highly likely that Pozzi purchased it in 1884 after the episode of the Salon, as a gesture of support for Sargent, whom the Gautreau family had turned against even though they had been wildly approving of Amélie’s portrait until the day before the Salon opened. Probably he also bought it simply because he liked the painting, which has a charming and luminescent quality. It is also possible that Marie Virginie gave Pozzi the portrait to thank him for her daughter’s surgery since she probably wished to be rid of it following the events of the Salon. Pozzi cherished the painting but it was certainly more to honor the artist than the sitter. Again it is worth remarking that the painting would not have hung at the Place Vendôme if Thérèse had entertained any suspicions regarding Amélie and her husband.

After the Salon, fame briefly morphed into infamy and Madame Gautreau was subject to derision and jeers in the drawing rooms of Paris. This does not seem to have concerned the Pozzis, whose home was always open to the Gautreau family although the visits seem to have been infrequent. Four weeks after the 1884 Salon, Jean Pozzi arrived in the world. He had, Pozzi wrote, “the good idea of arriving on a Friday, a day without consultations” so that his father himself could deliver him— which proved necessary when the obstetrician, Adolphe Pinard failed to arrive in time. Fortunately Pozzi, who did not include obstetrics in his usual professional practice, remembered enough from his student days in the maternity wards to catch his firstborn son. The following day he sent a note to Montesquiou: “Dear single man, I am the father of two since this morning, and I owe it to my newborn and his mother to stay by their side for at least 48 hours, it’s necessary to instill in his malleable brain a lasting impression of paternal authority! Therefore I shall not be available tomorrow for dinner.”

Amélie Gautreau’s life after the Salon of 1884 was a series of futile attempts to recapture the place in the spotlight she had so briefly occupied and so desperately desired. All failed and she passed into obscurity. Social historian Gabriel-Louis Pringué met her in middle-age a few years before her death. Though he had earlier been enchanted by her looks, he described her as “cold, aloof and stupid”.

After the Salon, Sargent left his beloved Paris and unfortunately, many potential masterworks lay stillborn in the artistic womb. His departure from France left a massive void. We do not have Sargent’s portraits of Bernhardt or other French actresses, of Paul Hervieu, Anatole France, Montesquiou or Zola, of Geneviève Straus, or of Clemenceau or other politicians. Luckily for the world, Sargent’s career blossomed in England where he was honored as the great society painter of his age, a revered portraitist of presidents and kings. Amélie was completely forgotten until Sargent sold her portrait to the Metropolitan when *voilà!* Madame Gautreau was reborn, resurrected from the ashes like a phoenix and transformed (at Sargent’s request) into *Madame X*. Her subsequent immortality was ensured.

Though Sargent never painted Bernhardt, he met her in London, years after the Madame X contretemps. Gautreau’s portrait was sitting on an easel in Sargent’s studio at the time but the sitter was long forgotten. Sarah, of course, not only knew the story of the 1884 Salon but was also very familiar with Pozzi’s own portrait, having admired it many times on her visits with Samuel and Thérèse. She struck up a friendship with playwright and designer Graham Robertson who was being

painted by Sargent. Knowing how tedious a sitting could be she volunteered to accompany Robertson. He knew her well enough to try to dissuade her but that was not to be. Bernhardt told him that she wished to see what Sargent was “making” of him, and she proposed accompanying him to an early morning sitting. To his surprise, she got up early and trotted happily along, wearing a neat black dress quite unlike her usual flowing silks and satins. She sat quietly, studying the work-in-progress, and received the firm approval of the painter. Robertson thought Sargent might ask to paint her too, and was relieved when he did not. Sargent, Robertson thought, was a painter of “facts” – something confirmed by contemporary biographer William Downes, who had the advantage of actually knowing Sargent and having him approve, in 1925, what was written of his life. Moreover, said Downes, “he was as indifferent to censure as he was to flattery.” Bernhardt’s portrait was best left to artists such as Clairin who could surround her with the fantasy she so adored.

## ***Rendez-vous with a bullet – 1***

*During the war of 1870-71, where penetrating wounds of the abdomen were concerned, death was the inevitable outcome.*

*Jean-Charles Chenu,*

*Chief Medical Officer of the French Army, 1874*

In December of 1886 Bernhardt was in Paris, already looking at the title role in Victorien Sardou's *Tosca*, which would open the following year and which would prove to be one of her greatest roles. She had just returned from a wildly successful tour of South America. "Poor Molière, I'm taking him among the Indians!" she had written to Pozzi from Buenos Aires earlier in the year. She had also made a considerable profit from the trip, which she immediately invested in a new house on the Boulevard Péreire that would remain her Paris home until she died.

By 1886 Pozzi's gynecological service was becoming well established at the Lourcine-Pascal hospital, his private practice was thriving, he was researching and publishing in journals, and he was preparing material for his textbook of gynecology. But he continued a busy general surgical practice as well. He also retained a particular interest in the management of gunshot wounds of the abdomen, something that had concerned him ever since his experiences in the war of 1870. So for the rest of his life he would remember one particular case that came his way late in 1886.

The 11<sup>th</sup> of December was a Saturday. It was raining slightly in the center of Paris but already there were signs of Christmas, and the gas would have been lit early in the shops. At about three in the afternoon, a young English schoolboy stood with a friend in the small boutique of an arms dealer in the trendy 16<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement*. The boy's father was an officer in the British Army, posted to Paris. The boy, at fifteen years of age, was a little indulged by his parents; he was used to wandering the streets of Paris alone or with friends, and always had plenty of money at his disposal. Now he wanted to look at a possible purchase—a shiny American revolver on display in the shop window. Carefully the dealer withdrew the coveted weapon, polished it with a cloth and inspected the mechanism. He checked, apparently, that the barrel was empty. To demonstrate this, he pressed the trigger.

There was a loud explosion. The teenager screamed and fell to the floor, clutching his stomach with both hands. Astounded, the gun dealer stared at the smoking gun. One bullet had remained in the chamber.

The boy was rapidly conveyed by horse carriage to his parents' apartment in the rue de Presbourg, where he was examined by a young doctor, Charles Petit-Vendol. His anguished mother stood weeping by the bedside. The doctor was disturbed by what he found. The bullet had left only a tiny entry wound, no bigger really than a large freckle, on the skin just above the left hip bone, but undoubtedly deeper in the abdomen much damage had been caused, despite the boy's good general condition for the moment. For a while, the doctor hesitated: what was the best thing to do here?

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the boy would be transported immediately to hospital for exploratory surgery. He'd be given an intravenous drip, blood would be taken for cross-matching and antibiotics administered to combat infection. Under general anesthesia, perforations in the internal organs would be expertly repaired. While the wounds healed, his stomach would be rested by the careful use of intravenous fluids. He would be home for Christmas, the object of his friends' great admiration: "*he got shot!*" Within a few weeks he would be back at school, playing sport, meandering again through the streets of Paris, though perhaps a little more supervised by his parents. The long-term prognosis would be excellent.

Such was not the case in 1886. Gunshot wounds of the abdomen were considered by surgeons in France – as elsewhere – to be universally fatal. Such wounds were more feared than amputations by both Confederate and Union soldiers during the American Civil War and the excruciating details of their suffering can be found in many journals and letters written by men on both sides of that conflict. French surgeons including Pozzi had seen many such injuries during the war of 1870, and in every case death had been rapid. Bacteria from within the bowel spread into the abdominal cavity through the holes in the bowel wall, peritonitis and septicemia developed and in the pre-antibiotic era were unstoppable. Pessimism was the overwhelming feeling produced by these cases and surgeons generally refrained from even attempting surgery, confining themselves to giving morphine and summoning priests. All of which would have been well known to Dr Petit-Vendol.

However recent developments in surgical technique had awakened, in younger physicians especially, a feeling that they should be making greater efforts to save such patients, and that surgery might hold the answers. Safe anesthetics and antiseptics were available and there were developments in surgical technique that might be applied to repair of the bowel. There were young surgeons who felt that opening the abdomen – a ‘laparotomy’ -and directly repairing torn bowel should be given a try, and who were bold enough to do it.

In 1885, at the first French Congress of Surgery, in Paris, and again in October 1886, at the Second Congress, surgeons had hotly debated the subject of attempting repair of gunshot wounds of the abdomen but had reached no conclusions. One of those who had spoken in favor of attempting intervention had been Pozzi, whose house and consulting rooms were located just a few streets away from the rue de Presbourg. Dr Petit-Vendol called for a horse-cab to drive to the Place Vendôme, where at number 10 he was fortunate to find that Dr Pozzi was at home. At once he agreed to see the patient.

In the apartment in the rue de Presbourg, Pozzi carefully felt the boy’s abdomen. It was soft, tender only around the bullet’s entry site. There was not yet any of the rigidity associated with the development of peritonitis. Lower down in the abdomen he found an area that was increasingly painful. Carefully he turned the boy over, looking for an exit wound. There was none. Undoubtedly the bullet was still in his body. Given the likely path of the bullet, the shot having been fired from above, by an adult taller than the boy, it was certain that the bowel was perforated. The lower abdominal pain and the boy’s great urge to pass urine indicated as well a wound of the bladder. Gently Pozzi passed a rubber catheter into the bladder. As he did so he murmured soft words of reassurance in English. The catheter revealed a quantity of blood-stained urine.

Turning to the boy’s mother, Pozzi outlined the problems – the definite damage to the bladder, the probable damage to the bowel, the inevitable development of peritonitis, the possibility that surgery might – *might* – save her son. The surgery must be done soon, this evening in fact.

“And if it is not done?” Then with every passing hour the possibility of peritonitis increased.

“If it is not done, Madame, your son I fear is certainly lost.”



Permission was granted. Pozzi promised to do all he could to make the operation succeed. He also sent for his colleague Professor Ulysse Trélat to confirm his decision and assist with the surgery. Trélat was a bluff character who had not hesitated to face down Thiers' troops searching for wounded Communards in the Salpêtrière hospital during the Commune; he was also a surgeon of great experience.

If the diagnosis was correct, and Pozzi attempted to repair the bowel at a laparotomy, he would be venturing into uncharted territory. There were no comforting textbooks or videos to turn to for help. But Pozzi came to the procedure with many relevant skills. His surgical technique was by then renowned, not only in Paris, or in France, but in many other parts of the world.

The operation would take place in the drawing room of the apartment in the rue de Presbourg. Surgery at home was nothing out of the ordinary at the time. For centuries minor procedures such as the opening of abscesses and the repair of wounds had taken place in family bedrooms or on kitchen tables. Although more complex surgery was now being performed in the hospitals of Paris, there was little in those environments that could not be replicated in the rooms of a fashionable Paris apartment, and following the surgery the boy would be well cared for by trained nurses hired by his family. Pozzi would just need to return to the Place Vendôme to collect his instrument case, always kept at the ready, and the sterile flasks containing the needles and spools of catgut and silk he had recently purchased in Germany. He would also write a rapid note to Charrière, surgical instrument maker, for the dispatch of a few items, and to his younger brother Adrien, also a doctor and at the time the intern to Ulysse Trélat. Adrien would come along to play the role of second assistant at the operation. Finally Pozzi would pen a few lines to the friends with whom he had planned to dine that evening, excusing himself. Then he would return to the rue de Presbourg and oversee the setting-up of the drawing room.

By eight that evening, the scene in the drawing room was complete. Tables and sofas were pushed back against the walls, ornaments tucked away, the carpet rolled up. Sheets were draped on the walls from floor to ceiling. One large table in the center of the room served for the operation itself. Around it were ranged buckets and household vessels that had taken on new purposes – for the soaking and sterilization of instruments and sponges. An alcohol lamp burning beneath a cooking pot dispersed into the air the droplets of phenol that formed a fine mist of antiseptic around the operation site – Lister's technique. The odor of phenol permeated everything in the room.

The surgeons would certainly have washed their hands, scrubbed them in fact. But they operated in street clothes, removing their jackets and rolling up their shirt sleeves. Dr Petit-Vendol was the anesthetist – standing at the head end of the table, he sprinkled chloroform onto gauze and held this over the nose and mouth of the unconscious boy. Trélat, his beard and moustache reddened by long tobacco use, stood on the patient's left side and Adrien stood on his right while Pozzi placed himself between the boy's legs. These were flexed at the knees and separated so that Pozzi could make his incision from the navel to the pubic bone, exposing the area inside the abdomen likely to be affected. Once the abdomen was opened, Pozzi gently lifted out lengths of intestine for inspection, like a sausage-maker inspecting his product.

*Voilà Monsieur!* exclaimed Trélat, and in the wall of a portion of bowel, grasped between Pozzi's blood-stained fingers, could be seen a hole some two inches long and one inch wide. With sponges Adrien mopped away blood and spilling bowel contents. Carefully, no doubt a little anxiously, Pozzi began to repair the perforation, holding the bowel between the thumb and forefinger of his left hand. His needle was held tight in a holder of his own design, and he used a fine silk for his sutures, bringing the edges neatly together, placing the stitches firmly into the healthy tissue at the edges of the wound. Eleven carefully spaced stitches were needed, the knots neatly cut. Pozzi rolled the completed repair between his fingers – there seemed to be adequate space left in the interior of the bowel. It was important that the stitches not form a scar which would shrink down and block the passage through the bowel.

The search continued. Five more perforations of the bowel and bladder were identified and repaired. At one point the boy struggled a little, and stretched out an arm, crying "No, no!" and Petit-Vendol hastily deepened the anesthetic.

Content that all the trauma had been dealt with, Pozzi ran his bare fingers up under the diaphragm, palpated the firm mass of the liver, passed his hand across the stomach, felt for the outlines of the kidneys and the pulsations of the aorta, which was beating normally. All appeared intact. The bullet itself could not be found, it seemed to be lodged in the deep tissues to the right side of the bladder, a region of large blood vessels that would be dangerous to explore. It appeared that it had done no further damage and could be left where it was.

Outside from the Champs-Élysées the clock was sounding midnight. Through the windows of the drawing room could be heard the rumble of carriages, the whinnying of horses, the farewell cries of those who had spent the evening partying. Trélat consulted his watch.

“More than two hours in this belly! Time to get out!”

Pozzi, using now a larger needle and coarser silk, closed the abdominal wound in two layers, placing a red rubber tube at the lowest point to help drain away fluid which might become infected. Adrien covered the wound with gauze soaked in iodine, bandaging it firmly: Lister’s technique.

It would be heartening to have a happy ending to this story, the boy making an uncomplicated recovery, convalescing in the days before Christmas, getting up out of bed assisted by his grateful parents, eventually returning to his school and his friends. Sadly this was not to be. He made good progress on the first and second days, but relapsed on the third, dying on the morning of the Tuesday following the accident. There was no fever, but there were signs that the bowel was inactive and filling with fluid, a condition known as ileus. Without the carefully balanced intravenous fluids of today, and the knowledge of the body’s chemistry that we now have, ileus was fatal, and the boy succumbed.

The following Wednesday evening, at a meeting of the Surgical Society of Paris, Pozzi freely submitted his surgical decision and management of the case to the scrutiny of his peers. He presented a detailed description and through the President asked for the opinions of his colleagues.

Trélat was of the view that operations on gunshot wounds of the abdomen should take place as soon as possible after the accident, because of the risk of peritonitis if the bowel were damaged. He supported Pozzi’s decision to operate. Others were not so sure, in particular Aristide Verneuil, who believed that conservative inactivity was more appropriate particularly when bullets of less than 7 mm caliber were used. Ulysse Trélat disagreed vehemently – conservative management was suitable for gunshot wounds of the lung, the muscles of the limbs, even the brain, he said, because the heat generated in the missile was enough to render it sterile, and if no immediate damage was done to vital organs the bullet might remain, inert and insignificant, in the body for years. Not so in the abdomen, when bowel if perforated leaked virulent organisms causing peritonitis and death.

The President of the Society asked whether Pozzi would like to reply to these criticisms. He would. He rose to his feet.

“I would like to explain that the gun was American, with a caliber of 7 to 8 mm, and with the charge formed from powder packed in so that the bullet had a range of a good forty yards,” Pozzi told his audience. At close range, it was inevitable that large holes would be torn in the bowel. Pozzi was adamant. There had been no choice about trying the laparotomy.

Two weeks later, Trélat reported to the Society on the autopsy findings. “No fluid, purulent or serous, was present in the abdominal cavity. The sutures were completely intact with no evidence of leakage.” However at one site of repair the width of the intestine had shrunk to two-thirds of its normal diameter, impeding the progress of bowel contents and probably precipitating the ileus.

‘The operation was a success but the patient died.’ It’s an old and macabre medical joke. But in fact this case did represent progress. Pozzi had shown that with early intervention, laparotomy, antisepsis, careful suturing and the use of drains, it was possible to avoid peritonitis. Unfortunately the means of good post-operative care for such cases were yet to be devised. These problems would occupy Pozzi, and many others, in the years following, and particularly at the time of World War I when gunshot wounds of the abdomen would again be seen by the thousands in France. Pozzi himself published more than 40 papers on the treatment of gunshot wounds and other war injuries, and the outcomes during World War I were infinitely improved on those of 1870. The use of antiseptics, blood transfusion and intravenous fluids all played a part even though there were not yet any antibiotics.

Pozzi was personally much grieved by the case. He detested failure in himself, but he also mourned the loss of the boy. Leaving the meeting of the Surgical Society that Paris night, he would have foreseen the need to conduct further animal experiments, and to proceed carefully with the choice of patients, if successful treatment of gunshot wounds of the abdomen was to become a reality.

What he would not have foreseen is the trick that Fate would one day play on him personally in the rue de Presbourg.

## *The Discovery of America*

*In order to study the organisation and setting-up of laboratories of surgery, the instruments in use in surgical practice and the questions that attach to the teaching of surgery, Doctor Samuel Pozzi is charged with a mission to the United States of America.*

*Raymond Poincaré, Minister of Public Education, 1893*

For Samuel Pozzi, 1893 was the year of the discovery of America.

In 1889, a century after the storming of the Bastille marked the start of the French Revolution, Paris had hosted the World's Fair, the *Exposition Universelle*. Though there had been previous Fairs in London and Paris, the 1889 *Exposition* significantly raised the bar and bested all earlier efforts. Instead of the regional cheesiness of previous expos, 1889 was an affair of global import, boasting gilded pavilions illuminated by the new medium of electricity and richly ornamented international attractions assembled under a huge central dome. There were gardens choked with exotic flora, foreign foods, dances and music, including a Javanese gamelan ensemble that Claude Debussy found 'enchanting.' Bizarrely, a 'Negro village' housed specially-imported indigenous peoples in a human zoo – a feature apparently considered acceptable at the time, even by forward-thinking members of the French Society of Anthropology. The Exposition spilled out onto the Quai d'Orsay, the wide Boulevard of the Invalides and the Field of Mars in front of the Military College. Despite the non-participation of some countries that were at odds with the Third Republic, Paris during that year welcomed more than thirty two million tourists and the Exposition proved immensely profitable. The hallmark of 1889 was a great tower of iron latticework which soared nine hundred and eighty four feet into the heavens above the Exhibition site. Gustave Eiffel's design had initially horrified many Parisians, including Charles Garnier and Alexander Dumas, who both signed a disapproving public letter, but fortunately the sharp-sighted engineer prevailed. Samuel Pozzi was always enthusiastic about its construction, as

was Bernhardt. The tower, the largest freestanding structure in the world at the time and initially referred to as “the iron lady”, quickly became an instantly-recognized symbol of Paris and although the original intention had been to dismantle it post-Exposition, its popularity rapidly brought about a change of plan. The tremendous success of the Exposition caused a tidal wave of competition between countries desperate to host the next World’s Fair, four years in the future,

This honor ultimately went to Chicago, where the gigantic Columbia World’s Fair opened in the Spring of 1893, celebrating the discovery of the New World and the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the voyages of Columbus. France was a major exhibitor and sent a delegation of writers, artists and academics that including many of friends of Sarah and Samuel. Returning to Paris, they waxed lyrical to those unfortunates left behind: the New World was indeed *merveilleux*.

Sarah was already widely-traveled in North America but Samuel had never crossed the Atlantic, though he had been thinking of America for years, and now needed little encouragement to set out. After England and Germany, it was the place that interested him most in its scientific study of gynecology. In addition to American medical advancement, Pozzi was fascinated by many elements of American culture including the gold-rush fiction of Western writer, Bret Harte. He asked around, seeking official backing for a visit and in June of 1893 Raymond Poincaré, Minister for Public Education (and later President of France), wrote out his instructions: Dr Pozzi would travel to the United States charged with visiting hospitals and laboratories throughout the country, but particularly in Chicago, investigating surgical practice and teaching. Pozzi, with his fluent command of English, was particularly suited to his task. Conveniently, the World’s Fair would still be in progress!

Bernhardt had first toured the United States in 1880-81, after she had resigned from the Comédie Française, and facing penury, accepted an offer from American theatrical agent William Jarrett to play in more than fifty American cities. This was the tour which was criticized by Samuel’s mother-in-law, and during which Sarah had her spectacular falling-out with Marie Colombier. It was immensely successful: she was received with wild adulation by American audiences even though she performed in French. One of her most acclaimed roles was as Alexandre Dumas’ *Lady of the Camellias*, a role that would become the most frequently performed of her entire career. Also on this tour she paid a visit to Thomas Edison, who recorded her voice on his newly-invented phonograph.

She did not forget Samuel while she was away from France, writing and sending cards on numerous occasions. One of these asked him to care for the small daughter of her maid, Félicie, who accompanied her on the trip together with her husband Claude, also employed to help with travel arrangements for the tour; their daughter had remained in Paris. From Boston Bernhardt wrote to Pozzi:

“Dear Doctor, You have saved my little Marie and I am forever grateful. You have done that quite simply because you are good. My poor Félicie who dares not write to you simply kisses your hands and my brave and simple Claude can find nothing else to say apart from this rather bizarre and simple sentence: ‘I wish Monsieur could get into some danger so I could save him.’ But dear Doctor on the contrary I would wish that you are always blessed in everything that you undertake and that happiness enfolds all those whom you love. In kissing the forehead of little Marie Doctor I will remember (you) and all my life the memory will remain true. Sarah Bernhardt, Boston, April 1881.

In 1886, Bernhardt toured both North and South America, and in 1891 embarked on her most extensive tour, taking in Russia and Australia as well as North America. (In Australia she was noted to be “the greatest actress who ever lived”, the beautiful “Franchay” who arrived with more than 200 pieces of baggage.) Most of her correspondence with Pozzi on this trip is in the form of short postcards: “Doctor God, here is my Bear, killed on the little islands of the Salt Lake, by a young Mormon chief, Sarah.”

“To you Doctor God these lines to remember your Sarah Bernhardt. Faraway grateful friend, always, always, Sarah.” Back in Paris, she was enthusiastic about his plan to go see the New World for himself.

Pozzi already had an established reputation in North America. In 1892, the first edition of the English translation of the *Treatise on Gynecology* had appeared in New York. The translation had been made by Dr Brooks Wells and the edition comprised two volumes totalling over 1000 pages, with fifteen color plates and nearly 500 black and white figures. This monumental work had been very positively received by American surgeons.

When Pozzi embarked on his first voyage in September of 1893, he boarded a brand new steamer, *La Touraine*, the newest craft of the French steamship company Compagnie Générale Transatlantique (CGT). French steamers at the time were much smaller than the colossal liners being built in Britain.

Instead of size and speed, the French were known for their stylishness and comfort. *La Touraine* was one of the most beautiful vessels on the seas and boasted an elegant grand staircase, a magnificent dining saloon and well-appointed cabins. The cuisine aboard the CGT ships confirmed the promise of the company's slogan: "You're in France as soon as you cross the gangplank!"

The ocean was calm throughout the trip and Pozzi, dressed smartly in white as befitted an ocean voyager, spent hours lounging or reading in a canvas chair on the upper decks. He held long conversations with fellow passengers over drinks in the afternoon, and at dinner in formal dress charmed the women making the Atlantic crossing with him. The ladies all wore the new fashion, a well-corseted gown, *sans* bustle, that placed emphasis on the waist, giving the wearer an hour-glass silhouette.

Then, after seven balmy days at sea, there was New York! As the *Touraine* came into the port, Pozzi stood on deck and saw on Bedloe's Island Bartholdi's great sculpture, put in place with the help of Gustave Eiffel. The Statue of Liberty seemed to him a symbol not only of French-American friendship but of the great possibilities of democracy in the New World. Next, New York City itself, the most gilded metropolis of the Gilded Age. With its massive Victorian buildings, its streets packed with people, the city itself seemed oversized, moving at a kinetic pace that made Samuel's heart beat faster. He took a carriage to William Waldorf Astor's thirteen-story marvel, the Waldorf Hotel, which had opened its doors in March that year. The location was prime New York real estate, Fifth Avenue and Thirty Fourth Street, once the location of the Astor family mansion and today occupied by the Empire State Building. The Astoria would open next door four years later, the two forming the original Waldorf=Astoria, but already in 1893 the Waldorf was becoming a landmark, providing a venue that was a center of social life in the city, rather than just a place to sleep for travelers. Samuel remarked on the vast foyer of the Waldorf, its four elevators, the luxurious apartment that was provided for him, the restaurant with its huge choice of wines and the panelled smoking room in the basement, where gentlemen puffed cigars with their feet on the fireplace.

He had time for only a short tour of the city. He strolled down Fifth Avenue, and saw both the Hudson and Brooklyn Bridges, impressed by the bustling energy and the noise. That evening he was welcomed by the French Ambassador, Monsieur Patenotre, who entertained him with stories of his recent trip to Chicago. Next morning William Wood, the American editor of the English translation of the *Treatise*, presented him with several copies. Then Sam was off to Chicago.

The journey from New York to Chicago took twenty-four hours, in one of the new Pullman cars of the Michigan Central Railway, introduced in the 1880s. The cars were inlaid with fine woods, their upholstered seats could be swung to face forward or back as the passenger desired, and there was a platform at the rear of the train where Samuel stood smoking in comfort while contemplating the



immensity of the Illinois prairie scenery. Eventually the great city of Chicago loomed onto the horizon.

He arrived at the General Union Station close to Lake Michigan. “Almost a sea port,” he noted, impressed by “the white-topped waves and breezes from the lake that thankfully exorcised the stench of the stockyards”, since Chicago was the meatpacking center of America. On the shores stood the artificial town of the Columbia Exhibition, with its gardens, colonnaded parks and man-made lakes dotted with gondolas replete with gondoliers. The massive fairgrounds were dubbed “the White City” for the fourteen Beaux-Arts style buildings that had been spray-painted snowy white then outlined in electric lights, utilizing Westinghouse’s new alternating currents. The effect was stunning, a heavenly utopia that completely dwarfed the French achievements of four years previously, even if the buildings, which were only temporary and constructed of a mixture of hemp fibres and plaster known as ‘staff’, had to be patched up rather frequently during the Fair. Instead of an iron tower, the crowning glory of the Columbia Exhibition was a massive revolving orb called the Ferris Wheel. Annie Oakley and Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show performed in a field adjacent to the White City, their performance much enjoyed by Samuel.

It was indeed the Fair of the whole world and there were far more attractions than he could take in. In his notes, he mentioned the Vienna Café, the Panorama of the Bernese Alps and the Brazilian Concert. French impressionism was being introduced to the Americans through the works of Monet, Pissarro and Degas in the French pavilion. Louis Comfort Tiffany had designed a stained-glass chapel especially for the White City and Pozzi’s old friend Sargent, now one of the world’s most successful portrait painters, exhibited nine paintings. Samuel would not have been aware that serial killer H. H. Holmes was prowling the fair grounds, looking for victims, nor did he mention some other marvels of the White City such the “Streets of Cairo” where Little Egypt danced the hootchy-kootchy, but he did visit the pavilions to savor such modern American staples as Aunt Jemima’s pancakes, Cracker Jacks, Juicy Fruit Gum and Pabst beer. This was also the Fair that introduced rag-time music to the world and Samuel would have heard the new melodies of Scott Joplin as he strolled across the acres of fairground.

When it came to the Chicago hospitals, Pozzi knew exactly what he wanted to see: Cook County, Rush, the Presbyterian, the Mercy and St. Luke’s – all of which were shown to him very willingly and which he found stunning. Some hospitals had been relocated after the terrible conflagration that almost levelled the city in 1871, and others, with their vast stone facades embossed with lions and griffins, had been refurbished and modernized. The new Cook County Hospital had opened in 1876, with two pavilions of wards and a total of 300 beds. In 1884 it had been expanded to more than 500 beds and for the first time, operating rooms had been added. Presbyterian Hospital had opened in

1883 as the teaching hospital for Rush Medical College, and it too included operating rooms. Dedicated operating rooms, Pozzi was pleased to see, were now an essential part of the modern American hospital, and in Cook County and Presbyterian these rooms were immaculate. There were separate sleek areas for sterilization and the staff were smartly dressed and extremely professional. Nowhere in Europe was there such organization – and Chicago was not even a capital city. Soon his briefcase was overflowing with notes and figures and the addresses of colleagues who had information to share.

There was much that was different from practice in France. The doctors still wore frock coats while on their rounds but unlike French doctors, most were clean-shaven and possessed a refreshing lack of formality. Pozzi seemed to enjoy the backslapping American conviviality and found common ground with the doctors who all called him ‘Sam.’ He was also much impressed by the role of private individuals and the great Chicago social clubs like the Union League, the Commercial Club and the Union Club, in funding hospitals. Respectable Chicago business families like the Swifts, the McCormicks, the Pullmans and the Pritzkers donated vast sums of money that were matched by wealthy pirates such as Charles Tyson Yerkes and John Warne Gates. Each hospital had a committee of society ladies who devoted themselves to the raising of funds, and there was also financial support from the churches. “I regret that these ideas hadn’t previously occurred to me or my compatriots,” wrote Pozzi. He decided that he would set up a similar Ladies Committee at the Broca the moment he returned to France. Already he had the names of suitable ladies in his head! They would devote themselves to improving the difficult social circumstances that certain patients faced, and to providing material comforts. They could organize fund raising events, twice a year at least, at Christmas and on Bastille Day. They could hold theatrical presentations- he would use his thespian connections for that. They could distribute presents of clothes and toys, and raise funds to assist with the hospital’s purchase of linen, books and bedding.

In the operating rooms and in the wards, which in contrast to the vast 20-bedded wards of Paris usually had only a small number of beds, often only one, he saw the Sisters of Mercy and trained nurses working side by side. Photographs of the Cook County Hospital nursing staff from the period show determined young women, their upswept hair covered by white caps, their uniforms crisp and covered by perfectly starched aprons. Pozzi learned that nurses in America generally received their training at schools of nursing situated in the hospital grounds and was surprised that they often came from families who were relatively well-off socially – they were the daughters of doctors, lawyers, businessmen, pastors and public officials. Young women in America now went into nursing much as in earlier times the daughters of the lesser nobility in France went into convents, and these nurses, once qualified, received a salary three or four times that of his assistants at the Broca.

The staff of the operating rooms utilized methods that were similar to those in France but they displayed an appreciation for methods of sterilization, cleanliness and small details of surgery that were impressive. Though the development of stainless steel surgical instruments was at least thirty years in the future, American surgeries in the early 1890s were illuminated by electric lights and by 1893 rubber gloves were known in operating rooms across the country. There was also a growing tendency for surgeons to change into white overalls and caps, the precursors of 'scrubs.' As he exited the operating room at Presbyterian, Pozzi couldn't help passing a curious hand over the beautiful set of doors that were opened in front of him. Was that marble? Yes, a grateful and wealthy patient had donated them. Still, apart from the precision of the instruments and the attentive and disciplined nursing staff, Samuel found there was nothing lacking in French operative techniques. Indeed, on his return to France, Pozzi was pleased to learn that another translation of his *Treatise* was being published in the United States. Edited by Curtis Beebe, a Harvard physician, the text, illustrations and index were all together in one large book rather than the two separate volumes of the earlier treatise.

Back in France, in April 1894, the *Independant de Bergerac* reported: "Dr Pozzi, having completed his important visit to Chicago on behalf of the Republic, has been named an Officer of the Legion of Honour." However Dr Pozzi was wasting no time in putting into practice what he had seen in America.

Firstly, an entirely new gynecology service would be built. A new building was constructed behind the existing Broca, in a triangle formed by the rue Corvisart and the rue Pascal. This single story brick building of 2000 square metres boasted on one side of the triangle three wards – two of eight beds named for Récamier and Paul Broca, and one of twelve beds named for Alphonse Guérin, a Broca surgeon who had done much to develop urologic surgery and had worked in the old Lourcine-Pascal. The second side contained consulting rooms for out-patients and the operating rooms, plus a tiered amphitheatre for teaching. The third side contained a nineteen-bed ward named for Pierre Huguier, a Paris surgeon noted for his detailed descriptions of female anatomy. All three sections looked over an internal garden, and connecting corridors made the gynecology service independent of the main hospital. Consistent with what Pozzi had observed in America, there was state-of-the-art central heating, excellent arrangements for the ventilation of wards and operating rooms, and showers for patients. By night, electricity illuminated Pozzi's service while the rest of the old hospital still made do with gas-lighting.

The operating area was revolutionary in its design, something Pozzi had undertaken himself. It contained an 'aseptic' operating room which students were forbidden to enter, an area for the sterilization of instruments and another for instrument storage, and an innovation that truly astonished

Pozzi's colleagues – a 'chloroform room' in which patients were first anesthetized before being wheeled into surgery. Pozzi's own office was close by, as were a laboratory and a photography service.

The new service was opened in June 1897, with Dr Felix Jayle as Pozzi's assistant, three interns and eight externs, including a second woman doctor, Mademoiselle Romanescu. Clearly Samuel had got over his concerns about women in medicine. The doctors were not the only people hard at work in the service in those first few months – in the wards and corridors could be seen men on ladders clutching palettes and paintbrushes. This particular innovation came not from America but from Pozzi's own belief that his patients would recover more quickly if surrounded by beauty. A team led by Georges Clairin was gradually covering the walls with pastoral scenes, shepherds and shepherdesses and pleasing landscapes, the most notable being *Health Restored to the Sick*, the mural painted by Clairin himself in 1898 that featured Bernhardt as the model for 'Health.' For the rest of his life as Samuel went about his work he would see Sarah there on the wall! The internal garden, with its beds of roses and pots of hydrangeas, was also designed to soothe the nerves of convalescents and promote healing. "The service of Doctor Pozzi," reported *Figaro*, "has followed the strict requirements for modern principles of hygiene, but within a framework that is both attractive and artistic; the only institution of its type in Europe, it has become a model that Paris invites others to imitate." In January 1899 the President of France, Felix Faure, came to inspect the Broca, and was greatly pleased by what he found.

By 1904, Pozzi's celebrity as a surgeon was recognized by an illustrated biography sold throughout France by the Félix Potin grocery stores. In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, luminaries of French medicine were held in high esteem much like modern astronauts. The book's cover shows Pozzi, still muscular and fit at the fifty-eight, *sans cravat*, his hair styled into a Caesar cut, his arms crossed against his chest. There are shots of him in the operating room of the Broca, surrounded by fellow surgeons, all now dressed like Americans in white medical scrubs and blue caps. There were also postcards of Pozzi sold widely on the streets of Paris. But he was not resting on his laurels; he was preparing to make his second visit to North America and once again the *Independant de Bergerac* gave details. Pozzi was to represent France at the International Fair in St Louis to mark the hundredth anniversary of the Louisiana Purchase and the incorporation of Louisiana into the United States. He was then to go on to Montreal to take part in the second Congress of French-speaking physicians in North America. He was scheduled to cross the Atlantic on *La Savoie*, a four-year-old French steamer.

On the eve of his departure in June, 1904 he wrote to Montesquiou, who had numerous acquaintances in North America: Dear Friend, I am leaving Paris on Friday (13<sup>th</sup>) to embark on Saturday on the vessel “La Savoie.” I’d be grateful if you would send me two or three of your cards with a few words of introduction to people you’d recommend in New York and Boston, and even Chicago. I know that you can open doors that are otherwise closed to me. Thanks, affectionately, Pozzi.” Then at the last minute, there was a change of plan.

The previous year, Pozzi had been summoned to treat an unusual patient, a flamboyant American multimillionaire named James Gordon Bennett Junior. Bennett, a sportsman and raconteur who lived part of each year in France, was one of the most colorful figures in an age known for its larger-than-life personalities. His father, James Senior, had emigrated to the United States from Scotland and in 1835 established *The New York Herald*, a hugely successful venture. Gordon Bennett assumed the helm of his father’s newspaper business in 1867, interested not only in publishing news but also keen to make it. He invested funds in several newsworthy ventures, the more exciting the better, bankrolling Henry Stanley’s expedition to Africa in 1867 to find the missing Dr Livingstone that made the phrase, “Dr. Livingstone, I presume?” part of the popular culture.

Gordon Bennett was as theatrical in his private life as in his public ventures – he was ejected from polite New York society in the 1877 when, at a party held by the father of his fiancée (who soon became his ex-fiancée) he became so drunk that he mistook a fireplace (or as some versions declare, a piano) for a toilet and urinated into the hearth. This incident was reported around the world, becoming part of the British lexicon in which “Gordon Bennett” is an expression of disbelief. He also hosted a party for Bernhardt in New York City, at which the actress was most disconcerted to find herself the only woman among one hundred men.

Exiled from New York, he acquired a steam yacht that he named the *Lysistrata*, which became his traveling palace, making an annual trek between America and France for many years until he built himself an enormous villa on the Cote d’Azur. In 1887 he launched the very successful *Paris Herald* (now the *International Herald Tribune*). He also established the Gordon Bennett Cups, the first a weighty silver trophy given to the victorious team in international yachting and the second for an international auto race, an event that would foreshadow the Grand Prix. For the next five years the Gordon Bennett Cup was the major event in motor racing and although after 1904 interest in the sport became more diverse and different competitions were set up in various European countries, Gordon Bennett is regarded as the instigator of international motor racing.

It was a mishap with a motorcar in 1903 that brought Gordon Bennett under Pozzi’s care, when he had a spectacular fall from the running board of one of his automobiles. Bennett not only smashed his watch chain and tore his waistcoat, trousers and shirt but also ripped his chest and abdominal wall, the

gash filling with road dirt. In Pozzi's hands, after cleaning and suturing, the wounds healed beautifully. Bennett was delighted to meet this dashing surgeon who spoke English and who knew both Chicago and New York and the two quickly became friends. When, in the following year, he learned that Pozzi was off to New York, Gordon Bennett, who was getting ready to leave again for the United States, invited his surgeon to make the crossing with him on the *Lysistrata*. Samuel had previously seen and much admired the vessel in port in Venice.

Registered in New York, the yacht boasted, among other things, a Turkish bath and two cows to supply fresh milk and cream. The covered bridge allowed Bennett's nattily dressed guests to walk, recline on a chaise-lounge or in a cane armchair, take tea or write to friends on specially designed stationery which bore the design of an owl, a favourite motif of the owner. Pozzi enjoyed the trip hugely, sitting up late at night over cigars and cognac with his loquacious host.

When the *Lysistrata* finally docked in New York, which was as noisy and frantic as on his first visit, he repaired to the new hotel, the Waldorf=Astoria, where the shock of America reappeared. This was now two hotels built by once-feuding cousins, William Waldorf and John Astor, the seventeen story Astoria nextdoor to the previous Waldorf and the two connected by means a corridor called Peacock Alley. Pozzi found the new thousand-room hotel even more sumptuous than the original Waldorf, with a staff trained to perform in lockstep precision.

Leaving New York, he continued his trek in a Pullman car now fitted with sleeping couchettes. There was heating, air-conditioning, and the innovation of a restaurant car with fresh gourmet meals so that the train did not have to stop for passengers to dine. The journey took him through the flat lands and prairies of Pennsylvania, Ohio and Indiana and finally to St. Louis, Missouri and the Great Exhibition of 1904.

While there was no Ferris Wheel or Wild West Show, the Louisiana Purchase Exposition featured a Grand Basin filled with gondolas and launches, massive plazas and palaces lit by electricity, rows of maple trees filling an enormous Forest Park and a rink that accommodated ice-skaters even in summer. Samuel sampled such quintessentially American dietary items as waffle-style ice-cream cones, hamburgers, hot dogs and peanut butter, and no doubt also heard the hit *Meet Me in St Louis*, though he did not mention this. On a less happy note, there was another human zoo – the "primitive" people of the Philippines, New Guinea and South Africa were on display as they had been in Paris in 1889.

On his return to Chicago, he met up again with old friends and was surprised to learn that the great surgical center of the United States was no longer Chicago, New York, or Philadelphia, but rather the little town of Rochester, deep in the prairie country of Minnesota. For fifteen years the Mayo

brothers, Will and Charlie, had been developing an ultra-modern surgical clinic with three hundred beds. “You must see it, Sam,” he was told. His packed itinerary meant he made only a brief visit but later that year he dispatched his assistant, Robert Proust, younger brother of Marcel, who returned with glowing reports.

Pozzi set out next for the train journey of over six hundred miles to Quebec. French Canadians had long been considered backward by the French, who viewed them as provincials and detested their strangely-accented French. They were a homogeneous group who practiced their Catholic faith with zealous devotion. There was a small French-speaking middle-class in Quebec and Montreal who acted as a buffer between their humbler rural countrymen and their English masters. In Montreal, on the platform of Canadian Pacific Railway, Pozzi was welcomed by an official delegation as the representative of France at the physicians’ Congress. That night he spoke at the opening of the Congress, and was introduced as “one of the most eminent practitioners of surgery, whose reputation preceded his arrival among us.” Pozzi had been asked to speak on “the importance of science to progress and peace”, a worthy topic, and he devoted some time to the achievements of Pasteur and Lister, then finished rather mischievously by quoting Biblical verses that had been drummed into him as a child. He evoked the story of Eli the Old Testament prophet who, informed of the coming of God, ignored a violent wind, and an earthquake, but fell to his knees when he perceived a gentle breeze. “It is thus that blows the regenerating and invigorating, if barely susceptible, breeze of science. It doesn’t astound, it doesn’t destroy like wars or revolutions, but we have all felt it pass and we know that it will transform the world” said Pozzi the atheist and rationalist to his staid Catholic audience.

These comments were received with some uneasiness by ultra-reactionary members of the Montreal Catholic diocese. Sarah had caused scandals in North America with her ‘Frenchness’ – now Samuel was doing the same. The next day the English *Montreal Medical Journal* noted that: “Professor Pozzi, who is not a Catholic in his religion, is distinctly ‘rouge’ in his politics, as we say in Quebec.” Pozzi’s leftist leanings did not deter the good Sisters and the doctors of the Notre-Dame Hospital from inviting Pozzi to give a demonstration of his surgical techniques; he demonstrated his enucleation of a fibroid from a uterus prior to hysterectomy. “Speed and skill,” commented the onlookers, impressed by the simplicity and effectiveness of his operating.

It was at this Congress that a French physician named Dr. Alexis Carrel, who had traveled from Bordeaux, first reported on his experiments with transplanting kidneys in dogs and the techniques of suturing blood vessels that this required. Although Carrel and Pozzi were the only Frenchmen present at the Congress, Samuel seems not to have met Carrel on this occasion, or at least to have noted it, although later he was to become keenly interested in Carrel’s work and would be the organizer, in

1913, with Georges Clemenceau, of the first meeting on transplant surgery in France. Carrel did not return to France after the Montreal Congress, having been subjected to a great deal of criticism in his native land for his initial attempts at transplant surgery. Instead he took up a post in Chicago, moving later to the Rockefeller Institute in New York to continue his research.

Carrel had no interest in the practice or teaching of medicine but he had been fascinated by research ever since the murder of Sadi Carnot, President of France, in 1894. When Sadi Carnot had bled to death after being slashed with a knife by an assassin, the young Carrel realized that his life might have been saved if physicians had known how to repair severed blood vessels. Carrel's experiments included using rods of caramel as a dissolvable support while he sutured arteries, and he took embroidery lessons to refine his techniques with the needle. However his Gallic colleagues saw no value in his work, failing to understand that his experiments with transplantation and the repair of body organs would lead to enormous advances in the fields of transplant surgery and tissue culture. Pozzi, though one of the first French doctors to appreciate Carrel's achievements, would not meet him until he visited North America again in 1909.

That year marked a century of the successful practice of ovariectomy, the operation to remove ovarian cysts. The centenary was to be celebrated in New York, and Pozzi was invited as the representative of France. The conference took place in the solarium at the Waldorf=Astoria in New York, a fact that pleased Samuel greatly, for he regarded the hotel as his American home. Representing his French colleagues, he nevertheless spoke in his perfect, British-accented English, firstly reminding his audience of the numerous French contributions to the development of ovariectomy, which was now performed under general anesthesia, in safe operating theatres, with antisepsis, by trained surgeons who wore gowns and gloves. Though he did not mention it in his address, Pozzi might well have thought of how he had operated on Bernhardt, safely removing a huge cyst. He did mention the names of several French surgeons who had contributed to the safety of the surgery; he also reminded his listeners that the use of hemostatic forceps to prevent bleeding at surgery had been largely a French invention. (In fact one version of the hemostatic forceps still currently used in France is known as Pozzi's forceps.) However he also paid tribute to other surgeons such as Howard Kelly of Baltimore and Spencer Wells of England who had contributed to the surgery's success. "This," he said, "is not a French operation or an American operation, it belongs to all the world." He received a standing ovation for his speech.

In 1904 Pozzi had sent Robert Proust to Rochester to visit the Mayo brothers. This time he traveled to Minnesota himself, delighted to have time to look closely at the cutting-edge work of this Rochester hospital. The story of the Mayo Clinic was uniquely American. William Worrall Mayo, born in England, had migrated to the United States, completed medical training and then gone on to raise two



sons, William and Charlie who eventually joined him in his frontier practice. When a tornado struck causing many deaths and injuries, the Mayos joined with other Rochester doctors and the nuns of the order of St Francis to care for the wounded in an emergency center set up in a dance hall. The nuns were originally a teaching order but their Mother Superior together with the Mayos quickly saw the longer-term need for a hospital in Rochester, and together they set about establishing the beginnings of the now world-famous Clinic and the nursing school to go with it. All the Mayos, although they had gained medical diplomas, were largely self-taught in the practice of surgery; they all showed great aptitude and from the very beginning the Clinic's surgical reputation grew.

Pozzi found the Mayo brothers lived in neighboring houses in Rochester, which he noted were "identical and made almost entirely from wood, with towers and bow windows, each surrounded by a garden." He also commented on the almost complete absence of works of art or other decoration in both the Mayo houses, and remarked that the two brothers, their faces entirely clean-shaven, "matched their houses", but he was extremely grateful for the welcome they gave him during his three-day visit. Their father was a spry ninety year-old who had not lost his enthusiasm for surgery, and he often bailed up Pozzi in the corridors ready to chat about his old cases. Remembering the early days, he told him: "We were green, and we knew it!" Pozzi eagerly collected information on all the innovations of the Mayo Clinic that he hoped to share with his associates in Paris, and extended invitations to the brothers to visit France, invitations which were taken up in 1911.

Ten days later, Pozzi returned to New York with the object of meeting Alexis Carrel. He wrote that: "I was very keen to see Dr Carrel, whom I had heard much spoken of by my American colleagues. My Paris colleague, Pierre Delbet, briefly mentioned Carrel's experience with transplants but not very enthusiastically and it had even produced in some of his associates a degree of defiance, of scorn. I was curious to meet the man for myself." He took a cab to Carrel's house at 60<sup>th</sup> Street near the East River; Carrel was absent, so Pozzi left his card. The following day Carrel introduced himself in the Palm Room of the Waldorf=Astoria and Pozzi noted in his journal:

"I saw in front of me a man of short stature, aged about forty, clean-shaven in the American style, with a large forehead, a modest manner, whose eyes shone from behind a lorgnette that he wore permanently. He reminded me of one of those little abbots one sees in Rome and Venice. He spoke in a soft, quite deep voice, with something of an American accent. We chatted for a while and I arranged to meet him the following day at the Rockefeller Institute. I got there early. It was a huge building of several stories, Carrel's lab was right at the top under the roof."

Carrel used canines in his experiments, under general anesthesia and with trained veterinary attendants to assist him. From the moment Pozzi walked through the door the surprises began: a dog was crawling on the floor, his neck bandaged. "We have just removed parts of the two carotid arteries to use as transplants," Carrel explained, dressed for canine surgery in a black garment that accentuated his ecclesiastical air.

Pozzi was then shown two dogs, one black and one yellow, each with one white front paw, transplanted from another dog. The transplanted paws were swollen but warm – the transplant had taken. The black dog had been operated on only three days previously and remained lying down but the yellow one, subjected to the surgery some six weeks before, jumped about happily. Further off another yellow dog and a white one ambled about together. The white one had successfully given a kidney to the yellow one several months previously.

Wagging her tail and seeking caresses was another dog, also yellow. "Your next victim?" asked Pozzi. "No, she was operated on a year ago," Carrel replied. "Look at the date on her collar, 6 February 1908. She had the left kidney removed, and it was placed for one hour in a sterile solution then stitched back into place. I re-sutured the vessels and the ureter (the tube that carries urine from each kidney to the bladder). That's not all. After the first operation, she had puppies. All of which showed that instead of dying as expected in the hour in which the kidney was removed from the body, the organ survived and is still functioning normally. Kidney transplantation is a real possibility."

Pozzi then watched as Carrel carried out an operation in a dog already anesthetized. He began by clamping one of the carotid arteries in two places then removing a section of artery between the clamps. He then interposed a piece of carotid removed from another dog three months previously and kept since at freezing point. The operation was accomplished with circular sutures using fine Chinese silk and slender needles. It was exactly the technique that he had presented in Montreal in 1904 but which Pozzi had not then seen. Once the clamps were removed blood flowed normally again to the dog's brain. The whole procedure took no more than half an hour. Pozzi was greatly impressed by Carrel's surgical skill and the apparent simplicity of the procedure, the first successful technique for suturing blood vessels together that he had ever seen.

The visit finished with a tour of Carrel's Museum of Pathology where Pozzi pronounced himself "stupefied" to see an aorta from which a slice had been removed, the gap left being repaired with a patch from the aorta of another dog, and a further specimen in which a portion of vena cava had been grafted onto an aorta. "But why don't you publish?" he asked Carrel. "Most of this work is unknown."

“Oh,” Carrel answered softly, “I’m too busy to write, I’d much rather just work.”

Pozzi left the Rockefeller Institute completely stunned. Never, in all his experience in France and elsewhere, had he come across such things. A world of scientific surgery that was totally new and exceptional had been opened up to him. He was completely convinced of the integrity and merit of Carrel’s work. He decided that he should write for Carrel. In his room in the Waldorf he worked feverishly on the papers and reports that he planned to present in Paris with the notes Carrel supplied him.

Two weeks after his return to Paris, he presented the first report of Carrel’s work to members of the Academy of Medicine: *New experiences of suturing vessels and transplanting organs and limbs of Alexis Carrel*, recounting with enthusiasm everything he had seen at the Rockefeller Institute. His revelations however failed to move most of his audience. Soon afterwards, the text appeared in *La Presse Medicale* and he mailed it off to Carrel, receiving a grateful response. But at the time, prior to the development of antibiotics and drugs to prevent transplant rejection, and when microsurgery was not even imagined, Carrel seemed like a crackpot to many of his colleagues. However Pozzi shared his vision of one day being able to transplant kidneys, even hearts, and his association with Carrel flourished, leading to the conference on transplant surgery organized by himself and Clemenceau just prior to World War I. Pozzi also had a close collaboration with Carrel during that war to improve the treatment of serious shrapnel and gunshot wounds. Undoubtedly the support of a surgeon as eminent as Pozzi was a major factor in the decision to award Carrel the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1912 (although Carrel’s close association with Vichy France during World War II has since diminished his reputation among medical practitioners and his scientific peers).

Ironically, the failure of French surgeons to grasp Carrel’s principles for suturing blood vessels, and to apply them in practice, was to have drastic consequences not only for soldiers wounded in the Great War, but also for Pozzi himself.

## Chapter Twelve

### *L’Affaire Dreyfus*

*Allow me to speak of the intense emotion I felt when I read your cry for justice. As a woman I have no influence but I am anguished, haunted by the situation, and the beautiful words you wrote yesterday brought tremendous relief to my great suffering.*

*Sarah Bernhardt to Émile Zola, January 1898*

The morning of Monday October 15<sup>th</sup> 1894 was chilly in Paris, but as the sun rose it broke through the mist hovering above the Seine and promised a brighter afternoon. As Pozzi began his ward rounds at the Broca, and Bernhardt prepared for rehearsal of a new play by Sardou, Captain Alfred Dreyfus walked briskly along the quays beside the river, then turned down towards the rue Saint-Dominique in the 7<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement* where the Ministry of War stood. On the Avenue Bosquet the dry brown leaves of the plane trees crackled beneath his feet, and from café doorways came the fragrance of new bread and fresh coffee. Above the Ministry dozens of chimneys spewed out the smoke of coal fires that promised a warm interior. Captain Dreyfus had been summoned to a 9 am hearing at the Ministry, an invitation he’d found a little strange because of the early hour and because civilian dress had been specified. As he walked towards the massive Beaux Arts structure that housed the French Army headquarters, Dreyfus might have sniffed something far more pungent than the familiar smells of Paris. It was a stench that wafted through the churches, newspapers, salons and fine restaurants of nineteenth century France, a stink so odious that incense and scented candles could not obliterate it.

Though the French were justly celebrated for their urbanity and sophistication, the smell of anti-Semitism had permeated Gallic society since Christianity became the dominant religion. This anti-Semitism had mutated over the years, changing from a hatred of Jews as Christ-killers and money-lenders to depicting them as bulbous-nosed psychotics who devoured matzos drenched in the blood of Gentile infants. Despite France being the birthplace of the Enlightenment, anti-Jewish sentiments were deeply embedded within the French psyche and nurtured by the most reactionary elements of the Catholic Church. Napoléon had attempted to staunch this rabid anti-Semitism

but failed. In the latter part of the nineteenth Century, many in France believed Judaism itself was a cauldron of perversity and that those born under the Star of David were members of an inferior race.

Though Jews and Gentiles mingled socially in drawing rooms, tiptoed into boudoirs together and even married, many of the most cultured denizens of the city felt comfortable with a pervasive ‘casual’ anti-Semitism. In the 1830s, George Sand dismissed Fromental Halévy’s masterpiece, *La Juive*, as “hooked-nose music”. Bernhardt had endured Marie Colombier’s anti-Semitic rants in *Sarah Barnum* and her celebrity did not shield her from bigots who felt free to caricature one of the great beauties of France as a reptilian crone. There were frequent ugly allusions to her “Hebrew blood.”

Still, the sentiments against Jews whispered in cafes and drawing rooms around Paris were verbal candy compared to the demagoguery of Édouard Drumont. Drumont, a superstitious zealot who believed in palmistry and carried mandrake to ward off evil spirits, founded the virulently anti-Jewish rag, *La Libre Parole*. He headed the Anti-Semitic League of France and authored *La France Juive*, a poisonous tome that accused Jews of being lily-livered, pox-ridden criminals of low intelligence. If Drumont had been looking for a *cause célèbre*, he struck the mother lode in the fall of 1894.

As Captain Dreyfus strode towards the office of the chief of the Army General Staff, his spit-shined oxfords clicking across the pavers, he could hardly have been called dashing. He was a nondescript fellow of thirty-five with thinning hair and intelligent eyes hidden behind a *pince-nez*. The youngest of seven children, he had been born and reared in Mulhouse, a town in the province of Alsace where Teutonic culture blended with French. Alsace was prime real estate, the site of a centuries-old ping-pong tournament between France and Germany.

Like Pozzi and Bernhardt, Dreyfus had his early life enormously influenced by both the French educational system and the war of 1870. In 1871, Germany annexed Alsace and adjacent Lorraine, renaming it Alsace-Lorraine. The Jewish Dreyfus family was forced to leave Mulhouse, a quaint town of white wine, dark beer and oom pah music, for Switzerland and then France. Twelve-year-old Alfred and his older brother were sent to boarding school in Paris, the first and only children in the family to receive a French education.

From childhood young Alfred harbored fantasies of life as a soldier and eagerly embraced the discipline of French academia. The Army seemed to him to represent all the qualities he aspired to as he entered his teens: honor, patriotism, duty, order. He graduated from the prestigious *École Polytechnique* and attended the Fontainebleau Artillery Academy for two years of training as an artillery officer. From there he was accepted into the War College, and was on the fast track to become an officer in the French Army. In 1893 he had graduated ninth in his class with an honorable mention and was immediately designated as a trainee in the French Army's General Staff headquarters. Sterling achievements all but his Jewish roots stuck in the craw of many of his fellow French officers. Bigotry reared its ugly head in the person of General Pierre de Bonnefond, a diehard Jew-hater who made it clear that "Israelites were not desired in the General Staff" then promptly lowered the grades of both Dreyfus and a fellow Jewish officer, Lieutenant Picard. The two men took their complaint to General Lebelin de Dionne, Director of the General Staff. General de Dionne expressed regret but insisted he was powerless to reverse the grades. Perhaps de Dionne was ineffectual or truly impotent but the lowered scores remained. The Dreyfus/Picard protest was duly noted by those in the army who felt he should suck up de Bonnefond's behavior like a man. A year later, Dreyfus's challenge was used as proof of his lack of patriotism.

At the Chief of Staff's office, Dreyfus was greeted by unsmiling officers and policemen. He was immediately asked to take a dictation test; no reason was given for this bizarre demand but he complied, writing meticulously each word of the dictation. At its conclusion, his main inquisitor stood up, and thundered: "I arrest you. You are charged with high treason." No further information about the nature of the accusations or the identity of the accusers was given to Dreyfus as he was bundled away by Major Hubert-Joseph Henry to the prison of Cherche-Midi, where he was to be kept in solitary confinement for the next three days.

Only much later would Dreyfus learn that a French spy working as a charwoman in the German Embassy had discovered handwritten documents in the wastebasket of the German military attaché. The papers detailed sensitive information on quick-loading, heavy armament then being developed by the French military; since Captain Dreyfus was an expert in artillery and had access to the data, he made the perfect patsy.

Though experts differed as to whether the handwriting on the incriminating document was indeed that of Dreyfus, two stating firmly that it was not, the Army continued to pursue the charges. To many in the Army, and to many of the public, the charges appeared cut and dried: Captain Dreyfus, a German-speaking Jew from Alsace, had handed military secrets to France's enemy, Imperial Germany. The news of the charges and of the existence of

the document, known as the 'bordereau', was released at a time when Drumont and his cronies were fanning the flames of an ever increasing anti-Jewish hysteria. The right wing gleefully painted Dreyfus as the quintessential Jew, untrustworthy and traitorous. Catholic priests across France proclaimed him the second Judas and the anti-Semitic press echoed their sentiments in vitriolic language.

A closed military court-martial convened and denied the Dreyfus defense the right to examine almost all the evidence against him. No details of the nature of the case appeared in the press, simply a statement of his guilt, and editors almost universally condemned him. The original bordereau was not produced as an exhibit and several other incriminating documents (much later found to have been forged, by Major Henry among others) were circulated secretly to the military judges. In January of 1895, Dreyfus was declared guilty of treason and sentenced to life imprisonment. He was expelled from the Army and publicly humiliated in a dramatic farce played before an audience of twenty thousand, most of them screaming for his blood. A soldier ripped the stripes and red sash of his rank from his uniform and his sword was broken in half; later, he was shipped off in chains to rot in Devil's Island, a hellish penal colony located off the coast of South America.

The military men stroked their waxed moustaches and patted each other on the back, unaware of exactly what they had unleashed. The Dreyfus Affair would tear apart the fabric of French society. Duels were fought, violence broke out in taverns, coffee houses and family dinners, lifelong friendships came to an end and for a while the Third Republic was brought to its knees.

Dreyfus himself seemed certain to die amidst the pestilence and filth of French Guiana when Lieutenant Colonel Georges Picquart came to the rescue. Like Dreyfus, Picquart was an Alsace native; he was however tall, dashing and unapologetically anti-Semitic. He had been one of the officers involved in the initial 'dictation' interview with Dreyfus, and at first believed completely in his guilt. In 1895 he was appointed chief of the Army Intelligence Service and luckily for Dreyfus, a sense of honor missing in his comrades compelled him to investigate the matter in greater detail. He discovered that his predecessor, Colonel Sandherr, had been involved in framing Dreyfus using documents forged by Major Henry. Most importantly he discovered that the guilty officer was not Dreyfus but an Army Major named Ferdinand Walsin Esterhazy who was perpetually in debt. Picquart was as tenacious as a pitbull in his attempt to reopen the case and despite warnings from other officers, continued presenting evidence of the innocence of Dreyfus. Esterhazy was arrested and charged with treason in late December of 1897.

By then the affair had become *the* issue among French intellectuals and politicians. Picquart was seconded to Tunisia for his chutzpah and perceived insolence, but prior to his banishment he leaked the truth to the liberal press and convinced an influential member of the French Senate, Auguste Scheurer-Kestner, that Dreyfus had been railroaded. Dreyfus's innocence became a white hot issue in the salons, especially those hosted by Jewish women. One Sunday evening in October 1897, Pozzi was dining at the home of Émile and Genevieve Straus on the Boulevard Haussmann. The room buzzed with conversation. Suddenly Madame Straus tapped her glass, calling for quiet.

“My friends,” she announced, “Joseph Reinach has something very important to tell you all.”

In the hushed silence that followed, Reinach began to speak, slowly then with great emotion. He revealed for the first time the involvement of Esterhazy in the case, and recounted the extraordinary story of the bordereau, until then largely unknown to the general French public. The fragment of text, said Reinach, was not written by the hand of Captain Dreyfus but by that of a superior officer, Major Esterhazy!

Reinach was certain of the facts, as were Scheurer-Kestner and his close friend Clemenceau. Both were certain that Dreyfus, at that moment rotting on Devil's Island, was innocent.

When Reinach finished his tale, there was a moment of consternation, as each person present began to realise the implications the ‘Affaire’ – as it was to become – would have for him or herself, and for France. At this point Schlumberger, who was also present, timidly tried to make an objection. He was immediately seized by both Reinach and his host, Émile Straus, and ejected. It is interesting to read the language Schlum uses about this event.

“It was at the end of 1897 that the Affair took on such alarming proportions. This terrible affair, so damaging to the nation, deprived me of many of my friends, me who had never fallen out with anyone before. I no longer was asked to dinner with the Strauses...I saw them around sometimes, but the atmosphere was always cold, very painful. They became the most fanatical believers in the innocence of Dreyfus.” Schlumberger displays quite



extraordinary indifference to the facts: Dreyfus was not only innocent, but framed. The acceptance of the original verdict represented the most extreme anti-Semitism on the part of many of Schlum's friends and acquaintances.

“I was astonished to see to what degree Madame Straus whom I had always known to be so totally indifferent to race and religion, whom I had seen joking with her husband who had strong opinions as a Jew, how much she interested herself in the beginnings of the drama. She seemed infinitely captivated by it. I was far from suspecting that one day she would become with regard to the trial, like so many other Israelites until then people of the world, a true Jewish tribeswoman, completely devoted to demolishing the old France to prove the innocence of someone whom so many others believed guilty.”

Samuel Pozzi saw the case, and the information provided by Joseph Reinach, whom he had known for at least twenty years and trusted completely, quite differently from Schlum. He immediately sprang to the defence of the Army captain; from that night at the Strauses Pozzi linked himself firmly with the Dreyfusard cause. He would not exchange a word with Schlum for the next eighteen years.

Three months later, on 8<sup>th</sup> January 1898, Pozzi was elected Senator for the Dordogne. The following day, as he took the train to Paris from the town of Perigueux, Esterhazy was being tried in the prison of Cherche-Midi. A day later, the Major was acquitted, freed of all suspicion in the Affair according to those who tried him in a military tribunal – to the great anger of the Dreyfusards, including the newly-elected Senator Pozzi.

*L'affaire* might have ended horribly for both Dreyfus and Picquart had it not been for the determined intervention of novelist Émile Zola. Zola was physically unassuming, a bearded fellow who like Dreyfus wore *pince-nez* and looked more like a university professor than the fiery proponent of French naturalism. Although his dark literary works brought him fame and financial success greater even than that of Victor Hugo, at heart Zola was a political animal and passionate defender of the republic. He had written a number of articles protesting the Dreyfus conviction but his great work on Dreyfus's behalf was yet to come. Two days later after Esterhazy was exonerated, Zola wrote and Georges Clemenceau published in his newspaper *L'Aurore* the vehement letter *J'accuse, Letter to the President of the Republic from Émile Zola*. *L'Aurore* sold 300,000 copies.

Zola had believed that the conviction of Esterhazy was inevitable and that this would be the beginning of the redemption of Dreyfus. The shocking acquittal and Zola's actions greatly swelled the numbers of Dreyfusards and around Zola, Reinach and Clemenceau there grew a group of Paris intellectuals committed to seeking justice for Dreyfus. That group included Samuel Pozzi. Pozzi had known Clemenceau since they were medical students together. The group met often and in varying numbers in Paris, and included Alfred's brother Mathieu Dreyfus, Scheurer-Kestner and Georges Clairin. As well Pozzi, like Auguste Scheurer-Kestner, was now also a member of the Senate and joined in fighting for Dreyfus's release within that body.

It was not only inevitable that Samuel Pozzi would be a Dreyfusard, it was inevitable that he would be an enthusiastic one. His upbringing and his family dictated it. Despite his devotion to the scriptures, Pastor Pozzy had been a great believer in education. Alongside the Biblical quotes on the walls of his house were quotes from Greek, Latin and French philosophers and writers. His sons were sent to the *lycées* of Pau and Bordeaux to study mathematics and science as well as languages and literature, and he was strongly supportive of Samuel's decision to study medicine in Paris.

In Paris, Samuel was to find a ferment of ideas about the nature and origins of Man. In his first years in Paris, along with his study of anatomy and physiology, he read the *Origin of Species* and other works of Charles Darwin in both French and English, and well before the outbreak of the war of 1870 he was a member of Broca's Society of Anthropology and influenced by Broca's ideas. Unlike Schlumberger, he did not flinch before the squalor and suffering of the dank wards of the Paris public hospitals, exalting rather in what he could learn and the changes he could bring as a fully-trained surgeon to those who sought his care. The war of 1870 and the horrors he saw there affected him deeply, but by way of reinforcement of what he had already encountered and absorbed into his personal system of belief. He no longer believed in a divine being, but his professional life, and much of his personal life, was now infused by his humanism and his humanitarianism, which would color his actions until the moment of his death.

As well, Pozzi's many friends were those who attracted him because of their intelligence, their wit and their knowledge of many different aspects of the world. They were fellow physicians and surgeons, scientists, writers, painters, actors and actresses, and the women who conducted the great salons of Paris. Among them were many of Jewish origin, including Genevieve Straus, the Proust family, Judith Gautier and Bernhardt herself – as well as his great love Emma Fischhof. Their religion and ethnicity were irrelevant to Pozzi, as they were to many in his

intimate circle. Pozzi was contemptuous of the racism attached to French anti-Semitism; it was entirely natural that once the details of the Dreyfus case became known he should throw himself into supporting the Captain.

Bernhardt was also a prominent Dreyfusard, a defender from the beginning. Playwright Louis Verneuil who was briefly married to her grand-daughter suggested that Sarah was aware of Dreyfus from the beginning of the case and that she was part of the mob of twenty thousand who witnessed Dreyfus being publicly humiliated. He went on to insist that it was Sarah who pushed Zola to write *J'accuse!* Even though he exaggerated Sarah's role in the Dreyfus affair, she too had suffered greatly because of her Jewish heritage. Certainly she had known Joseph Reinach as long as Pozzi had -in a note to Pozzi in April 1878 she tells him that "Reinach was delighted with your letter" but does not elaborate on this.

*J'accuse!* immediately split the country into two distinct camps; Dreyfusard, which included the left, lovers of the republic and writers and artists like Monet, Mary Cassatt, André Gide, the Halévy family, Colette, Clemenceau, Marcel Proust and Pissarro. Though some have erroneously put him in the anti-Dreyfus camp, even Robert de Montesquou put aside his snobbery and was convinced of Dreyfus's innocence.

The anti-Dreyfus camp included the French Catholic Church, Royalists, the French military establishment and some right-wing artists including Degas, Cézanne (who had been a boyhood friend of Zola's), Francis Coppée, author of Bernhardt's earliest stage success and the sculptor, Rodin. Sarah's son, Maurice, also joined the anti-Dreyfusards despite his Jewish roots and his mother's zealous belief in the Captain's innocence. The two argued so violently that according to Sarah's granddaughter: "Maurice fled with his family from Paris to Monte Carlo and for many painful months Maurice and Sarah were not on speaking terms."

Sarah penned her own letter to Zola on the day *J'accuse!* was published:

"Dear Grand Master,

Allow me to speak of the intense emotion I felt when I read your cry for justice. As a woman I have no influence but I am anguished, haunted by the situation, and the beautiful words you wrote yesterday brought tremendous relief to my great suffering.

I thought of writing to thank Auguste Scheurer-Kestner but knowing that everything that admirable man does is considered criminally suspect, I thought that if an artiste – what am I saying? – an actress was known to admire his courageous deeds, that discovery would be sure to crush him. To you whom I have loved so long, I say thank you with all the strength of a melancholy instinct which cries out to me: It's a crime! A crime!"

It was at this time, when all of Paris was aflame, that the only negative comments about Pozzi showed up in print. The main attacks were from the violently anti-Semitic writer Léon Daudet. Daudet's attacks on Pozzi have been quoted by art historians without being put into the context of the Dreyfus Affair. Daudet described Pozzi as "talkative, pomaded and empty." Of his skill as a surgeon he wrote: "I would not trust him to cut my hair, especially if there was a mirror in the room."

Though Daudet's social observations about Belle Époque Paris were often witty and perceptive, he was a bigot and a voice of reaction. In the early years of the twentieth century, he edited a vicious right wing daily, *Action Française*. A rabid monarchist, Daudet remained on the wrong side against France's march toward democracy and before dying in 1942, lived long enough to do a joyful goosestep with Vichy France.

Societal passions were fanned in large part by the actions of the most ardent anti-Dreyfusards, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Catholic publications joined with priests and declared the *Affaire* a conspiracy of Jews and Freemasons bent on destroying the prestige of the Army and ultimately France herself.

Meanwhile within the Army it was discovered that Major Henry had in 1896 forged a number of documents purporting to strengthen the case against Dreyfus. Henry was finally arrested for his actions and killed himself in his prison cell by slitting his throat with a razor. Instead of being condemned, he was celebrated by the anti-Dreyfus camp as a martyr for France. Anti-Semites planned to raise a monument to him built from a collection sponsored by three hundred and fifty Catholic priests

There was increasing support for a new trial from politicians, intellectuals and the general public. After publicly attacking the army cabal with *J'accuse!*, Zola was found guilty of libeling the military and sentenced to

imprisonment. He fled to England where he remained for eleven months until being granted amnesty. Pozzi's group, with Reinach and Clemenceau remaining in France, was central to the efforts of those demanding a second trial of Dreyfus. In the Spring of 1899, it was agreed that Dreyfus would be returned to France and a new trial held. This news was greeted with joy by the Dreyfusards. Scheurer-Kestner, who was both a friend and a patient of Pozzi's, was unwell in Biarritz when this decision was made public. He wrote to Pozzi:

“My dear friend, Your telegram arrived just at the moment when I was complaining of having no news from you. Thank you for your kind thoughts. Yes, I am delighted, for this business will surely have moral and political consequences. It's a direct hit on the Jesuits.

I'm getting along better, but my daily routine is depressing me. I embrace you with all my heart, A. Scheurer-Kestner.”

Scheurer-Kestner also gave Pozzi, at about this time, a letter he had received from Lucie Dreyfus, Alfred's wife, written in October 1898, when Scheurer-Kestner was publicly calling for a re-trial.

“Sunday morning

Dear Monsieur,

I am so very happy about everything that has happened that more than anything I would like to come to see you, so I could personally tell you of the joy I feel and convey my immense gratitude. It's now eleven months since your first admirable and courageous intervention, eleven months, it's a long time for those who have suffered such abuse and injustice. But don't let's forget that we had mountains to climb, crimes to reveal, and that the resistance to our efforts was as great as the crimes themselves.

As well, dear Monsieur, I must say that not for an instant have I forgotten that it was to you that we owe so much, that it is to you that my husband, my parents, the sisters, all our family, owe our immense happiness, and that thanks to you my children will be able to bear a name that is honorable and without a stain upon it.

We sent you a telegram yesterday, I hope that it gave you pleasure. I would like so much to be able to hold your hands, to tell you how much we wish for your return to health, and finally how very good and noble you are.

With my very warmest wishes, L. Dreyfus”

The trial was to take place in Rennes, the capital of Brittany, in an empty secondary school (today named the Lycée Zola; the hall in which the trial was held is now a basketball court.) The trial would be open to the public, although entrance was greatly restricted. Samuel Pozzi was determined to be there. He left the heat of Paris and arrived in Rennes at the beginning of August 1899. The city swarmed with soldiers and police charged with controlling crowds of anti-Dreyfusards. Pozzi joined the pro-Dreyfus faction who had congregated at a local inn, the Three Steps. The three main players, Zola, Joseph Reinach and Clemenceau, chose to stay away since their presence would have surely caused rioting; however, the rest of the faithful were in attendance. Reinach had arranged entry for Pozzi with the defence lawyers for Dreyfus. He wrote to him in early August:

“My dear friend, (Ferdinand) Labori and Bernard Lazare have the details of your arrival in Rennes – go and find one or the other, who will arrange your entry. You can be certain this will work out although it’s impossible to have a permanent entry card. But I can assure you, you won’t make the journey in vain. On the contrary, the Prefect will be happy to accede to the wishes of Monsieur the Senator.

Your report (for the Senate, on reform of the French schools’ examination system) is illuminating.

I have been delighted by your recommendations. I haven’t read it all yet. That will be for the holidays. What holidays?? With my best wishes, Joseph Reinach.”

In the following days in the courtroom, amidst the soldiers, curiosity seekers and diehards on both sides, reporters noted Senator Pozzi, “a striking personage because of his height and dapper appearance”, mingling with the civilians who kept their violent discussions away from the military. During the days of the trial he sat taking copious notes with pencil and paper, during breaks congregating with his friends in the courtyard of the *lycée*, a tall figure in civilian dress standing out among the disdainful officers in uniform and highly polished boots. Each night he gathered with friends at the Three Steps and reported back to Reinach. Pozzi was not the only celebrity who made an appearance. According to the *New York Times*, the beautiful actress Réjane was in attendance. Though a report from a *New York Times* journalist said that “...the Dreyfusards and the anti-Dreyfusards are beginning to show a greater cordiality toward each other”, the discord became so heated that an assassin wounded Labori with a bullet in the back.

In spite of growing support among the French populace, Dreyfus was again found guilty “with extenuating circumstances” at the second trial and sentenced to be returned to Devil’s Island. This was in many ways a more shocking conviction than the first, since it was now clear to a large part of the French population that he was innocent. Dreyfus and his family were exhausted. There was the question of a presidential pardon. Clemenceau spoke for most Dreyfusards when he said that: “My heart says yes, but my reason says no.”

It was decided to seek a medical opinion. Dreyfus was wasted, bent after many bouts of dysentery and missing all his teeth. Pozzi was sought but had taken himself away to tend his property at La Graulet and the concerns of his constituents. Another physician, Pierre Delbet, examined Dreyfus and reported: “The state of health of the prisoner is incompatible with his continuing in detention.” On 19 September President Émile Loubet signed the decree ordering the release of Dreyfus. A number in the Dreyfus camp saw it as capitulation and threw their hands up in disgust, but it is doubtful that Dreyfus could have survived another trip to Devil’s Island. The group who had met at the Three Steps continued to meet and support attempts to have Dreyfus exonerated.

Zola died from asphyxiation in 1902, poisoned by carbon monoxide from a clogged chimney. Since there had been a number attempts on his life, his supporters suspected the worse but could not prove it. Years after his death, a roofer made a death bed confession, admitting that he murdered Zola because of his role in the Dreyfus affair. Three years later, the Radical Party of France unmasked the French Catholic Church as the main villains in the Dreyfus case and succeeded in passing legislation

that separated church and state. Finally, in 1906, twelve years after the case began, the long-suffering Dreyfus was exonerated of all charges, given the Legion of Honor and promoted to the rank of Major. The Dreyfus acquittal strengthened the Republic and revealed the insufferable conduct of the army and the Catholic hierarchy.

In June of 1908, Zola's cremated remains were transferred to the Panthéon in a solemn ceremony. Dreyfus was present at the tribute as was Pozzi who stood near him on stage. When a rabidly anti-Dreyfusard journalist and friend of Drumont named Grégori shot Dreyfus and wounded him in the arm, Pozzi ignored the personal danger and rushed forward to provide aid, an act for which Dreyfus was always profoundly grateful.

Sarah wrote a letter to Dreyfus dated June 6, 1908 after the shooting:

“You have suffered again. We have cried again. But you should no longer suffer and we should no longer cry. The flag of truth is placed in the hand of the illustrious man resting under the Panthéon's glorious arches. The flag will snap louder than the barking of the dog pack.

“Suffer no more, our dear martyr. Look around you, close by, then farther on and farther on still, and see this great mass of people who love you and defend you against cowardice, lies, and the quest to forget. Your friend is among them. Sarah Bernhardt.”

Grégori managed to convince a jury that he was not aiming his pistol at Dreyfus but at the Dreyfus cause, and was acquitted by a jury. His acquittal proved that the anger over Dreyfus had not remotely abated. The Dreyfus Affair brought up issues of anti-republicanism, anti-Semitism and anti-clericalism that the French were not prepared to deal with and underscored the bitter divisions within French society.

On 8<sup>th</sup> September 1908, following the verdict in favor of Grégori and his receipt of a note from Pozzi, Dreyfus wrote to him:

“My dear Doctor,

I thank you warmly for your card which I found very touching. The verdict really rebounds on those who gave it; truly one needs a very warped mind and a very accommodating conscience to answer no



to the question: is he guilty of causing blows and injuries? If the jury, after having acted in the name of justice, had asked for a suspended sentence, I could easily have understood it, even though, with his scornful and disdainful attitude, he didn't deserve it. But you know me well enough, my dear Doctor, to know that I don't worry about these trifles. Rather we need to draw from them greater strength so that we can educate the masses, and teach them that the words justice, truth and conscience impose upon us duties and obligations.

Yours with all my heart,

Alfred Dreyfus.”

Pozzi remained Dreyfus's personal physician and friend until his own death in 1918.

Dreyfus was given an honorable discharge from the Army in 1907 because of his poor health, but in 1914 at the outbreak of World War I, like Pozzi, he volunteered for military service again. He served in a wide range of artillery commands, as a Major and finally as a Lieutenant-Colonel. He was raised to the rank of Officer of the Legion of Honor in 1919, and lived until 1935. His son, Pierre Dreyfus, who was three years old at the time of the first trial, served in World War I as an artillery officer and was awarded the Croix de Guerre; his two nephews also fought in the French Army during World War I, both losing their lives. The same artillery piece for which Dreyfus was accused of revealing secrets to the Germans was used in blunting the early German offensives because of its ability to maintain accuracy during rapid fire.

Georges Picquart, the ultimate whistle blower, was found innocent of all charges and promoted to the rank of General. When he died as a result of an accident in 1914, he left a request not to be buried in his uniform. Pozzi's grandson, Claude Bourdet, became an active member of the French Resistance during the War, was captured by the Gestapo and imprisoned in various concentration camps including Buchenwald. He became a supporter of the anti-colonial fight, denounced repression in Madagascar and later wrote his own version of *J'accuse!* which accused French colonials of torture in Algeria.

The French Army did not concede that Dreyfus was innocent until September 25, 1995 when the head of the army's historical service acknowledged more than a century later, and for the first time publicly, that the Army had been wrong and Dreyfus had been innocent. The admission raised the

wrath of anti-Semites throughout France. Three years later, on the 100th anniversary of the printing of *J'accuse!*, France's Roman Catholic daily paper, *La Croix*, finally apologized for its anti-Semitic editorials during the Dreyfus affair.



Blessé, le commandant Dreyfus (en chapeau haut de forme, au centre du groupe, et le poignet soutenu par le docteur Pozzi, en uniforme d'académicien) est accompagné à la mairie du Panthéon pour un premier pansement.

At the interment of Zola's ashes at the Panthéon Samuel Pozzi assists Dreyfus (slightly obscured in the photograph) who has been wounded in the arm.

## Chapter Thirteen

### *Sarah's missing leg*

*Listen to me, adored friend. I beg you, cut off my leg a little above the knee. Do not protest. I have perhaps ten or fifteen years left. Why condemn me to constant suffering? Why condemn me to inactivity? Even with a celluloid cast I shall be handicapped and won't be able to perform. And horror of horrors, I shall always be in pain.*

*Sarah Bernhardt to Samuel Pozzi, February 1915*

Such is Bernhardt's continuing fame in France that in December of 2008, *Sud-Ouest*, the leading newspaper of south-west France, was able to feature a page-one exclusive with the simple announcement: "Sarah's leg refound!" This story referred to the apparently "miraculous" discovery, in the basement of the Faculty of Medicine in Bordeaux, of Bernhardt's leg, amputated in Bordeaux in 1915. A spokesman for the Faculty quickly pointed out to national and international media that "we never actually lost the leg. It was just forgotten, and now we have found it (and will) prepare it for display." However there was more consternation when local Bernhardt devotees pointed out that the specimen slowly disintegrating in a jar of formalin was actually a left leg, amputated below the knee, whereas Sarah had undergone an above-knee removal of her right limb for an excruciatingly painful arthritis of the joint.

The trouble began in 1904, when Sarah was playing Tosca, a role she had made her own since 1887. At the end of Act 2, Tosca, in order to gain the release of her imprisoned lover and flee Rome with him, initially yields to the seduction of the police chief and villain Scarpia, but then, noticing a knife on the table beside her, makes the decision to kill Scarpia rather than allow him to kiss her. As he advances to embrace her, she plunges the knife into his heart, crying: "And *this* is Tosca's kiss!" For this haunting scene Sarah wore a clinging Empire gown with a long serpentine train that coiled about the stage as she committed the murder, then surrounded Scarpia's body with candles and placed a crucifix on his chest. Slowly backing away from the corpse, overcome with horror at what she had done, she slid into the wings, the train continuing to snake across the stage even when she was gone. This scene, declared a British critic, "is the nearest thing to great tragedy that has ever been seen in modern times" and Sarah continued to play Tosca regularly to packed houses until at least 1913.

In Act 3, after much action both dramatic and melodramatic, Tosca's lover is killed by a firing squad on orders previously received from the dead Scarpia. Tosca, learning of this, leaps from the ramparts of the Castel Sant'

Angelo to her own death. Though the drop on the stage beyond the ramparts was in fact only a short one, it was during one of these leaps that Sarah twisted her right knee.

Intermittently over a decade the pain bothered her, but it grew much worse in the summer of 1914. Naturally it was to Samuel that Bernhardt turned for advice. Pozzi's grandson Claude Bourdet recalled, many years later, meeting Bernhardt at this time with his grandfather:

“One day, just before the First World War, I was coming out of the apartment block where my grandfather lived and where he had his consulting rooms, on the Avenue d'Iéna. There was a carriage coming down the avenue, it seemed to me to be an electric carriage because I was, I remember, struck by the fact that I did not see a horse. I was four or five years old, so long ago that I can't be sure of real impressions at that time. But what I am sure of is that my grandfather, whom we had not found at home, jumped out of the carriage and took me in his arms very tenderly, as he always did. My governess was watching on the footpath. Then my grandfather more or less threw me into the carriage where I disappeared into a mass of silk and feathers that covered me with kisses. My memories of this event are entirely agreeable, but there was more to come. My grandfather retrieved me, and returned me to my governess, and spoke words that I have never forgotten, probably because they have been repeated to me a hundred times since: ‘You have just been kissed by Madame Sarah Bernhardt!’”

At first Pozzi's recommendations were conservative – go and try the waters at a spa, he told her. Having travelled to the hot springs in the town of Dax for a mud cure, on the 27<sup>th</sup> June she wrote to him from Brittany: “My Doctor God, my dear friend – this is what's going on: I have taken a cure at Dax. This little town is in a valley in the Landes region. It's the most humid country possible... At last I am at Belle-Île in my own solitary corner with the immense horizon all around me... What can I do, what can I do with my knee??? I can no longer take the weight properly on my leg. This unhappy limb was surrounded at Dax by a quite disgusting putrid black mud. I don't know if the treatment has done any good at all but I haven't budged for 25 days and I think that at least the enforced rest has done me some good. My knee no longer has the appearance of the head of a newborn babe, it's almost normal size, my kneecap is visible, clearly outlined, but I still can't put any weight on the leg. What should I do? Abbema sent me Doyen who thought it would be necessary to open the knee to remove some substance causing the problem. However he said he wouldn't do anything without your presence, and then someone quietly said to me: do nothing! They hate each other! I put my leg in the sun, it's red from the kiss of the sun and so a bit intimidating at the moment but I think it will greet you with aplomb and receive the kiss of a beautiful Phoebus\*

without fever. If you were the friend of former times you would jump at coming to see your old flame who at the moment is playing her last card, but will always be the adoring admirer of the divine surgeon. Now you are this society person attached to the Right Bank, so what can I do? However if you did come you would have several days rest with your friends... Good-bye! I adore you, Doctor God. What must I do? I kiss you, Sarah.” (\*Here Bernhardt cleverly compliments Pozzi on his well-preserved good looks as she plays with classical allusions to Phoebus as both the sungod and the god Apollo, renowned for his beauty.)

Pozzi of course immediately wired that he would come at once to Belle-Île and Sarah responded with an effusive telegram: “My Doctor God thank you thank you. You take the fast train at ten past nine in the evening from the Orsay station. You reach Quiberon at half past seven in the morning. You straight away take the boat which departs immediately and my son will wait for you with the car at 9.30 at the Place where you will disembark and a quarter of an hour later you will have too many arms, too

many hands and too many hearts receiving you and expressing their deepest tenderness. Telegraph me the evening of your departure, Sarah. ”

At Belle-Île, Pozzi carefully examined the joint. Bernhardt was 70 and suffered chronic kidney disease for which Pozzi had prescribed a diet consisting of a great deal of milk. “I drink my milk with disgust and digest it badly...but that doesn't matter, I drink, drink, drink!” she wrote to him on one occasion. He was reluctant to recommend surgery and proposed instead a mechanical support splinting the leg. But on 11<sup>th</sup> July Sarah wrote: “Ah! My Doctor God, I am fed up and this leg weighs heavily on me...I must be better by 1<sup>st</sup> August for my American tour. I have my engagements to keep, my scenes and my rehearsals.” And on 21<sup>st</sup> July: “Ah! My Doctor God, it's not going well. Above all my knee is very swollen, terribly swollen in that apparatus and the suffering was intolerable so I had to take it off...I hold myself upright but I still cannot walk. As for my kidneys the analysis made on the day of your arrival was sent back to you on Monday, and it showed 500 micrograms of albumin and nothing else abnormal. Do you not think Doctor God that I should try a radium treatment before giving up altogether? You see I am supposed to make a tour that would give us three million nine hundred thousand francs which it now looks like I am going to have to renounce and it goes against my heart to do so! So there it is. Now you know everything. What shall I do? I love you very tenderly and hold out my hand to you with hope, Sarah.”

Bernhardt returned to Paris where Pozzi examined the joint again. He did not share Sarah's opinion of the possible value of radium and advised instead a plaster cast which would hopefully allow the knee joint to fuse— the leg would be stiff but reasonably functional and hopefully the pain would be gone. The cast would have to remain in place at least six months. At this stage it is clear that Pozzi still felt that the diagnosis was one of osteo-arthritis brought on by the old injury. "It's just a matter of being patient, in order to get fusion," he wrote to her. "It will definitely be stiff, but it will be effective." On the eve of World War I, as across France reservists were being called up, the cast was applied: lounging or sitting, with her heel on a cushion, Sarah found the plaster tolerable, but standing, the encased limb was unbearably heavy and painful. Still, she accepted with good grace what her Doctor God had told her.

With the outbreak of the war at the beginning of August Samuel immediately volunteered again, at the age of 68, and was appointed a military surgeon with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. He donned a uniform with five stars on the sleeve, three of gold and two that matched the silver of his beard and temples. To his practice at the Broca and in his private rooms at the Avenue d'Iéna he now added surgical lists at the hastily-assembled operating theater of the old Panthéon Hospital in the rue Lhomond in the 5<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement*, and ward rounds wherever patients could be found a temporary bed. Numerous wealthy friends with large Parisian townhouses, including Emma's father, Charles Sedelmeyer, withdrew to one or two rooms of their mansions, giving over the others for conversion into wards for the wounded. The enemy advanced rapidly and by the beginning of September were just 200 kilometres from Paris, where most of the 600,000 wounded French soldiers had been transported. Belgium had been overrun and Lille was occupied. On 30<sup>th</sup> August bombs were dropped for the first time on Paris, with several casualties. There would be ten more aerial bombing raids before Christmas. Like many other Parisians, Thérèse Pozzi hastily gathered belongings together and departed with Catherine and Claude, then aged five, for La Graulet. The government prudently moved its headquarters to Bordeaux. Sarah was determined to stay in the capital, as she had done in 1870 when she had organised her own hospital at the Odéon. However Clemenceau, then a senator and later in the war Prime Minister of France, came to see her with the news that as a national figure, her name was on a list of hostages the Germans were determined to seize and send to Berlin as soon as they entered Paris. He implored her to leave the city, and Samuel too recommended it. She demurred, seeming quite taken with the idea of herself as a hostage, until Clemenceau declared that she was a national treasure equal to the paintings of the Louvre, whose safety her beloved *patrie* could take no risks with, and reluctantly she agreed.

On the morning of her departure she declared her wish to gaze one last time at the Avenue of the Champs-Élysées before leaving from the Gare d'Austerlitz. To her great astonishment hundreds of taxis blocked the Avenue, heading towards Étoile carrying reinforcements to the Battle of the Marne. An officer tried to requisition the taxi which besides Bernhardt contained her two small grand-daughters and a maid. Then, seeing the national treasure stretched out on the back seat, her leg in plaster, he immediately apologised: "Pardon, Madame! I did not realize it was you." He ordered the driver to take her to the station and then return, telling Bernhardt, truthfully as it turned out: "Rest assured, Madame, *they shall not pass!*"

In late September, now set up in a modest villa outside Bordeaux, she wrote to Samuel:

"My Doctor God, I embrace you very tenderly, sadly also; the days weigh me down without respite and that makes me suffer even more...I am here in Andernos, a little corner of Gironde, a kind of village at the bottom of the bay of Archacon 42 kilometres from Bordeaux...My villa is quite small, in the middle of a wooded garden. From my bed I can see the road and that distracts me a bit...I work in painting and literature but well, you know me, I am dying of boredom. However there is always something new to learn and age doesn't keep us from school...I hold you in my heart and embrace you as I love and admire you. Sarah."

Pozzi, very busy in Paris as more and more wounded men were evacuated there, entrusted her care to one of his former interns, Jean Denucé, now professor of surgery at the Bordeaux Faculty of Medicine. Her X-rays and detailed notes were duly dispatched to Denucé who was very attentive, not hesitating to consult or inform Pozzi of developments, on occasion telegraphing several times a day. Sarah also wrote. On 8<sup>th</sup> October she told him "...you must be dead with fatigue, but still, I need five minutes. Yesterday was 7<sup>th</sup> and that makes two months that my leg has been in plaster...I am suffering much less but still at times I have small cramps... It's now four and a half month since I put my foot on the ground, it was at Liège...the poor little town of Liège, so gay then, so noisy, it looks like one of our towns in the Midi with its movement and its straw hats, and I remember having joked about the Belgians!!! I could kick myself, it's like a cruel joke. I love them and admire them. They are and will remain the heroes of this horrible epic! Ah! Their blood, their tears, their ruins, their heroism! As opposed to those cowards...those bandits. Never can the punishment equal the crimes committed. But you know all that, I am just repeating things. ...I am going to repeat something else: I love you deeply my friend, Sarah."

Though she gritted her teeth against the pain, it was really becoming unbearable. Clairin came to Andernos and she got him to write to Samuel. "She cannot walk as far as the postbox," Clairin told Pozzi, "she has to be supported to the chaise-longue...she talks of an operation and a false leg."

Telegrams flew back and forth between Bordeaux and Paris, and on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1915, Denucé, submitting to Sarah's pleas, removed the plaster, revealing a right knee swollen to twice the size of the left, and of which "the least movement brought forth a cry of agony from the brave patient." A careful examination led Denucé to a diagnosis of tuberculosis causing arthritis of the joint. He wrote to Pozzi: "My dear Master, I don't want to make any decision without knowing what you think and I await your response." Meanwhile Sarah had also written: "My beloved Doctor God, I beg you to take this letter seriously...my leg has been in a plaster cast for six months...I beg you to cut off my leg a little above the knee. With a well-constructed wooden leg I'll be able to give poetry readings and even make lecture tours. I'll be free to come and go without pain. I cannot bear to be useless, confined to a chair as I have been for six months. It's clear to me that my leg will never fuse; I'm not young enough for that... My friend, don't think I'm hysterical. No. I'm calm and cheerful. I want to live what life remains to me, or else die at once. At this moment lads of twenty are losing their legs, and their arms, meant for embraces. And you refuse me! No! it's impossible! my leg must be cut off immediately! I want to be operated on this week. I am not able to be moved."

Denucé conferred with Pozzi, who discreetly ordered a Wassermann, a test for syphilis, a disease which could sometimes be mistaken for tuberculosis and which could be treated without surgery. The test was negative – despite her extensive list of lovers Sarah had never contracted the disease that carried off Guy de Maupassant, Edouard Manet and Paul Gauguin among many other of her contemporaries. Sarah also had no evidence of tuberculosis elsewhere (although her history of early childhood illnesses does support a possible diagnosis of latent tuberculosis, a disease that can recur after many years of quiescence.) Her kidneys were functioning reasonably well. Pozzi was reluctant to operate himself on his old friend and in any case could only leave his military duties briefly. Bernhardt wired him: "Your presence a tender flower, your absence evidence of unavoidable duty God will assist me Sarah." On 22<sup>nd</sup> February France's greatest stage performer, dressed in a white satin peignoir and swathed in pink crepe-de-chine veils, was wheeled past her anxious family while bravely humming the opening bars of the *Marseillaise*. One of the still-rare women doctors in France, Mademoiselle Coingt, used the "latest novelty," the balloon mask of Professor Ombrédanne, to administer ether. Later the young doctor wrote that "in the same voice I had heard in *Tosca* and *The Lady of the Camellias* Bernhardt said to me 'Mademoiselle, I'm in your hands...let's go, quickly, quickly.' And to Denucé she said, 'Darling, give me a kiss!' I felt I was at the theater except I myself



had a role in the painful drama!” The mask was applied to Sarah’s face, the ether turned on. “I’m choking, I’m suffocating!” she cried. “Turn it off!” Moments later she was asleep. Denucé applied a tourniquet, and in Dr Coignt’s words “made the first cut. Five minutes later the leg fell off.” Within fifteen minutes Denucé had completed the surgery, stitching a flap of muscle and skin over the stump of Sarah’s thigh bone. The operation of amputation was by then a safe and routine surgical procedure; there were no complications for Bernhardt and little blood loss.

Mademoiselle Coignt continued: “The wound was dressed and the great tragedienne, crowned by her peignoir and satin-lined sheepskin, wheeled back to her room... ‘Where is Denucé and the young woman who put me to sleep?’ ‘Madame, I am here,’ I said. ‘Oh darling, you’re nice, come here, I want to see you.’ I tried to leave but she detained me. ‘Darling, I like you, stay a bit longer.’ I told her to be calm and not to talk. The drama continued. One feels she is always acting, playing the role of someone who has just undergone a grave operation.”

Denucé telegraphed Pozzi: “Operation completed. Very rapid. No complications. Used minimal ether. *Tout va bien.*”

The leg was conveyed to the Faculty for pathological examination – the knee at least being fully dissected. Definite evidence of tuberculosis - “carious bone, fresh necrosis, numerous areas of caseation (a cheese-like appearance)” – was displayed. “Tuberculosis of the joint, amputation fully justified” was the pathologist’s final conclusion. Bernhardt’s immediate post-operative course was unremarkable – Denucé’s intern, awed by the celebrity patient, stayed up all night to administer morphine and watch over her. Subsequently there was concern about her kidneys as her urine output dropped but close attention to fluids produced a better result. On 8<sup>th</sup> March she wired Pozzi: “Good morning Doctor God doing very well walk on the balcony will write you a long letter tomorrow infinitely tenderly Sarah ” and on 10<sup>th</sup> March Denucé wrote to Pozzi that he was sending her home, since “I cannot persuade Madame Bernhardt to stay longer!” Wrapped in furs, Sarah arrived back at the villa in Andernos on the morning of 13<sup>th</sup> and a short time later Pozzi appeared for a brief surprise visit – he had come on the overnight train from Paris and could stay only a few hours. She was overjoyed to see him - though he neglected to tell her that he had first been with Denucé to view the dissected specimen at the Faculty! What eventually happened to the severed limb is not recorded. Sarah certainly turned down a request from the owners of the P.T. Barnum freak show to put the leg on display – despite the tantalizing offer of 10,000 American dollars.

By April she was jumping about on her left leg, and wrote to Samuel thanking him for his care of her. Remembering their long intimacy, she told him: “My Doctor God...no being is more dear to me than you. Dear Friend, I must open the box of memories we share to let you breathe the perfume of those flowers we gathered together in the garden of Life! I love you tenderly, infinitely...Sarah.”

By October of that year she was able to return to Paris and soon was hard at work, devoting much of her time to war efforts. That month she appeared in a long patriotic poem, *Les Cathédrales*, in which she embodied Strasbourg Cathedral. Though making most of her rousing speech while sitting, in the last verses she raised herself to her full height crying out “Weep, weep, Germany! The German Eagle has fallen into the Rhine!” to thunderous applause. Faced with the reality of a cumbersome wooden leg, she opted instead for a white and gilded sedan chair with horizontal shafts, in the style of Louis XV, carried by two porters. Just occasionally she used a wheelchair. She went as close to the front as she was allowed by anxious generals, reciting stirring pieces to troops in barns and market places, ruined villages and deserted chateaux. Once she began to speak, a miracle took place as the tiny, elderly, one-legged woman won over these battle-weary men with her genius. When she wound up her recitations, they rose to their feet in their thousands, cheering her; these were perhaps the greatest performances of her life.

Despite her frenetic schedules, and his long days of operating and consultations, Bernhardt and Pozzi still managed to see each other socially. Close to Christmas of 1915 she telegraphed him: “Will be in Paris Tuesday morning going admirably counting on you for dinner Tuesday evening to celebrate reunion with my children and return to health profound tenderness Sarah.” Just two weeks later, she was on a new tour of England, writing to Samuel from London on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1916: “I’m doing fairly well I believe...I have had tremendous success, note tremendous, I do think that’s the right word. I will stay another month in England and I will drink my milk!” Later that month she played in Manchester, telling him that: “I’m drinking this damn milk without result at the moment, couldn’t I add something to this diet and if so what? I haven’t had as much as a grain of wheat for the past two months and sometimes I have terrible pangs of hunger...Here is my little itinerary, you’ll see that I’ll be in England a while. Ah, it’s hard to be so far from my country at this time. The French newspapers arrive very irregularly and the English papers are deadly boring. Or else one has to search through five hundred columns to find what one wants. I am playing at the moment a little piece of which I am the author and which has for a title *A Theater on the Field of Honor!* It is a mad success! I am a young soldier who though wounded wants to fight on nevertheless, and who dies enfolded in the flag he has saved. The audience weeps and it is a great triumph. I put in this act the verses of the flag that I’ve saved, the audience sings the Marseillaise and the cries of *Vive la France* come to caress and

overwhelm me. There, now I embrace you ...Sarah Bernhardt.” She attached her “little itinerary” that would have been daunting for a woman half her age.

Later in 1916, Bernhardt set out on her delayed tour of the United States, a tour which really would be her final visit to that country and to the huge following who had always feted her despite her performing only in French. She appeared in scenes from her regular repertoire, interspersed with a few new short plays and recitations. Particularly popular with audiences was the Field of Honor piece—again and again she convincingly transformed herself into the young French soldier, mortally wounded yet determined to save his battalion’s standard from the enemy. And throughout her time in the States she worked passionately to advance the cause of the Allies – America had not yet entered the war. Described as “the head and heart of France” by American media, she was delighted when the US finally joined the Allies in 1917.

Throughout the American tour, Bernhardt had suffered intermittent attacks of the kidney pain that she had experienced for years, and for which Pozzi had prescribed the “disgusting” milk diet. In 1907, he had made the clinical diagnosis of a kidney stone, but an examination in one of the ‘new-fangled’ X-ray machines that were the brainchild of Marie and Pierre Curie had failed to confirm this. In April 1917 Sarah was in New York when she was seized with excruciating pain and was rushed to Mt Sinai Hospital, where doctors operated to remove the ‘non-existent’ kidney stone which had clearly been present for many years. Immediately she recovered from her anesthetic she wired Pozzi: “Dear friend you were right ten years ago I had a stone but X-ray deceived us here have discovered enormous stone I have been operated on yesterday evening Tuesday in less good conditions than ten years ago operation very successful doctors seem very happy I embrace you infinitely, tenderly, Sarah.”

A week later she reported to him that “the kidneys seem to want to take up their function again have still a drain in the kidney operated on they talk of giving me a blood transfusion that terrifies me with love all my tenderness Sarah.”

She was right to be alarmed. The science of blood transfusion was in its infancy. Many attempts had been made during the nineteenth century to transfer blood directly, both in animals, and from one human being to another. Sometimes this was successful but often it was immediately fatal. In 1900 the reasons for the fatalities began to be understood when Professor Karl Landsteiner of Vienna discovered the ABO blood groups – everyone of us has on the red cells of their blood substances that

are either A, or B, or both (AB ) or none –the O group. Mixing blood of the A and B types causes a severe allergic reaction, whereas mixing other types does not. In 1906 at St Alexis Hospital in Cleveland, surgeon George Crile had performed what is regarded as the first successful modern transfusion, between two brothers, using the knowledge derived from Landsteiner’s work; the blood was passed directly from one brother to the other. This method was improved, particularly during World War I, and in America blood transfusion was ‘state-of-the-art’ for 1917, but even then Sarah would have been transfused directly from the vein of a donor with the same blood group as herself. It was only in the 1930s that it was realized that there are many other factors in the blood that have to be compatible between the donor and the recipient, and the techniques developed of cross-matching blood to prevent severe reactions, as well as methods of transferring it using intravenous rubber tubing. Fortunately two days later Bernhardt was able to wire Pozzi again: “Doctor God everything went well so well that decided not to transfuse I kiss you Sarah.”

She convalesced in Florida and when she was well enough continued her tour, staying on in North America until the middle of 1918. The major Allied offensive was in place and German forces were retreating back to their homeland. But German U-boats still menaced Atlantic shipping and American friends warned her not to attempt the crossing. She dismissed these concerns with a wave of a perfumed hand, and set out for France, travelling a circuitous route to avoid the enemy and arriving in Bordeaux on Armistice Day of 1918. On the dock was Maurice, together with dozens of friends waiting to welcome her.

To her great distress, however, her Doctor God was no more. He had been murdered in his consulting rooms five months before her return.



Samuel Pozzi with his grandson, Claude Bourdet, 1915

## ***Rendez-vous with a bullet-2***

*I'm so sorry, my dear chap, to be spoiling your evening like this, but I've at least one bullet in my gut...*

*Dr Samuel Pozzi to Dr Thierry de Martel, 13 June 1918*

Monsieur Maurice Machu did not at first appear to Pozzi to be particularly remarkable as a patient. The 38 year old official of the Tax Office in Boulogne-sur-Mer was operated on by Pozzi in July 1915 for a varicocele -varicose veins of the scrotum. This is a common condition that has been linked not very directly to decreased fertility in some men, and one which can certainly cause discomfort.

Varicocele is not a cause of impotence or erectile dysfunction and the operation would not have been undertaken to correct such a problem. If this was discussed at the pre-operative consultation, Pozzi would have tried to make this clear to Machu. That there was discussion is well established. Machu was admitted to a private nursing home at Neuilly, west of Paris, and the surgery took place on a Sunday – Samuel by the second year of the war being totally committed to his military and public patients during the working week. Machu addressed him a formal note – he would be pleased if prior to his surgery he could have a few words in private with Monsieur le Professeur. The conversation duly took place, followed by the operation. This involved removing portions of the affected veins through an incision in the skin of Machu's scrotum. The operation is a straightforward one, and in the case of Machu was uncomplicated. He was duly discharged some days later back to Boulogne-sur-Mer.

In retrospect, though, Machu does seem to have had some degree of erectile dysfunction long before he presented to Pozzi, and probably for most of his life. He seems to have believed that this would be cured by his surgery. It is also clear that at some point Pozzi began to find the man's behavior odd, though not alarmingly so.

Machu had difficulty paying his account of 800 francs. Pozzi agreed that it could be paid in instalments over two years, and this duly happened, at least in part. At Christmas 1915, Machu sent Pozzi a postal order for 125 francs, a card with best wishes for the New Year, and a detailed description of his state of health.

“Monsieur, I wish to tell you that my health is better, although only somewhat...there is still a sensation of heaviness and I find it prudent to wear a support garment. The veins although less pronounced than before the operation are still easily palpated beneath the skin and only disappear completely when I am lying down.

“Erections are very infrequent, two or three times a month, in the mornings, after urinating; ejaculation only once, about two months ago.

“The improvement is really in my general health. My appetite has improved. My strength, which was sapped by the flow of blood into the varicocele, is starting to come back, albeit slowly...Intellectual effort is easier. The stinging in my eyes which made my work so difficult, especially in bright light, has entirely disappeared.

“In all, there is no reason to despair yet, since you told me it would take me at least a year for a complete cure.”

“With sincere respect, Maurice Machu. Under-Commissioner for Indirect Taxation.”

The handwriting is an elegant cursive, exactly what one would expect from a bureaucrat in Machu's position. It would seem, though, that the Under-Commissioner attributed a great many health problems to his varicocele beyond the well-recognized local discomfort. The amount of blood pooling in the veins even in the standing position is modest, nowhere near enough to cause the kind of general physical upset he describes. Clearly he also expected some kind of transformation in his sexual performance.

In January 1917 and January 1918, Pozzi received further New Year cards with greetings from Machu and postal notes for 125 francs. The debt was gradually being paid off.

In November 1917, Machu consulted Pozzi again, describing a variety of symptoms, and from then until March of 1918 he wrote every month. Pozzi is believed to have replied, giving instructions for Machu's care, but all this correspondence has been lost. The last letter from Machu arrived at the Avenue d'Iéna in March 1918, and it seems that no reply was sent.

Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> June 1918 was a day like any other for Pozzi. Arriving by car at the military hospital at the Panthéon, he spent several hours on ward rounds, checking wounds and dressings, draining pus, chatting with men and their families. Around midday he went to lunch and returned with the day's *Figaro*, containing a copy of a letter from General Foch to Clemenceau announcing that "calm has been established" along the whole French front. He operated throughout the afternoon, finishing at six, then sat in his office dealing with correspondence and working out the operating list for the following day. Finally, he removed his white gown and summoned his chauffeur.

"Alphonse, let's go home!"

Reaching the Avenue d'Iéna, Pozzi let the chauffeur go for the night.

"See you tomorrow morning, 8.30! Good night!"

Alphonse, having put the car in the garage, filled the petrol tank and gave a last polish with a chamois to the bodywork of the Renault 16-22 before setting off home himself.

In the black-and-white tiled foyer of number 47, the servants greeted Pozzi. Ketty, the maid who had been with him for years, took his uniform kepi and told him that there were two patients waiting to see him in the small salon at the back of the ground floor apartment. The second, who had no appointment, had come from the provinces, and had arrived at two that afternoon. Learning that Pozzi would not be there until at least six he had hesitated then announced that he would return, and left his card : Maurice Machu, Under Commissioner of Taxation, Boulogne –sur-Mer.



Pozzi stopped for a second, then remembered. “Ah! the nutcase with the varicocele. Tell him I’ll see him after my first consultation.”

Twenty minutes later he led the first patient back into the corridor and invited Machu in. He indicated a chair, opposite himself, to the man, and Ketty left, quietly shutting the door again.

Minutes later, when she was back in the foyer, the door of the consulting room opened and she saw her master, doubled up, his hands on his stomach, walking with difficulty. He leaned against her, almost knocking her over. “Ketty, he’s a madman! He’s killed himself, but he’s shot me twice in the stomach!”

Amazingly, Ketty had heard nothing.

She helped Pozzi lie down on the floor, covered him with his military cape, for he was shivering, and ran to telephone for help. Who should she call? She bent over the wounded man, who had regained a little color. The Broca? The Panthéon ?

“Broca? No, too far away... Call the Astoria Hotel, ask for Dr de Martel, tell him to come at once with an ambulance and stretcher. And call the police.”

Dr Thierry de Martel, formerly an intern of Pozzi’s, was still at work in the Astoria hotel in nearby rue de Presbourg, which had been converted into a military hospital. Within minutes he was on the scene, kneeling down next to the tall figure stretched on the carpet.

Calmly Pozzi explained: “He’s a lunatic I operated on three years ago for a varicocele. I’d have done better not to operate, he’s a mental patient who thinks he’s impotent from the surgery. I was trying to calm him down, planning to refer him to one of our psych colleagues, when I saw him suddenly stand up and pull out a revolver, shouting ‘No, no, that’s not what I want!’ He fired several times, three or four, before putting the gun to his head and killing himself.

“I’m so sorry, my dear chap, to be spoiling your evening like this, but I’ve at least one bullet in my gut. You know how I manage these injuries. Can you arrange a laparotomy as soon as possible, just do whatever’s necessary. We’re both surgeons, you and me, we know our job. I have confidence in you...” His words faded away.

Police Commissioner Delanglade and Inspector Léoni arrived next. They found Machu lying on the floor at the foot of the consulting couch, a trickle of blood flowing from the wound in his temple, the gun still in his hand. In his pocket was a piece of paper, a litany of complaints of supposed wrongs committed by his surgeon “whom he was going to kill as a warning to all those doctors who don’t carry out the wishes of their patients,” before killing himself. There was also ten francs in an envelope marked “to cover costs of the transport of my corpse to the morgue.”

Monsieur Mouton, director of the judicial police, and a colleague arrived, having rushed from police headquarters. Ketty had opened the garage and was waiting fearfully by it. Soon the military ambulance with its red cross arrived, and the policemen saluted as Pozzi was placed on a stretcher. He leaned over and spoke to Ketty: “Don’t forget to call those folks who are expecting me for dinner, and give my apologies – name and address on my desk...”

The English ambulance driver proceeded at top speed to the Astoria where Pozzi was placed in a single room. Quickly nurses undressed him and put on a shirt that Ketty had provided. Then de Martel was able to make a more thorough examination.

“How small these little entry wounds of bullets are, compared to what we’ve seen from the shells on the battlefield!” he commented to his former boss. One wound in the arm, not serious, luckily missing the chest. “What’s this scar on the ankle?” asked de Martel.

“’71, the siege,” came the answer.

Returning to the abdomen de Martel palpated gently, found the entry wound, searched for an exit wound. There was none.

“An Xray?” he suggested.

“Useless. I’ve got it in the belly, well and truly, and from directly in front. It’s necessary to operate, don’t you think?”

“Oui, monsieur.”

“Do it soon then! And no chloroform or ether, just morphine, atropine and local anesthetic. You understand, I’m 72 years old, no need to explain that. All the same, I want to know what’s going on with the surgery and I’ll help you if necessary...but just try to forget who I am, do it as if I’m an unknown soldier!”

Nurses wheeled him rapidly through the corridors. Reaching the operating table in the hotel’s ballroom, he refused the help of the deferential staff, and leaning on his wounded arm, slid himself off the trolley and onto the table beneath the harsh electric light.

There was a short silence, broken only by a yelp of pain as iodine was applied to the area around the wound. A special apparatus – introduced to France from the United States by Pozzi- was used with surgical drapes to isolate the operating field. Thierry de Martel, with Felix Jayle, also a former Pozzi intern, as assistant, scrubbed, gowned and gloved. De Martel injected local anesthetic in the form of cocaine all around the entry wound, to the left, the right, and up towards the umbilicus, as into the room tiptoed Clemenceau (now Prime Minister) and Pozzi’s surgical colleague Albert Robin, dressed in theater gowns. Both had come as soon as they heard the news.

The patient didn’t flinch, not even when de Martel passed in a sound following the track of the bullet.

“I’m opening the abdomen, Monsieur.” Without hesitation he made a long incision in the midline. As Jayle retracted the muscle and the peritoneal layer was incised Pozzi murmured: “You’re hurting me, dear friend!” More cocaine was injected.

“That’s better!”

With his thumb, without a word, the surgeon showed his assistant a perforation of the intestine.

“Needle on a holder, threaded with fine silk!”

With infinite care, watching his patient’s responses for signs of pain, de Martel slowly explored the length of the intestine. Ten holes torn in the bowel wall were each carefully stitched with the silk. The patient’s pulse remained steady, under the influence of the morphine/atropine mixture which Pozzi himself had pioneered with his anesthetic colleague Dr Albert Dastre. Now he was reaping the benefits himself.

What was he thinking ? Was he remembering the occasion, more than thirty years previously, when he had operated on the young English boy? By coincidence that had been in the same street, rue de Presbourg, almost opposite the Astoria.Or the many battle wounds he’d operated on himself, since the start of the war? Or of Emma, who was in Dinard in Brittany, sheltering from the war, and who could know nothing of what had happened?

When the ten perforations had been sutured, de Martel began to further explore the abdomen, looking for the bullet itself. Suddenly his patient vomited, and with this strain there was a gush of blood. A major vein had been torn open when the bullet lodged in the bone beneath it. Although at first the blood had clotted around the tear there was now bleeding that was impossible to stop. Pozzi rapidly lapsed into unconsciousness despite the frantic efforts of de Martel and Jayle to apply enough pressure to stop the hemorrhage. Although Carrel had practiced suturing blood vessels in his dogs, French surgeons had not yet taken on the techniques, nor were there instruments yet devised, to apply what he had learned to humans. In the presence of a teary de Martel and other surgeons, on the operating table in the Hotel Astoria, with the Prime Minister of France close by, Samuel Pozzi left this world.

Two years previously, in April 1916, he had put his wishes into verse for Emma.

*Dearest to my deathbed summon no priest  
Let him leave no chalice or sacred host  
He would tell me no doubt, and I might believe  
That I was wrong to love you more than I loved God*

*Dearest, do not allow yourself  
A veil on your face or tears in your eyes.  
When I am placed in my coffin of oak  
Don't cry for the dead, who will sleep better unmourned.*

*Friends, may none of you come to my grave  
In solitude I will take my leave  
Since my memory must also soon depart  
It matters not when; friends, forget me at once.*

He was dressed in his military uniform. On his chest were pinned the medal of the Legion of Honour, the Order of Leopold of Belgium and the small medal of a volunteer of 1870. He was laid out in the basement of the Astoria, in the saloon of the former bar, surrounded by bundles of flags – the French tricolor. The nurses and orderlies from the Broca and the Panthéon hospitals took up a silent guard at the foot of the coffin.

People began to pour into the saloon, bringing masses of flowers that were piled around the room. They gathered around the corpse, and yes, it was indeed him, his face calm but pale, the elegant salt-and-pepper beard immaculately barbered. Then slowly, sadly, each one slipped out into the darkening streets of Paris. There was further bombing of the city that night but his guard stayed constant until dawn.

The following day every newspaper, including of course *Figaro*, ran the story, their commentaries reading like elegies. It appeared that since March, apparently because Pozzi had not replied to his letter, Machu had grown increasingly bitter and introspective, blaming all his physical and psychological woes on his operation. The previous morning he had calmly taken the train for Paris with the express intention of murdering Pozzi.

Claude Bourdet was not quite nine at the time of his grandfather's death and always retained vivid memories of the event: "The most moving, indeed terrible, recollection I have of him was of his murder in 1918. My mother and grandmother were at Montpellier (they did not return until after the Armistice) and I was with them. I can remember as if it were yesterday the tremendous confusion, of the family, of the whole household, when a telegram arrived telling us about this awful event. My grandfather had been operated on by his former intern...I remember the word 'laparotomy' that I heard then for the first time. My mother and grandmother could not return to Paris because of the war so my uncles dealt with all the details of his funeral. I remember the many articles in the newspapers that I read with great attention and amazement: I understood that my grandfather Samuel Pozzi had definitely been an important person."

Marcel Proust was staying in the French countryside. He wrote at once to Jean Pozzi: "I have learnt with deep sadness of the awful death of your father. His memory, his striking presence, are linked inextricably to my childhood and my youth. He and your admirable mother, sometimes dining with my parents, sometimes receiving them at the Place Vendôme, are amongst the sweetest, dearest, most cherished of my early memories, which today alas are the most painful...Marcel Proust." Proust was just one of the thousands of people, some as well-known as he, others simply private citizens, who addressed their regrets to Pozzi's family.

Proust wrote in detail to Geneviève Straus:

"15 June 1918.

Dear Madame Straus

The day before yesterday I had sent for news of you and M. Straus from rue Miromesnil, and then last night I heard the terrible news. I hesitated to write to you, remembering the death of Hervieu and the precautions which had to be taken before giving you the news. In the end I sent somebody round to

your house. Your concierge said that you knew the bad news and that it had not been possible to hide it from you. And my pain was so deep, I who had always known Pozzi, who saw him when he came to dine at the house when I was fifteen years old, who dined out in town for the first time at his house in the place Vendôme (besides you will remember that it was at the house that you met him, and it was I who he had charged with asking if he could come to visit you, at the same time you would have seen him at the duchesse de Richelieu's - or at the duchesse de Rivoli's ). Yes, I say my pain was so deep, but it was surpassed by the worry of how much pain and such an awful end for such a great friend would cause you.

There is no chance of me coming to Saint-Germain; I have been refused all safe conduct, and in any case you would not receive me as my visit would cause you even more fatigue. And yet I suffer from being far away from you in such times. In the first moments after the news, even before the sadness, the awful singularity of the event made me think of those ruined towns like Soissons which were the pillars between which the battles unfolded; and much in the same way as after the death of Calmette, an innocent victim who was mysteriously sacrificed, one sensed the coming of war, it made one wonder whether after the death of Pozzi if there isn't going to be Peace; if they haven't been the twin bloody pillars which bound the start and finish of the war. Alas I am not thinking about these absurd conjectures any more, but about his kindness, his intelligence, his talent, his beauty, of everything the veneration of which constantly sustained me in the old days and of which I have spoken with you; then about my brother who adored and worshipped Pozzi; then above all about our meetings at your house. I am writing a long letter to his son. As for his wife I am hesitating, I don't know to what extent exactly they were separated, never having wanted to ask questions or to hear any gossip about such delicate questions. So that I don't know at all. Dear Madame Straus, I who am always in your heart in my imagination cannot tell you how much all these blows it suffers upset me. And allow me to say as well that if I find that you are too far away from me at Saint-Germain, at the same time I think that you are a little too close to the Germans; and as you have Trouville, Pau, Biarritz, Monte-Carlo to choose from why don't you go there? Is M. Straus not sufficiently recovered to make the journey? In that case would you like me to install myself at Saint-Germain with him so that you could go to the Midi or Trouville? But I know perfectly well that I could not replace you in any way. How happy I would be in my grief all the same to know that you were a little further away. Please accept my very great respects and very deep sympathy.

Marcel Proust.

Two days after his death, Catherine confided to her journal; "Papa, admirable, astonishing Papa, you are now in the legendary universe like a prince of fairies, triumphant, you whose name alone used to

open doors, you who could join souls to your own sun...you did not believe in God and you dispersed his power...”

At the same time, Thérèse began a long correspondence with Jean. She was in Montpellier in the south of France, not in good health, and could not anyway travel to Paris. Jean would take care of all the details for her.

“Jean, what a terrible business. I no longer loved him but I am all the same torn apart. I am putting aside memories of those terrible later years to concentrate on the beginning, when we were happy. Do what’s necessary, you can do it better than I. I am sure he will have willed that he be transported to Bergerac, and of course at the moment that’s impossible. For the moment he should be interred in the Protestant temple at Étoile.”

Later, she wrote: “Yes, we will keep La Graulet, but there will be time to think of that. Do what is necessary for everyone concerned – de Martel, his assistants, give away all his instruments, take what you think is necessary. In our unhappiness there is at least the fact that all this took place in a house belonging to us, which sorts out a lot of problems.

“Yes, we should have loved him more, to have been a united family. It has taken this appalling death to show us that we loved him, all of us, and that our misunderstandings were nothing, in comparison with the happiness that we might have given each other. I hope that he did not suffer. He always feared death, and to find himself at the end, all alone, without *her*, must have been atrocious for him. For myself, who loved him so deeply, I know that I will always suffer. His presence, even far away, was always indispensable to me. To hear him spoken of, to read his name, to just see him sometimes, I didn’t ask for more than that since I knew he was perfectly happy. But this disappearance, the shutting out of this sunlight, it’s intolerable.”

The Havas news agency provided details of the funeral arrangements: “The funeral of Professor Pozzi will take place on Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> June at the Protestant temple (near the Étoile). It will commence at the hotel Astoria at 10 am. In accordance with the wishes of the deceased no orations will be spoken. There will be no wreaths or flowers. No further announcements will be made; this notice serves in place of invitation.”



On Sunday afternoon a death mask was made using plaster of Paris, then Samuel was placed in his “coffin of oak” which was lifted up into the foyer of the Astoria. Jean Pozzi, in officer’s uniform, Jacques, who had enlisted as a private in the infantry, and Pozzi’s half-brother Adrien, now a military surgeon and who had made the difficult journey from Reims, were in attendance. On Sunday evening and throughout Monday thousands of people – friends, colleagues, patients, and members of the general public, filed silently past.

On Tuesday an immense procession wended its way through central Paris to the Étoile. A military band played and many hundreds of troops took part, as did large delegations from the Faculty of Medicine (closed for the day) and Pozzi’s hospitals the Broca and the Panthéon, and many representatives of the government and the Senate. A simple ceremony at the Protestant temple included the music of Bach, Beethoven and César Franck and also some psalms and Biblical readings – the latter something that Pozzi the atheist might have wished to avoid. But that was all. The coffin was lowered into the crypt beneath the temple.

The following day at the Surgical Society of Paris, Pozzi was well remembered. “He was here as usual at our last meeting, alert, elegant, youthful...wearing his uniform, no doubt to indicate that age had not limited his activity nor his devotion to his country...The following day he fell victim to one those senseless crimes that defy analysis...he died in his role as a surgeon. With admirable lucidity, he guided the efforts of his fellow surgeons, and it seemed that success was assured when a sudden hemorrhage took him off in a matter of minutes...

“Pozzi played a major role in the surgery both of our country and in our country, as well as being familiar with the worlds of art, science, literature and politics. He owed his fame not only to his great affability and charm, but also to his profound knowledge of the classics, to the wide range of backgrounds of his many friends and acquaintances, to his intense curiosity about everything, and to his impeccable taste. An ardent patriot, he was always seeking to promote French science and French surgery.”

In July 1918, Emma wrote to Jean asking for the return of a number of pictures and *objets d’art*, mostly from Venice, that she had left for safe-keeping in the Avenue d’Iéna apartment, and which held enormous sentimental value for her. She added that in April 1918 she had witnessed Samuel’s

last Will, and that he had said to her : “While I’m leaving my material goods to my friends, to you I’m leaving my heart!” The items she requested were eventually returned to her when the will was settled.. Jean obeyed his mother’s wishes in burning Emma’s letters, but he carefully preserved the diaries that recorded all her travels with his father.

He also preserved the letters from Sarah Bernhardt, which are in the Pozzi archives of Nicolas Bourdet. It seems that he realised their importance, both to his father, and to posterity.

On June 13<sup>th</sup> 1919, exactly a year after Pozzi’s death, most of his vast collection of paintings, coins and other antiquities and items, including the Tiepolo ceiling, went on sale in Paris; the catalogue for this event is now a collector’s item in its own right. And on 24<sup>th</sup> August of that year the remains of Samuel Pozzi were transferred to the Protestant cemetery in Bergerac, where he now rests. Fittingly, the Sargent portrait, preserving the image of Pozzi in the vigor of his middle years, was later to make its way to the America he had come to appreciate so much.

Bernhardt lived on for nearly five more years. She saw the end of the war, and returned to Paris. But many of her friends in addition to Pozzi were gone, or soon to go – most notably Jojotte, who died at her Brittany home in 1919. She continued to work on stage – very successfully – and to travel, to England, where she gave a command performance for Queen Mary. Then, back in Paris, she began to rehearse a new play by Sacha Guitry that had reached dress rehearsal stage when she collapsed. She did not go back to the theater again. She remained in her house on the Boulevard Péreire, where hundreds of friends came to visit her and where she even made a short film. In early 1923, she developed pneumonia, and on 23<sup>rd</sup> March died in the arms of her son Maurice.

She was laid out in the same coffin that Pozzi had seen in the rue de Rome so many years previously, dressed in white and, like Pozzi, with the ribbon of the Legion of Honor across her breast. For three days a constant stream of mourners flowed past, leaving flowers – Spring flowers – as they had done for Pozzi. Then even more people lined the streets of Paris to watch the funeral procession that wound its way first to the church of St François de Sales in the 17<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement* and then to the cemetery of Père-Lachaise, stopping for a minute’s silence outside the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt on the Place du Châtelet. At the graveside, as for Pozzi, there were no speeches. And each year since, thousands of visitors to Père-Lachaise have come to pay their respects at her grave, where a headstone is marked simply: Sarah Bernhardt.

*Quand même.*

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All letters in French to and from Samuel Pozzi, including those of Sarah Bernhardt, quoted in part or in full in this book, unless otherwise specified, have been translated by Caroline de Costa. All quotations from works listed above and written in French have been translated by Caroline de Costa.

In Chapters Ten and Fourteen, and in short sections of the book elsewhere, direct translations from Claude Vanderpooten's biography have been included, as per the permission granted to us by him verbally in 2006.

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## Two “Very Brilliant Creatures”

1. Gottlieb, Robert. The Drama of Sarah Bernhardt. *The New York Review of Books*, 10 May 2007, pp. 10-14.
2. Davis *ibid* p.100 states that “Pozzi brazenly used his profession for entry to the best bedrooms in Paris.” No evidence is offered for this allegation of behavior that would have been considered as unacceptable to the French medical profession of the time as it would be to the American medical profession today.
3. “A very brilliant creature” – John Singer Sargent’s letter to Henry James of 25<sup>th</sup> June, 1885. Quoted in Ormond and Kilmurray, *ibid*, p. 54.

## La Bohème

1. Snel, Harmen, personal communication, 2008.
2. Youle Bernhardt’s brother Edouard, sent to boarding school in Brittany at the age of eleven, adopted the Breton surname, Ker-Bernhardt, the “Ker” roughly translating to “son of Bernhardt” or “house of Bernhardt”. Details of his subsequent life are scant; when he was fourteen the headmaster of the school wrote to the Mayor of Amsterdam complaining that Edouard’s parents had not only not been to see him, they had not paid his fees. He would seem to have stayed on in Brittany, and as a teen making his way in France, he may have worked in the region as a pedlar or a porter in a local inn, possibly around the time Sarah as an infant was sent to live with Breton foster-parents. He may then have kept a watchful eye on his infant niece while her aunts, Henriette and Rosine helped with the baby’s keep.
3. Images of Bernhardt including those mentioned here are easily viewed on the internet eg at [www.artcyclopedia.com](http://www.artcyclopedia.com).

## La Guerre

1. Much of Vanderpooten's information derives from his direct conversations with Pozzi's grandson Claude Bourdet during the early 1990s.

#### Mutual Friends

1. The English translation of *Sarah Barnum* is extremely badly done with little attention to the original French and a great deal of pure fiction from the translator.

2. Gottlieb *ibid* mentions this quote in his article. He also states that the remark that Bernhardt had "a corn" instead of a clitoris was given "wide currency". Colombier in *Sarah Barnum ibid* page 63 writes: "...un soir qu'à souper chez Brébant, on blaguait l'actrice.

'Elle! Fit un journaliste! Mais ce n'est pas un (*ici un terme médical...*) qu'elle possède...c'est un durillon!" (Translation: "...one night at supper in Brébant's people were joking about the actress.

'Her!' said a journalist. 'But it's not a ...*medical term*...(sic) that she has, it's a corn!"

Clearly Colombier and the anonymous journalist must be seen as quite unreliable sources. The 'medical term' which does not appear in print may also have been 'vagina' and durillon can also be translated as 'callus'.

3. This work may be seen at [www.petitpalais.paris.fr](http://www.petitpalais.paris.fr).

#### Belle Époque Bimbo

1. The portrait can be seen at [www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/16.53](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/16.53).

2. Davis *ibid* pp 105-06 suggests that Gautreau may have had affairs with Ferdinand de Lesseps and Léon Gambetta. De Lesseps was 75 years old in 1880, and happily married to his (relatively younger) second wife; Amélie Gautreau was just 21 years old. Gambetta is described by Davis as "a political force in Paris in the 1880s" and she speculates that Gautreau may have been the



“Madame X” referred to by French newspapers as Gambetta’s secret mistress. However the “secret mistress” is well known to have been Léonie Léon, with whom he had a close relationship from 1872 and intended to marry; furthermore his cabinet lost power in January 1882, whereupon he retired to the country with Léonie and died there in December of that year. The years of his political power were the 1870s. Both de Lesseps and Gambetta were friends of the Gautreau family but there is nothing to support allegations of a sexual liaison between Amélie Gautreau and either of these men, and their social and personal situations would seem to argue against any such relationship. Amélie’s mother’s very close interest in her daughter’s life would seem to be a further argument against “a string of affairs.”

3. Davis *ibid* page 125: “Pozzi could be counted on for a recommendation” to Gautreau. There is no record of this recommendation happening, for the simple reason that Pozzi had not yet met her at the time Sargent was seeking to paint her, there had been no affair between himself and Gautreau in 1881 and she did not visit his home at the time his own portrait was being painted by Sargent – if she had, obviously Sargent would already have been well acquainted with her by 1883.

4. Dr Valerie Steele, personal communication.

5. Mount *ibid* page 64 simply suggests a relationship between Pozzi and Gautreau, speculating that this may have followed her attending a sitting or private showing of *Dr Pozzi At Home* in 1881; he offers no evidence for this. Olson *ibid* page 61 likewise describes rumors of a relationship and says that Sargent met Gautreau “in the winter of 1882-83, probably through Pozzi”; again there is no evidence documented. However Davis *ibid* page 112 writes that at the time Sargent was painting Pozzi in 1881, “the doctor and Amélie were at the height of their affair” and that Gautreau took advantage of the sittings to visit Pozzi at the same home he shared with Thérèse in the Place Vendôme. This is a quantum leap from speculative non-fiction into complete fiction.

6. The fact that *Doctot Pozzi At Home* was being shown in Brussels in February 1884 lends weight to this suggestion.