

THE VICISSITUDES OF THE LACROIX EDITION OF THE COMPLETE WORKS OF P.-J. PROUDHON

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Source: *Revue d'histoire économique et sociale*, 1958, Vol. 36, No. 4 (1958), pp. 444-463.

At the time of his death, Proudhon left behind an extremely confused situation. The year 1864 had been very difficult for him, and should have, it seemed, prompted him to make testamentary arrangements. He had done nothing. In July, despite the erysipelas from which he was barely recovering, he was full of optimism and counted on another ten or twelve years of labor to complete his work. "A true man," he wrote to Buzon, "fears only one thing: ending up bankrupt and leaving his undertakings unfinished."²

Yet, from that moment on, he and his family had only the 2,000 francs lent by his Belgian friend Delhasse³ to live on. They would allow him "to reach January in complete safety." At the end of December, Delhasse himself sent him a new thousand-franc note.

Having left for Franche-Comté in August to recover, he went to see old acquaintances. But he traveled without restraint, banqueted with old friends, and, upon returning three weeks later, saw his illness worsen. Bakunin, having visited him in mid-December, had the impression that he was doomed.

Finally, on January 16, 1865, almost moribund, he dictated to his fourteen-year-old daughter Catherine, in the presence of his wife, a text that would lead to many complications. It read as follows:

MM. F. Delhasse, Bourson, Penet, Jalasson, Bergmann, Beslay, Cretin, Garnier frères, Bourgès, Maurice (of Besançon), Guillemin, Maguet, Antoine Gauthier, A. Defontaine, Buzon jeune, Rolland, Langlois, Ferrari, Leurs, Abbé Lenoir, Chaudey, Duchêne, Gouvernet, Pilhes, Massol, etc., have met to form a family council with

¹ We are grateful to M^{me} Fauré-Frémiot and Mlle S. Henneguy, granddaughters of P.-J. Proudhon, who kindly provided us with the original documents to which this note refers.

² *Correspondance*, Volume XIII, July 15, 1864.

³ *Correspondance*, Volume XIII, July 7, 1864. All amounts mentioned in this note must be multiplied by at least 300 to be translated into 1959 French currency.

the aim of providing for one or more reprints of the works of the said M. Proudhon and of ensuring the interests of his widow and children.

For these reasons, M. Proudhon expressed the wish that Messrs. Langlois, Rolland, Chaudey, Duchêne, Bergmann, and Bourson, who are especially devoted to literature, be responsible for the reprints, while Messrs. Beslay, Antoine Gauthier, Bourgès, Penet, Pilhes, etc., businessmen, would take charge of the interests.

For my father,
Catherine PROUDHON.⁴

Most of Proudhon's friends were in the group of twenty-six. But only six of them were responsible for reprints and five others for interests. This document was extremely imprecise. The twenty-six must have rarely met, and the five who were supposed to take care of interests do not seem to have done so either. As for the six "dedicated more especially to literature," they met once or twice at Chaudey's house. But one of them, Bourson, lived in Brussels; Bergmann was in Strasbourg. The other four had their homes in Paris.

This document, as Gustave Chaudey immediately noted, had no legal value. This was a simple piece of advice given by Proudhon to his wife regarding his works on the one hand, and her interests on the other. All literary rights were now in the widow's hands. She had the right to modify at will what had been, on her husband's part, a simple instruction.

A note in Proudhon's handwriting listed the works in progress:

1. *The Working Classes*.
2. *On Art* (About Courbet).
3. *The Theory of Property*.
4. *Political Geography and Nationality*.
5. *France and the Rhine* (refutation of Amédée Thierry).
6. *Theory of the Constitutional Movement in Europe, or What, Finally, is the Republic?*
7. *History of Jehovah*.
8. *Conclusions on the Gospels and the Life of Jesus*.
9. *History of Poland*.
10. *Parallel between Napoleon and Wellington* (refutation of Thiers).
11. *On Pornocracy and Women*.
12. *The Normaliens*.
13. *Condensed History of Napoleon I*, according to Thiers.
14. *Literary Criticism* (for a journal): See Hugo, Renan, Lamartine, etc.
15. *Course in Political Economy*.
16. *Continuation of the Stock-Market Speculator*, New Manual.
17. *Mélanges*. Articles on Various Subjects.

Numbers 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, and 11 were partly written; the others simply in notes.⁵

⁴ Letter to Delhasse dated January 21, 1865, signed by J.A. Langlois, Georges Duchêne, Rolland, Gouvernet and Auguste Defontaine (in Langlois's handwriting), (unpublished).

⁵ Langlois to Bourson, February 14, 1865 (unpublished).

Difficulties would arise immediately. Among the prepared manuscripts, number 16 concerned a new edition of the *Stock-Market Speculator's Manual*. This work, as well as those entitled *Theory of Taxation* and *Reforms to be Accomplished in the Operation of the Railways*, had been prepared by Duchêne, under the direction and according to the instructions of Proudhon. Once Duchêne's work was completed, the latter would correct, transform, or expand it — and alone sign it. The new edition of the *Speculator's Manual* was to consist of five parts. The first was entirely completed by Duchêne. How should this collaboration be arranged? Langlois asked Bourson and Bergmann. According to the latter, the solution was easy. As with the previous edition, it was necessary to publish under Proudhon's name alone and, in a notice to the public, reproduce the paragraph from the previous edition establishing what was due to Duchêne. If Proudhon had nothing to do with the design of the new *Manual*, Duchêne would publish it under his own name.⁶

This was the situation when an unexpected complaint arose. One of the twenty-six appointed by Proudhon, Abbé Lenoir, claimed that the committee of six had only been specifically designated for reprints of works already printed and published. It had not been specifically designated, any more than the other twenty, to deal with manuscripts. Abbé Lenoir therefore asked to be added to the committee of six and, if not, wished to see the matter decided by the twenty-six. Langlois refused, as did Duchêne, Rolland, and Chaudey.⁷ The latter pointed out that while M^{me} Proudhon had all the rights, the mandate of the six was not legal, and it was up to them to decide whether they should retain it “in case M^{me} Proudhon did not show us the trust with which her husband had honored us.” According to him, none of the six should be part of the official family council. The poor widow found herself lost amidst these opposing claims and did not know who to listen to. She trusted Langlois, but would have liked him to enlighten her. Why did he find it detrimental, for the memory of her husband, that Abbé Lenoir should, at his request, be assigned to Bourson, Bergmann, Rolland, Chaudey, Duchêne, and Langlois? The latter replied

that by appointing these six people *and no others*, Proudhon was certain that his handwritten thoughts would not be distorted when these thoughts are in formless notes; — that a writer's thoughts can be *involuntarily* distorted when the majority of interpreters or translators are not in communion of ideas with the author; — that in a meeting held on February 13, Abbé Lenoir very explicitly declared that he had, in fact, very little in common with Proudhon in terms of ideas and tendencies; — that in this respect, he would be a dangerous interpreter by virtue of the Italian proverb: *Traduttore, traditore*; — that Abbé Lenoir was

⁶ Bergmann to Langlois, February 20, 1865 (unpublished).

⁷ Chaudey to Langlois, February 20, 1865 (unpublished).

undoubtedly a true friend of Proudhon, excellent in this capacity for looking after the interests of his illustrious friend's family with others, but, *on reflection*, worthless for dealing with the manuscripts, and consequently having to be dismissed by Proudhon, even though *he was* a man of letters.

"I could have," added Langlois in his letter to Bourson, "also spoken of the legitimate apprehensions inspired in us by Abbé Lenoir's ecclesiastical character in the presence of Proudhon's works."⁸ Bourson and Delhasse approved all the more, the latter said, "that only one of the twenty-six rises to cast doubts into the mind of a poor woman, and he is a priest. This makes me suspicious."⁹

As a man of letters, this Abbé Lenoir might have found some indulgence in the committee; but, as a priest, he united unanimous opposition. M^{me} Proudhon had no choice but to follow the peremptory advice of the six.

They were actively engaged in finalizing the unpublished manuscripts and reprinting the already published works. Here they encountered two condemnations: the first relating to two articles published in *Le Peuple* on January 26 and 27, 1849, and the second to the work *On Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*. On April 3, 1865,¹⁰ they requested permission from the imperial prosecutor to include these works in the collection of complete works. But they never received a favorable response. Furthermore, the Garnier brothers, whom Proudhon considered friends (they were among the group of twenty-six), could not bring themselves to undertake the publication of *The Political Capacity of the Working Classes*; it was the publisher Dentu who took responsibility for it. But they agreed to publish *The Principle of Art*, for which, given the circumstances, they also offered royalties higher than those paid during Proudhon's lifetime.¹¹

A new kind of difficulty arose. Bourson, director of the *Moniteur belge*, a very close friend of Proudhon, was now hesitant about the responsibility that participation in the Committee of Six might entail. He was referring to manuscripts that Delhasse had seen during his visit to Paris¹² and whose nature he did not specify. Perhaps they expressed Proudhon's discontent with certain Belgian figures during the demonstrations that had precipitated his return to France in 1862. Bourson felt that he would not be forgiven for the smallest part

⁸ Langlois to Bourson, February 22, 1865 (unpublished).

⁹ Delhasse to Langlois, February 24, 1865 (unpublished).

¹⁰ Chaudey, Langlois and Duchêne, to the Imperial Prosecutor (in Chaudey's handwriting), April 3, 1865 (unpublished).

¹¹ Garnier brothers to Madame Proudhon, April 26 and May 3, 1865 (unpublished).

¹² Bourson to Delhasse, April 27, 1865 (unpublished).

taken in the publication. His position as a Belgian civil servant prevented him from retaining a participation in the Committee of Six. He asked that his name disappear from the group of six and be included in that of the twenty-six. The question thus posed required a rapid solution. *The Principle of Art* was about to appear, preceded by a warning signed by the committee. Ultimately, the latter decided to substitute Delhasse's name for Bourson's, rather than simply removing the latter. Delhasse, informed of this decision,¹³ immediately approved it.¹⁴

On the Principle of Art and its Social Destination appeared shortly thereafter. The "Notice to the Reader" indicated that, of the work's twenty-six chapters, fifteen had been completely written by Proudhon. The others "were arranged by us and put in order according to the instructions left by Proudhon." But among the documents relating to this work, none indicates by whom this arrangement was made. This notice also seemed to resolve the question raised about *The Speculator's Manual*. "The work, completed by Duchêne, without Proudhon having been able to review it, it was said, will appear, because of this circumstance, with this mention: Written on the plan and notes of P.-J. Proudhon, by Georges Duchêne." A month later, *The Political Capacity of the Working Classes* appeared at Dentu, a work which was to have a great influence on the International Working Men's Association, founded in London the previous year.

On the occasion of the publication of this volume, M^{me} Proudhon entered into negotiations with Dentu concerning the remaining copies of the six brochures or volumes that he had published. They were to be included in the collection of complete works that was planned to be published by the publishing house A. Lacroix, Verboeckhoven et C^{ie}. The same was true of the volumes published by Alphonse Lebègue, publisher in Brussels. The latter proved very accommodating. He offered to sell everything to Lacroix on the most conciliatory terms.¹⁵

Albert Lacroix was both a Belgian publisher and writer who had completed extensive studies at the University of Brussels. Having received a doctorate in law, he had, at the age of twenty, won the government prize in a competition between the four universities of Belgium on the subject: *Influence of Shakespeare on French theater*. He then established relations with the French refugees in Brussels. To publish the Works of Marnix de Sainte-Aldegonde, discovered by Edgar Quinet, he bought a small printing press. He himself wrote

¹³ Langlois to Delhasse, May 12, 1865 (unpublished).

¹⁴ Delhasse to Langlois, May 16, 1865 (unpublished).

¹⁵ Lebègue to Delhasse, September 20, 1865 (unpublished).

the historical note on Philippe de Marnix, placed at the head of the publication, and printed some poetic works by friends. Until then, he had not considered becoming a publisher. However, at the age of twenty-seven, he formed a trading company with the son of the Belgian painter Verboeckhoven and opened a bookstore in Brussels, which soon had branches in Paris, Livorno, and Leipzig. In 1862, he published Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* in Paris. He later told us that, on the day it went on sale, the Police Prefecture, faced with the disruption caused to traffic, had sent a dozen officers to establish a security service that had become indispensable. Lacroix then became the publisher of Edgar Quinet, Louis Blanc, Jules Michelet, Lamartine, Eugène Sue, Molinari, etc. It was he who, in 1864, launched a young beginner, then very shy, he said, who was to go far: Emile Zola. Lacroix was an enterprising and daring spirit. It is therefore not surprising that M^{me} Proudhon and the Committee of Six collaborated with him and considered entrusting him with the publication of the complete works.

During the summer, negotiations had been suspended. Chaudey was in no hurry to settle the matter, Langlois had left for Switzerland and Lacroix was not in Paris. Upon their return, Langlois and Duchène submitted a draft to Lacroix. The agreement was finally signed on September 21.¹⁶ It stipulated that the Lacroix publishing house would pay M^{me} Proudhon sixty centimes per volume of the complete works for a print run of 3,000 copies. The whole thing was presented in a lump sum of 36,000 francs payable over two years at a rate of 1,500 francs per month starting at the end of January 1866. If the work *On Justice* could not be published in France, the lump sum would be reduced by the same amount, bringing it down to 31,500 francs. The Lacroix publishing house received an eight-year privilege. As for the publication of the posthumous works, of which M^{me} Proudhon remained the sole judge, the same payment conditions were stipulated. But this contract did not indicate within what timeframe M^{me} Proudhon would deliver the texts of the complete works; it was silent on the revision of the proofs and the final proof. More seriously, during his lifetime, Proudhon had been convicted twice for his writings. In the last prosecution, he had involved his publisher Garnier, who had to spend a month in prison and pay a heavy fine after the seizure of the edition. The Lacroix agreement did not provide for the possibility of a posthumous work being prosecuted. The consequences of these omissions would soon be felt.

The ink on the Lacroix agreement had barely dried when a rather serious disagreement arose within the publication committee. Chaudey and Rolland, impressed by the attacks and malicious insinuations of a few literary bohemians, now claimed that Proudhon's notes should be published as they were, even if

¹⁶ Unpublished.

they were contradictory, or even corrected by other notes, without putting them in order, without changing a single comma, and, *a fortiori*, without deleting a single one. Langlois and Duchêne, who had been working on the manuscripts for several months, strongly opposed this suggestion.

On the same day, September 1, 1865, Langlois gave his reasons:

After stating in a footnote that the existence of the Gospel according to Saint Mark was not established until 130 or 150 years after Jesus Christ, Proudhon said, in an additional footnote: *This is an error*. Another example: Proudhon said, in a marginal note that he did not use in a later version, to Ms. Juliette La Messine: “Shut up, whore; shut up, prostitute.” Yet another more important example: We found in the list of works prepared to complete the *Condensed History of Napoleon I according to Thiers*, by P.-J. Proudhon. If we adopted the ideas of Rolland and Chaudey, we would end up depriving the public of this work, which exists only in marginal notes on thirty-two volumes of Thiers's history.¹⁷

But Langlois and Duchêne recognized the other members of the committee's right to review their work and make observations.

Attempts to reconcile the two theses were unsuccessful. The *Theory of Property* appeared in the Posthumous Works.¹⁸ The Notice that preceded this work was not followed by the signatures of Chaudey and Rolland, but only by those of the four other members of the committee. The press immediately seized on this peculiarity, which led to attacks, sometimes benevolent, sometimes perfidious. *Le Figaro* of November 7 opened fire; then came *L'Indépendance belge* of November 9 and *Le Nain jaune* of November 14. Other newspapers followed. Langlois and Duchêne strove to respond to all the contributions. But, in turn, Chaudey and Rolland entered the scene, and *La Presse* of November 20 published a letter from the latter defending their point of view. Langlois called upon Sainte-Beuve, who was preparing his study on Proudhon, and begged Delhasse to rush to Paris, “so that Proudhon's memory and ideas would not be compromised and left defenseless to the almost unanimous enmity of journalists.”¹⁹

A reasonable voice was heard from Strasbourg. Bergmann, Dean of the Faculty of Letters, one of Proudhon's oldest friends, fully approved of Langlois's public responses. But he would see “with great displeasure if the defense turned into recriminations and accusations, however just they might be... It would be imprudent to prolong the discussion by poisoning it... It is deplorable that the

¹⁷ Langlois to Delhasse, September 21, 1865 (unpublished).

¹⁸ Chez Lacroix. It bears the date 1866. According to the existing custom, works published from October onward bore the date of the following year. The same would apply to the *Annotated Gospels*.

¹⁹ Langlois to Delhasse, November 21, 1865 (unpublished).

public should come to know what dissension there is in the Proudhonian camp...”²⁰ He declared the rallying of Chaudey and Rolland essential and begged Langlois to become closer to them. The latter immediately sent a copy of Bergmann's letter to Chaudey and Rolland, but his approach was limited to that. He warned Delhasse²¹ that, within three days, he would send them proofs of the Notice of the *Annotated Gospels* and would ask them if they would agree to put their signature at the foot of this text. This, he said, was all that could be done “without failing in our dignity,” because at that time, “dignity” played a very important role in the lives of individuals. However, Langlois submitted all the notes of the *Pornocratie* to Sainte-Beuve and obtained from him the approval of his work of arrangement. But irritation grew more and more between the two groups. Speaking of his wife and his mother-in-law, Langlois ended his letter of November 23 to Delhasse with these words: “Poor women are not used to all these struggles; it upsets them and makes them *sick*. Not everything in life is rosy.”

Bergmann had corrected the proofs of the *Annotated Gospels* and given the final approval. It was about to go to press. Langlois sent Chaudey and Rolland the Notice that was to be placed at the head of the work and informed them that he would have the first ten proof sheets at his home, at their disposal. From there, they could go to M^{me} Proudhon's to compare their work with the original. Langlois would gladly receive their visit on Saturday 25th after one o'clock in the afternoon, or on Sunday morning 26th November. If Monday 27th or Tuesday 28th pleased them better, they only had to say so.²² Wasn't that a challenge? Rolland, it is true, lived in Paris at 9 rue Fontaine, near Langlois; but Chaudey had his home at 50 Rue des Petits-Champs, and M^{me} Proudhon at 10 Grande-Rue, in Passy. The first ten sheets, printed in 18vo, made up 360 pages. There were therefore 360 pages to be checked at 8 Rue Mansart and then compared with the original at M^{me} Proudhon's. Did Rolland or Chaudey make these visits? No text attests to this. But they must have taken place, because on November 30, at 5:00 p.m., Langlois, while at Lacroix's, wrote to Delhasse: “Could you tell me, to the nearest twenty-four hours, the day of your arrival in Paris? Could you also bring that day forward? It is urgent.”²³

²⁰ Bergmann to Langlois, November 21, 1865 (unpublished).

²¹ Langlois to Delhasse, November 23, 1865 (unpublished).

²² Langlois to Chaudey and Rolland, November 24, 1865 (unpublished).

²³ Langlois to Delhasse, November 30, 1865 (unpublished).

Two days later, Langlois enlightened Delhasse on the meaning of his enigmatic questions.²⁴ M^{me} Proudhon had asked Lacroix to suspend publication until the arrival of Delhasse. Here is why: Langlois and Duchêne had deleted five notes from Proudhon's text, totaling fifteen lines. They explained their decision with reasons they considered decisive. But Chaudey and Rolland requested that these notes be placed as *errata* at the beginning of the volume. Langlois and Duchêne were absolutely opposed to this. Langlois even added that no amount of discussion would change his determination. Bergmann, questioned about the deletions, gave his "absolution for some, his approval for others." But there could be no question of inserting the five deleted notes into an *errata*.²⁵ Since it was impossible to reach an agreement, Bergmann deemed it preferable not to sign the Notice, which was done. And it was decided that in the future there would be no more collective signatures. Notices would be signed only by those who had actually worked on the published work.

The *Annotated Gospels* appeared on Wednesday, December 13, 1865. Barely ten days had passed when, on December 23, at 9:00 a.m., the work was seized from the publisher and all depositories, pursuant to Article 1 of the law of March 25, 1818, for the offense of insulting religions recognized by the State. Langlois, inclined not to aggravate the situation, hoped that the blow simply came from the clergy.²⁶ It would be possible, in this case, he said, that the publisher would be limited to intimidating and that the seized book would not be prosecuted. But, if the publisher was targeted, there would be a trial, conviction, and expulsion of Lacroix, which would lead to the termination of the contract. And Langlois, having become fearful of this idea, begged Delhasse not to speak of it to anyone.

But Duchêne intervened energetically. The prosecution of Lacroix was, in his opinion, obvious, his condemnation certain. If the dispositions of the imperial government were hostile to Proudhon's works, as Lacroix claimed, there was no point in bringing a trial against the latter, because the case would be dismissed. It was therefore necessary to allow Lacroix to publish the *Annotated Gospels* as well as the *Acts of the Apostles* in Belgium. Other booksellers could be consulted, and if one were found willing to publish, the termination would have to be accepted. The issue of servile or arranged publication would also have to be

²⁴ Langlois to Delhasse, December 2, 1865 (unpublished).

²⁵ Bergmann to Langlois, undated (unpublished).

²⁶ Langlois to Delhasse, December 24, 1865 (unpublished).

resolved.²⁷ On this subject, Duchêne mentioned the *Speculator's Manual*. This matter seemed to have remained unresolved, despite the Notice in the *Principle of Art*. Duchêne proposed to remove from the manuscript everything written by Proudhon and to publish the rest under his signature alone. And on December 28, Langlois and Duchêne²⁸ sent Delhasse a letter informing him that if it were necessary to publish differently from what they had done until then, they would withdraw from the committee of six and that of twenty-six. Duchêne, for his part, submitted a second note to M^{me} Proudhon and waited for the question of the Manual to be “definitively settled in a fortnight.” He also submitted a draft agreement.²⁹

Since the seizure of December 23, Lacroix persisted in considering the agreement of September 21, 1865, to be null and void. Langlois had the idea of asking the publisher Garnier for his opinion on this claim. Accompanied by Duchêne, he briefly explained the matter to him and requested an interview.³⁰ It certainly took place, but there is no record of it. The publisher Garnier had to request absolute secrecy regarding a conversation concerning his colleague.

On January 10, 1866, Lacroix was sentenced by the Sixth Chamber of the Tribunal to one year in prison and a fine of 3,000 francs, and the printer Poupart to three months in prison and a fine of 500 francs. Lacroix and Poupart weren't the only two victims. Bergmann was also about to be hit. Accused of having corrected the proofs of a condemned book and having given it the go-ahead, he was summoned before the Higher Council of Public Instruction for dismissal. He arrived in Paris a day early and immediately went to Sainte-Beuve, to whom he had communicated many of Proudhon's letters for his biography. Jules Troubat recounted what followed:

Sainte-Beuve dictated letter after letter to me for the Higher Council; one among others for M. Ravaisson, which I collected in his *Correspondence*, where it is said:

“This loyal and profound scholar corrected the proofs only on the specific philological point. He was imprudent, nothing else; he was naive. A paternal disciplinary council is created precisely to assess these things. One will believe oneself to be useful to the University by dividing injustice. I don't know how this

²⁷ Note from Duchêne, undated. The last paragraph is in Langlois's handwriting, which recommends “not communicating this to anyone except Delhasse.” The latter had rushed to Paris.

²⁸ Langlois and Duchêne to Delhasse (in Duchêne's handwriting), December 28, 1865, 6 p.m. (unpublished).

²⁹ Undated draft in Duchêne's handwriting (unpublished).

³⁰ Langlois and Duchêne to Garnier (in Langlois's handwriting), January 12, 1866 (unpublished).

honest man will take this public share of degradation, but I know well that Strasbourg and Alsace will tremble....

"Oh! How I would like to be a minister for five minutes!

"For me, if Bergmann was completely struck, I would cover my face and scream; if he is half struck, I will only cover one cheek and moan."

Bergmann was only reprimanded; he was only given a lecture, he who could have lectured so many others... Sainte-Beuve's letters spared him dismissal, but he left incensed and did not forgive the indignity he had suffered. He opted for Germany after the annexation.³¹

Lacroix had committed himself before the Sixth Chamber to terminate the agreement, which he considered null and void. This theory was not accepted by M^{me} Proudhon and his counsel. They would support the validity of the contract of September 21, 1865. The first monthly payment, which fell due on January 31, 1866, would clarify the situation.

Albert Lacroix, who, for Bougeard's work, entitled *Marat*, had just spent a month experiencing the Sainte-Pélagie regime, not wanting another dose of captivity, had hastened to retire to Belgium, leaving the Paris house in the care of his employees. They having declined payment of the first monthly installment, M^{me} Proudhon invited Lacroix to give them instructions.³² For his part, Langlois asked Delhasse to hasten Lacroix's response. It was necessary to speak to the latter as if his denunciation of the agreement were irrevocable, and he added: "It is up to him to offer a compromise; it is not up to us. Keep these final reflections to yourself."³³

In truth, Langlois and Duchêne were not happy to see the coming obligation in which M^{me} Proudhon would find herself having to begin the trial. Throughout its duration, she would receive no payment for herself and her daughters, which was what they feared above all else. Therefore, despite their apparent intransigence, they would take advantage of every opportunity to avoid a complete rupture.

The letter Albert Lacroix wrote at that time is not among the documents preserved by the family. But we know its contents from an undated note in the handwriting of Georges Duchêne. It specifies the four points of Lacroix's letter: 1. He had forgotten the special legislation of the Restoration. But what has happened profoundly modifies the agreement, which is now destroyed and broken; 2. It might be appropriate to agree to publish the posthumous works in Belgium; 3 He requests M^{me} Proudhon's intentions regarding the 3,000 franc fine

³¹ J. Troubat, *La salle à manger de Sainte-Beuve*, pp. 215-216. Paris, Mercure de France, 1910.

³² M^{me} Proudhon to Lacroix, in Brussels, February 2, 1866 (unpublished).

³³ Langlois to Delhasse, February 2, 1866 (unpublished).

to which he was sentenced and the costs of the trial; 4. There had been an error on his part in paying for the two printings of *Property*.³⁴

Duchène's commentary opposed this thesis. The validity of the contract was certain, he asserted, and the Court would decide it. But he nevertheless agreed with Lacroix's views. Despite the trial that was about to be undertaken, a special agreement could be concluded with him to publish in Belgium all of Proudhon's unpublished works that could not see the light of day in France. In this case, both parties would be obliged to refrain from mentioning the new agreement at the trial. And Duchène was preparing a draft letter to this effect.

Before sending it, Langlois and Duchène requested a consultation with Jottrand, a lawyer in Brussels and father-in-law of Delhasse's daughter. Then they submitted the whole matter to Vivet, the attorney at the Tribunal that Chaudey had just appointed.³⁵ They explained that the purpose of the proposed letter was to give M^{me} Proudhon, during the trial, free disposal of her husband's unpublished works; for her, this represented 4,000 to 5,000 francs that could be immediately realized. Although she firmly intended to address the Tribunal, she did not want to say so clearly to Lacroix, for fear that he would refuse any arrangement. The second volume of the *New Testament* would be entirely composed in Belgium. For several years, it would not be possible to make use of it in France. By authorizing Lacroix to print it, M^{me} Proudhon “would find there within six months a resource of 1,000 to 1,500 francs.”

Faced with this situation, the lawyer Vivet visited Verboeckhoven, who was then in Paris, and proposed this transaction: The complete works would be put up for sale in France and the posthumous works in Belgium.³⁶ However, this proposal did not meet with the approval of Langlois and Duchène, as sales in Belgium did not exceed 1,000 to 1,500 copies, while in France they could reach 3,000.³⁷

But Langlois's ardent desire to bring about a settlement and avoid trial led him to take steps that threatened to spoil the entire affair. A protest from the lawyer Vivet tells us that M^{me} Proudhon had communicated to him a letter from Langlois “in which I don't know what counter-project was devised, which would involve termination and fifteen thousand francs in damages.”³⁸ To which Lacroix

³⁴ Undated note from Duchène (unpublished).

³⁵ Vivet to Langlois and Duchène, February 26, 1865 (unpublished).

³⁶ [Note missing in the original publication.]

³⁷ Langlois and Duchène (in Langlois's handwriting) to Vivet, February 27 (unpublished).

³⁸ Vivet, attorney, to Gustave Chaudey, undated (unpublished).

had replied through his lawyer: “Maintain the agreements... and reduce to 20,000 francs the 31,500 included in the contract.” It also seems that Langlois must have insinuated that Vivet had an interest in the trial, which the latter considered “crude.” Vivet declared that he would henceforth disavow any action that did not come directly from his client.

After all this prevarication, the action was finally brought. On June 30, 1866, the Court ruled in favor of M^{me} Proudhon. Shortly before, Lacroix had reprinted a second edition of the *Annotated Gospels* in Belgium. The second volume of the *New Testament*, containing the annotated *Acts of the Apostles*, the *Epistles*, and the *Apocalypse*, was published in October, but without a notice. Who had corrected the proofs and approved the printing? We do not know. But it probably was not Bergmann, who had just experienced a deep wound.

During the Proudhon-Lacroix proceedings, negotiations with Dentu had finally reached a conclusion. On June 15, 1866, a contract was signed under the terms of which Dentu paid M^{me} Proudhon the sum of five thousand francs in three installments accepted at the end of August, the end of September, and October 15 as final payment for the seven volumes or pamphlets he had published. M^{me} Proudhon would regain full ownership of the works as they sold out.

The Lacroix firm did not consider itself defeated and appealed the judgment. The case was registered with the First Chamber of the Paris Court. Negotiations then resumed and resulted in a new contract on November 26. The monthly payment of 1,500 francs was reduced to 1,000 francs and would last for three years starting at the end of January 1866; any outstanding terms would be settled immediately. M^{me} Proudhon contributed 1,750 francs to the fine and costs of the criminal proceedings to which Lacroix had been sentenced. However, the latter assumed the costs of the civil proceedings and agreed to withdraw his appeal.

By returning to M^{me} Proudhon a copy of this agreement, Lacroix expressed the hope of being assisted in the future to compensate him for his losses.³⁹ But four months after this agreement, he was already complaining that he had only been able to publish *Economic Contradictions* in the Complete Works collection, two volumes out of the twenty-two planned, while he had paid twelve monthly installments out of thirty-six. He requested that he be given, among the old works:⁴⁰

The Creation of Order in Humanity,

³⁹ A. Lacroix to M^{me} Proudhon, December 6, 1866 (unpublished).

⁴⁰ A. Lacroix to Vivet, attorney, March 25, 1867 (unpublished).

The two *Memoirs on Property*,
The four volumes of brochures and newspaper articles, and, among the
posthumous works:
The manuscript of *Rhine*,
Old Testament, Genesis and Exodus,
The Pornocracy.

Lacroix was given the manuscript of *Rhine*, studied by Chaudey and published at the end of 1867, as well as the first two volumes of older works requested. For the rest, Lacroix often had to make the same declaration. Neither M^{me} Proudhon nor her advisors certainly realized that, in the publisher's mind, a close connection must exist between the payment of monthly installments and the publication of the works. The agreement being silent on this subject, no one was overly concerned. Copies continued to be delivered to the publisher only sparingly.

Tired of making vain demands, Lacroix in turn summoned M^{me} Proudhon to appear before the Tribunal. This was a threat that distressed her. The irreconcilable disagreements that had emerged within the committee of six, the criminal conviction of the publisher and the printer, the affront inflicted on Bergmann, all indicated that the system that had prevailed until then could not continue. The summons issued by Lacroix required new measures to be taken. It was then that M^{me} Proudhon contacted M.-L. Boutteville to oversee the rest of the publication.

Boutteville had been a friend of Proudhon's for about fifteen years, but he was not a member of the Committee of Six, nor even of the Committee of Twenty-six. He had been a teacher at the Lycée Bonaparte and the Collège Sainte-Barbe, but had been dismissed for his adherence to "Natural Morality." In early 1850, he had contributed to the weekly supplement of *La Voix du Peuple*, then to *Le Peuple* in 1850. He had entered into a personal relationship with Proudhon during his translation of Karl Grün's preface to the German edition of *Economic Contradictions*. Proudhon had briefly considered including this translation in the new French edition of his work. But he ultimately gave up, "being sufficiently Germanized as it was."

On March 8, 1868, a contract intervened between M^{me} Proudhon, Lacroix and Boutteville. The latter was responsible, from April 1, 1868: 1. to direct the publication which was to be made by Lacroix and C^{ie} of the posthumous works of Proudhon; 2. to correct the proofs of the old works which would be published again, and consequently to give the final approval. He would receive 200 francs per month for at least three hours of work each day. This sum, advanced by Lacroix, would be chargeable to the copyright.

On April 8, M^{me} Proudhon sent Lacroix the following volumes to serve as copies for the reprint: *War and Peace*, *The Federative Principle*, *Theory of Taxation*, *Literary Majorats* and *The Sworn Democrats and the Refractories*. For his part, Boutteville worked assiduously and Lacroix received from him on June 1 the copy of the newspaper articles extracted from the *Représentant du Peuple*, the *Peuple*, the *Voix du Peuple* and of the *Peuple de 1850*.⁴¹

These newspaper articles formed three volumes published in 1868, 1869 and 1870, under the title *Mélanges*. The condemned articles of January 26 and 7, 1849 were not included. Critics did not spare this collection. Alfred Darimon complained about the absence of some first-rate pamphlets. Having been Proudhon's right-hand man in 1848-1850, he would certainly have been consulted, but, although he had maintained relations with Rolland and Langlois, his ostensible support for the Empire no longer permitted any official relationship with him.⁴²

Two posthumous writings remained to be put together: the *Political Contradictions* and *The Pornocracy*. The first of these saw the light of day in 1870. In his Preface, Boutteville did not indicate precisely the condition in which he found the manuscript. He admitted, however, that in some cases he had had to "make a choice and leave aside fragments that were still unformed." Moreover, sometimes faced with the obligation to add one or two words, he had enclosed them in brackets.

The manuscript and notes of *The Pornocracy* had been carefully studied by Langlois and Duchêne. Langlois claimed it was a "hieroglyph to be deciphered." It had taken him, he said, "six days of ten hours of work to find the proper order." The manuscript and notes were submitted to Boutteville on May 21, 1868, along with the works of Jenny d'Héricourt, Dr. Henri Favre, Juliette La Messine, Juliette Lamber, and Dr. Clavel. As he had done with his previous works, Boutteville had to conscientiously study these various documents. But there was no question of publication yet. Boutteville died in 1870.

⁴¹ The receipt provided by Lacroix also bears the following note: "This receipt is given without prejudice to all our rights and actions and all our claims in the pending legal proceedings caused by the considerable delay or failure by M^{me} Proudhon to deliver the copy requested by us two years ago."

⁴² Darimon, who had been a member of parliament since 1857, did not run for re-election in the 1869 elections. Despite the Emperor's promise, the only effective compensation he received was the consulate in Rotterdam, but he did not return to his post. Under the Third Republic, he contributed to various newspapers, notably *Le Figaro*, and published several volumes of memoirs. Later, aged and destitute, having lost his wife and son, he ended his life at the Galignani hospice in Neuilly, "among a group of old people who are dying," he told us bitterly. He died in 1902, at the age of eighty-three.

Since the agreement of September 21, 1865 was due to expire in 1874, M^{me} Proudhon considered making definitive use of all of her husband's unpublished works. She thought of including the correspondence in which Lacroix, before the war, had appeared to be interested.⁴³ Great efforts had been made to collect as many letters as possible. Finally, Lacroix was offered full ownership, with the right to publish in all forms and languages, of the 32 volumes published to date, the *Correspondence*, the *Notebooks* and all the remaining manuscripts, for the sum of 60,000 francs paid in cash. Article 4 of the draft was full of flavor. It clearly proved that Madame Proudhon now realized the importance of the work of finalizing and revising the proofs. Here it is:

ARTICLE 4 — M^{me} and M^{lle} Proudhon (Catherine was of age) are not required to do any work of revision or classification of these manuscripts, and it is purely free of charge and optional that they will have P.-J. Proudhon's friends carry out the proper order and condition of these various writings, but without obligation on their part, which M. Lacroix accepts; failing which the manuscripts will be delivered as is, with him being responsible for making the best use of them. In this case, P.-J. Proudhon's heirs must be consulted and approve the revision work that M. Lacroix would have carried out before the publication of these manuscripts.

Who then were Proudhon's friends at that time? Chaudey had been shot at Sainte-Pélagie on Raoul Rigault's order on May 3, 1871; Duchène, ill, was about to die in 1876; Rolland had passed; Bergmann had remained in Strasbourg in the annexed country; Delhasse was in Brussels. Thus, only Langlois, then a deputy and a member of parliament until 1885, remained of the Committee of Six appointed by Proudhon. The burden of finalizing the text would therefore fall entirely on Lacroix, who would then have to obtain the assent of M^{me} and M^{lle} Proudhon.

Was this agreement approved by Lacroix? Was it approved without modification? It is impossible to say, because we are only in the presence of a “draft contract.”⁴⁴ But this is unlikely. Lacroix did, it is true, announce the *History of Poland*, the *Life of Jesus*, the *History of Jehovah*, and the *Notebooks*. But none of these works were published by him, and the manuscripts always remained with the family.⁴⁵

Moreover, an event had occurred that, seemingly unimportant, would have serious consequences for the publishing house. His health being seriously affected, Albert Lacroix had to leave the management of the publishing house to

⁴³ Lacroix, Verboeckhoven et Cie to G. Chaudey, October 19, 1867 (unpublished).

⁴⁴ Undated (unpublished).

⁴⁵ However, there must have been a treatise concerning the new publications that Lacroix was going to undertake; but it has not been found.

Verboeckhoven and retired to Dinard-Saint-Enogat, then a simple fishing hamlet. He had been deeply impressed by this charming little beach located in a climatic zone favored by the action of the Gulf Stream. Driven by the audacious spirit he had already demonstrated in his publishing business, he bought land, cleared roads and built buildings. When his personal resources were no longer sufficient, he borrowed from the Cr dit Foncier and, convinced of the future of the enterprise, continued his construction. But no one came. The bookstore was in serious danger of suffering the repercussions of the failure of this dream. Partner Verboeckhoven became frightened and withdrew from the partnership. Far from improving Lacroix's situation, this departure increased his already heavy expenses. Subsequently, the Cr dit Foncier, which was owed very high annual interest, forfeited the mortgage he had taken out. Lacroix was eliminated from the business. Construction was then continued by the large land agency. Thanks to considerable and ingenious publicity, Dinard became, in the last three or four years of the last century, a fashionable beach, and subsequently, the most fashionable beach on the English Channel.⁴⁶

The Pornocracy was finally published in 1875. The short preface that preceded the work was signed with the initials C. E. This was Charles-Edmond Chojecki, known as Charles-Edmond, former editor of *La Voix du Peuple*. After having been on the closest terms with Proudhon since 1849, he had ceased all relations as a result of the latter's attitude toward Poland. After her husband's death, M^{me} Proudhon reconnected with Charles-Edmond and his family. This is how she came to commission him to publish *The Pornocracy*. It is unclear what Langlois and Duch ne thought of it. Charles-Edmond, however, sensed the delicacy of the situation, for he signed only his initials to a particularly colorless preface.

In that same year, 1875, Albert Lacroix published Proudhon's *Correspondence*. He did so with extraordinary speed. The 14 volumes that comprised it were published that same year. This haste was not fortunate. This collection contains numerous errors of date. Today, after a century, with all the key figures having disappeared, events of great simplicity become almost incomprehensible because of these errors. Many letters are not included. Over the past half century, a number of Proudhon's unpublished letters have been published in various journals. Several libraries and public institutions in Europe possess them, notably the Institute of Social History in Amsterdam and the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow. Several close friends of Proudhon had not agreed to include in this collection the letters they held, starting with Bourson and Rolland, both designated by Proudhon for the committee of six. Bourson had not done so, perhaps for the same reason that had caused his retirement from the publication

⁴⁶ Today, Boulevard Albert-Lacroix is the city's main art gallery.

committee. As for Rolland, it was for unknown reasons. They must have been very strong, because when his name appears in other missives from Proudhon, it is always printed R***. The same abbreviation exists in the various volumes of memoirs that A. Darimon published until 1889.⁴⁷ Massol, a contributor to *Le Peuple de 1850*, who had spoken a few words at Proudhon's funeral, did not allow any of the letters he had received to appear in the collection. However, he was not averse to publicity, being one of the main proponents of "Independent Morality." No letters from Abbé Lenoir either. Was this the result of resentment at not having been admitted to the publication committee?

The *Correspondence* had no success in bookstores. When Lacroix sold his Paris publishing house to Marpon and Flammarion, they made efforts to facilitate its distribution, but in vain.⁴⁸ Lacroix was still preparing the publication of *Caesarism and Christianity* around 1881. It was the only completed part of the *Kronos* that Proudhon had intended to write in 1859. But this two-volume work, preceded by a very interesting preface by Langlois, was not published until 1883 by Marpon and Flammarion.

Subsequently, from 1896 to 1900, Clément Rochel published *Jesus, Napoleon I, Napoleon III, Commentaries on the Memoirs of Fouché* with various publishers, but these volumes were not very successful. The anarchist *attentats* had barely emerged, and Proudhon was the "father of anarchy," as Prince Kropotkin had declared in 1883 before the Tribunal of Lyon.⁴⁹ The only unpublished work at this time was the *History of Poland*, whose publication has so far been declared "inopportune." Almost all of the partially composed works had been published. The rest consisted mainly of notes.

After selling his bookstore in Brussels, Albert Lacroix retired to Paris and, towards the end of the last century, he contributed to various journals and published, in collaboration with Viscount Caix, an *Illustrated History of France* in twenty volumes through the Ollendorf publishing house. He died in 1906, at the age of seventy-two.

⁴⁷ The letters to Rolland were partially published in 1946 by Jacques Bompard. But his introduction is silent on the reasons for Rolland's abstention in 1875. One can also observe the perfect discretion of this introduction regarding his subsequent development and the date of his death.

⁴⁸ Subsequently, Ernest Flammarion reduced the price of the fourteen volumes, first to 50 francs and, a few years later, to 20 francs, but without much effect. During the 1914-1918 war, the price of old paper having risen from 3 to 80 francs per 100 kilos, Ernest Flammarion melted down this correspondence.

⁴⁹ In 1896, Arthur Desjardins published a very studied biography of P.-J. Proudhon, but conceived in a very "bourgeois" and rather unpleasant spirit. This is enough to characterize the spirit of society at the time.

Working translation by Shawn P. Wilbur; last revised August 12, 2025.