

L’Affaire Saint-Fiacre

G.Simenon

April 4-6, 2018

The father of Maigret had been *régisseur* (i.e. in charge of running) at a certain rurally situated *chateau de Saint-Fiacre* a biographical detail written down in 1932 and which one wonders whether Simenon would ever refer to in future books or simply forget and hence running the risk of contradicting in latter installments. In particular Maigret himself is supposed to have been born there, and now in this book makes a reappearance back at his old hunting grounds.

As usual we get a succinct, yet quite evocative description of the place and his visit to the early mass where the old resident of the chateau falls down dead, an apparent heart-attack. And from then on we are taken on a tour with more or less credible characters. The dead proprietress of course, but she hardly puts on an appearance, her irascible son who takes center stage, a secretary and possible lover she had taken on and who turns out to be a much younger man who brings on his lawyer on the scene. Then of course the present *regisseur* and his son, an immaculate bank man in a nearby town. And not to forget the local doctor and the local priest, set characters in any rural village. A crew of characters, of whom one is bound to be the culprit as in a story of Agatha Christie, or more imaginatively, as in a set-up of a modern absurdist play, by say Ionesco. The resolution will no be disclosed, partly because it so confused so it is not entirely trivial to make head or tail of it.

As noted above, the presentation is dotted with apparently irrelevant details, but significant in their careful delineation of precise, not to say pedantically observed circumstances. Such as

Des feuilles mortes voletaient dans le sol. Leur froissement sec indiquait qu’il avait gelé pendant la nuit.

or in the description of the dilapidation of the chateau, the running of which has obviously foundered on harsh economic realities.

Partout de la poussière, des vieilles choses sans beauté, un amas objets inutiles. Les tentures étaient fanées. ... Et sur es murs, on voyait des traces plus claires qui prouvaient que des meubles avaient été enlevés.

The skill of those crafted stories, is probably underestimated, the plots are subsidiary and serve no other purpose than to provide a narrative flow, without which most putative readers would be puzzled and left in the lurch in the dark.

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