Introduction

> I too have had my period of nervousness, my sentimental stage; and like a galley slave, I still carry its mark on my neck. Besides, can one ever forget anything, does anything ever disappear, can one separate himself from anything at all? Even the most frivolous of persons, if they could reflect for a moment, would be astounded at what they have retained of their past. There are subterranean constructions in everything; it's only a question of surface and depth. Plumb the depths and you shall find.
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> —*Flaubert to Louise Colet, 1852*

SONDEZ ET VOUS TROUVEREZ. . . . In what must certainly be one of the most exhaustive attempts to "plumb the depths" of an author's personality, Jean-Paul Sartre has recently published an enormous two-volume work on the youthful Flaubert. It may come as a surprise to admirers of *Madame Bovary* that Sartre could find so much to say about the period preceding 1856, the year when Flaubert's masterpiece appeared. And indeed, one's surprise is justified when we consider that Flaubert's "coup de maître" has so long been mistaken as his "coup d'essai." But scholars have known for a long time that a lot more went into the composition of *Madame Bovary* than fifty-five months of arduous writing. Far from being barren, the period before its appearance is rich not only in promise, but in substance. Imagine then the surprise of the cultivated public when, on the eve of the First World War, Flaubert's "Complete Works" included several vol-

umes of hitherto unpublished, if not entirely unknown, "juvenilia."[1] It was more than a surprise; it was a revelation.

These early works, long relegated to oblivion and finally emerging as appendixes, are in reality a prolegomenon to any understanding of Flaubert. They contain in embryonic (and often rudimentary) form all the great themes that the master will take up again in later life, to mold, polish, and perfect. In addition to a precocious literary imagination and a surprisingly exuberant, untrammeled style, they reveal more about the deep structures of Flaubert's personality than do the mature works, the latter having been written against the grain of his fundamentally lyrical nature. There are even those, like Albert Béguin, who regret the fact that Flaubert did not continue to write in this vein, that his art became so painstaking, so exacting, so *literary*.

For the Freudians among us, there is indeed something primordial and deeply revealing about these outflowings of a romantic sensibility. Nothing he wrote later in life is so clearly oedipal as Flaubert's first rendition of his encounter with Mme Schlésinger (*Mémoires d'un fou,* 1838), in comparison with which the final "version" of the *Sentimental Education* is a mystical sublimation. Nothing he wrote later is so frankly erotic and full of sexual joy as *Novembre* (1842), nothing as exotic and fantastic as the first *Tentation de Saint-Antoine.* And nowhere do we find as complete an account of Flaubert's aesthetic theories as in the first *Sentimental Education.*

Yet for all the spontaneity and brio of the early works, for all their candor and natural appeal, there is of course no reason to regret the perfectionism of the mature Flaubert. It is to the latter quality and to a bridling of the earlier feelings that we owe the masterpieces. But there is no reason either to reject the early

1. The most important of these early works include the *Mémoires d'un fou, Novembre,* and of course the first *Sentimental Education.* They were published for the first time by the Librairie Conard in Flaubert's *Oeuvres Complètes* (1909–1912). Thanks to the elegant translation of the late Douglas Garman, Flaubert's first novel is now available to his admirers in the English-speaking world.

works out of hand, to dismiss them as the unstructured phantasmagoria of an immature mind. Certainly, a direct confrontation between the first and the second *Sentimental Education* would only accentuate the obvious shortcomings of the 1845 version. But besides setting up a rather high standard (many critics consider the *Sentimental Education* of 1869 Flaubert's greatest work), such a qualitative comparison misses the whole point, namely, that twenty-five years of *education*, aesthetic as well as sentimental, separate the two works. If Flaubert chose the same title for both of them, it was not because they share a common plot (for in fact they do not), but because they share an abiding concern with the organic growth of personality—with the unfolding and discovery of the Self. This is the particular meaning that Flaubert attaches to the word "education." And Flaubert's basic concern with the problem of the personality unfolding in Time does not represent so much an obsession with an abstract theme as it does a living dialogue between the two poles of his existence: between the man that was and the man that is about to be. Flaubert's career (and his life is practically synonymous with his career) dramatizes a confrontation between past and future, an ongoing process in which the present is ever provisional. That is why, at any of the particular milestones which mark his career, we can identify Flaubert only at the risk of artificially arresting the living flow of his life. It would be the equivalent of saying that, at this precise point in time, his education had come to an end.

But if there is one turning point which would allow us to divide Flaubert's life into "before" and "after," this would be the famous and still mysterious incident, in January 1844, on the road near Pont-l'Evêque. Variously described as an attack of epilepsy, or of apoplexy, or as an existential "prise de conscience," there can be no doubt that this moment when Flaubert felt himself "carried off suddenly in a torrent of flames" represents the watershed of his existence. Two years later, in August 1846, he writes to Louise Colet: "The 'I' now living only contemplates the other, who is dead. I have had two very distinct existences.

External events have symbolized the end of the first and the birth of the second; the whole thing is mathematical. My active, passionate, emotional life . . . came to an end in my twenty-second year." The dramatic seizure near Point-l'Evêque marks the moment when Flaubert retires from practical life and encloses himself within the "stoical walls" of art to become the "hermit of Croisset" that we all know. For Flaubert, as for his hero Jules, it is time to commence his literary education and to become himself: "Thus he was now fully committed to the great problem of style."[2]

The fiery commencement of this "vita nova" finds an exact parallel in an equally strange, mysterious incident recounted in the first *Setimental Education*; and it has equally portentous results. Before the apparition, in the twenty-sixth chapter, of the fateful dog with its fiery eyes, it is Henry who accupies the center of the stage and who is the focus of the reader's attention. After the apparition, Henry fades away, and Jules, who heretofore had done little more than brood in the background, suddendly moves to the forefront. The unbalanced, not to say schizophrenic structure of Flaubert's first novel is most apparent at this its most critical juncture, which divides the book into "before" and "after." What can be the meaning of this curious shift, if not that something equally unbalancing has occurred to Flaubert? How can we explain this structural disharmony if not through a rupture in the psyche?

Although Flaubert is reticent about going into the details of his sickness, we know that it assumed a great symbolic importance and signified the end of his youth. "The nervous sickness which has lasted for two years," he writes in 1846, "has marked its conclusion, its termination, its logical result." We know also that the composition of the *Sentimental Education*, begun in

2. Translated literally (and clumsily) the sentence would read: "He thus entered wholeheartedly into the great study of style." The French retains the meaning of "entering into" a new life, the way one enters into a monastery, and suggests also the idea of dedication to an ideal through self-denial. In view of Flaubert's fascination with monasticism and his identification with the hermit Saint Anthony, the mystical aspects of this dedication are no less interesting than the surrealistic symbols marking the rite of passage from the old life to the new.

February 1843 and terminated on 7 January 1845 "at one o'clock in the morning" (so reads the manuscript), was interrupted by the attack near Pont-l'Evêque. And while we cannot tell for certain which part of the book preceded and which part followed the "event," all the internal evidence points to the twenty-sixth chapter as the dividing line. With a temporal lack of precision which is itself highly significant, the chapter opens with the words: "It was *about* that same time that Jules had a distressing experience"; it proceeds in an entirely novel tone, at first surrealistic and then speculative, to describe this experience and its pregnant consequences. For Flaubert, Pont-l'Evêque meant the end of "ordinary life" and the start of his literary asceticism; for Jules, the appearance of the dog means an end of sentimentalism and the start of the lesson proper.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Flaubert meant to dramatize his break with the world of contingency in the hallucinatory sequence (which in many ways recalls the dreamlike hunting scenes of *Saint-Julien l'Hospitalier*) preceding Jules's entrance into the world of art. The sudden shift in focus and tone, the unexpected abandonment of the story line in favor of abstract theorizing, the rather desperate attempt to tie up the loose ends of Henry's existence—all this would seem to indicate that the rhythm of Flaubert's book exactly parallels the perturbations of the author's mind. Flaubert's choice of two heroes instead of one might lead us to posit an irreducible antagonism in his psyche, a primordial imbalance which the novel seeks to disguise as two separate entities. But as the book opens, Jules and Henry are in fact two harmonious halves which complement rather than war against each other. Both of them are at the beginning mere potentialities—empty pages upon which experience has yet to leave its mark. And if Flaubert hesitates to begin his story, if he initially allows nothing to happen to his heroes, this is not because he fears that life will bring out latent differences, but because he knows that experience will create irreversible histories. Flaubert, in a word, wants to keep his options open; and his invention of two heroes is merely a subterfuge which permits a vacillation while avoiding a choice.

For we are here dealing not with two heroes, but with a double-hero, a "homo duplex" wavering between different versions of his destiny. Henry and Jules are the incarnation of that dialectic between past and future whose resolution can lie only in a commitment to a certain course of action here and now. But since action always leaves its imprint on the soul, such a commitment is tantamount to accepting a limited definition of one's being. Any choice implies the rejection of a possibility: if I choose to live in Paris, I cannot at the same time choose to live in the provinces; if I choose to have an affair and experience the joy of physical love, I cannot at the same time retain my illusions of a platonic romance. . . .

Such a list of mutually exclusive alternatives could be extended almost indefinitely, but they can be summed up in the two antagonistic modes of existence between which the young Flaubert hesitates to choose: Shall he become a man of the world, successful in love and business, a man of action measured in his behavior and conventional in his opinions? Or shall he become a spectator of life, an outsider who remains aloof from the vanity of action and translates into artistic form his comtemplation of the Ideal? For Flaubert this choice is as imperious and the alternatives as irreconcilable as Kierkegaard's *Either-Or*. It is a question of being either a man-of-the-world with his baggage train of superficiality, convention, and "bêtise," or a man-of-art who, no longer "of this world," is ". . . he who takes the human heart for his province (and who) must arm himself at every vulnerable point and pull his visor well down over his face if he hopes to remain calm in the midst of the fire he is starting, unscarred by the battle he is to watch."[3]

3. This key passage in the 26th chapter continues: "The soldier who is actually engaged in fighting is no more capable of grasping the action as a whole than the gambler is conscious of the poetry of gambling, or the libertine of the splendour of debauch, or the lover of love's beauty, or perhaps even the monk of the grandeur of religion. If every passion and every dominant idea in life is a circle in which we must turn in order to discover its size and circumference, we must not remain shut up within it but get outside it." We recognize here one of the earliest statements of the theory of "objectivity" to which Flaubert tried, not with complete success, to remain faithful for the rest of his life.

The Flaubert who later describes himself as the " 'homme-plume' who lives by the pen, because of the pen, in relation to the pen and even more with the pen" has so well succeeded in creating his own image that we are at pains to imagine him as ever having had to *choose* to become himself. His life appears to be more of a destiny unfolding than of a decision taken. But if his first novel is any indication, there is nothing ineluctable or predestined about the eventual ascendancy of Jules-the-artist over Henry-the-man-of-the-world. Indeed, Henry is at first a thinly disguised portrait of the artist as a young man. Like Flaubert, he arrives in Paris from the provinces to study law, for which (again like Flaubert) he has little talent and even less enthusiasm. Far from displaying the self-assurance and the proclivity toward worldly success that will develop later on, he strikes us as a charmingly innocent, wide-eyed youth who is so reluctant to face the challenges of adult life that he hesitates to unpack his luggage. For Henry is hardly installed in his new quarters than he starts to regret the simple country inns from whose window one can contemplate "the main road" leading, one must suppose, toward Paris, toward a future bright with great expectations.

This contemplative, passive attitude which leans toward the future with a foot firmly entrenched in the past, and which only reluctantly treads on the road of realization—this attitude is typical of a youth who is afraid to act on his dreams for fear of thereby destroying them. Abstinence, passivity, aloofness are the hallmarks of one who, even before experience can confirm the fact, half suspects that the world is not made to the measure of his dreams.

Flaubert underlines the passivity of his hero by constantly having him stand, agape, watching the activity of others. Stylistically, this immobile posture is stressed by the repetition of verbs like "he watched"; "he contemplated"; "he dreamed"; "he admired"; etc.[4] Symbolically and, if one might say, topographically, the same attitude is expressed by the hero's cultivation of *dis-*

4. The reader who takes the trouble may find dozens of such expressions in the first few pages of the book.

tance: "He would climb to the top of church towers, and stay there for ages, leaning on the stone parapet and gazing down at the roof-tops at the smoke rising from the chimneys and, way below, the tiny little people, crawling about the streets like flies."

The preceding passage recalls nothing so much as the cult of artistic distance preached by Jules; and the fact that Flaubert ascribes such behavior to Henry is a further indication of the initial solidarity between the author and the young hero arriving in Paris. Jules is an afterthought who does not really come into his own until the twenty-sixth chapter. Why then, we ask, does Flaubert bother to introduce Jules at all, at the risk of breaking the unity of his design and creating all kinds of structural gaps and jolts? For indeed Flaubert's attempt to sew Jules into the plot leaves all too obvious seams. When in the second chapter Henry fondly thinks back to his childhood, for instance, he remembers three of his companions, one a sailor, the second already dead, and the third married. And if we ask why he has not a thought for Jules, later referred to as "the other half" of himself, it is obviously because Flaubert had not yet thought of him either. When Jules does appear, it is out of the blue in the form of an unexpected letter which takes up the entire interpolated third chapter.

Flaubert himself provides us with a partial explanation for the need he felt to create a counterpart to Henry. In a letter of 1852 to Louise Colet (the famous parts of which are always quoted out of context) he addresses himself to precisely the kind of questions we have been raising:

> I am surprised, dear friend, at the excessive enthusiasm you show for certain parts of the *Education*. I think they're good too, but not so much better than the others. In any case, I don't at all approve of your idea of taking out the entire part devoted to Jules in order to give unity to the book. You have to consider the way the book was conceived. The character of Jules only stands out because of its contrast with Henry's; one of them in isolation would be weak. At first I had only Henry in mind, but the need for a counterpart made me conceive of Jules. . . .
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> As far as literature is concerned, there are in me two distinct charac-

ters ("bonhommes"): one who is fond of declamations ("gueulades"), of lyricism, of lofty flights, eaglelike, of the sound quality of sentences and the summits of thought; and the other who scrapes and digs out the truth as much as he can, who likes to stress the little facts as much as the big, and who tries to make you feel in an almost *physical* way the thing he reproduces. . . . The *Sentimental Education* represented, without my knowing it, an attempt at fusing these two tendencies (it would have been easier to create the purely human in one book and lyricism in another). I have failed. No matter how much cosmetic is applied to the work (maybe some day I'll get to it), it will always be defective. Too many things are missing, and it's always through the *absence* of something that a book is weak. . . .

(It would be necessary) to write a missing chapter where it would be shown how the same trunk had, by necessity, to fork into two branches; that is to say, why such and such an action brought about a certain result in one character rather than in the other. The causes are shown, and so are the effects, but the link between them is not. This is what vitiates the book and makes it untrue to its title.[5]

I have quoted the letter at such length because, in addition to a lucid criticism of the book, it offers further proof of the unity underlying its original design. Flaubert's metaphor of the tree forking into two branches only underlines the difficulty he experienced in portraying the mysteries of organic growth; for how, indeed, can the same trunk produce such essentially different branches as Jules and Henry? In trying to resolve what he felt were contradictory impulses in his own psyche, Flaubert had recourse to the expedient of inventing two separate characters, or rather, of grafting the one upon the other. Instead of insisting upon a unity in contradiction, upon the natural symbiosis that can result from two apparently irreconcilable sets of experience; instead of subjecting, in short, the same hero to two different lessons in his sentimental education, Flaubert winds up with two trees, two heroes, two sets of experience.

For the problem from which Flaubert shrinks back (and which he so masterfully resolves in the second *Sentimental Education*) is to show, not how the same tree forks into two branches, but on

5. The translation of this letter, as well as that of all the other excerpts from Flaubert's correspondence quoted in these pages, is my own.

the contrary how the same trunk, twisted now this way and now the other, weathers the storm without breaking into two. The problem is, in other words, to show how Henry *becomes* Jules. Flaubert's arboreal metaphor has validity only if we turn it upside down to represent two branches *coalescing* into one trunk. Only in such a way can the essential unity of the person be preserved, for persons do not grow the same way as trees. There is nothing in Henry which predestines him to be a scrubby pine rather than an oak; and even though Flaubert seems to rule out the possibility of choice by using the term "of necessity," he immediately qualifies such determinism by adding that "such and such an action brought about a certain result." Obviously, the key word here is *action*: it takes away from the realm of plants and introduces the truly human dimension of growth and change. This is the fourth dimension of Time—that "missing link" between cause and effect whose absence Flaubert so rightfully laments. His attempt to short-circuit the connection between past and present with such devices as epistolary exchanges (which allow the author not only to be in two places at the same time, but to give the appearance of *being* two persons at the same time) was, he realized, avoiding the real issue of education—a word which for Flaubert has the almost existential meaning of becoming oneself through action. But the Flaubert who looks back upon his past cannot understand the present in terms of the past; he cannot see a unity of being behind the diversity of experience:

> Alarmed by the vividness of his memories, all the more poignant because of the things he had done and felt at this very spot, he began to ask himself whether they really belonged to the same man, whether a single lifetime could have been time enough; and so remote did his own past now seem that he tried to connect them with some other, long-lost existence. Thinking of all the ideas that had occurred to him, as he passed these same milestones beneath these same bushes, of all the passionate impulses and bitter pangs of grief he had experienced, he looked at himself in astonishment, and, unable to distinguish clearly either the motives that had produced them or the relations between them, all he could discover within himself was . . . a vast confusion, a whole world overshadowed by vague and universal

grief, whose secret, whose unity, remained incomprehensible. (Chapter 26)

Jules is here the spokesman of the same "I" whom we saw previously "contemplating the other, who is dead." And the "other" is of course none other than Henry. For Henry represents that which Flaubert actually was: the man arriving from the provinces who experiences sensual love and the temptations of mundane success. But even more importantly, Henry represents that which Flaubert was afraid of becoming: the man caught in the meaningless round of worldly activity. This is why the author progressively moves away from his hero, unceremoniously dismisses him in a résumé, and finally condemns him to the ultimate meaninglessness of repeating the same experience over and over again (Henry's affairs, his "rise" to success, etc.). Such is the manner of death-in-life in which Flaubert, in what Sartre has called his "manichean" vision of reality, identifies with the world of men. To separate himself from it, he must, in an almost religious sense, become "dead to the world"; he must cut himself off from that part of his past which has compromised with the world, tasted of its pleasures, and succumbed to its temptations. And to be sure, there is no more effective way to deny one's past than to pretend that it belongs to somebody else.

If Flaubert reacted against a part of his past to the extent of calling it "dead" or of lending to it a personage whose development he despises, we can only account for it by positing some kind of fissure, some kind of gaping wound in the mind. The hiatus between his present and his past seems so radically unbridgeable that perhaps only another appeal to the mystery of Pont-l'Evêque can hope to provide an adequate explanation. But a recourse to mysteries is a critic's confession of failure. There is, in the *Sentimental Education*, a much more pedestrian explanation for the final divergence between Henry and Jules. Alike and practically undifferentiated in their youth, they become antagonists in adult life because they accede to it by such radically different routes. They have had, as was hinted previously, two entirely different lessons in love.

The experience of love represents, for Flaubert, a kind of schema for the future development of the personality. It provides a model to which all subsequent experiences tend to conform and upon which it leaves an indelible stamp. Love is a paradigm for all the lessons of life; and education is almost synonymous with "sentimental" education.

Very briefly, Flaubert's position toward love and women is the same as that of his contemporary Kierkegaard. As stated by the philosopher's spokesman Victor Eremita (the "hermit of Croisset" would have been intrigued by this name!), woman has the power to awaken the ideal in man, but if he allows himself to be tied down by her charms, he will forever remain a prisoner of the finite: "Many a man has become a genius, hero, poet or saint because of a young woman, but none of them ever became a genius because of a woman he possessed, for thanks to her he became only a civil servant."[6] Woman's influence is, in other words, entirely negative: she is a source of inspiration only if man can resist falling under her spell.

This is a conviction repeated time and again in Flaubert's correspondence: the priesthood of art implies the ultimate sacrifice of sexual abstinence, for the creative act is the exact opposite of the reproductive act. Flaubert, moreover, expressly formulates a theory of sublimation when he establishes a direct relation between abstinence and creativity. This body-soul dualism sometimes takes such extreme forms that he castigates the flesh and is tempted to destroy it, as when he writes to Louise Colet that, as a youth in Paris, he at one time wanted to castrate himself. "There comes a time," he says, "when *one feels the need to make oneself suffer,* to hate one's flesh, to throw mud in its face—so hideous does it appear." For Flaubert as for Nietzche, suffering and self-denial are the hallmarks of the great: "The soul's dimension can be measured by its suffering, the way one calculates a river's depth by its current."

We are now in a better position to understand Flaubert's rather grotesque symbol of the Strasbourg goose, which (like

6. Sören Kierkegaard, *In Vino Veritas.*

Musset's pelican) stands for the self-sacrifice of the artist: "It is through prolonged suffering that genius is created." Since the suffering resulting from unrequited love is one of the most intense that we know, it follows that it is also one of the most fruitful. Success with women, on the other hand, is "generally a sign of mediocrity," as Flaubert says somewhere in his correspondence.

The schema of the *Sentimental Education* results almost mathematically from these convictions. Henry allows himself to be ensnared by the pleasures of love, and acting under its spell, he gives up whatever potential for creativity he might have had. (Significantly, he burns all of his correspondence and literary projects on the eve of his departure for America. From then on he is well on his way to becoming the cad that will eventually marry a Minister's niece.) On the other hand, the love that Jules feels for his actress is tinged, like the name Lucinda itself, with all the poetry of make-believe and charged with the glamor of the theater. It brings to mind the confusion between the actress, the rôle, and a faraway memory so wonderfully portrayed in the opening pages of Nerval's *Sylvie*. In contrast to Henry, whose sensitivity to Mme Renaud's perfume is exclusively sensual, Jules responds in a poetic, Baudelairian way to the "voluptuous emanations of the theater." And, again in sharp contrast to Henry, his love is from the start creative: it is for Lucinda and under her inspiration that he writes his first play.

In a sense then, we can find in these contrasting experiences of love an explanation for the polarity of the *Sentimental Education* and the "missing link" between cause and effect that Flaubert thought he had failed to provide. In one of his letters, Flaubert exclaims: "Ah! if I had been loved at seventeen, what an idiot ('crétin') I would be now." But there was never really much danger that he should turn out like Henry, for this is the same Flaubert who writes: "Oh my God! If I wrote in the style I conceive of, what a writer I would be!" Still, there can be no doubt that unrequited love proved to be as fruitful for Flaubert as it was for his alter ego Jules. For what Jules learns from his faithful dog is this: that the writer must, through the alchemy of style,

transmute the substance of his own exeperience into the work of art. This is why the dog leads him back to the bridge where formerly, at the point of jumping, he was interrupted by a young girl crying: "Charity, charity." The bridge itself is a symbol for the link that Jules must establish with his own past; and once he has found his way back to himself, the gap separating him from others may be bridged by the kind of love that ". . . instead of being lavished upon a single being or a single object . . . (is) scattered all around in sympathetic rays." (Chapter 21)

By taking to heart the lesson brought by the wondrous dog, Flaubert at times allows us a glimpse into that "royal chamber" wherein he has walled up his own youthful love. We hear the echoes of this chamber still resounding when, almost thirty years later, he comes back to his love in the second, the great *Sentimental Education.* And if the problem of the first novel was to show how Henry became Jules, we have in his works sufficient testimony to show how Jules became Flaubert.

GERHARD GERHARDI

University of Texas
Austin, Texas
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