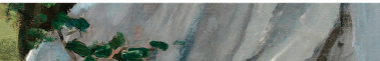




**Gustave Flaubert**  
**Sentimental Education**

A new translation by Helen Constantine

**OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS**



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## SENTIMENTAL EDUCATION

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT was born in 1821 in Rouen, where his father was chief surgeon at the hospital. From 1840 to 1844 he studied law in Paris, but gave up that career for writing, and set up house at Croisset in 1846 with his widowed mother and niece. Notwithstanding his attachment to them (and to a number of other women), Flaubert's art was the centre of his existence, and he devoted his life to it. His first published novel, *Madame Bovary*, appeared in 1856 in serial form, and involved Flaubert in a trial for irreligion and immorality. On his acquittal the book enjoyed a *succès de scandale*, and its author's reputation was established.

Flaubert is often considered a pre-eminent representative of 'realism' in literature. It is true that he took enormous trouble over the documentation of his novels. Even his historical novel *Salammbô* (1862), set in Carthage at the time of the Punic Wars, involved a trip to North Africa to gather local colour. But Flaubert's true obsession was with style and form, in which he continually sought perfection, recasting and reading aloud draft after draft.

While enjoying a brilliant social life as a literary celebrity, he completed a second version of *L'Éducation sentimentale* in 1869. *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* was published in 1874 and *Trois contes* in 1877. Flaubert died in 1880, leaving his last (unfinished) work, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, to be published the following year.

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GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

*Sentimental Education*

*The Story of a Young Man*



*Translated by*

HELEN CONSTANTINE

*With an Introduction and Notes by*

PATRICK COLEMAN

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## INTRODUCTION

THE seductive appeal, but also the unsettling ambiguity, of Flaubert's 'story of a young man' begins with its title. In common parlance, an *éducation sentimentale* refers to a person's initial instruction in love. It includes the sensual discoveries of one's sexual awakening, the emotional knowledge that comes from experiencing the force and the fragility of intimate relationship, and the worldly wisdom achieved by gaining some perspective on all of it. One way we seek such perspective is by reading stories about the sentimental education of other people, and one of the important functions of the French novel, from Mme de Lafayette through Stendhal and Flaubert to Proust and beyond, has been to provide us with such stories. In the broadest sense, of course, the theme is a common one in the novels of many cultures. To take just one example, what is the theme of that other great 1860s 'story of a young man', *Great Expectations*, but the sentimental education of Dickens's hero Pip? Yet the widespread notion that the expression *éducation sentimentale*, like *savoir-faire*, has no exact English equivalent is based on its association with a particular attitude, at once open-minded and disenchanting, towards the lessons of desire that we find, or think we find, in the great French novelists.

There is, however, another reason for focusing on the translation of Flaubert's title: it brings to the fore an ambiguity not immediately apparent in the French, but which was pointed out by Marcel Proust a century ago. Proust had given his own great novel of education a title rich in ambiguity.<sup>1</sup> Based on his attentive reading of Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale*, Proust sensed that his predecessor might be exploiting the conflicting possibilities of the one he chose. From a strict grammatical point of view, Proust says, *éducation sentimentale* can be read in two contradictory ways. It can mean 'education of the sentiments', with the latter term referring, not just to feelings as such, but to the opinions and judgements that emerge in and

<sup>1</sup> Briefly, is the 'lost time' of *In Search of Lost Time* (*À la recherche du temps perdu*) a past good time to be retrieved, time wasted and in need of redemption, or some combination of both?

from those feelings. This meaning of ‘sentiment’ can be found in eighteenth-century English as well. Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1758), for example, is an extended examination of this interaction of feeling, opinion, and judgement.<sup>2</sup> A sentimental education of this sort is not complete until the whole complex of impulses that together make up what we now call our emotional intelligence is tested and refined through intellectual reflection. Whether stories of sentimental education end happily or not, they should culminate in wisdom of a critical, self-aware kind. On the other hand, an education may be ‘sentimental’ in the more negative sense of one short-circuited by sentimentality. Shying away from the challenges of critical self-awareness, sentimentality collapses the distinction between thinking and feeling, making the one merely the intensification or intellectualization of the other. Stories of this second type offer only a parody of wisdom, complacently or cynically closing off further reflection—for cynicism may be a self-satisfied shadow of sentimentality.

In real life, of course, distinguishing between these two forms of sentimental education may not be an easy task. Our upbringing may prompt us to question what we might call the emotional regime of our culture; it also pressures us to bow to the way things are, in our personalities or in the world around us. Over the last three centuries, novels dramatizing critical and conformist sentimental educations have illustrated this tension in various ways. Some have tried to portray an authentic sentimental education through the struggles of exemplary protagonists. Others have dramatized in admonitory fashion the deadening effects of excessive compromise. In so doing, the best of these novels model a sentimental education of a higher, more sophisticated sort. That is to say, they illustrate an approach to the ongoing task of discerning the difference between the critical and conformist shaping of emotion and of negotiating the tension between them. What we value in writers such as Dickens and George Eliot, for example, contemporary with Flaubert, and in the great novelists who learned from him, including Henry James, Proust, Joyce, and Mann, are the ways they help us to understand what this process involves and, just as importantly, what it feels like.

<sup>2</sup> As is also, in its own way, Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey* (1768), which, several times translated as *Voyage sentimental*, was instrumental in introducing the adjective into French. For Sterne’s and Smith’s use of the term, see Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey and Other Writings*, ed. Ian Jack and Tim Parnell (Oxford, 2003), pp. xxvii–xxviii.

By making 'sentimental education' his title, Flaubert suggests that what we will find in his novel is an enactment of this process of discernment. His use of the definite article underscores his ambition. The novel does not give us *a* sentimental education but *the* sentimental education.<sup>3</sup> The exemplariness of the case study might be found at various levels of the text. It might be illustrated in the story of a hero who struggles in representative fashion with the consciousness and social contradictions of his time. It might be found at the level of the narrative, in the evolution of the perspectives we are invited to consider as we follow the hero's story. In a writer as subtle as Flaubert, we expect that ultimately it will be the interplay between story and narrative, between theme and form, which will show us what constitutes 'the' sentimental education, so that at the end we will be better equipped to distinguish between sentiment and sentimentality at every level of experience and reflection. As readers of Flaubert's earlier novel *Madame Bovary*, we have been given a negative lesson about what happens when these levels are confused; we come now to *Sentimental Education* in the expectation of seeing what a properly differentiated structuring of feeling should look like. Indeed, the title promises so much that some early reviewers attacked Flaubert for the extravagance of his claim.

What no doubt provoked them even more, and continues to perplex readers today, is that the novel confounds the expectations it raises. The hero, Frédéric Moreau, is enticed by women sufficiently various and engaged by such widely differing political ideals as to provide ample opportunity to examine his feelings. As a law student, he meets other young men who challenge his provincial views, and as the beneficiary of a substantial inheritance that allows him to settle permanently in Paris he mingles with economic and artistic entrepreneurs who stir his ambitions. The Revolution of 1848 offers him the possibility of a political career, but also the chance to discover the underside of political manoeuvres. Although he thinks he has met the

<sup>3</sup> Flaubert could also have omitted the article altogether, letting the reader decide just how generalizable the pattern is supposed to be. English usage does not allow the translator to make this distinction in phrases like this one that involve an abstract noun. 'The Sentimental Education' would not be idiomatic (nor would 'The Great Expectations'; the French translation of Dickens as *Les Grandes Espérances* is also an interpretative choice). The presence or absence of optional articles in English titles can be significant, too. Compare *The Portrait of a Lady* (Henry James) and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (James Joyce).

love of his life when in 1840, as a newly minted *bachelier*, he is dazzled by the sight of Mme Arnoux, over the following decade he will become entangled with three other women, each endowed with a particular charm: the mistress of Mme Arnoux's husband, a *lorette* or courtesan whom other lovers pursue as well; a home-town girl whose early crush on him grows into womanly passion; and a society lady of refined taste and jealous demands. That all of these different women should find Frédéric attractive means they see some intriguing potential in him, yet Henry James spoke for many readers when he complained that Frédéric is so vague in thought and ineffectual in action that even his failures fail to instruct. Even more disconcerting is the impersonality of the narrative. Flaubert's refusal to have his narrator judge Madame Bovary's adultery was the chief reason he was prosecuted for publishing it, but sophisticated readers could see the logic in refraining from telling us *what* to think about a provincial woman like Emma, whose delusions and deviant passions were all too liable to be summarily condemned by narrow-minded moralists. But what could be the point of refusing to tell us at least *how* to think about the aspirations of a young man of middling talent and muddled motives as he and the friends around him negotiate their personal and political relationships in the capital of France? The novel seems to belie its title.

### *The Genesis of Sentimental Education*

We know from Flaubert's correspondence that he was in fact not very happy with the title, but not because he felt it was inappropriate. Inadequate it might be, but in the end it was the only one that fitted.<sup>4</sup> Though he does not say so, the real reason is that Flaubert had already written a novel with the title 'L'Éducation sentimentale' many years before, when he was in his twenties, which was never published. The story follows two childhood friends as they experience the thrills and disappointments of love: Henry with a married woman, Jules with a free-spirited actress. The former moves to Paris, with an interlude in America; the latter remains in the provinces but at the

<sup>4</sup> 'I don't say the title is good. But so far it's the one that best renders what I had in mind.' Letter to George Sand, 3 April 1869, in *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert 1857-1880*, edited and translated by Francis Steegmuller (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), 129.

end of the book departs for the 'Orient' (that is to say, the eastern Mediterranean). Henry settles for a conventional career, marrying the niece of a government minister, while Jules commits to the solitary life of the artist. The contrast between the two characters is schematically drawn and the comments of the narrator awkwardly intrusive, and so it is not surprising that Flaubert never published the book. A deeper problem is his handling of the main theme. The young author displays a striking ability to use the notion of sentimental education as a springboard for exploring the early stages of young men's imaginative experience. Yet, the range of both the experience and the exploration is pre-emptively circumscribed. Flaubert's one use of the title phrase in a story within the story does not, as one would hope, add an additional layer of meaning; instead it undercuts the point of writing the main novel. Any realistic story of sentimental education will be tinged to some degree with disenchantment, but the emblematic little anecdote Flaubert inserts into the middle of the 1845 'Sentimental Education' takes that tendency to an extreme. On his way to New York, Henry meets a black man named Itatoé, who works for the captain of the ship:

His father had sold him for a box of nails; he had come to France as a servant. He had stolen a scarf for a chambermaid he loved; they had sent him to the galleys for five years. He had returned on foot from Toulon to Le Havre to see his mistress again; he hadn't found her. He was going back now to the land of the Blacks.

Like any other man, he, too, had got his sentimental education.<sup>5</sup>

In putting Africans and Europeans on the same level, this passage supports the author's claim that sentimental education as he understands it is the same for everyone, but in its refusal to enter the character's subjectivity and in its throwaway conclusion, the text implies that the pattern is a common one only in its denial of difference. There is nothing new to discover in another instance of this education and nothing new to say about it.

The 1845 'Sentimental Education' reflected how Flaubert thought about his own life at the time he wrote it. A year earlier he had suffered

<sup>5</sup> Gustave Flaubert, *Œuvres de jeunesse (Œuvres complètes, vol. i)*, ed. Claudine Gothot-Mersch and Guy Sagnes (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 978. Except where indicated, translations from the French are my own.

a series of seizures generally thought to be epileptic in nature. They had forced (or, perhaps better, allowed, given the probability of some psychosomatic element in their genesis and the convenience of their timing) the 23-year-old young man to abandon the law studies he hated. From then on Flaubert would devote himself entirely to reading and writing, living at Croisset near Rouen with his mother. The link between them was reinforced when Flaubert's father and beloved sister Caroline died within a few months of each other in 1846. Starting that same year, when his health had recovered, Flaubert would again visit Paris for various periods of time, but not long after completing his novel, he wrote this in a letter to the closest companion of his youth:

By dint of being in a bad way, I'm in a good way . . . I have weaned myself from so many things that I feel rich in the midst of the most absolute destitution. I still have some way to go. My sentimental education isn't finished, but I may graduate soon. Have you sometimes thought, dear sweet friend, how many tears the horrible word 'happiness' is responsible for?<sup>6</sup>

The young Flaubert is eager to embrace disappointment and be done. He deliberately renounces what is in any case denied him, all in the name of art. What produces his disenchantment, however, is not any actual experience of the transience of happiness; it is scepticism about the promise contained in the word itself. Flaubert is renouncing what he has lived only in his mind, and so it is no wonder his conception of sentimental education should be so thin and abstract. Ironically, within a year of declaring his education almost complete, Flaubert found himself caught up in a tempestuous love affair, one very different from the one he attributes to his fictional Henry. His relationship with Louise Colet, a free-living poet struggling to make her way in the Paris literary world, brought him more pleasure and pain than he could ever have anticipated. Begun in 1846, the affair was broken off in 1848 and then resumed in less intense form in 1851, when Flaubert was setting to work on *Madame Bovary*. By the time their relationship ended for good in 1855, when that book was almost finished, it had also provided the catalyst for a decisive development of Flaubert's aesthetic ideas. In responding to Louise's

<sup>6</sup> Letter to Alfred Le Poittevin, 17 June 1845, in *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert 1830-1857*, edited and translated by Francis Steegmuller (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), 34.

sincerely humanitarian but often mawkish writings, Flaubert sharpened his views about the necessary impersonality of art. In addition, her feminist ideas and emotional assertiveness also challenged his tendency to view women in simplistic terms as either idealized or sexualized figures in the drama of a man's sentimental education. If in the end he did not amend his views—he chose to remain single rather than accede to Louise's demands for a more stable and ongoing intimacy—he was certainly forced to acknowledge their partiality.

Another crucial moment in Flaubert's sentimental education came when in 1849 he followed the footsteps of the fictional Jules and travelled to the Orient. The inspiration he would find during his eighteen-month trip exceeded anything he might have imagined for his character. In the Egyptian dancer and prostitute Kuchuk Hanem, Flaubert discovered a woman of enigmatic, archetypal sexual power. His encounter with her (purely physical, since they did not have a common language in which to communicate) became a source of endless reverie. Kuchuk's enduring influence on Flaubert's emotional imagination, and his art, can be detected in the second *Sentimental Education* of 1869. Flaubert's use of the term 'apparition' to describe the moment when on the boat to Nogent, Frédéric first sees Mme Arnoux, 'etched out against the blue sky' in the novel's first scene, would for the French reader of the time most likely connote the widely discussed apparitions of the Virgin Mary at La Salette in 1846 and at Lourdes in 1858. No doubt Flaubert intended this allusion, but for the author the image recalled a very different and private event: his unforgettable first sight of Kuchuk Hanem, 'surrounded by light and standing against the background of blue sky' at the top of an Egyptian staircase, looking down at a man who was also travelling in a boat up a river, not the Seine but the Nile.<sup>7</sup>

While these unexpected real-life experiences upset Flaubert's desire to bring his sentimental education to an early close, he also began to curb his tendency to pre-emptive closure in his aesthetic conception of the theme. As he looked backwards, he gained a clearer perception of how his views had been shaped by the world in which he had grown up. It was understandable that he should view his early identification with the Romanticism of the preceding generation,

<sup>7</sup> Gustave Flaubert, *Flaubert in Egypt: A Sensibility on Tour*, trans. and ed. Francis Steegmuller (1979; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), 114.

that of Lamartine and Hugo, which had been made all the more attractive because it had been attacked as vulgar and subversive by his classical-minded schoolmasters, as immature and in the end all too conventional. But as Flaubert grew into adulthood he became aware of just how much even the ostensibly more radical stance of a Byron had turned into a cultural cliché. Not only did he realize his struggle for originality was not unique; what was more disturbing, he saw that his spiritual disenchantment, like the sowing of sexual wild oats, could be considered without shock as just a stage in a young man's development. He tried to maintain the edge of his internal rebellion by sharpening it with the nihilism of the Marquis de Sade and the corrosive laughter of Rabelais, but no writer of the past could help him articulate his most profound insight into the nature of the world around him or handle the challenge it presented to him as a writer. This was the sense that no matter how hard a man tried to maintain a creative tension between critique and conformity, and no matter what efforts an artist made to give creative artistic representation to that dialectic of idealistic feeling and ironic reflection that lies at the heart of a genuine sentimental education, modern culture would absorb that tension and neutralize that dialectic by the deadening power of what he called 'received ideas'.

Clichés and conventional opinions pervade every culture, of course. What distinguishes the *idées reçues* of a modernity that prides itself in already being enlightened and critically aware is that they are not recognized as such and revised when artists point them out. Flaubert's personal experience had led him to modify his initial, and defensively reductive, definition of sentimental education. But in attempting to expand and deepen his conception of that education, he had to wonder how he could imagine and then convey it authentically, given that the usual strategies of idealizing or ironic distancing would offer no sure protection against the transformation of a work of art into another *idée reçue*.

Flaubert's path out of this impasse was a long and tortuous one. One solution was to tap the resources of the distant past. In *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, a book about a fourth-century Egyptian monk, the first version of which was completed in 1849, sentimental education is reframed as a spiritual asceticism straining against all worldly temptations. Unfortunately, when Flaubert read the manuscript to his friends Maxime du Camp and Louis Bouilhet, they

found it incomprehensible. It was just too eccentric. Only in 1874, five years after the publication of *Sentimental Education* and in the anxious atmosphere of a France reeling from military defeat in the Franco-Prussian War and shaken by the brutal repression of the Paris Commune, would Flaubert be able to recast the *Temptation* into a readable, though still challenging book.

A second strategy, as mentioned above, was to focus on a contemporary but marginal figure. Flaubert reframed his theme in a revolutionary way when he decided to write about the sentimental education of a woman, in the book that became *Madame Bovary*. A girl's discovery of love is one of the novel's most conventional themes, and fictional female heroines may be led to scrutinize their heart or learn the painful lesson of abandonment, but an *éducation sentimentale* of the more explicitly sexual and more intensely intellectual kind, involving experiences deviating from social rules and reflections detached from conventional moral considerations, was the prerogative of male protagonists. Rare exceptions such as the monstrous Mme de Merteuil in Laclos's *Liaisons dangereuses*, and the even more disturbing title character of Sade's *Juliette*, only proved the rule.

Flaubert's unpublished 1845 novel had made at least a gesture towards the inclusion of men of another race, but it did not challenge gender norms. *Madame Bovary* does so to disturbing effect. Emma's 'virile' qualities never obscure the reality or pathos of her womanly predicament, and Flaubert's re-examination of the gendered polarities of sentimental education is apparent in the way he mixes dreaminess and down-to-earth fact in narrating her erotic experiences. The prosecution of *Madame Bovary* for immorality confirmed his low opinion of bourgeois France, but it also validated his achievement in publishing a story that could not immediately be absorbed into the cultural repertoire—though of course in time Emma and her illusions would become as iconic a figure as any in a later modernity more acutely, if still too comfortably, aware of itself as an image factory.

After a return to the ancient world with *Salammô* (1862), the story of a mercenary revolt against the government of Carthage and a rebel's doomed love for a local priestess, Flaubert began to think about setting another novel in contemporary France. At first, the central figure was again to be a woman, this time named Mme Moreau. According to the preparatory notes Flaubert began to sketch in 1862, the story, as in *Madame Bovary*, was to centre on an adulterous

relationship, although in formulating it as one involving ‘the husband, the wife, the lover, all loving each other, all cowardly’,<sup>8</sup> Flaubert deviates from the pattern of the earlier novel in two significant ways. First, while her lovers may be cowardly, Emma Bovary is bold in her pursuit of them. By putting the three leading characters of the new book all on the same level Flaubert would seem to negate the energizing potential of its Parisian setting. Second, the working-out of that premiss was to be just as anaemic. The characters all ‘understand their relative position and don’t dare say it to each other. The feeling (*sentiment*) ends on its own. They separate . . . then, they die.’

The scope of the project begins to expand, paradoxically, with another deflationary move: Flaubert’s decision that the lovers should not consummate their affair. Although the young man will become ‘hardened’ by his experience in society, he will remain too timid to pursue the wife, focusing his desires instead on *lorettes*, women looking for ongoing sexual arrangements with men prepared to ‘keep’ them in style. The result is a recentring of the book on a different kind of love triangle. Initially the central figure was the wife, torn between virtue and desire but unable to take the initiative the young man fails to seize himself—an inversion, in other words, of the situation dramatized in *Madame Bovary*. Now, Flaubert focuses his attention on the hero and his experience with two women, the ‘honest’ and the ‘impure’. The transfer of the name ‘Moreau’ from the wife to the lover underscores this shift of emphasis. Flaubert finds himself wondering: is the story to be ‘a sort of sentimental education’? One understands Flaubert’s hesitation. Will this dramatization of the theme be an improvement on the first?

Flaubert’s first innovation is to imagine the *bourgeoise* and the *lorette* as parallel rather than opposing characters. As objects of desire, they

<sup>8</sup> The following quotations are taken from what is known as ‘Notebook 19’, the earliest of the many sketches and drafts that provide a fascinating record of the novel’s genesis. The contents of Notebook 19 were first published in 1950, but much of the other (and very considerable) material relating to *Sentimental Education* only became available to scholars after it was acquired by the Bibliothèque nationale in 1975. The full significance of these manuscripts is still being explored, but what are known as the ‘scenarios’ of the novel, the more extended notes and outlines intermediate between the notebooks and the drafts, have been published in a helpfully readable form. See Flaubert, *L’Éducation sentimentale: Les Scénarios*, ed. Tony Williams (Paris, 1992). This volume also reproduces (pp. 324–33) the text of Notebook 19 as transcribed by Pierre-Marc de Biasi in his edition of Flaubert’s *Carnets de travail* (Paris, 1988).

are equivalent to the point of the hero's being able to switch from one to the other without difficulty. By abolishing the ethical hierarchy between the hero's erotic alternatives, Flaubert undermines any easy identification of sentimental education with the achievement of an 'enlightened' moral judgement, whether of an edifying or cynical cast. Even so, Flaubert is reluctant to follow where his imagination is leading him. Something else was required to prevent critically shaped sentiment from collapsing into complacent sentimentality. The solution appeared when Flaubert discovered in the historical and political configuration of the setting a structural analogue to the dynamic of the story's personal relationships. 'Show', he advised himself in his notebook, 'that sentimentalism (its development since 1830) follows politics and replicates its phases.'<sup>9</sup> As he researched and wrote the book, Flaubert would modify this rather simplistic conception of sentimentalism as a mirror of politics. What he learned as he explored the events and writings of the period leading up to and through the Revolution of 1848, was that while every aspect of life was subject to the same flattening of moral difference and dynamism, that flattening took multiple forms. Moreover, because the various individual and collective expressions of this process proceeded at different speeds, they clashed with each other in ways that generated new and sometimes incongruous forms. By arranging his material in a carefully controlled pattern of echoes and contrasts, Flaubert found he could generate artistic energy from a contrapuntal orchestration of inertias.

### *Sentimentalism 1: Inaction*

The sentimentalism Flaubert portrays in the novel has three related aspects, and a brief exploration of how he treats each of them may offer helpful points of entry into the book. The first aspect is an inclination to vacuous reverie that precludes decisive action. Frédéric is an ineffectual dreamer possessed by images of happiness and social success so vivid and immediate that he feels the reality of them will follow by itself. If they don't there is no point in striving to attain them, because what is pursued with effort cannot match what is, and derives its charm from being, given. Even then, to have social success and

<sup>9</sup> In the manuscript, Flaubert capitalizes the word *Sentimentalisme*, but editors do not attribute much significance to his unsystematic use of capital letters.

personal fulfilment available for potential acquisition is better than to have to take responsibility for actual possession. In a letter of 1864, Flaubert told one of his women correspondents that the novel he was writing was ‘about love, about passion; but passion such as can exist nowadays—that is to say, inactive’.<sup>10</sup> We like to think of ‘modernity’ in terms of strenuous activity, of boldly transgressive assertions of artistic as well as sexual desire, but for many male writers of the later nineteenth century, erotic diffidence was the real mark of the modern. This view is perhaps most memorably reflected in a remark made by one of Flaubert’s female acquaintances. In 1862, he and his friends the writers Jules and Edmond de Goncourt were visited by the actress Suzanne Lagier, who was known for her licentious songs and libertine lifestyle. In *Sentimental Education*, Flaubert drew on her experiences in creating the character of the courtesan Rosanette. The story (told in the first chapter of Part Three) of how Rosanette lost her virginity is taken directly from Lagier’s own real-life account. Over the course of the evening, Lagier made only half-joking advances to the three men in turn. Disappointed by their lack of response, she exclaimed, ‘Ah, go on! You are all *moderns*, the three of you!’<sup>11</sup>

Flaubert does not say why modern passion should be so inactive, and his brief account of Frédéric’s childhood or early education does not explain why he should be so lacking in initiative. To find a clue, we must look around rather than behind Frédéric, to his circle of friends rather than to his family origins, which are only briefly sketched. The first thing we notice is that Flaubert’s portrayal of the other young (or youngish) men in the novel seems to be at odds both with his declared focus on love and with his blanket characterization of their passions as inactive. Their relationships with women do not lack initiative, and some are not interested in love at all. Frédéric’s closest companion from school, Charles Deslauriers, easily finds a mistress, but his real passion is for power, the opportunity to dominate other people. Significantly, the only women he tries to seduce are those with whom his friend is involved. He only succeeds with one, but he tries his luck with them all. Frédéric’s other *lycée* classmate, Martinon, embarks on

<sup>10</sup> Letter to Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie, 6 October 1864, in *Letters of Flaubert 1857–1880*, ed. and trans. Steegmuller, 80.

<sup>11</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal: Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, ed. Robert Ricatte (Paris, 1989), i. 790 (23 March 1862).

a strategic affair with the wife of the wealthy M. Dambreuse and succeeds admirably in pivoting at the right moment to woo his daughter. Even the timorous aristocrat M. de Cisy, whom Frédéric meets at law school, is able to steal Rosanette away from him for a night, thanks to his wealth. The dandy journalist Hussonnet is evidently popular with the actresses he promotes. It is true that the irascible Regimbart, known as the ‘citizen’ for his militant nationalism (the ‘citizen’ of Joyce’s *Ulysses* is partly inspired by him), neglects the wife who admires him, but we are told (in what now seems a remarkably offhand way) that the reason is his predilection for young girls (p. 214). In contrast to him, the good-hearted Dussardier shocks his friends when he tells them the only woman he wants is one he can love for the rest of his life. If he doesn’t do much to find one, his poverty, his injury, and then his vigorous commitment to the Republican cause don’t leave him the time. The two remaining friends display little interest in women, but they, too, are passionate about other things: the ascetic Sénécal for ideological authority, the aesthetic Pellerin for art.

Yet, if we look closer, we see that they are all ‘inactive’ in a deeper sense. They suffer from what Flaubert in his early notebook calls a ‘radical failure of imagination’, in paradoxical contrast with the futile excesses of their tastes, their sensuality, and their reveries. Precisely because they are mesmerized by seductive images of themselves enjoying the success they crave, they are incapable of the kind of creative self-projection that would enable them to pursue their goals more effectively. To take a small example, Deslauriers tells Frédéric they can make their way in the world by imitating Balzac’s Rastignac, who rose from provincial poverty to Parisian success through charm, boldness, and wit. Yet, when he is frustrated in his desire to meet the Dambreuses by his lack of appropriate clothing—a very Balzacian situation—instead of begging, borrowing, or even stealing the outfit he needs, as Rastignac would have done, Deslauriers simply gives up. Or rather, he falls back into his habitual resentment of Frédéric and his wealth. The latter is equally satisfied with looking down on his friend’s shabbiness, finding as usual in his own costly elegance some compensation for the feeling of inadequacy Deslauriers never fails to provoke in him (p. 143). It never occurs to either man to take a step back from their feelings in order to broker a deal. They desire success mostly to indulge their impulses more freely; in the crunch, the indulgence matters more than material advantage.

Near the end of the novel, Deslauriers seems finally to have made it when we see him coming out of the church where he has just married an heiress. He is wearing 'a blue suit with silver embroidery, a prefect's uniform' (p. 385). We soon learn that his success was short-lived: he was unable to leverage the status that came with the costume. What is true of Deslauriers is true of all the young men in the novel: they cannot be other than who they are. This is not because they possess a stable core identity stronger than any role. On the contrary, it is because their identity consists in a static set of attitudes they have internalized too unthinkingly to be able to adopt them more provisionally and in a detached manner. What Flaubert means by 'inactive' passion, therefore, is not emotion devoid of intensity; it is feeling that fails to get a grip on the world.

When they make themselves ridiculous, characters who cannot help being what they are, especially when they want to be different, are the stuff of comedy, and there are many occasions when Flaubert gives the actions of his young men a comic ineptness. At the end of the book Frédéric and Deslauriers themselves look back in laughter at their youth; they acknowledge themselves to be figures of fun. Yet we may find their laughter a little too comfortable in the narrow focus on their own earliest youth. People who cannot deviate from a self-image that has become second nature can also be frighteningly inhuman. Regimbart and Martinon are disturbingly impervious to the concerns of other people. Sénécal in particular is sinister in his implacability, and it is only because he has disappeared from sight that Frédéric can glide over the bloody moment when he last saw him. Flaubert challenges us with the suggestion that these characters illustrate the pervasiveness of sentimentality just as much as Frédéric does in his idealization of Mme Arnoux. Conversely, one is led to reflect in an equally challenging way on the nature of Frédéric's passion. A love as ridiculous as it is poignant is the stuff of romantic comedy, and so it is not that combination that bothers us, although the depiction earlier in the book of the virtuous and impure objects of his desire as interchangeable is somewhat disquieting. More disturbing is the possibility, expressed only implicitly, that Frédéric's sentimental fidelity to his ideal, in its inactivity, might be just as deathly in its way as the political constancy of Regimbart or Sénécal. We are unlikely to sympathize with the latter, but what does it say about us if we have identified more than a little with Frédéric?

This is one example of how Flaubert prompts us to scrutinize our own sentiments through subtle juxtaposition of material rather than by explicit commentary on it. That despite the overall pessimism of his vision he believes in the possibility of genuine reflection is indicated by the tenor of one of the rare instances in which the narrator intervenes in the story with a comment that does more than confirm what we can infer from the narrative itself. It comes at a point late in the story when Frédéric finds that to make love to Mme Dambreuse he needs to think about either Mme Arnoux or Rosanette, both of whom he has forsaken in order to gain 'a high position in society' through an affair with a society lady. The narrator speaks of the 'sentimental atrophy' (*atrophie sentimentale*) that has 'left his head completely clear' in this situation (p. 345). If Frédéric's feelings have atrophied, they must have had some tensile strength before, a strength he might yet recover. Yet, what has atrophied is his passion for the two interchangeable figures of the matron and the *lorette*. A foolish disposition that seemed at first to illustrate the flattening of desire now appears in retrospect as a comparatively commendable capacity to seek something beyond what can be seen with a clear head.<sup>12</sup> This is an even more radically flattened reality, symbolized here by Mme Dambreuse's 'thin bosom', the sight of which dampens what ardour Frédéric can muster when she arrives at his house dressed for the ball. The education of feeling, the reader's no doubt more than Frédéric's, is shaped by unexpected ironies such as these.

### *Sentimentalism 2: Replication*

If the first form of sentimentalism involves the 'inactive' quality of the agent, the second relates to the inert, even disabling results those agents achieve. Political conflict, including revolution, is shaped by the same tendency to strike a pose or inhabit a role that drives personal self-promotion, and by the same lack of genuine imagination. Like Marx, Flaubert saw the Revolution of 1848 and its aftermath as a farcical reprise of the tragic events of the decade that began in 1789. Louis Napoleon ('Napoleon the Little', as Victor Hugo would

<sup>12</sup> D. A. Williams makes the point well: 'If this is what the atrophy of sentiment leads to, sentiment cannot be all that bad.' *The Hidden Life at its Source: A Study of Flaubert's L'Éducation sentimentale* (Hull, 1987), 169.

call him) has none of the grandeur of his uncle. At the political club where Frédéric hopes to secure popular support for his election to the Constituent Assembly, ‘each person regulated himself on a model, some copying Saint-Just, some Danton, others Marat’, while Sénécals, as chairman of the meeting, is an imitator twice removed, since ‘he himself tried to be like Blanqui, who copied Robespierre’ (p. 281).<sup>13</sup> The goals the revolutionaries seek are as comically (and yet dangerously) mimetic as their self-images. According to Flaubert, the French socialists of his time sought to establish a form of collectivism that while ostensibly modern in fact mirrored the oppressive corporatism of the Catholic Church. ‘They are all little men deep into the Middle Ages and caste consciousness (*esprit de caste*).’<sup>14</sup> Socialism’s rhetoric of ‘fraternity’ masked its hatred of individual freedom and of independent thinking. Introducing universal suffrage before the educational groundwork had been laid, in the belief that the people would naturally choose rightly, was a mistake. It only led to the crushing electoral victories the populist Louis Napoleon used to justify the re-establishment of authoritarian rule.

In this judgement, Flaubert agreed with some of the more clear-sighted left-wing leaders, who had pleaded for elections under the new rules to be delayed until they could get their message out to the provinces. But Flaubert was not optimistic even about the long-term education of the masses. ‘Philosophy will always be the portion of aristocrats’, he told his friend George Sand, who for years had worked with the humanitarian socialist Pierre Leroux.<sup>15</sup> Against a rising tide of what he called ‘democratic stupidity’ Flaubert held fast to the more elitist and rationalist liberalism of the eighteenth-century

<sup>13</sup> Hegel observes somewhere that all the great events and characters of world history occur twice, so to speak. He forgot to add: the first time as high tragedy, the second time as low farce. Caussidière after Danton, Louis Blanc after Robespierre . . . The eighteenth Brumaire of the fool after the eighteenth Brumaire of the genius! Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, in *Later Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Terrell Carver (Cambridge, 1996), 31. Marx’s book was first published in 1852; by an interesting coincidence (Flaubert did not know anything about Marx’s German work) a second edition appeared in 1869, the same year as *Sentimental Education*.

<sup>14</sup> Letter to Amélie Bosquet, July 1864, in Flaubert, *Correspondance*, ed. Jean Bruneau (Paris, 1973–2007), iii. 400. Flaubert’s use of the term *caste* may also reflect his study of other religions, equally guilty in his eyes of stifling individuality, as he had shown in *Salammbô*.

<sup>15</sup> Letter to George Sand, 29 September 1868, in *Letters of Flaubert 1857–1880*, ed. and trans. Steegmuller, 120.

Enlightenment. 'If we had continued on the highroad of M. Voltaire, instead of veering off via Jean-Jacques, neo-Catholicism, the Gothic, and Fraternity, we wouldn't be where we are', he wrote in 1867.<sup>16</sup> The 'Gothic' here refers again to popular fascination with the Middle Ages, but it also evokes a genre of Romantic fiction, one of those that fed Emma Bovary's sentimental dreams. The image of the 'high road' (*grande route*) finds an echo, first in another letter to George Sand,<sup>17</sup> and then in the final chapter of *Sentimental Education*. There, Frédéric and Deslauriers agree that the former's fate can be attributed to his failure to 'steer a straight course' (p. 392) in life. 'I was too logical', Deslauriers says, 'and you were too sentimental.' The first part of the statement would have the ring of truth were it not for the clearly dubious claim Deslauriers makes for himself in adding that his own failure stemmed from 'an excess of rectitude'. Once again, Flaubert prevents us from endorsing too comfortably any summary judgement.

Another sign that Flaubert wants us to resist the stupidity (*bêtise*) of rushing to a conclusion<sup>18</sup> may be found in another of the narrator's exceptional interventions in the text. The judgement he offers seems so reasonable to readers today that we may not realize how much it jars with its context. When we are told with what venom the conservatives denounced the Second Republic of 1848 as a reincarnation of the Terror of 1793 Flaubert seems to be highlighting just another one of those stock historical analogies that stifle any new thinking. He goes on to say, however, that the regime being attacked was responsible for 'the most humane legislation there had ever been' (p. 275). The narrator does not specify what that legislation was, but given what we know of Flaubert's convictions such measures would surely include the ending of slavery in the French colonies and the first serious, if short-lived effort to guarantee a job for all those who wanted to work. But how could such innovative legislation have emerged from the motley beliefs and mimetic behaviour of those we are shown making the 1848 Revolution? The novel does not say. It records an effect without tracing its cause.

<sup>16</sup> Letter to Jules Duplan, [15] December 1867, in *Letters of Flaubert 1857-1880*, ed. and trans. Steegmuller, 111.

<sup>17</sup> Flaubert, *Correspondance*, ed. Bruneau and Leclerc, iii. 711.

<sup>18</sup> 'Yes, stupidity consists in wanting to reach conclusions.' Letter to Louis Bouilhet, 4 September 1850, in *Letters of Flaubert 1830-1857*, ed. and trans. Steegmuller, 128.

To simply repeat that Flaubert leaves the task of interpretation up to the reader is here to offer an inadequate response. Not telling us why people do what they do is one thing; character has its mysteries. Withholding an explanation of how historical action achieved a rare unequivocal good result suggests a failure of generosity; perhaps more crucially, it indicates a lack of trust. Indeed, Flaubert is sceptical of his readers' ability to arrive at authentic historical understanding. His own investigations into the Revolution of 1848 had so convinced him of the destructive effects of belief in the inevitability of progress and the sure triumph of goodness for him not to fear that any explanation he might offer would be incorporated into yet another naively teleological system. Yet he was even more worried that in attempting to offer historical explanations, no matter how rigorous, his novel would sacrifice its potential value as art.

The thoroughness of Flaubert's research has so impressed historians that some have treated *Sentimental Education* as if it were a source document in its own right. In one sense, of course, it is. Flaubert had witnessed some of the February events at first hand, and in preparation for the novel he did an extraordinary amount of primary research, perusing entire runs of newspapers and reading deeply in books and pamphlets of every ideological stripe. Flaubert had also been an attentive reader of histories ever since his schooldays, when he was inspired by a teacher who had studied with the great Jules Michelet. Flaubert read each of the works Michelet himself continued to produce, as well as those of many others, including Hippolyte Taine, who became one of his friends. But just because of this familiarity with histories written over several decades, he was acutely conscious of how accounts of the past, and most notably of the French Revolution of 1789, were constantly being rewritten as new facts were unearthed and new ideologies became fashionable. He did not want to see his novel consigned to obsolescence, or, even worse, have it dismissed by later generations as blinkered by bias. The first fate he could forestall by dramatizing only specific moments and details he could document with certainty. He also refrained from linking them in extended causal chains that at best could only be provisional constructs and which could easily descend into mere speculation. Of course the work of narrative inevitably involves making connections, if only the ones created simply by putting facts in sequence. Flaubert thus sought to avoid the second fate by constructing patterns of juxtaposition using only

material that, instead of fostering presumptuous hopes by suggesting that order could be discerned in disorder, would provoke an indignant reaction at the persistence of senseless violence or an ironic response to stubborn delusion about the most basic truths. Such reactions, he was convinced, are more timeless in quality than admiration; as the novel says of Dussardier, they refine one's sensibility (p. 215) yet are less likely to be vitiated by the sentimentality that infuses identification or the satisfaction that comes from grasping a manageable meaning. This does not entail, however, that hatred of oppression need be rooted or must result in personal animosity. On the contrary, and as Dussardier's attitude towards Vatnaz's criminality shows, if 'dissection is revenge', Flaubert insists one can never have enough 'sympathy', that is, disinterested appreciation, for the reality of human weakness.<sup>19</sup>

### *Sentimentalism 3: Perception*

The third form of sentimentality concerns the manner in which agency and achievement, such as they are, and stories about them, as they are told, are apprehended. Flaubert had already formulated the issue in a famous statement about the heroine of *Madame Bovary*. Emma, he wrote, 'had to derive a kind of personal profit from things, and rejected as useless anything that did not contribute directly to her heart's gratification—for her temperament was sentimental rather than artistic, and she longed for emotion, not scenery'.<sup>20</sup> The contrast here is between greedy incorporation and detached contemplation, of looking at things—or people, or books—as objects of consumption when they should be viewed, initially and finally, for who or what they are independently of us and in relationship with other things. By 'scenery' (*payssages*), Flaubert is not referring to a backdrop for one's personal drama but something like a landscape painting. This is a type of art without a 'subject', in the sense of a human situation or idea to the communication of which everything else is subordinated in the work. Instead, a landscape invites attention to the patterns of arrangement it discerns in the world it depicts. Feeling is not concentrated in a human

<sup>19</sup> The quotations are taken from Flaubert's letters to George Sand of 18–19 December 1867 and 10 August 1868 respectively, in *Letters of Flaubert 1857–1880*, ed. and trans. Steegmuller, 113, 118.

<sup>20</sup> Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, trans. Margaret Mauldon (Oxford, 2004), 34.

figure representing that feeling to and for the viewer but dispersed in the scene as a whole, and is presented for an apprehension which precedes or perhaps supersedes the pleasure or instruction the viewer may draw from it. Of course, not all landscapes offer a disinterested apprehension of this kind, and conversely fostering such an apprehension is surely one of the goals of all great art. It is certainly one of Flaubert's. Here, he is using the *paysage* as a metaphor to make a point about the relentlessly self-interested attitude of his heroine, in order to contrast it with that of the book that tells her story.

The notebook recording the initial ideas for *Sentimental Education* picks up the theme. Anticipating the end of his story, Flaubert notes that the hero's excessive indulgence in reverie, coupled with his lack of genuine imagination, will have prevented him from being an artist. But while Flaubert may have had some such purpose in mind at the start, as the cowardly love triangle developed into a story about a young man's sentimental education the contrast between art and sentimentality became less clear-cut. For one thing, although Frédéric is certainly a consumer obsessed with the accoutrements he sees as necessary for the satisfaction of his desires, his appetites do not have the same urgency as Emma's. Of course, this is in part because, unlike Emma, Frédéric soon has an inheritance at his disposal and ample opportunity as a single man in Paris to do what he likes. Yet for a long time he remains content with merely contemplating Mme Arnoux, whose initial 'apparition' is described more as a kind of landscape image than as a personal meeting. Their eyes, for example, never quite meet. Instead, the sunlike radiance of her eyes conditions the lover's ability to see the things that surround her. In other words, there seems to be something artistic, or at least aesthetic, in Frédéric's way of loving. It is notable, too, that Flaubert shows Frédéric to be sensitive to landscape. In the episode in which he and Rosanette visit Fontainebleau (during which we glimpse the figure of an actual landscape painter), he escapes from the agitation of the 1848 Revolution in Paris to a historical site where the absence of people fosters a more melancholy view of the past precisely as past, not as prelude to a future eagerly expected to emerge from it.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> For the literary as well as the artistic significance of this particular place, see Kimberly Jones et al., *In the Forest of Fontainebleau: Painters and Photographers from Corot to Monet* (New Haven, 2008).

In other situations, too, Frédéric remains an oddly passive spectator. He is closely attentive, sometimes even in a hallucinatory way that indicates a dispossession of self, to the arrangement of objects in a scene. At the same time, he does not make the sustained effort needed to understand the other characters in ways that would advance his interests. Unlike his more prosaic companions, he does not integrate isolated moments into instrumental chains of cause and effect. He is entranced with surfaces, and if this is a sign of 'inactive' passion, it is also similar enough to disinterested contemplation that although the narrative must go around and beyond Frédéric's perceptions it does not have to negate them in order to communicate an artistic vision of the world. Frédéric is 'a man of innumerable weaknesses' (p. 277), but some expressions of those weaknesses might be read as moments in which sensual gratification is sacrificed for the sake of an ideal image. This is certainly how Mme Arnoux interprets his actions during their final meeting, though readers less partial to Frédéric (and to her) may well disagree. On another level, Pellerin's endless dissatisfaction with his art is a form of sentimental inaction in that he is so dominated by the stances of previous artists that he can do no more than pastiche them. Yet his anxiety about falling short of the true standard of beauty has something admirable about it, and, as Alison Fairlie has shown, some of his reflections mirror Flaubert's own thoughts on the matter.<sup>22</sup> In the text as in the interpretation of it, the line between sentiment and the sentimental becomes a hard one to draw.

There are critics for whom this is precisely Flaubert's point. They would view the double meaning of *L'Éducation sentimentale's* title as undecidable rather than as merely ambiguous. According to this view, the sentimental education the novel models for us culminates neither in rueful wisdom nor in comfortable rumination but in a critical suspension and suspicion of judgement. There is ample warrant for this inference, both in the novel and in Flaubert's famous statement about conclusions. But one may think this too intellectual, and, in its own way, too final a judgement to be a wholly satisfactory response to the story Flaubert tells. Other readers, perhaps chiefly those who at one point or another found themselves responding to the rhetoric of

<sup>22</sup> Alison Fairlie, 'Pellerin et le thème de l'art dans *L'Éducation sentimentale*', in Fairlie, *Imagination and Language: Collected Essays on Constant, Baudelaire, Nerval, and Flaubert* (Cambridge, 1981), 408–21.

romance and now feel they know better, will be less hesitant about taking ambiguity as bitter irony instead. They will see the novel as the expression of an ongoing work of disenchantment always expecting further confirmation, seeking to provoke that disenchantment in the reader, and finding in the latter's incomprehension or imperviousness something more to be disenchanted about. From this point of view, there is no conclusion for the simple reason that the process of disillusionment is never complete. The Flaubert who realized he had claimed too prematurely that his sentimental education was almost finished and had to eat his words would surely agree. This interpretation, however, faces the objection that the novel is never quite as unrelenting as this. We might cite as evidence a fact often overlooked because it is too obvious or perhaps because it would sound too cad-dish to present in this way. This is that Flaubert twice (if not three times) allows Frédéric to avoid a marriage that would have proved even more disastrous for him and more disenchanting for the reader than his actual fate.<sup>23</sup>

There is, however, a third possibility. In discussing the problem of how Flaubert's characters could be thought of as inactive despite the energy they display in the pursuit of their passions, I suggested that 'inactivity' consisted of an inability to be other than what they were. A similar approach might be taken to interpreting those aspects of Frédéric's and others' behaviour whose contemplative, selfless, or aesthetic qualities approximate to the artistic yet do not finally qualify as such. What is genuine in the idealized love Frédéric places above appetite and what is admirable in his lack of self-regard are not vitiated in the end by his sensual indulgence or his narcissism. Important as these failings are, Flaubert is not a moralist, and he can imagine a life in which these tendencies can coexist with other, nobler ones. What undermines Frédéric's 'aesthetic' aspirations is that he does not give them genuine embodiment (as opposed to merely associating them fetishistically with material objects), and what makes his self-sacrifices a vain exercise is that they do not stem from a self that has accepted its embeddedness in the world as it is (as opposed to merely fretting over its distance from the ideal and frantically trying to abolish it by magical thinking). One might put it like this: in ways just as crucial as those in which he cannot be other than what he is,

<sup>23</sup> See Jean Borie, *Frédéric et les amis des hommes* (Paris, 1995), 40–1.

Frédéric is unable to be other than what he is not. He is unable to view transcendence as a task, and not simply as a state of transport. He cannot move from dispossession to determination. From this point of view, what Flaubert does is to shape a narrative in which ‘the’ genuine sentimental education is not about achieving a higher level of consciousness or arriving at a lower view of humanity but more modestly about seeing the human landscape as landscape, that is, as a pattern of various and contradictory forces and facts that call for patient and sympathetic attention to their finitude. One could call the expression of such attention ‘description’, did not that word, by an ironic twist, connote a merely ‘inactive’ process in inartistic modern sensibilities. On the contrary, it is in scrupulous attention that reflection and feeling find their best discipline.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> I would like to express my appreciation to Helen Constantine. Her fine translation has helped me to a much better understanding of the subtleties of Flaubert’s text, which she conveys so well. It has been a pleasure to work with her a second time. I especially wish to say how grateful I am to the editor of Oxford World’s Classics, Judith Luna, for the confidence she has shown in entrusting me with this and other projects. I have been privileged to benefit from her unflinching encouragement, gentle prompting, and insightful advice, all of which have been crucial to my work over the last two decades. Thanks also to Rowena Anketell, who as copy editor of this volume caught a number of slips and made many useful suggestions.

## NOTE ON THE TEXT

*L'ÉDUCATION SENTIMENTALE* was first published by Michel Lévy in November 1869, though with a title-page date of 1870. It was reprinted twice without changes in the following years, but a new edition published by Charpentier in November 1879, with a date of 1880, incorporated a large number of minor changes made by Flaubert. This edition was the last one to appear in the author's lifetime and so has served as the basis for all recent editions. Many of the modifications involve small stylistic adjustments of interest only to specialists, but one series of changes is worthy of remark. Flaubert eliminated almost 200 connective conjunctions and adverbs, including 131 instances of the word 'but'. Numerous instances of 'then', 'and', 'however', 'finally', and other such words were also deleted. The effect is to make the relationship between various statements less explicit. In the absence of such connectives, readers must rely on the rhythm and tone of the sentences to draw a possible, but perhaps never quite definite, pattern of connections among them.

In addition to these changes, which are clearly attributable to the author, the Charpentier edition includes a number of typographical errors, which have been silently corrected by modern editors. In some cases, however, it is not clear whether the anomalous feature is an error, an oversight, or an authorial decision. Editors have differed in their willingness to emend the text based on another printed or manuscript version that seems to offer a more coherent reading or to reflect Flaubert's most considered intention. Most of these variations are too minor to matter to all but the most specialist reader, but in the very few instances where the difference may be of more general interest, the alternative reading is recorded in the Explanatory Notes.

## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

I HOPE English readers will enjoy this translation of one of the most important novels of nineteenth-century French literature. Translating a long novel is always difficult and demanding. Flaubert's use of the many tones and varieties of the language of sentiment in a wide variety of characters from differing social classes, against a backdrop of important historical events, presented an exciting challenge. It will be for the reader to judge if I have managed to carry the spirit of the novel across into my own language and culture.

Some of the questions I have had continually in mind for the last two years are: is that 'le mot juste'? Flaubert had a notorious interest in the exact word, whether writing about furnishings, dress, manufacture, or medicine. What *precisely* does Flaubert mean? Is that turn of phrase appropriate to the social context? Have I hit the tone of that dialogue? Does the sentence sound harmonious and 'natural' in English? These are problems all literary translators will recognize, and it was these rather than the peculiarities of Flaubert's style—among them the famous *style indirect libre*, for which there is an acceptable English stylistic equivalent—that presented tricky, though enjoyable, problems.

I have used Albert Thibaudet's Folio edition of the text, which has notes by S. de Sacy. This is based on the last edition published, by Charpentier, during Flaubert's lifetime. Thibaudet made a very few minor corrections to this last edition, in accordance with those indicated by Flaubert in a manuscript of 1879 preserved in Croisset. I have consulted previous versions of the novel and in particular Robert Baldick's (Penguin, 1964) to check and compare my translation.

I have been enormously helped in this two-year endeavour by the generous suggestions and expertise of David Constantine and Patrick Coleman. My grateful thanks also are due to Judith Luna at OUP who has constantly spurred me on, and to the ever-welcoming team in the Translation Centre at the Espace Van Gogh in Arles, where I have several times been privileged to work on my translations.

*Helen Constantine*

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The standard critical edition of Flaubert's *Œuvres complètes*, under the general editorship of Claudine Gothot-Mersch (Paris, 2001– ), 3 vols. to date, will include *L'Éducation sentimentale* in its fourth and final volume. Earlier separate editions of great value include those of Alan Raitt (Paris, 1979), P. M. Wetherill (Paris, 1984), and Claudine Gothot-Mersch (Paris, 1985). These are all out of print, but there are readily available editions in the Folio, GF, and Livre de poche series, the last two having especially helpful annotations by Stéphanie Dord-Croulé and Pierre-Marc De Biasi respectively.

Flaubert's letters are essential to a full understanding of his work. His complete *Correspondance* has been edited by Jean Bruneau and Yves Leclerc (Paris, 1973–2007), 5 vols. plus separate index volume. In English, Francis Steegmuller has edited and translated an excellent selected *Letters of Gustave Flaubert* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980–2), 2 vols. There are also separate editions in English of Flaubert's correspondence with George Sand and Ivan Turgenev.

### *Biography*

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## A CHRONOLOGY OF GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

- 1802 Achille Flaubert, Gustave's father, comes to Paris to study medicine.
- 1810 Achille Flaubert moves to Rouen to work as deputy head of the hospital (the Hôtel-Dieu).
- 1812 Achille Flaubert marries the adopted daughter of the head of the Hôtel-Dieu.
- 1813 Gustave's brother Achille-Cléophas born.
- 1819 Achille Flaubert appointed head of Hôtel-Dieu on the death of his superior.
- 1821 (12 December) Gustave Flaubert born.
- 1824 (July) Gustave's sister Caroline born.
- 1836 While at school in Rouen, writes several stories. On holiday at Trouville, falls in love with Elisa Foucault, a woman of 26, who shortly afterwards marries Maurice Schlésinger. The image of Elisa Schlésinger recurs in a number of Flaubert's writings: in particular, she is said to be the model for Madame Arnoux in *L'Éducation sentimentale*.
- 1837 More stories. One of these, *Une leçon d'histoire naturelle, genre Commis*, is published in a local journal; another, *Passion et vertu*, anticipates the story of *Madame Bovary* in certain respects.
- 1838 *Mémoires d'un fou*, an autobiographical narrative; *Loys XI*, a five-act play.
- 1839 Completes *Smarh*, a semi-dramatic fantasy which may be considered an embryonic version of *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*.
- 1841 (November) Registers as law student in Paris, though continuing to live at home.
- 1842 *Novembre*, another autobiographical narrative. Passes his first law examination.
- 1843 Begins the first version of *L'Éducation sentimentale*. Fails his second law examination.
- 1844 Has a form of epileptic seizure. Gives up law. (April) Flaubert's father buys a house at Croisset, near Rouen. (June) The Flaubert family moves to Croisset.
- 1845 *L'Éducation sentimentale* (first version) completed.

- 1846 Flaubert's father and sister die. He sets up house at Croisset with his mother and niece. Meets Louise Colet in Paris; she becomes his mistress.
- 1847 *Par les champs et par les grèves*, impressions of his travels in Brittany with his literary friend Maxime Du Camp.
- 1848 Together with Louis Bouilhet (another literary friend) and Maxime Du Camp, witnesses the 1848 uprising in Paris; he will later draw on these memories for scenes in *L'Éducation sentimentale*. Begins *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* (first version).
- 1849 Reads *La Tentation* aloud to Bouilhet and Du Camp, who consider it a failure. Leaves for a tour of the Near East with Du Camp.
- 1850 (February) They journey up the Nile; (May) they cross the desert by camel. (August) Death of Balzac; Flaubert and Du Camp reach Jerusalem. (September) They abandon plans to travel to Persia and turn west; (October) Rhodes; (November) Constantinople; (December) Athens.
- 1851 (April) Flaubert in Rome; Du Camp returns to Paris. (May) Flaubert returns to Croisset; resumes relations with Louise Colet. (19 September) Begins writing *Madame Bovary*.
- 1852 While working on *Madame Bovary*, recalls his earlier project for a *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*.
- 1854 End of affair with Louise Colet.
- 1856 *Madame Bovary* completed and published in serial form in *La Revue de Paris* (from 1 October). Begins to revise *La Tentation*.
- 1856–7 Fragments of *La Tentation* published in *L'Artiste*.
- 1857 Flaubert and *La Revue de Paris* prosecuted for irreligion and immorality; acquitted. The trial attracts a great deal of attention and makes *Madame Bovary* (now published as a complete novel) a *succès de scandale*. Begins work on *Salammbô*.
- 1858 Visits North Africa to gather material for *Salammbô*.
- 1862 *Salammbô* completed and published: an enormous success. Flaubert by now a famous literary figure.
- 1863 January: first letter to George Sand. February: first meeting with Turgenev.
- 1864 Begins work on *L'Éducation sentimentale*. In the course of the next five years gathers material for his novel, and at the same time enjoys a brilliant social life.

- 1866 (August) Nominated Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur. November: George Sand's first visit to Croisset.
- 1869 *L'Éducation sentimentale* (definitive version) completed and published. Death of Louis Bouilhet.
- 1870 Works on yet another version of *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*. (August) Franco-Prussian War begins; (December) victorious German troops arrive in Rouen.
- 1871 (January) Armistice signed with Prussia; (May) insurrection in Paris; (July) German troops leave Rouen.
- 1872 Flaubert's mother dies. Third version of *La Tentation* completed.
- 1874 *La Tentation* published. Begins work on *Bouvard et Pécuchet*.
- 1875-7 Writes *La Légende de Saint Julien l'Hospitalier*, *Un Cœur simple*, and *Hérodias (Trois contes)*.
- 1877 *Trois contes* published. Returns to *Bouvard et Pécuchet*.
- 1877-80 Works on *Bouvard*, which will remain unfinished.
- 1880 (8 May) Dies.
- 1881 *Bouvard et Pécuchet* published. House at Croisset sold and later demolished to make way for a distillery.
- 1882 (January) Death of brother, Achille Flaubert.



# SENTIMENTAL EDUCATION



## PART ONE

### I

ON 15 September 1840, at around six o'clock in the morning, *La Ville-de-Montereau*, almost ready to leave, was puffing out thick clouds of smoke alongside the Quai Saint-Bernard.

Passengers were arriving, out of breath; barrels, ropes, baskets of washing got in their way; the sailors made answer to no one; people bumped into one another; packages were piling up between the paddle boxes; and the din on the quay was absorbed in the hissing of the steam escaping through the metal plates, enveloping everything in a whitish mist, while the bell in the ship's bows sounded its insistent clanging.

At last the ship left, and the two riverbanks, lined with shops, workers' yards, and factories, slipped away like two wide ribbons being unspooled.

A young man of eighteen with long hair, holding a notebook under his arm, stood near the helm, not moving. He gazed through the mist at the church towers, at the buildings he could not put a name to; then in one last glance he embraced the Île Saint-Louis, the Cité, Notre-Dame; and before long, as Paris disappeared, he heaved a deep sigh.

Monsieur Frédéric Moreau, having just passed his baccalaureate, was going back to Nogent-sur-Seine to idle away two months before going to read for the Bar. His mother had sent him, with the necessary sum of money, to Le Havre to visit an uncle who, she hoped, would leave him something in his will; he had returned only the night before; and he was making up for not being able to stay in the capital by taking the longest route back to his home in the provinces.

The noise subsided; they had all found seats; but some remained standing close to the engine, warming themselves, and the funnel spat out, with a slow, rhythmic rattle, its plume of black smoke; tiny drops of dew trickled down the brass; the deck shuddered with a dull internal vibration and the two paddle wheels, turning at speed, churned up the water.

The riverbank had little sandy shores on either side. Sometimes

they came across timber rafts and set them rocking with their wash; in his rowing boat a man sat fishing; then the drifts of fog melted, the sun appeared, and the hill, which followed the course of the Seine on the right, gradually fell away, while another, closer, rose up on the opposite bank.

On it was a crown of trees, amongst low houses with Italianate roofs. They had sloping gardens separated by newly built walls, wrought-iron fences, lawns, hothouses, and large pots of geraniums spaced at regular intervals on terraces you could lean over. Many a man, at the sight of those peaceful, stylish residences, felt the desire to be the owner of one, to see out his days there with a nice billiard room, a rowing boat, a wife—or some other pipe dream. The rather novel pleasure of a boat trip encouraged passengers to exchange confidences. The more droll amongst them were already beginning to laugh and tell jokes. Many sang songs. They were jolly together. They offered one another a drop to drink.

Frédéric thought of his room at home, the kind of play he might write, the pictures he might paint, and of future passions. The happiness his noble soul deserved seemed a long time coming. He recited melancholy verses to himself; he paced rapidly up and down the deck; he went to the far end by the ship's bell, and saw a man, in a group of passengers and sailors, flirting with a country girl, while fondling the gold crucifix she was wearing on her breast. He was a curly-haired fellow of some forty years. His stocky frame filled his black velvet jacket, two emeralds gleamed on his cambric shirt, and from beneath his wide white trousers protruded a pair of strange red boots, made of Russian leather tooled with a blue design.

The presence of Frédéric did not bother him. Several times he turned round and winked at him; then he offered everyone a cigar. But no doubt bored with this company, he moved away. Frédéric followed him.

The ensuing conversation was first about different kinds of tobacco; then it moved on, quite naturally, to the subject of women. The man in the red boots gave the young man advice. He expounded theories, told anecdotes, citing himself as an example, and delivered all this in a fatherly tone of voice, with an engagingly frank disregard for morals.

He was a Republican. He had travelled widely; he knew the inside of theatres, restaurants, newspapers, and all the celebrated artists,

whom he referred to in a familiar way by their first names. Before long Frédéric was telling him about his plans; he encouraged him.

But he broke off to observe the ship's funnel and muttered a lengthy, rapid calculation, to work out 'how often each piston, at so many strokes per minute, would have to etc.'—and, once he had arrived at the answer, he talked about the beauties of the landscape. He said he was glad to have escaped from his work.

Frédéric felt a certain respect for him and couldn't resist the temptation to ask his name. The stranger replied all in one breath:

'Jacques Arnoux, proprietor of *L'Art industriel*,\* Boulevard Montmartre.'

A servant with gold braid on his cap came to say:

'Would Monsieur care to go below? Mademoiselle is crying.'

He disappeared.

*L'Art industriel* was a hybrid establishment, consisting of a publication about painting and a shop selling pictures. Frédéric had seen that title on several occasions in the window of the bookshop in his home town, on large posters bearing the name of Jacques Arnoux in large capitals.

The sun was directly overhead, making the iron sheathing around the masts, the metal on the rail, and the surface of the water gleam and glint. Around the prow the water parted in two furrows, which spread out to the very edge of the fields. At each bend in the river the same curtain of pale poplars came into view. The countryside was quite empty. Small white clouds hung overhead, inert, and the vague feeling of ennui pervading everything seemed to make the boat move more slowly and the passengers appear even more insignificant than before.

Apart from a few well-to-do people in the First Class, they were working men and women, shopkeepers with their wives and children. As it was usual at that time not to dress smartly for a boat trip, almost all were wearing old skullcaps or faded hats, flimsy black suits, rubbed threadbare by the office, or frock coats with the buttonholes stretched from being worn too often in the shop. Here and there, inside the occasional woollen jacket you saw a calico shirt stained with coffee; pinch-beck tiepins were stuck into shredded ties; list slippers were held together by sewn-on straps. Two or three disreputable-looking individuals holding bamboo canes braided with leather glanced around shiftily, and fathers of families asked questions and looked amazed.

They talked standing up or squatting on their luggage; others slept in corners; several were eating. The deck was littered with walnut shells, cigar stubs, the peelings of pears, the detritus of sausage that had been brought wrapped in paper. Three besmoked cabinetmakers had stationed themselves outside the canteen; a ragged harp-player was resting, leaning on his instrument. Now and again you could hear the fires being stoked with coal, a raised voice, someone laughing.—And the captain on the bridge paced incessantly to and fro between the paddle boxes. To get back to his seat, Frédéric pushed open the gate to the First Class and two sportsmen with their dogs had to move out of his way.

It was like an apparition:

She was sitting in the middle of a bench all by herself, or at least, with no one else that he could see, so dazzling was the light from her eyes. She raised her head as he went past; in an involuntary gesture he inclined his shoulders slightly, and when he had walked on a little, along the same side of the boat, he looked at her.

She wore a wide straw hat with pink ribbons that fluttered out behind her in the breeze. Her black hair framed her large eyebrows, and reached down very low on her oval face, seeming to press against it lovingly. Her pale dress of spotted muslin billowed out in numerous folds. She was engaged in some embroidery; and her straight nose, her chin, and indeed her whole person, was etched out against the blue sky.

As she didn't change her position, he took several steps to right and left to conceal his manoeuvring; then he stationed himself next to her sunshade, which was propped against the seat, and pretended to be observing a rowing boat on the river.

Never had he seen such beautiful dark skin, such an attractive figure, such delicate, translucent fingers. He contemplated her work basket in wonder, as though it were an extraordinary object. What was her name? Where did she live? What did she do? What was her past? He wanted to know how her room was furnished, all the dresses she had ever worn, what people she knew; and even the desire to possess her physically evaporated beneath a deeper yearning, a painful and infinite curiosity.

A Negro woman with a scarf tied round her head, appeared, holding by the hand a little girl who was already quite tall. The child, who had tears in her eyes, had just woken up; she took her on her lap.

Mademoiselle hadn't been a good girl, even though she'd soon be seven. Her mother wouldn't love her any more, she was too spoiled. And Frédéric was delighted by hearing all this, as though he had made a discovery, an acquisition.

He supposed her to be of Andalusian extraction, possibly Creole;\* had she brought this Negro woman back with her from the islands?

A long shawl with purple stripes had been placed behind her back, on the brass rail. How many times, in the middle of the ocean, in the course of the damp evenings, must she have wrapped it round her figure, covered her feet with it, slept in it! But it was being dragged down by its fringe, it was gradually slipping and was about to fall into the water. Frédéric, in one leap, caught it. She said:

'Thank you, Monsieur.'

Their eyes met.

'Are you ready, my dear?' cried Arnoux, appearing at the hatch to the companion way.

Mademoiselle Marthe ran to him, and clinging to his neck, pulled at his moustache. There came the sounds of a harp, she wanted to see who was playing; and soon the player, fetched by the Negro woman, entered the First Class. Arnoux recognized him as a former painters' model; he spoke familiarly to him, to the surprise of those present. At last the harpist tossed his long locks over his shoulders, stretched out his arms, and started to play.

It was an oriental romance, full of daggers, flowers, and stars. The man in rags gave a spirited rendering; the thrumming of the engine distorted the tempo; he plucked harder; the strings vibrated, and their metallic notes seemed to sob out the lament of a proud love vanquished. On both sides of the river woods bowed down to the water's edge; a breath of cooler air wafted across; Madame Arnoux looked vaguely into the distance. When the music stopped, her eyelids fluttered several times as if waking from a daydream.

Respectfully, the harpist came forward. While Arnoux was searching for his change, Frédéric stretched out his closed fist, and opening it unostentatiously, dropped a gold coin\* into the hat. It wasn't vanity which drove him to give money in her presence, but a generous impulse in which she was associated, a religious urge, almost.

Arnoux, indicating the way, cordially invited him to go down. Frédéric said he had just lunched; in fact he was dying of hunger; and there was not one centime in the bottom of his purse.

Then it occurred to him that he had as much right as anyone else to go into the saloon.

The well-to-do were sitting eating at round tables, a waiter was circulating; Monsieur and Madame Arnoux were at the back on the right; he picked up a newspaper lying on the long velvet-covered bench, and sat down.

At Montereau they were to take the coach to Châlons. Their trip to Switzerland would last a month. Madame Arnoux scolded her husband for being indulgent with the child. He whispered something in her ear, no doubt a compliment, for she smiled. Then he got up to close the curtain at the window behind her.

A harsh light was reflected from the low, all-white ceiling. Frédéric seated opposite could make out the shadow under her eyelashes. She moistened her lips in her glass, crumbled a little bread between her fingers; the lapis lazuli locket attached by a gold chain to her wrist chinked occasionally against her plate. Yet the people sitting around her did not seem to notice.

Sometimes through the portholes you could see the side of a boat come alongside the steamer to fetch or drop off passengers. People at the tables leaned towards the openings and put names to the places they passed along the banks.

Arnoux was complaining about the food: he objected vociferously to the bill and got it reduced. Then he carried the young man off to the bows to have a grog. But before long Frédéric came back to the awning, under which Madame Arnoux had seated herself again. She was reading a slim volume with a grey cover. Her mouth curled at the corners from time to time and her face lit up in a flush of pleasure. He was jealous of whoever had invented those things she seemed so interested in. The more he observed her, the more he felt a gulf opening up between them. He was thinking that he would have to leave her soon, for ever, without having snatched a word with her, without leaving even a memory.

Flat fields stretched out on the right-hand side; on the left pastures rose gently to a hill, where vineyards, walnut trees, a windmill could be espied among the greenery, and the little paths beyond formed zigzags on the white rock, which touched the rim of the sky. How blissful it would be to climb up and up, his arm around her waist and her dress brushing against the yellow leaves, listening to her voice, under the radiance of her eyes! The ship could halt, all they had to do

was get out; and yet such a simple action was more impossible than moving the sun's orb.

A little further along they saw a castle with a pointed roof, with little square turrets. There was a wide flower bed in front of it; black archways down tall avenues of lime trees disappeared into the distance. He imagined her walking beneath their branches. At that moment a young man and woman appeared on the steps, between the tubs planted with orange trees. Then everything vanished.

The little girl was playing around him. Frédéric wanted to give her a kiss. She hid behind her nurse; her mother scolded her for not being nice to the gentleman who had rescued her shawl. Was that an indirect approach?

'Is she going to talk to me at last?' he wondered.

Time was getting short. How could he get an invitation to the Arnouxes? All he could think of was to make a remark about the autumn tints, adding:

'Soon it'll be winter, time for balls and dinners!'

But Arnoux was totally taken up with his luggage. The shore of Surville appeared, the two bridges came closer. They sailed past a rope-maker's, and then a line of low houses; below them there were cauldrons of tar, wood shavings; and children ran along the sand, doing cartwheels. Frédéric recognized a man in a long-sleeved jacket and shouted:

'Hurry up!'

They were docking. After a painstaking search for Arnoux in the throng of passengers, he shook hands, and the latter said:

'I hope we meet again, Monsieur!'

Once he was on the quay, Frédéric turned round. She was standing near the tiller. He sent her a look in which he tried to put his entire soul but she remained unmoved, as though he had done nothing. Then, taking no notice of his servant's greeting, he said:

'Why didn't you bring the carriage over here?'

The poor man apologized.

'What a fool! Give me some money!'

And he went off to eat in the inn.

A quarter of an hour later he had a sudden urge to go into the yard where the coaches were, as if by chance. Perhaps he would see her again?

'What's the use?' he told himself.

And the cab carried him off. His mother did not own the two horses. She had borrowed the one belonging to Monsieur Chambrion, the tax collector, to harness it next to hers. Isidore had set off the day before, had rested at Bray until evening and spent the night at Montereau, so that the animals, now refreshed, were trotting along with a spring in their step.

Harvested fields stretched around them, as far as they could see. There were two rows of trees along the roadside, one stone pile after another: and gradually, Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, Ablon, Châtillon, Corbeil, and the rest of his entire boat journey came back to him; he could now remember new and more intimate details: under the last fold of her dress her foot had vanished into a thin silk boot of a maroon colour; the canvas awning had formed a wide canopy above her head, and the little red acorns along its edge continually fluttered in the breeze.

She resembled the women in romantic novels. He wanted to take nothing from, nor add anything to, her person. The world had suddenly got larger. She was the luminous point at which all things converged. Rocked by the motion of the cab, with his eyes half-shut, staring at the clouds, he gave himself up to a dreamy, infinite delight.

At Bray he did not wait until the horses had been given their oats, he went ahead down the road by himself. Arnoux had called her Marie. He shouted 'Marie!' as loud as he could. His voice was lost on the breeze.

Crimson flamed wide across the western sky. Large stacks of corn rising from the midst of the stubble threw out gigantic shadows. A dog began to bark in a farm in the distance. He shivered, uneasy for no reason.

When Isidore caught up with him, he took the driver's seat. His weakness had passed. He was very determined to obtain an introduction into the Arnoux household and to get to know them. Their house must be interesting, and besides he liked Arnoux; then, who knew? At that point he blushed: his head whirled, he cracked the whip, shook the reins, and drove the horses so fast that the old coachman said more than once:

'Gently, gently! You'll tire them out!'

Gradually Frédéric calmed down and heeded what his servant was telling him.