



## Fantasia of the Library

### I

*The Temptation of Saint Anthony* was rewritten on three different occasions: in 1849, before *Madame Bovary*; in 1856, before *Salammô*; and in 1872, while Flaubert was writing *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. He published extracts in 1856 and 1857. Saint Anthony accompanied Flaubert for twenty-five or thirty years—for as long, in fact, as the hero of *the Sentimental Education*. In these twin and inverted figures, the old anchorite of Egypt, still besieged by desires, responds through the centuries to a young man of eighteen, seized by the apparition of Madame Arnoux while travelling from Paris to Le Havre. Moreover, the evening when Frédéric—at this stage, a pale reflection of himself—turns away, as if in fear of incest, from the woman he continues to love recalls the shadowed night when the defeated hermit learns to love even the substance of life in its material form. “Temptation” among the ruins of an ancient world populated by spirits is transformed into an “education” in the prose of the modern world.

*The Temptation* was conceived early in Flaubert’s career—perhaps after attending a puppetshow—and it influenced all of his works. Standing alongside his other books, standing behind

This essay originally appeared in *Cahiers Renaud-Barrault*, No. 59 (1967), pp. 7–30; it was also used as an introduction to the German translation of *The Temptation* (Insel Verlag) by Anneliese Botond. It is reprinted here by permission of Editions Callimard. (Unless otherwise indicated, all footnotes are supplied by the editor.)

them, *The Temptation* forms a prodigious reserve: for scenes of violence, phantasmagoria, chimeras, nightmares, slapstick. Flaubert successively transformed its inexhaustible treasure into the grey provincial reveries of *Madame Bovary*, into the sculpted sets of *Salammbô*, and into the eccentricities of everyday life in *Bouvard*. *The Temptation* seems to represent Flaubert's unattainable dream: what he wanted his works to be—supple, silky, delicate, spontaneous, harmoniously revealed through rapturous phrases—but also what they must never be if they were to see the light of day. *The Temptation* existed before any of Flaubert's books (its first sketches are found in *Mémoires d'un Fou*, *Rêve d'Enfer*, *Danse des Morts*, and, particularly, in *Smahr*),<sup>1</sup> and it was repeated—as ritual, purification, exercise, a “temptation” to overcome—prior to writing each of his major texts. Suspended over his entire work, it is unlike all his other books by virtue of its prolixity, its wasted abundance, and its overcrowded bestiary; and set back from his other books, it offers, as a photographic negative of their writing, the somber and murmuring prose which they were compelled to repress, to silence gradually, in order to achieve their own clarity. The entire work of Flaubert is dedicated to the conflagration of this primary discourse: its precious ashes, its black, unmalleable coal

## II

We readily understand *The Temptation* as setting out the formal progression of unconfined reveries. It would be to literature what Bosch, Breughel, or the Goya of the *Capriccios* were at one time to painting. The first readers (or audience) were bored by the monotonous progression of grotesques: Maxime Du Camp remarked: ‘We listened to the words of the Sphinx, the chimera, the Queen of Sheba, of Simon the Magician. . . . A bewildered, somewhat simpleminded, and, I would even say, foolish Saint Anthony sees, parading before him, different forms

1. Flaubert's juvenilia.

of temptation.”<sup>2</sup> His friends were enraptured by the “richness of his vision” (Franpis Coppée), ‘By its forest of shadows and light’ (Victor Hugo), and by its “hallucinatory mechanism” (Hippolyte Taine). But stranger still, Flaubert himself invoked madness, phantasms; he felt he was shaping the fallen trees of a dream: “I spend my afternoons with the shutters closed, the curtains drawn, and without a shirt, dressed as a carpenter. I bawl out! I sweat! It's superb! There are moments when this is decidedly more than delirium.” As the book nears completion: “I plunged furiously into *Saint Anthony* and began to enjoy the most terrifying exaltation. I have never been more excited.”

In time, we have learned as readers that *The Temptation* is not the product of dreams and rapture, but a monument to meticulous erudition.<sup>3</sup> To construct the scene of the heresiarchs, Flaubert drew extensively from Tillemont's *Mémoires Ecclésiastiques*, Matter's four-volume *Histoire du gnosticisme*, the *Histoire de Manichée* by Beausobre, Reuss's *Théologie chrétienne*, and also from Saint Augustine and, of course, from Migne's *Patrologie* (Athanasius, Jerome, and Epiphanius). The gods that populate the text were found in Burnouf, Anquetil-Duperron, in the works of Herbelot and Hottinger, in the volumes of the *Univers Pittoresque*, in the work of the Englishman, Layard, and, particularly, in Creutzer's translation, the *Religions de l'Antiquité*. For information on monsters, he read Xivrey's *Traditions tératologiques*, the *Physiologus* re-edited by Cahier and Martin, Boaißtrau's *Hfstdres prodigieuses*, and the Duret text devoted to plants and their “admirable history.” Spinoza inspired his metaphysical meditation on extended substance.\* Yet, this list is far from exhaustive. Certain evocations in the text seem totally dominated by the machinery of dreams: for example, the

2. *Souvenirs littéraires* (Paris, 1882); Du Camp, who was among the first to listen to Flaubert's recitation, discouraged his efforts.

3. As a result of the remarkable studies by Jean Seznec—FOUCAULT.

4. Jacques Suffel, in a Preface to *The Temptation* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1967), p. 19, discusses Flaubert's preoccupation with *The Ethics*.

magisterial Diana of Ephesus, with lions at her shoulders and with fruits, flowers, and stars interlaced on her bosom, with a cluster of breasts, and griffins and bulls springing from the sheath which tightly encircles her waist. Nevertheless, this "fantasy" is an exact reproduction of plate 88 in Creutzer's last volume: if we observe the details of the print, we can appreciate Flaubert's diligence. Cybele and Atys (with his languid pose, his elbow against a tree, his flute, and his costume cut into diamond shapes) are both found in plate 58 of the same work; similarly, the portrait of Ormuz is in Layard and the medals of Oraios, Sabaoth, Adonaius, and Knouphus are easily located in Matter. It is indeed surprising that such erudite precision strikes us as a phantasmagoria. More exactly, we are astounded that Flaubert experienced the scholar's patience, the very patience necessary to knowledge, as the liveliness of a frenzied imagination.

Possibly, Flaubert was responding to an experience of the fantastic which was singularly modern and relatively unknown before his time, to the discovery of a new imaginative space in the nineteenth century. This domain of phantasms is no longer the night, the sleep of reason, or the uncertain void that stands before desire, but, on the contrary, wakefulness, untiring attention, zealous erudition, and constant vigilance. Henceforth, the visionary experience arises from the black and white surface of printed signs, from the closed and dusty volume that opens with a flight of forgotten words; fantasies are carefully deployed in the hushed library, with its columns of books, with its titles aligned on shelves to form a tight enclosure, but within confines that also liberate impossible worlds. The imaginary now resides between the book and the lamp. The fantastic is no longer a property of the heart, nor is it found among the incongruities of nature; it evolves from the accuracy of knowledge, and its treasures lie dormant in documents. Dreams are no longer summoned with closed eyes, but in reading; and a true image is now a product of learning:<sup>5</sup> it derives from words spoken in the past,

5. See above, "Language to Infinity," p. 61, for a similar under-

exact recensions, the amassing of minute facts, monuments reduced to infinitesimal fragments, and the reproductions of reproductions. In the modern experience, these elements contain the power of the impossible." Only the assiduous clamor created by repetition can transmit to us what only happened once. The imaginary is not formed in opposition to reality as its denial or compensation; it grows among signs, from book to book, in the interstice of repetitions and commentaries; it is born and takes shape in the interval between books. It is a phenomenon of the library.

Both Michelet (in the *Sorcière*) and Edgar Quinet (in *Ahasvérus*) had explored these forms of erudite dreams, but *The Temptation* is not a scholarly project which evolved into an artistically coherent whole. As a work, its form relies on its location within the domain of knowledge: it exists by virtue of its essential relationship to books. This explains why it may represent more than a mere episode in the history of Western imagination; it opens a literary space wholly dependent on the network formed by the books of the past: as such, it serves to circulate the fiction of books. Yet, we should not confuse it with apparently similar works, with *Don Quixote* or the works of Sade, because the link between the former and the tales of knight-errantry or between the *Nouvelle Justine* and the virtuous novels of the eighteenth century is maintained through irony; and, more importantly, they remain books regardless of their intention. *The Temptation*, however, is linked in a completely serious manner to the vast world of print and develops within the recognizable institution of writing. It may appear as merely another new book to be shelved alongside all the others, but it serves, in actuality, to extend the space that existing books can occupy. It

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standing of Sade's relationship to the learning of the eighteenth century.

6. Cf. below "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," p. 139, and "Theatrum Philosophicum," p. 169.

7. On the role of "repetition" in Foucault's thought, see below, "Theatrum Philosophicum," pp. 186-196.

recovers other books; it hides and displays them and, in a single movement, it causes them to glitter and disappear. It is not simply the book that Flaubert dreamed of writing for so long; it dreams other books, all other books that dream and that men dream of writing-books that are taken up, fragmented, displaced, combined, lost, set at an unapproachable distance by dreams, but also brought closer to the imaginary and sparkling realization of desires. In writing *The Temptation*, Flaubert produced the first literary work whose exclusive domain is that of books: following Flaubert, Mallarmé is able to write *Le Livre* and modern literature is activated-Joyce, Roussel, Kafka, Pound, Borges. The library is on fire.

*Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* and *Olympia* were perhaps the first "museum" paintings, the first paintings in European art that were less a response to the achievement of Giorgione, Raphael, and Velasquez than an acknowledgement (supported by this singular and obvious connection, using this legible reference to cloak its operation) of the new and substantial relationship of painting to itself, as a manifestation of the existence of museums and the particular reality and interdependence that paintings acquire in museums. In the same period, *The Temptation* was the first literary work to comprehend the greenish institutions where books are accumulated and where the slow and incontrovertible vegetation of learning quietly proliferates. Flaubert is to the library what Manet is to the museum. They both produced works in a self-conscious relationship to earlier paintings or texts-or rather to the aspect in painting or writing that remains indefinitely open. They erect their art within the archive.<sup>8</sup> They were not meant to foster the lamentations-the lost youth, the absence of vigor, and the decline of inventiveness-through which we reproach our Alexandrian age, but to unearth an essential aspect of our culture: every painting now belongs within the squared and massive surface of painting and all literary

8. See Foucault's discussion of the "archive" in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, pp. 126-31.

works are confined to the indefinite murmur of writing. Flaubert and Manet are responsible for the existence of books and paintings within works of art.

### III

The presence of the book in *The Temptation*, its manifestation and concealment, is indicated in a strange way: it immediately contradicts itself as a book. From the start, it challenges the priority of its printed signs and takes the form of a theatrical presentation: the transcription of a text that is not meant to be read, but recited and staged. At one time, Flaubert had wanted to transform *The Temptation* into a kind of epic drama, a *Faust* capable of swallowing the entire world of religion and gods. He soon gave up this idea but retained within the text the indications marking a possible performance: division into dialogues and scenes, descriptions of the place of action, the scenic elements, and their modifications, blocking directions for the "actors- on stage-all given according to a traditional typographical arrangement (smaller type and wider margins for stage directions, a character's name in large letters above the speeches, etc.). In a significant redoubling, the first indicated setting-the site of all future modifications-has the form of a natural theater: the hermit's retreat has been placed "at the top of a mountain, on a platform rounded in the form of a half-moon and enclosed by large boulders." The text describes a stage which, itself, represents a "platform" shaped by natural forces and upon which new scenes will in turn impose their sets. But these indications do not suggest a future performance (they are largely incompatible with an actual presentation); they simply designate the specific mode of existence of the text. Print can only be an unobtrusive aid to the visible; an insidious spectator takes the reader's place and the act of reading is dissolved in the triumph of another form of sight. The book disappears in the theatricality it creates.

But it will immediately reappear within a scenic space. No

sooner have the **first** signs of temptation emerged from the gathering shadows, no sooner have the disquieting faces appeared in the night, than Saint Anthony lights a torch to protect himself and opens a "large book." This posture is consistent with the iconographic tradition: in the painting of Breughel the Younger, the painting that so impressed Flaubert when he visited the Balbi collection in Genoa and that he felt had incited him to write *The Temptation*, the hermit, in the lower right-hand corner of the canvas, is kneeling before an immense volume, his head slightly bowed, and his eyes intent on the written lines. Surrounding him on all sides are naked women with open arms, lean Gluttony stretching her giraffe's neck, barrel-like men creating an uproar, and nameless beasts devouring each other; at his back is a procession of the grotesques that populate the earth-bishops, kings, and tyrants. But this assembly is lost on the saint, absorbed in his reading. He sees nothing of this great uproar, unless perhaps through the corner of his eye, unless he seeks to protect himself by invoking the enigmatic powers of a magician's book. It may be, on the contrary, that the mumbling recitation of written signs has summoned these poor shapeless figures that no language has ever named, that no book can contain, but that anonymously invade the weighty pages of the volume. It may be, as well, that these creatures of unnatural issue escaped from the book, from the gaps between the open pages or the blank spaces between the letters. More fertile than the sleep of reason, the book perhaps engenders an infinite brood of monsters. Far from being a protection, it has liberated an obscure swarm of creatures and created a suspicious shadow through the mingling of images and knowledge. In any case, setting aside this discussion of the open folio in Breughel's painting, Flaubert's Saint Anthony seizes his book to ward off the evil that begins to obsess him and reads at random five passages from Scriptures. But, by a trick of the text, there immediately arises in the evening air the odors of gluttony, the scent of blood and anger, and the incense of pride, aromas worth more than

their weight in gold, and the sinful perfumes of Oriental queens. The book-but not any book-is the site of temptation. Where the first passage read by the hermit is taken from the "Acts of the Apostles," the last four, **significantly**, come from the **Old Testament**<sup>9</sup>—from Gods Scripture, from the supreme book.

The two earlier versions of *The Temptation* excluded the reading of sacred texts. Attacked by the canonical figures of evil, the hermit immediately seeks refuge in his chapel; goaded by Satan, the Seven Deadly Sins are set against the Virtues and, led by Pride, they make repeated assaults upon the protected enclosure. This imagery of the portal and the staging of a mystery are absent from the published text. In the final version, evil is not given as the property of characters, but incorporated in words. A book intended to lead to the gates of salvation also opens the gates of Hell. The full range of fantastic apparitions that eventually unfold before the hermit-orgiastic palaces, drunken emperors, unfettered heretics, misshapen forms of the gods in agony, abnormalities of nature-arise from the opening of a book, as they issued from the libraries that Flaubert consulted. It is appropriate, in this context, that Flaubert dropped from the definitive text the symmetrical and opposing figures of logic and the swine, the original leaders of the pageant, and replaced them with Hilarion, the learned disciple who was initiated into the reading of sacred texts by Saint Anthony.

The presence of *the book* in *The Temptation*, initially in a theatrical spectacle and then more prominently as the source of a pageant, which, in turn, obscures its presence, gives rise to an extremely complicated space. We are apparently presented with a frieze of colorful characters set against cardboard scenery; on the edge of the stage, in a corner, sits the hooded figure of the motionless saint. The scene is reminiscent of a puppet theater. As a child, Flaubert saw *The Mystery of Saint Anthony* performed numerous times by Père Legrain in his puppet theater;

9. Acts of the Apostles 10:11; Daniel 2:46; 2 Kings 20:13; 1 King 10:1—FOUCAULT.

he later brought Georges Sand to a performance. The first two versions of *The Temptation* retained elements from this source (most obviously, the pig, but also the **personification** of sin, the assault on the chapel, and the image of the virgin). In the definitive text, only the linear succession of the visions remains to suggest an effect of "**marionnettes**": sins, temptations, divinities, and monsters are paraded before the laconic hermit—each emerging, in turn, from the hellish confines of the box where they were kept. But this is only a surface effect constructed upon a staging in depth (it is the flat surface that is deceptive in this context).

As 'support for these successive visions, to set them up in their illusory reality, **Flaubert** arranged a limited number of stages, which extends, in a perpendicular direction, the pure and **straightforward** reading of the printed phrases. The first intersection is the reader (I)—the actual reader of the text—and the book lies before him (1a); from the **first** lines (it **is** in *the Thebaid* . . . *the hermit's cabin appears in the background*) the text invites the reader to become a spectator (2) of a stage whose scenery is carefully described (2a); at center stage, the spectator sees the hermit (3) seated with his legs crossed: he will shortly rise and turn to his book (3a) from which disturbing visions will gradually escape—banquets, palaces, a voluptuous queen, and **finally** Hilarion, the insidious discipline (4). Hilarion leads the saint into a space filled with visions (4a); this opens a world of heresies and **gods, and** a world where improbable creatures proliferate (5). Moreover, the heretics are also capable of speech and recount their shameless rites; the gods recall their past glories and the cults that were devoted to them; and the monsters proclaim their proper bestiality. Derived from the power of their words or from their mere presence, a new dimension is realized, a vision that lies within that produced by the satanic disciple (5a), a vision that contains the abject cult of the Ophites, the miracles of Apollonius, the temptations of Buddha, and the ancient and blissful reign of Isis (6). Beginning as actual readers,

we successively encounter five distinct levels, five different orders of language (indicated by a): that of the book, a theater, a sacred text, visions, and visions that evolve into further visions. There are also five series of characters, of figures, of landscapes, and of forms: the invisible spectator, Saint Anthony in his retreat, Hilarion, -the heretics, the gods and the monsters, and finally, the shadows propagated by their speeches or through their memories.

This organization, which develops through successive enclosures, is **modified** by two others. (In actuality, it **finds** its confirmation and completion in two others.) The first is that of a retrospective encasement. Where the figures on the sixth level (visions of visions) should be the palest and least accessible to direct perception, they appear forcefully on the scene, as dense, colorful, and insistent as the figures that precede them or as Saint Anthony himself. It is as if the clouded memories and secret desires, which produced these visions from the first, have the power of acting without mediation in the scenic space, upon the landscape where the hermit pursues his imaginary dialogue with his disciple, or upon the stage that the fictitious spectator is meant to behold during the acting out of this semi-mystery. Thus, the fictions of the last level fold back upon themselves, envelop the figures from which they arose, quickly surpass the disciple and the anchorite, and finish by inscribing themselves within the supposed materiality of the theater. Through this retrospective envelopment, the most ephemeral fictions are presented in the most direct language, through the stage directions, indicated by the author, whose task is an external definition of the characters.

This arrangement allows the reader (1) to see Saint Anthony (3) over the shoulder of the implied spectator (2) who is an accomplice to the dramatic presentation: the effect is to identify the reader with the spectator. Consequently, the spectator sees Anthony on the stage, but he also sees over his shoulder the apparitions presented to the hermit, apparitions that are as substantial as the saint: Alexandria, Constantinople, the Queen of