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## Sexual Commodification and Memory in “*L’Éducation sentimentale*”

### Abstract

Flaubert believed that a crisis of memory, which was particularly acute during the period of the Revolution of 1848, plagued his generation. The essay argues that, in the context of confronting what he refers to as the “idea of prostitution,” Flaubert chose sexual commodification as the privileged locus to portray that crisis of memory in *L’éducation sentimentale*. Such a strategy is notably discernable in a scene that is crucial for the treatment of gender in the novel. There Rosanette, one of the two main female characters, tells the story of how she was sold into prostitution by her family as a child. This narrative of a little girl’s image-driven experience amounts to a rare moment of self-reflexivity in the novel. In the process, it contests *L’éducation sentimentale*’s famous conclusion where the two main male characters, Frédéric and Deslauriers, reflect on their lives in general and on their dealings with prostitutes in particular. Rosanette’s memory scene offers us a unique female perspective on sexual commodification and serves as a remarkable example of counter-discourse in a novel that is otherwise dominated by male-gendered experiences of memory.

Flaubert croyait qu’une crise de la mémoire, particulièrement remarquable autour de la période de la Révolution de 1848, fut le fléau de sa génération. Cet article soutient que dans *L’éducation sentimentale*, par le biais d’une confrontation avec ce qu’il appelle «l’idée de la prostitution», Flaubert choisit le commerce sexuel comme lieu privilégié pour décrire cette crise de la mémoire. Cette stratégie narrative est notamment manifeste dans un passage capital pour tout traitement de la question du genre dans *L’éducation sentimentale*. Là, Rosanette, l’un des deux principaux personnages féminins, raconte comment elle a été vendue par sa famille et contrainte à devenir une enfant prostituée. Ce récit de l’expérience enfantine motivée par l’image, constitue un moment d’auto-réflexivité rare dans le roman qui va à l’encontre de la célèbre conclusion où les deux personnages masculins principaux, Frédéric et Deslauriers, reviennent sur leur vie en général et sur leurs rapports avec les prostituées en particulier. La scène où Rosanette met en jeu sa mémoire nous offre donc une perspective féminine unique sur le commerce sexuel et constitue un exemple remarquable de discours oppositionnel dans un roman dominé par les expériences de la mémoire d’hommes.

In a letter he sent to Louise Colet on June 1, 1853, Gustave Flaubert stated most emphatically, brutally even perhaps, the importance he granted to prostitution in both his private life and his art. Flaubert had been introduced to Colet seven years prior in the atelier of the renowned sculptor James Pradier<sup>1</sup>. Colet, a dedicated writer recognized by the Académie française, organized an influential salon with the help of Victor Cousin that was frequented by literati, political progressives, and writers such as Vigny, Desbordes-Valmore, Gautier, and Dumas. She actively participated in the movement for women’s emancipation and invested energy and funds into Flora

(1) Pradier’s sculpture of Louise Colet, meant to symbolize the city of Strasbourg, is still displayed on Place de la Concorde. Other examples of his

public art can be seen at the Madeleine, in the Invalides, next to the Comédie française, in the Luxembourg Gardens, and on the Arc de Triomphe.

Tristan's socialist journal *L'Union ouvrière*. At great risk to herself, she also supported Victor Hugo's work in exile. Yet, in spite of her political courage and creative accomplishments, she is remembered primarily as Flaubert's long-suffering mistress and confidante from 1846 to 1848 and again from 1851 to 1854<sup>2</sup>. Colet's misery was due in no small part to her lover's avowed attraction to other women, mainly prostitutes.

In his letter to Colet, Flaubert criticizes Leconte De Lisle (whom he had yet to meet) for his insincere claim of never having been able to go with a prostitute: «Il y a encore une chose qui m'a semblé légèrement bourgeoise dans ce même individu: 'Je n'ai jamais pu voir une fille'. Eh bien, je déclare que j'ai souvent pu, moi! Et en fait de dégoût, tous ces gens me dégoûtent fort»<sup>3</sup>. For Flaubert, it was not only hypocritical but outrageous that De Lisle would spurn *les filles à carte*, or *en carte* (individually registered women who actively sought out their clients), all the while enjoying the equivalent of *les filles à numéro* (women who waited for clients to come to them, whether in brothels where they were registered as a number or by extension, in the case of courtesans privileged by class, in their private apartments). «Est-ce qu'il croyait qu'il ne pataugeait pas en plein dans la prostitution, quand il allait essayer de son corps les restes du mari?» exclaims Flaubert. «... Comme elle n'avait pas de *carte*, ce bon Delisle pouvait *la voir*. Je déclare que cette théorie-là me suffoque» (p. 339)<sup>4</sup>.

Flaubert goes on to affirm in the clearest of terms his interest in sex for money, all the while acknowledging his potential deviancy, albeit more likely a defiance of the bordello norm than of official morality: «C'est peut-être un goût pervers, mais j'aime la prostitution et pour elle-même, indépendamment de ce qu'il y a en dessous» (p. 340)<sup>5</sup>. Although «la prostitution ... elle-même» would appear at first glance to refer to a pure, even asexualized form of venal sex, Flaubert is not abstracting it here from its carnal base. We should read his use of the term «elle-même» as a reference to prostitution's theory, in other words to that which seeks to reveal and to understand its own substance. «Il se trouve en cette idée de la prostitution», he goes on to say, «un point d'intersection si complexe, luxure, amertume, néant des rapports humains, frénésie du muscle et sonnement d'or, qu'en y regardant au fond le vertige vient, et on apprend là tant de choses!» (p. 340). From Flaubert's perspective, commodified sex creates a space where eroticism, bitterness, emptiness, money, and the flesh all collide productively. The reference to «vertigo» confirms, if need be, the power of fascination prostitution holds for him.

The ultimate reward for the dizzying effect of commodified sexuality lies in the work of art: «Ah! faiseurs d'élégies, ce n'est pas sur des ruines qu'il faut aller appuyer votre coude, mais sur le sein de ces femmes gaies» (p. 340). The suggestion that poetry be grounded in life, or in this case more specifically in the flesh, concerns the impetus for the creative process rather than the representation of any specific material in the literary work. It does not, therefore, contradict Flaubert's finely-tuned aesthetics of ornamentation, that dedication to form, which, when coupled with Flaubert's

(2) Colet is only slowly receiving attention for her own work. See for example, F. DU PLESSIX GRAY, *Rage and Fire: A Life of Louise Colet: Pioneer Feminist, Literary Star, Flaubert's Muse*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1994.

(3) FLAUBERT, *Correspondance*, Paris, Gallimard, 1973, «La Pléiade», vol. II, p. 339. Two months later, Flaubert's disgust with De Lisle's resistance to prostitution will give way to admiration for the poet's commitment to Beauty. See his letter to Colet, 14 August, 1853 (394).

(4) The italics are Flaubert's. For a detailed dis-

cussion of the relatively fluid categories of prostitution see A. CORBIN's landmark study *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1990.

(5) For C. BERNHEIMER, what lies beneath prostitution, and what Flaubert denies is the female sexual body that he «associated with animality, disease, castration, excrement, and decay». *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1997, 2.

predilection for sweeping irony that takes everything as its target – the characters, the narrator, the reader, the situation, the plot structure, etc. – works so hard to thwart any tendency towards redemption<sup>6</sup>. Flaubert's suggestion that poetry be rooted in life is also consistent with his brilliant portrayal of venal sex in *L'Éducation sentimentale* where prostitution comes into play as a theme, a multivalent metaphor, and a complex structural or, more precisely, de-structuring device.

It has been rightfully argued that Flaubert's story of his generation that lived through the revolutionary period of 1848 is conditioned by a variety of manifestations of commodified sexuality. *L'Éducation sentimentale*'s conclusion, in particular, has received a good deal of critical attention for its exemplary convergence of several of the novel's central concerns – in particular memory, loss, and irony – against the backdrop of a brothel<sup>7</sup>. On those final pages, Frédéric and his friend Deslauriers famously run through a list of memorable moments from their school days and end up reflecting on their very first attempt as teenagers to procure the services of a prostitute. The sexual implication of Frédéric's final words, «C'est là ce que nous avons eu de meilleur»<sup>8</sup>, is self-ironic not least because the teenagers' attempt to lose their virginity at the brothel ended in failure and humiliation. Because their visit «chez la Turque»<sup>9</sup> had not been mentioned up to this final page, the founding story of the male heroes' relationship with sexual economy and with failure comes last, and through this critique of the *Bildungsroman* model we are at pains to determine what exactly, if anything, was achieved in their “sentimental education”.

The novel's conclusion is also important because it is one of very few moments when the characters actually remember, rather than repress, their past. This does not mean the men's youth is an integrated living memory on which they might be able to build their present, something like an *Erfahrung*. It appears instead like a buried past that is only now being dug up and attached to their current lives: «En exhumant leur jeunesse, à chaque phrase, ils se disaient: “Te rappelles-tu?”» (p. 262). In a novel replete with failures, the two friends unearth yet another one. Although the reader may feel compelled to respond to the encouragement to remember (*Te rappelles-tu?*), it would not be possible to remember the story of the disastrous visit to the brothel because, although clearly very important, it appears for the first time only in these final lines of the novel. Richard Terdiman who argues that *L'Éducation sentimentale* is primarily «a text about the impotence of memory, about what has become its grotesque and scandalous vacuity», sees in the final dialogue «the failure of organic integration of the past into the lived experience of the characters», a failure which is but one of the signs of what Terdiman refers to as «the memory crisis» of the long nineteenth-century<sup>10</sup>. In order to make sense of the final scene, readers must engage with their interpretive memory, or what Christophe Ippolito calls their

(6) Perhaps the most sustained argument for a consideration of Flaubert's resistance to the reader's drive towards intelligibility and unity of meaning can be found in J. CULLER's *The Uses of Uncertainty*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1974.

(7) See, for example, the seminal studies of W. PAULSON, *Sentimental Education: The Complexity of Disenchantment*, New York and Toronto, Twayne, 1992, p. 53; V. BROMBERT, *The Novels of Flaubert: A Study of Themes and Techniques*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1966, p. 161; and C. BERNHEIMER, *op. cit.* (p. 154). For a complementary gender analysis, see M. ORR, *Flaubert: Writing the*

*Masculine*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000.

(8) FLAUBERT, *Œuvres complètes*, Paris, Seuil, 1964, Collection «L'intégrale», vol. 2, p. 163, my emphasis.

(9) Kuchuk-Hanem, the prostitute who bore a Turkish name and with whom Flaubert became enthralled in 1850 during his trip to Egypt with Maxime Du Camp, was the prime example of a «femme gaie» on whose breast the artist rested, as per the recommendation to De Lisle.

(10) R. TERDIMAN, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1993, p. 26. The mnemonic dysfunction in the post-Revolutionary period is, for

*narrative* memory: «a memory that the reader has of the text and of the implicit relationships that are sustained in it»<sup>11</sup>. Ippolito notes that «a reading based on narrative memory involves a retrospective reading leading to a *meditatio* and dealing with the significance of the text, at the semiotic level of representation and at the figural level of meaning» (p. 32). Although we cannot share Frédéric and Deslaurier's memory of their failed brothel expedition, since the episode's absence meant we had no access to it in the linear course of the novel, our narrative memory allows us to understand *the logic* of the characters' memory as it is inscribed in the structure of the novel where reenactments of failure proliferate. The appearance *in extremis* of a grounding event as essential as a failed visit to a brothel leads Charles Bernheimer to see in the conclusion a measure of Flaubert's «success in transforming a compulsion to lose into a structure of loss» (p. 141).

Taken together, these analyses point to the fact that the dynamic relation between memory and loss is inseparable from the representation of prostitution, which is itself at the core of *L'Éducation sentimentale*'s thematics and signifying structure. Let us explore these connections further by considering the case of the primary representative of venal sex in the novel, Rosanette. In particular, the scene where she relates to Frédéric her painful memory of being abandoned by her mother while still a girl and sold into prostitution is a passage that has received far less critical attention than the novel's conclusion and far less attention than it deserves.

The notes Flaubert took down in his *Carnets* demonstrate the important role prostitution played from the onset of his project for the novel. The moment when a prostitute tells her own story in *L'Éducation sentimentale* is therefore potentially a key to understanding one of the book's central issues. Rosanette's recollection of crossing the threshold between childhood innocence and a sex worker's experience represents an inversion of the novel's conclusion. Furthermore, it stands as a dissident response to the novel's dominant male discourse on sexual commodification. A consideration of the specific details of Rosanette's story of initiation into prostitution reveals a narrative grounded in an image-driven experience of the young girl's identification with her new status as the type of *fille* whose function it is to service men. It also exposes Flaubert's conflicted relationship with the ethics involved in portraying the prostitute's ground of suffering.

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Of all the major characters that participate in the economy of prostitution in *L'Éducation sentimentale*, Rosanette does so the most overtly. She is explicitly referred to as a *lorette*. According to the *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, the term first appears in 1836. The *lorette* was such a popular figure that a year later a *Physiologie de la Lorette* appeared, followed most notably by Alexandre Dumas' *Filles, Lorettes et Courtisanes* in 1843<sup>12</sup>. The category of *lorette*, which overlaps to a certain degree with the high-class courtesan, is typically set off from her poorer coun-

Terdiman, a product of the epochal reconfiguration of both memory and exchange; the defining attribute of memory in the nineteenth century being a product of the process of reification that underpins the capitalist economy. Pierre Bourdieu refers to this process of reification as "genesis amnesia," the forgetting of the individual and collective genesis of a given that gives itself all the appearances of a

natural phenomenon. See P. BOURDIEU, *Méditations pascaliennes*, Paris, Seuil, 1997, p. 217.

(11) C. IPPOLITO, *Narrative Memory in Flaubert's Works*, New York, Peter Lang, 2001, p. 5.

(12) M. ALHOY, *Physiologie de la lorette*, Paris, Aubert, 1841; A. DUMAS, *Filles, lorettes et courtisanes*, Paris, Dolin, 1843.

terpart the *grisette*. As L. Czyba notes, unlike the *grisette*, «la lorette ne descend pas dans la rue, elle s'y exhibe, elle ne menace pas l'ordre bourgeois, elle le garantit»<sup>13</sup>. An important change of attitude towards the *lorette* occurred from the 1840's to the 1850's when specific attempts were made to control the image of what had come to be seen as "the unruly prostitute"<sup>14</sup>. Writing in the 1860's with the historian's care for temporal veracity, Flaubert's interest in portraying this popular figure as she appeared in the 1840's is in full evidence in the earliest notes he took for the novel.

If, at least since the publication in 1979 of *Essais de critique génétique*, literary geneticists have demonstrated the decisive nature of the *avant-textes* in the creative process<sup>15</sup>, the potential importance of pre-texts is all the more salient in the case of Flaubert who, as Timothy Unwin points out, «left thousands and thousands of pages of jottings, drafts, plans and scenarios which, strictly speaking, have to be considered as much a part of the corpus as the completed texts»<sup>16</sup>. Flaubert's *Carnet 19* contained the first general observations on his new book project of which we are aware, and was likely written in 1862 and 1863 after which the plan was set aside for a year while Flaubert corrected the proofs of *Salaambo*. *Carnet 19* contains no less than a dozen references to the term "lorette", such as: «N'osant déclarer son amour, il se rejette sur les lorettes» (F°35); «Désir de la femme honnête d'être une lorette. Désir de la lorette d'être une femme du monde» (F°37); «Lorettes (secondaires) autour de la principale» (F°38)<sup>17</sup>. The significant recurrence of the term offers an excellent indication of how important the figure was from the book's inception and from how early on Flaubert established the groundwork for the character of the prostitute. In the final version of *L'Éducation sentimentale*, that character will be referred to as "Rosanette," "Rose," "la Maréchale," or simply "la lorette."

Frédéric is drawn towards the *lorette* specifically because his ambition to be counted among the wealthy elite means that his ideal mistress must circulate among those of a particular class, which indeed Rosanette does. In addition to Frédéric, she is sexually linked to Arnoux, le père Oudry, Jumilly, Flacourt, le petit Allard, Bertinaux, de Cisy, Saint-Valéry, le Baron de Comaing, and prince Tzernoukoff. References to her status as a commodity that changes hands are numerous and varied. For example, with the intention of shaming Frédéric into paying for a portrait of Rosanette that he had ordered, the artist Pellerin exhibits the painting (where the model appears topless, holding a red velvet pouch) above the descriptor "Mlle Rose-Annette Bron, appartenant à M. Frédéric Moreau, de Nogent" (p. 93). The use of the present participle "appartenant" suggests that Frédéric possesses either the painting or Rosanette, or both (although he has yet to put down the money for the painting). Rosanette's function as a commodity is strengthened here by this public display of her portrait, which, when viewed in conjunction with its description, underscores her social function<sup>18</sup>.

(13) L. CZYBA, *La Femme dans les romans de Flaubert*, Lyon, Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1983, p. 197.

(14) See C.A. SULLIVAN, 'Cautériser la plaie': *The Lorette as Social Ill in the Goncourts and Eugène Sue*, «Nineteenth-Century French Studies», Volume 37, Number 3 & 4, Spring-Summer 2009, pp. 247-261.

(15) *Essais de critique génétique*, éd. L. HAY, Paris, Flammarion, 1979. Of particular interest is the article by R. DEBRAY-GENETTE, *Génétique et poétique. Le cas Flaubert* (pp. 21-67). See also P.-M. DE BIASI and I. WASSenaar, *What is a Literary Draft?*

*Toward a Functional Typology of Genetic Documentation*, «Yale French Studies», 89, 1996, pp. 26-58.

(16) T. UNWIN, *Gustave Flaubert, the Hermit of Croisset* in *The Cambridge Companion to Flaubert*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 5.

(17) For a detailed discussion of the genesis of the novel, see the chapter entitled «Points de repères critiques et génétiques: la rédaction de *L'Éducation sentimentale*», (pp. 307-315) in P.-M. DE BIASI's monumental study *Gustave Flaubert: Carnets de travail*, Paris, Baland, 1988.

(18) For a genetic analysis of Flaubert's treatment



While Rosanette is portrayed as a commodity that can be bought or sold, the basis of her value actually lies in the more fluid pattern of the various positions she occupies within the homosocial sphere of her male "clients." In *Capital*, Marx states that it «is not enough for [the commodity] to appear to the buyer as an article with particular useful qualities, i.e. as a specific use-value which can gratify specific needs whether of individual or of productive consumption. Its exchange-value must also have acquired a definite, independent form, distinct, albeit ideally, from its use-value»<sup>19</sup>. In a particularly telling instance of objectification, Rosanette appears proudly on display in the carriage she is sharing with Frédéric at the horse races while she is at the same time the object of a bet by the aristocrat Cisy, whose goal it is to possess her that same night. Cisy's bet is played out while Frédéric basks in the social recognition he gets from his association with Rosanette: «[d]es gentlemen la reconnurent, lui envoyèrent des saluts. Elle y répondait en disant leurs noms à Frédéric. C'étaient tous comtes, vicomtes, ducs et marquis; et il se rengorgeait, car tous les yeux exprimaient un certain respect pour sa bonne fortune» (p. 83). From a Marxian perspective, the young hero's «bonne fortune» depends on his mistress's position in the chain of desire of this semiotic economy rather than on any intrinsic value she might have. In addition to her use-value, the prostitute's exchange-value is actually what the buyer counts, what he counts on, and what counts for him. At the race track, her exchange-value is represented as a function of the desire of wealthy men for her, at least to the extent that that desire is perceived to circulate among the serpentine carriages.

Rosanette's role as a determining factor of male social identity is perhaps most obvious at the dinner party hosted by Cisy. The guests – all of them men – weigh, define, and evaluate each other according to their experiences of dealing with women in general and more specifically with women as *lorettes*. In the following passage, they broach the topic of Rosanette:

Le Baron ajouta:  
Que devient-elle, cette brave Rose? ... a-t-elle toujours d'aussi jolies jambes? prouvant par ce mot qu'il la connaissait intimement.  
Frédéric fut contrarié de la découverte.  
– Il n'y a pas de quoi rougir, reprit le baron; c'est une bonne affaire!  
Cisy claqua de la langue.  
– Peuh! pas si bonne!  
– Ah!  
– Mon Dieu, oui! D'abord, moi, je ne lui trouve rien d'extraordinaire, et puis on en récolte de pareilles tant qu'on veut, car enfin... elle est à vendre!  
– Pas pour tout le monde! reprit aigrement Frédéric.  
– Il se croit différent des autres! répliqua Cisy, quelle farce!  
Et un rire parcourut la table (p. 88).

The homosocial space depicted here is not just a function of the event's location and the composition of its membership, a roundtable gathering of men. It centers on the way women circulate and it can be defined by how women are treated, or more precisely how they are traded.

Rosanette is clearly more than an object that changes hands. One of the benefits of the money she receives for sex is that it provides her with certain spaces of free-

of Pellerin's conflicted aesthetics, see C. GOTHOT-MESCH's, *Quand un romancier met un peintre à l'œuvre: le portrait de Rosanette dans "L'Éducation sentimentale"* in *Voix de l'écrivain: mélanges offerts*

à Guy Sagnes, Toulouse, Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1996, pp. 103-115.

(19) K. MARX, *Capital*, vol. I, New York, Vintage, 1977, p. 955.

dom, «des zones de brume» as Evelyne Woestelandt subtly describes them, which help her remain allusive in the eyes of her clients<sup>20</sup>. The extent to which she enjoys that freedom, however, does not so much garner her respect among her clients as it stimulates their rapaciousness and strengthens their self-identification as men. In this respect, the dinner guests' laughter as they mock Frédéric's naiveté regarding the status of women as commodities not only outlines the perimeter of the shared table but serves to define the collective identity of the diners as well. Through his rivalry with Cisy over Rosanette, Frédéric is forced to realize that he is a participant in the same form of sexual commerce as his male companions, a commerce that is quite simply the condition of possibility of his long sought-after insertion into a meaningful system of social relations in bourgeois Paris. As Flaubert's correspondence demonstrates, a similarly competitive, albeit also more communal, spirit was in evidence in the real-life bantering that Flaubert and his friends engaged in on the topic of the most recent *filles* they had added to their long list of conquests<sup>21</sup>.

Given the fact that Flaubert puts prostitution, as both a figure and a metaphor, to multiple, ambiguous, even complex uses in the novel, it is reasonable to assert, as does Woestelandt, that Rosanette would be situated in «le domaine de l'ambivalence, femme prise dans le réseau prostitutionnel, femme changeante qu'il est 'impossible de connaître'» (p. 126)<sup>22</sup>. However, while it remains impossible "to know" any character, Flaubert does provide us with a remarkably detailed description of the root cause of Rosanette's condition when she returns to the source of her initiation into the sexual economy and recalls her painful loss of innocence to prostitution as a child. That story is genetically rooted in the recollections of the actress and singer Suzanne Lagier, who was one of Flaubert's mistresses off and on during the period of *L'Éducation sentimentale*'s composition, which lasted from September 1, 1864 to May 16, 1869. Lagier was also a principal source, along with James Pradier's wife Louise (aka Ludovica), for the character of Rosanette. In particular, the story that Rosanette will later tell of her loss of virginity is built precisely around an anecdote Flaubert recorded in *Carnet 19*: «Un enfant (16 ans) attend dans un boudoir la perte de son pucelage – souper servi – ne mange que des confitures et s'endort sur des gravures lubriques. (S. Lag.)» (p. 284). The reference at the end of this note suggests that Flaubert heard the story from Lagier herself. This interpretation would be consistent with other sources Flaubert records in the *Carnets* that also appear in parentheses; and it certainly conforms to Pierre-Marc de Biasi's interpretation (p. 257). However, while the story Flaubert records therefore likely comes from Lagier, it remains unclear whether or not this is an autobiographical anecdote of Lagier's or the story of someone else's experience. Although we may not be able to conclude whether or not Flaubert recorded Lagier's personal testimony, what matters is that Rosanette's story is indeed a self-portrayal. This is quite significant because, as Alain Corbin tells us,

(20) See E. WOESTELANDT, *Le corps vénal: Rosanette dans l'Éducation sentimentale*, «Nineteenth-Century French Studies», 1987-8, 16, 1-2, p. 122.

(21) For example, in a letter to Flaubert on January 21, 1849 regarding the actress Virgine Octave, Du Camp writes: «Je l'ai voulue et je l'ai eue. Non pas pour moi, mais pour nous. Réjouis toi, car je l'ai fait autant pour toi que pour moi!» (Quoted in J.-L. DOUCHIN, *La vie érotique de Flaubert*, Paris, J.J. Pauvert, 1984, p. 191). A year later, that «communal spirit» takes on same-sex overtones in Flaubert's famous letter to Bouillet from Egypt dated March 12, 1850. After describing his rapport with Kuchuk-Hanem, he notes: «Dans l'absorption de

tout ce qui précède mon pauvre vieux, tu n'as pas cessé d'être présent... Je regrettais (le mot est faible) que tu ne fusses pas là, je jouissais pour moi et pour toi, je m'excitais pour nous deux et tu en avais la bonne part, sois tranquille» (*Correspondance*, vol. I, p. 607).

(22) For a discussion of several of the contradictions stemming from prostitution as a negative motif, see V. BROMBERT, *The Novels of Flaubert*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1966, pp. 125-150. For Brombert, the bordello motif «represents ersatz on all levels, transmuting almost every gesture into parody» (p. 135).



it was extremely rare in this period for sexual workers to tell their own story. «The nineteenth-century prostitute does not speak to us about herself», states Corbin, «what reality we can glean is mediated through male eyes: those of the policeman, the doctor, the judge and the administrator» (viii). Although it comes from a fictional character, Rosanette's autobiographical story is all the more important in the context of the dearth of first person narratives of prostitution during this period.

Ironically, Rosanette reveals her painful memory to Frédéric while entertaining false hopes of a sustained and therefore more respectable relationship with him during their stay in pastoral Rambouillet. On one of their strolls, a poor disheveled peasant-girl approaches the couple requesting alms and, in so doing, the child reminds Rosanette of her own tragic past. The realization that she might share more than a charitable offering of food or money with the little girl – indeed that she might also share a common bond of experience with her – constitutes the first in a series of reflections that structure Rosanette's memory of being sold into prostitution. In response to Frédéric's comment that the girl is pretty, Rosanette exclaims: «Quelle chance pour elle si elle n'a pas de mère!» (p. 128). We soon learn that the reason why Rosanette wishes that the child did not have a mother is because her own abandoned her when she was just fifteen. The adult Rosanette's rivalry with and wariness of other women in the novel is consistent, psychologically speaking, with this formative experience of betrayal by her mother.

Rosanette's description of her childhood home and her mother's betrayal is presented in three modes of discourse. While Flaubert's use of the free indirect discourse generally suggests a degree of complicity with his characters, the addition of both the indirect and direct discourses in the following passage has the competing effect of distancing the narrator from the character's plight:

Rosanette voyait leur chambre, avec les métiers rangés en longueur contre les fenêtres, le pot-bouille sur le poêle, le lit peint en acajou, une armoire en face, et la soupente obscure où elle avait couché jusqu'à quinze ans. Enfin un monsieur était venu, un homme gras, la figure couleur de buis, des façons de dévot, habillé de noir. Sa mère et lui eurent ensemble une conversation, si bien que, trois jours après... Rosanette s'arrêta et, avec un regard plein d'impudeur et d'amertume: 'C'était fait!' (p. 128).

The family's poverty is clearly demonstrated in the details of their lodgings, where the same space served as both a bedroom and the workshop for the father's silk loom, as well as in the fact that Rosanette slept in the same dark loft for fifteen years. This detail appears in stark contrast to the utterly allusive manner in which Flaubert suggests the girl was sold into prostitution. As we well know, what is excluded in Flaubert's text is at times as important as what the text overtly states. Not only are his silences and suspensions ripe with suggestions, they also allow readers to internalize the episode in which they occur, giving the readers, as Ippolito points out in a different context, «an opportunity to pause in discovering the story and to reflect on the narrative with the help of [their] own memory» (p. 20). In this case, the ellipsis underscores the inexpressible response, of both Rosanette and the reader, to the mother's sale of her daughter's body. The narrator, alone, is left out of this emotional response.

Because the dark and dour character who purchased the young girl's body was a married man, the tryst was arranged in the private room of a restaurant. Using terms more befitting a child, the adult Rosanette recalls that: «On m'avait dit, que je serais heureuse et que je recevrais un beau cadeau» (p. 128). But instead of the present she had hoped to receive, she was struck by a series of reflections: «Dès la porte, la première chose qui m'a frappée, c'était un candélabre de vermeil, sur une table où il

y avait deux couverts. Une glace au plafond les reflétait...» (p. 128). These reflections serve to intensify the specular quality of this memory scene, which as we recall was set in motion when Rosanette came face to face with the beggar child with whom she identified. These reflections also prefigure her transformative experience from a child to an adult when later she comes upon a book of lurid images, as we shall soon see.

While seated at the table, Rosanette was served the token drink of adulthood, a large glass of wine, and her head began to spin. To a certain extent, the spinning she felt as her encounter with the man in black drew near echoes the vertigo Flaubert described to Colet when he contemplated the abyss of prostitution. However, the young Rosanette shares neither Flaubert's theory, nor certainly Frédéric's perspective since the novel's central character has a radically different experience of the sexual economy in which he too is embedded. Rosanette's vision of prostitution, her understanding of the threshold she crossed from innocence to experience, the knowledge of what she faced as a child, is more dramatic, more violent even, than what either Frédéric or Flaubert himself suggest they experience in their dealings with prostitution.

Faithful nonetheless to Suzanne Lagier's story, as he received it, Flaubert underlines the girl's youth and vulnerability by having her choose jam, as a child might well do, rather than any of the splendid dishes that were laid out in front of her: «La table était couverte d'un tas de choses que je ne connaissais pas. Rien ne m'a semblé bon. Alors je me suis rabattue sur un pot de confiture, et j'attendais toujours» (p. 128). The detail of her eating jam *straight from the jar* further emphasizes her alienation from the adult feast around her. What's more, Rosanette's memory, her vision of herself as a child stands in stark contrast to the male gaze Frédéric had lain upon the young beggar girl when he imagined her turning into an object of desire when she grew up: «Elle sera bien jolie plus tard» (p. 128). Frédéric's expression of attraction is consistent with his apparent eroticizing attitude towards young girls earlier on in the novel, as evidenced in the following passage: «Une petite fille d'environ douze ans, et qui avait les cheveux rouges, se trouvait là, toute seule. Elle s'était fait des boucles d'oreilles avec des baies de sorbier; son corset de toile grise laissait à découvert ses épaules, un peu dorées par le soleil; des taches de confitures maculaient son jupon blanc; – et il y avait comme une grâce de jeune bête sauvage dans toute sa personne, à la fois nerveuse et fluette» (p. 41)<sup>23</sup>. Flaubert's use of the indirect discourse here is all the more remarkable when read through Rosanette's description because it clearly establishes the messy eating of jam as a sign of childhood.

Rosanette goes on to describe how, after a long wait, while settling down to sleep in the back room of the restaurant, she came across a picture book that would soon tell the story of a buried childhood: «Je ne sais quoi l'empêchait de venir. Il était très tard. Minuit au moins, je n'en pouvais plus de fatigue; en repoussant un des oreillers pour mieux m'étendre, je rencontre sous ma main une sorte d'album, un cahier; c'étaient des images obscènes... Je dormais dessus quand il est entré» (p. 128). Rosanette's crossing point between innocence and experience comes in the form of sleep and, by extension, we are invited to imagine it was prepared in dream, that is in an imaginary state fed by the pornographic images on which the child fell asleep. If one of the functions of Rosanette's story is to bring together the various inchoate events of her past and provide them with a clearer form, this moment of remembering might well stand for a particular form of therapy. Indeed, following Peter Brooks for whom psychoanalysis is «implicitly a narratology»<sup>24</sup>, Ippolito also sees a therapeutic

(23) In this case the girl is the daughter of M. Roque, who will fail in his attempts to have her marry Frédéric.

(24) P. BROOKS, *Psychoanalytic Constructions and Narrative Meanings*, «Paragraph», 1986, 53.

atmosphere in this narrative of memory, but with a twist: «Frédéric, when listening to Rosanette's story, is represented in the position of a psychoanalyst who tries to fill in the gaps of his patient's story: only he is the one who is sick, and he cannot "reconstituer un ensemble" from what Rosanette is telling him» (p. 23).

In any event, the subconscious component to this narrative strongly suggests that Rosanette's transition into prostitution was image-driven, and doubly so. The *album d'images obscènes* offers the young girl an initial image of her new identity and these images are supplemented by the ones in the dreams that accompany sleep. What is certain is that Flaubert presents us here with an inverted mirror structure. Seeing an innocent reflection of her past, in the guise of the beggar girl, Rosanette comes to remember the obscene images between the covers of the book that mirrored what she would later become. Out of this chiastic structure, the innocent child awakens into a new situation, and a new state, as an adult.

The fact that the child describes these images as *obscene* bears underscoring. In particular, the root of the Latin *obscenitas* (*ob* + *scaena*) is clearly operative in this passage. When Rosanette encounters the "album d'images" it appears *off-stage*, extraneous, disconnected from her world. Certainly, the transformation of the character, from her discovery of the lurid album to her awakening, is dramatic. The relationship with the "*album d'images obscènes*" begins as an experience of alterity: the images are radically other, and present themselves on a different stage than the one the child occupies. But, upon awakening, Rosanette finds herself transported both literally and figuratively onto what had been for her an *obscene* stage; she now finds herself in a metonymic relation to the pornographic book, about to perform her first venal sex act.

Flaubert's extremely tight description of a female character's extraordinary transformation is remarkable in and of itself, but it also tells us something important about the child-prostitute as subject. We have previously noted that the story Rosanette recounts can be read as an inverse reflection of the male characters' perspective at the close of *L'Éducation sentimentale*, according to which their first "experience" with venal sex was the best moment of their lives. When we consider the internal reflections of Rosanette's memory, rather than its external reflections (as they relate to the novel's conclusion), the narrative structure of Rosanette's acquisition of a new identity appears to conform to the Lacanian logic of the mirror-stage<sup>25</sup>. If this stage in the child's development effectively takes place somewhere between the ages of 6 and 18 months, it is not necessarily a passing experience of infancy; it is also a model for the relationship the "I" entertains with its self-image throughout its life. The dynamic – and, we should underline, *libidinal* – relationship Lacan locates between the "I" and the image remains active as a force in the subject's psychic life<sup>26</sup>. Lacan's notion of identification has a bearing on our reading of *L'Éducation sentimentale* because in his view the child not only recognizes itself in the image; since the child cannot fully relate its incoherent sense of self with the clearly delineated form it sees in front of it, the child is also *transformed* by the otherness of the image.

This inadequate relationship between the sense of self and self-image will continue to disrupt the subject's experience of existence throughout his or her life. Not only is there no reason for the image that the child sees to be that of an actual mirror, since it can be a mother or another object that allows for identification, but Lacan

(25) See LACAN's 1949 paper *Le Stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je telle qu'elle nous est révélée dans l'expérience psychanalytique* published in *Écrits I*, Paris, Seuil, 1970, pp. 89-97.

(26) «[Le sens de l'activité de reconnaissance par l'enfant de son image réfléchie est] révélateur d'un dynamisme libidinal», p. 90.

stresses the point that this identification is *fictional*, in the sense that the Ideal-I will never fully conform to the subject's real experience of his or herself. «Mais le point important», Lacan writes,

est que cette forme situe l'instance du *moi*, dès avant sa détermination sociale, dans une ligne de fiction, à jamais irréductible pour le seul individu, – ou plutôt, qui ne rejoindra qu'asymptotiquement le devenir du sujet, quel que soit le succès des synthèses dialectiques par quoi il doit résoudre en tant que *je* sa discordance d'avec sa propre réalité (p. 91).

For Lacan, we become something akin to characters that play out the role of the fabricated protagonist in our autobiography. This fictional encounter is what gives pattern, figure, and form to our otherwise inchoate self. In *L'Éducation sentimentale*'s testimony of the prostitute, in the narrative transition from the amorphous consumption of jam from a jar to the mirroring images in the obscene book, Rosanette's *fiction* is brought to light.

With Lacan's notion of the manner in which the subject is transformed by the fictional self-image in mind, if we return to Rosanette's own words as they relate to the obscene book – «Je dormais dessus, quand il est entré» – we begin to hear the modulations in her use of the expression “dormir dessus.” The expression “I'll sleep on it”, “la nuit porte conseil”, is commonly used when speakers plan to *reflect* on a given topic, in their most private of moments. While asleep, Rosanette would certainly have had time to reflect, unconsciously, on the pornographic images she had just seen. The images, then, would have no longer remained *other* for the girl. For Lacan, «le stade du miroir est comme une identification au sens plein que l'analyse donne à ce terme: à savoir la transformation produite chez le sujet quand il assume une image» (p. 90). Flaubert constructs a scene that exemplifies this structure of identification to a remarkable degree: Rosanette becomes a prostitute in the flesh, certainly, but she also identifies, in a psychoanalytic sense, with pornographic images that transport her to an obscene stage, so radically different from that of her childhood<sup>27</sup>. This identification does not contradict the fact that Rosanette has not made her peace with the identity she was thrust into. She is painfully aware that her body was colonized, that it was exposed and invaded by drives other than its own. In the process, she was forced to pass through a sort of inverted looking glass where Rosanette the girl became Rosanette the *filles*. This tension between her adoption of a new identity and her understanding that that identity is alien to her is one of the more dramatic issues Flaubert raises in this memory scene.

When compared with the how feebly Frédéric's final recollection of his past serves him, the impact Rosanette's memory has on her appears to be more ethical, in the sense that it involves a transformation of a way of being and a concern for the feelings and needs of the other. The pain of her childhood memory leads Rosanette to empathize, for example, with the young disheveled beggar girl. From this perspective, the extent to which memory weighs differently on Rosanette and on Frédéric suggests memory is gendered in the novel. While we might sympathize with Frédéric's inability to form *Erfahrungen* from his memory, in other words to synthesize the gross material of experience into inter-related unities of understanding, the way in which Flaubert constructs Rosanette's memory scene certainly arouses our compassion, which extends to the character as both a young girl and as an adult woman and, by association, to the beggar-girl as well. However, once the memory is told, Flaubert hastens to deprive us of the comfort of our sympathy.

(27) The representation of the transition from the specular “I” to the social “I” that normally

takes place in the oedipal phase would here be hyper-condensed into the time-frame of a catnap.

We have already described the dramatic impact of Rosanette's memory as it is verbally expressed. We have also seen that Flaubert provides us with clear indications of the weight of that memory through silences, ellipses, and indirect descriptors. Perhaps the most glaring of these gaps comes immediately after «Je dormais dessus, quand il est entré». No further details are provided of the sexual encounter. We only know that Rosanette reflects in silence on her memory: «Elle baissa la tête et demeura pensive» (p. 128). At this point Flaubert resorts to the artistry of his characteristic tripartite rhythm: «Les feuilles autour d'eux susurraient, dans un fouillis d'herbes une grande digitale se balançait, la lumière coulait comme une onde sur le gazon» (p. 128). The balanced, melodic, and even soothing style used here to describe the environment underscores the silence, the break in Rosanette's story, and perhaps more precisely the moment when her story becomes unspeakable. The harmonious description of the surrounding peace offers a space to reflect on the tragedy of the meaningful memory. In that space, the reader's reflection mirrors Rosanette's silent introspection.

Nonetheless, as we well know, Flaubert is notably resistant to sentiment and certainly no less so in a novel that explores the blunders of an entire generation. Although Rosanette's story of childhood rape makes a strong appeal to our sense of pathos and only finds its emotional equivalent in the description of the loss of her baby (and perhaps also in the story of Dussardier's murder at the hands of his former friend), Flaubert disrupts the soothing pastoral idyll with a subtle but devastating attack. The reflective quiet that is meant to draw us in is broken by the sound of a more base form of rumination: «et le silence était coupé à intervalles rapides par le broutement de la vache qu'on ne voyait plus» (p. 128). Flaubert's irreverence regarding Rosanette's story is manifest here: not only is the previous stylistically elaborate and pleasing reflective moment undermined by a prosaic reference to an *irrelevant* ruminant ("qu'on ne voyait plus"), but Rosanette herself comes to stand in for the *ob-scene* cow: «Rosanette considérait un point par terre, à trois pas d'elle, fixement, les narines battantes, absorbée» (p. 128). After the *lorette* retells her transformation from a girl to a *fille*, the narrator portrays her as *une vache*. In this manner, in keeping with his pervasive irony and his resistance to automatic sentimentality, Flaubert works to unhinge whatever power over the reader the emotional impact of Rosanette's story has by degrading its enunciator. Still, what remains after the scathing critique of the empathetic response to the character of the prostitute, is the analytic precision of the story of her identity formation.

Faithfully-based on what is likely the autobiographical anecdote of a *lorette*, Rosanette's memory of her first experience with prostitution in *L'Éducation sentimentale* stands as an inversion of Frédéric's recollection of his own first contact with venal sex at the close of the novel. If Frédéric considered his willful, albeit failed, attempt to pay for sex as the best moment of his life, Rosanette's forced entrance into the world of sexual commerce was the worst experience of hers, at that point at least in the narrative. Like Frédéric's, Rosanette's description of her past offers a privileged portrayal of the intersection between memory and prostitution in the novel and, like Frédéric's, Rosanette's story appears to structure her experience of loss. But her highly perceptive story also functions as a form of counter-discourse to Frédéric's final narrative wherein, according to the critical consensus, nothing is gained or understood. In particular, Rosanette's memory carries an ethical weight when compared to Frédéric's because while the male hero appears to learn so little from his past, the pain that suffuses the prostitute's memory allows for an empathetic, compassionate relation to others. However appealing this ethical response to her memory may be for the reader, and perhaps precisely *because* of her story's undeniable appeal, Flaubert debases it with biting irony through his masterful use of form. Although he critiques

an ethical response to the sufferings of the prostitute even as he carefully elicits it, Flaubert also offers up a strikingly coherent insight into the prostitutional experience. His portrayal of Rosanette's interaction with a series of reflections that crystallize in a book of obscene images points to the formation of the prostitute's identity as a psychoanalytically-rooted fiction. Furthermore, Rosanette's testimony represents a moment of rare, clear-minded self-reflexivity and, in so doing, offers us a unique and therefore valuable perspective on one of the most ubiquitous determinants of the novel, the idea of prostitution.

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