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Review of Marthe Robert, *En haine du roman*

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ROBERT, MARTHE. *En haine du roman*. Paris: Balland, 1982. 152 pp.

En haine du roman is a lively and well-written discussion with the stated objective of wanting to account for the near religious veneration with which Flaubert viewed his activity as a writer. The answer is that Flaubert's exclusive devotion to writing was a retreat from life, indeed a hatred of it and particularly of the drives towards social success and power and, at root, sexual conquest and procreation. Yet the very fact that he wrote, and that he wrote books like *Madame Bovary* when he (as he sometimes said) preferred writing books like *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, points to the vestige of such drives and also to something like a struggle within between two contending dimensions of his character.

That aspect of Flaubert which was calculating (Balzacian) and scheming for limited but concrete success played out its life in the arduous planning and research of his novels. It also saw itself fictionalized in such characters as Deslauriers of *L'Education sentimentale*. In conflict with it, however, was a side of Flaubert's psychological life that gave itself up to unending dreams of idealized power, wealth and self-enhancement, as limitless as the unstructured thought that articulated them. This was the dominant aspect of Flaubert's personality, the one that provoked his withdrawal from a developed sexual life with women and from the social arena of Paris. Fictionalized, it is Antony, Emma and Frédéric.

The importance of writing was that it allowed Flaubert both to dramatize his inner life (the competing "deux petits bonshommes" mentioned in the correspondence) and, more importantly for Robert, to expiate a sense of guilt for childhood transgressions. Indeed, a number of the juvenilia are discussed (in conjunction with the correspondence) as Flaubert's first attempts to shape his "roman familial," the idealizing (fictionalizing) of his earliest experiences.

The psychoanalytic structure that subtends the argument of *En haine du roman* gives form to two personality types which (for the purposes of literary criticism) vie for power in all novelists and, if these latter are as aware of their inner conflicts as was Flaubert, in their work. These types, which seem based primarily on Freud's work with the Wolfman, are the *Enfant trouvé* (the self-indulgent dreamer) and the *Bâtard* (the schemer). They exist as a response to childhood trauma and, if successfully lived through, are stages on the way to adulthood. Flaubert's development in this sense remained infantile, caught up in a web of patricidal and maternally incestuous desires on the one hand, and of a hatred of the mere fact of having been born (and so of the world) on the other. This explains his immense literary effort: "se sentant coupable de tous côtés, jamais il ne croit faire assez pour se racheter" (147). It also helps explain the incredible violence that is found throughout his work.

En haine du roman is an interesting contribution to Flaubert studies for three reasons. First, it successfully combines the two major currents in today's work: the psychological/sexual study of the man in/and his work and the study of the developmental structure of Flaubert's texts along with the analysis of his rhetoric. Second, it continues the discussion, fueled by Sartre, of the importance of the juvenilia (*Quidquid volueris* and *Passion et vertu* are treated, as well as *Mémoires d'un fou*, *Novembre* and the first *Tentation de saint Antoine*). Third, it brings out and dusts off an old topos in Flaubertian criticism, that of the two conflicting sides of his creative personality. They used to be called the Romantic and the Realist and, in those terms, the discussion played itself out around 1940. The solution, and not a very happy one, was that "he was both." Certainly one merit of Marthe Robert's book is to make an argument for a new look at this dual structure and to show in a developed way how indeed "he was both," and the importance that had on his work.

If the book has an Achilles' heal, it is in being an elaboration of a chapter on Flaubert from an earlier book, *Roman des origines et origines du roman* (Gallimard, 1976). That this may date the argument somewhat is possible but less important than the fact that, in *En haine du roman*, Robert often refers the reader to her earlier study, assuming that certain holes in the present argument can be filled in this way. This is especially true of the typology of the Foundling and the Bastard, which, by Robert's own admission, is more fully documented in *Roman des origines*. One may infer that Robert's interests (and the import of her argument) tend to go beyond Flaubert and point to a phenomenon (that would include Balzac and Kafka) of which Flaubert is one of the more interesting examples.

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