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## Review of Michal Peled Ginsburg, *Flaubert Writing: A Study in Narrative Strategies*

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*Flaubert Writing: A Study in Narrative Strategies.* By MICHAL PELED GINSBURG. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1986. Pp. xii + 207. This study starts from the premise that the young Flaubert had difficulty sustaining his narratives, that once underway, the opposing efforts of both narrator and character to promote their individual interests within the text led to an impasse, a kind of narrational death, which required a particular strategy (presumably on the part of the author) to circumvent the difficulty and keep things going. For Ginsburg this "stammering" (1) was a problem that Flaubert never quite outgrew. Consequently, she invites us to read his development as a novelist in terms of the different solutions the various works bring to the problem of continued narrative and, ultimately, to that of the representation of the self. Barthes's notion of the interchangeability of text and reading is important here, as are certain precepts from Lacan and Derrida, notably that all projections issuing from the self are necessarily of the self and that the self can be said to exist only as it is represented in language. The self in question, however, is not Flaubert's (although Ginsburg is willing to admit this as a marginal hypothesis). It is the spectacle that is projected by the narrator, or by a character turned narrator, that makes Flaubertian narrative possible.

In her reading of the juvenilia (*Mémoires d'un fou, Novembre*, the first *Education sentimentale*) Ginsburg posits an alienation, "the loss of self through self-representation"

(17), that results from an erotic narcissistic doubling. Such doubling occurs when a character begins to "narrate" an idealized version of himself, most often through dream or memory sequences or by projecting an idealized other, thereby provisionally eliminating the "real" self, itself a projected representation. "The mirror image usurps the place of the self and, in so doing, annihilates the self; the mirror image is therefore inherently hostile and threatening" (19). The character then reasserts his interests by annihilating the created spectacle, and so a cycle is generated of projection, differentiation, fear and elimination. With the first *Education* this structure becomes serial in form, as Jules continually shifts his attention from one image to another in the vain search for a unified image of himself.

The succeeding chapters develop, through the mature novels, the consequences of this seriality, by and large within the deconstructionist format of showing where the properties of "pseudo-oppositions" actually shift constantly between the two poles. Thus it is in *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, for example, that the paratactic structure of the parade of images is ordered rhetorically. This time the ordering is according to metonymical contiguity rather than to narcissistic doubling, offering a second structural paradigm. The spectacle is "emancipated" (54), in that it has come from the outside (the Devil), and the opposition appears to be between the self (a function of character) and the "discourse of the other" (48) (a function of the narrator). In the interest of the narrator, the multiplicity of the images guarantees the continuation of the narration, but also the dissolution of the self as a stable entity. Yet the Devil, also, is a spectacle created by Anthony's erudition, and we see in this novel an extended system of internal reduplication based on the notion that all discourse (along with the desire it gives rise to) is derivative.

Ginsburg argues that the rest of the *œuvre* is a further elaboration of these two paradigms. In *Madame Bovary* Flaubert returns to the narrational problems of the earlier narcissistic model in order to demystify it (as a character shaped by others and one who opts to preserve an imaginary self, Emma can never fully become a narrator) and to undermine the ironic discourse of character-narrator separation through constantly changing point of view. *Salammbô* dramatizes a search for signification structured along a metonymical chain of substitutions where a sense of strangeness results from the arbitrary nature of the chain and one of familiarity from the paradigms it produces. What characters take for truth really comes from the accidental, contingent sliding of properties from the strange to the familiar. For Ginsburg *L'Education sentimentale* further demystifies the concept of the self as continuous and psychologically comprehensible. Metonymical structure is generated by subtle shifts in point of view that occur in the movement from dual relationships to triads. This "constant reshuffling" (143) allows the novel to continue, saves Frédéric from the immobility of narcissism and yet turns life into failure. A counter-movement ("metaphorical reversal") is established most completely by Dussardier, who tries to resist change and, in his "success," dies.

For Ginsburg the last novel and stories deal with the futility of creation. They point up that the conflict of the preceding texts is an imaginary one, that the structure of oppositions is only apparent. For example, there is constant "sliding" of identities between Bouvard and Pécuchet, each becoming the other, neither having intrinsic qualities. Moreover, even when considered as one, they have no memory with which to totalize their experience. From the outset the self is unstable. Also the spectacles that the two create

are uncontrollable (e.g., the melons) and are therefore “successful attempts at creation yet failures at controlling reality” (162), that is, at signifying. Ginsburg proposes a similar argument with the stories centered around the structural and thematic importance of the family.

One may differ over the point at which Flaubert began to “deconstruct” the tendentiousness of dialectical opposition, arguing that such thinking began rather early, perhaps even with *Quidquid volueris*. That Flaubert engaged in such writing, though, is beyond question, and we are indebted to Ginsburg for showing us the complexity involved in this narrative practice. Moreover, she brings to her study an impressive familiarity with the vast range of Flaubertian criticism, making her book an extremely helpful synthesis of key subjects such as point of view and closure.

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