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## Review of Gustave Flaubert, *La Première Education sentimentale*, ed. Martine Bercot.

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**Flaubert, Gustave. *La Première Education sentimentale*. Notes and Introduction by Martine Bercot. Paris: Librairie Générale Française, collection Livre de Poche, 1993. Pp. 447.**

For an author as frequently read and, more importantly, as heavily studied as Flaubert, it is somewhat surprising that a reliable edition of the complete works, that would be as useful to today's scholars as appealing to a general public, has yet to be produced. An updated Pléiade edition is underway, though there is yet no indication of how inclusive it will be, nor to what extent it will be an effective instrument for scholarly research. The 1973 Club de l'Honnête Homme edition was certainly ambitious in scope (to include virtually everything), but remains seriously marred in many of its volumes by errors of scholarship. The earlier Conard (1910) and Descharmes (1925) editions are simply obsolete in light of the vast amount of manuscript material and correspondence that has been published over the past half century. Filling the gap are a number of inexpensive, paper editions of the type that normally serve undergraduate-level instruction and a budget-conscious general readership in search of a good introduction to unfamiliar works. What has changed, in these editions (with respect to Flaubert's works, at any rate), is the critical apparatus that, while still containing the familiar chronologies and elementary biographical and bibliographical information, goes considerably further than before in elaborating references that touch the interests of serious students and practicing scholars.

That this new presentation of the 1845 *Education sentimentale* should be such an edition makes perfect sense. After all, the novel is important only in light of Flaubert's development and so of interest almost exclusively to specialists. While not foremost a Flaubert expert, Martine Bercot is a well-known *dix-neuviémiste* who has been able to establish, in her copious notes, a network of references highlighting Flaubert's indebtedness to other writers, the development of his aesthetic over the 10 year period through the completion of *Madame Bovary*, and the myriad thematic, structural and even lexical prefigurations of much of Flaubert's work to come.

Giving full weight to the fact that she is presenting a *roman de formation*, Martine Bercot has also made a thorough reading of the manuscript and offers an appendix of significant variants and marginal notations. Extensive revisions in Flaubert's manuscripts, of the type that has given rise to the preoccupations of *la critique génétique*, do not begin until *Madame Bovary*, and from then on with a vengeance. However, even as a young writer who was more confident with the *premier jet* than he would later be, Flaubert is still interesting in these variants as he begins to reflect more on what he has written.

In his recent (paperback) edition of the *écrits de jeunesse*, Yvan Leclerc stated the dual importance of this body of writing: it documents (for us) the early formation of a major literary figure; it was a conscious point of reference (for Flaubert) in the development of his *œuvre*. As Leclerc makes perfectly clear, there is every indication that, far from repudiating his early writings, Flaubert reread them at intervals throughout his career. In fact, this process may well have begun by 1845, placing this novel at that critical point of transition between juvenile and mature practice. Jules, the novel's artist as a young man, is able to formulate the relationship that already exists between youth and experience: "Je n'ai pas la force de me moquer de ma dernière phrase. Pourquoi l'homme de vingt ans se raillerait-il de celui de quinze, comme plus tard celui-ci sera nié et bafoué par l'homme de quarante? . . . Je respecte encore les joujoux cassés, que j'avais quand j'étais enfant" (75). The astonishing continuity in Flaubert's work is certainly due in part to this acknowledgment, where we recognize the deliberate elaboration of ideas and projects that had their germ as much as thirty years earlier: the *Dictionnaire* and *Boutard et Pécuchet*, the first and last writing of *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, are but two obvious examples. Whence the importance of this novel—the last to deal openly with the vocation of the writer—which certainly merits somewhat more than the "obscurité des romans de formation" (441).

Martine Bercot's edition of the first *Education sentimentale* will be of use to Flaubert scholarship, and may well be the best one available for some time to come. As inexpensive as it is, this volume would also be an excellent addition to any graduate course on Flaubert.

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