

## NOTES AND REVIEWS

### Le Bal Masqué in Flaubert's *L'Éducation Sentimentale*: A Critique of Revolutionary Idealism

In *Le Rouge et le noir*, when the July Revolution begins to affect his characters, Stendhal complains that "La politique au milieu des intérêts d'imagination, c'est un coup de pistolet au milieu d'un concert."<sup>1</sup> Writing *L'Éducation sentimentale*, Flaubert faces the same problem of assimilating real political events to a fiction, attributing to "le défaut du genre historique" his concern that "les fonds emportent les premiers plans."<sup>2</sup> As the antithesis of *le roman sur rien*, "*le genre historique*" seems especially problematic for Flaubert: the reader's convictions about 1848-1851 are an obstacle for the writer who values self-contained fiction.

Critics often identify the obvious parallels between Flaubert's romantic and revolutionary plots as a response to this *problématique* of the historical novel.<sup>3</sup> That the two plots comment ironically on each other seems clear to many; Jean-François Tétu argues convincingly that this irony makes the novel "une sorte de déni de l'Histoire, puisque, au moment même où elle s'affirme dans le texte, sa signification spécifique est niée."<sup>4</sup> However, neither Tétu nor others who focus on the relationship between public and personal threads in *L'Éducation sentimentale* note the central role that the masked ball at Roseanette's house plays in relating these apparently different themes. Indeed, Tétu observes that the chapter ending with the ball (II, p. 1) is the only account of Frédéric's private life which does not correspond to a historical development "ce qui peut, déjà, le dénoncer comme une illusion" (p. 91). One might rather say that the ball scene is not only an event in Frédéric's life but a story that encapsulates the course of French politics from 1848 to 1851 in a manner that deprives them of political significance.

Foreshadowing significant events in Frédéric's love life, the ball episode also foreshadows the Revolution. Unflattering caricatures of all social strata are seen, some in nearly allegorical guises, as in the case of the dyspeptic Angel led off to her cab by a medieval Baron.<sup>5</sup> The liberating frenzy of the first dances, in which aristocrats mingle with fishwives and sailors, is followed by a drunken quarrel

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<sup>1</sup>*Le Rouge et le noir* (Paris: Garnier, 1973), p. 360.

<sup>2</sup>*Correspondance* (Paris: Conrad, 1954), V, 363.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Victor Brombert, *The Novels of Flaubert* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 125-85; Michael Danahy, "Narrative Timing and the Structure of *L'Éducation Sentimentale*," *Romantic Review*, 66 (1975), 32-46; Jean-Pierre Duquette, *Flaubert ou l'architecture du vide* (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1972), pp. 152-72 and "Flaubert, l'histoire, et le roman historique," *RHLF*, 75 (1975), 344-52; Gerhard Gerhardt, "Romantic Love and the Prostitution of Politics: On the Structural Unity in *L'Éducation sentimentale*," *Studies in the Novel*, 4 (1972), 402-15; Lorenza Maranini, *Il '48 nella struttura della Education Sentimentale* (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1963); Marcia Miller, "A Note on Structure and Theme in *L'Éducation sentimentale*," *Studies in Romanticism*, 10 (1971), 130-36; Géralde Nakam, "Le 18 Brumaire de *L'Éducation sentimentale*," *Europe*, 485-87 (1969), 239-48; Béatrice Slama, "Une lecture de *L'Éducation sentimentale*," *Littérature*, 2 (1971), 19-38.

<sup>4</sup>"Désir et révolution dans *L'Éducation sentimentale*," *Littérature*, 15 (1974), 93.

<sup>5</sup>Peter Cortland notes the allegorical function of the Angel and the Baron in *The Sentimental Adventure* (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), p. 33.

during which the guests hurl porcelain while the Fishwife exclaims: "Le bourgeois qui en fabrique nous en cadote!"<sup>6</sup> Chaos ends when Roseanette orders the guests to obey her. "Je suis votre maréchale! Ils s'exécèrent, et tous applaudirent en criant: 'Vive la Maréchale!'" (p. 125). The parallels with February and June 1848, and with Louis-Napoleon's coup, are obvious.

More important than allegory is the idea of masking and role playing. While some costumes—e.g. Roseanette as dragoon, the doctor Des Rogis as a Molière physician—are ironically appropriate, we usually note the disparity between guest and costume. Delmar is Dante, a potbellied man of forty is a choir boy, the feminist Mlle Vatnaz is a veiled Arabian. Often the costumes seem to have more life than the guests: Frédéric sees "une masse de couleurs qui se balançait aux sons d'un orchestre caché"; the women rise and "leurs jupes, leurs écharpes, leurs coiffures se mirent à tourner" (pp. 114, 120). Like Delmar, who goes through five stage names, the guests change and exchange identities: ". . . la Débardeuse se disloquait comme un clown, le Pierrot avait des façons d'orangoutang . . ." (p. 126).

Producing an impossible confusion of periods and classes, the costumes contribute to the dreamlike dislocation of time that characterizes the episode. Frédéric responds with "un sentiment d'abandon, un malaise," the "mouvement giratoire . . . vertigineux" of the dancers creates "une sorte d'ivresse," and the scene ends with his prophetic dream, "l'hallucination du premier sommeil" (pp. 116, 117, 120, 127). Even the narrator contributes to our disorientation by intruding uncharacteristically: ". . . ces élégances, qui seraient aujourd'hui des misères pour les pareilles de Roseanette, l'éblouirent" (p. 117). Images of fragmentation—"une sorte de pulvèrulence lumineuse," "poudre d'iris," "costumes fripés, poudreux"—quite literally break up the physical setting (pp. 117, 120). In the hothouse atmosphere everyone seems breathless: Roseanette "haletait un peu," "La Poissarde, que la mesure trop rapide essouffait, poussait des rires," the little group that dances furiously "n'en pouvant plus, s'arrêtèrent et on ouvrit une fenêtre" (pp. 116, 120, 126). Most ominous is the tubercular Sphinx "ne résistant plus au sang qui l'étouffait" (p. 124).

Repetition of the motifs of the masked ball in Flaubert's description of the sacking of the Tuileries signals the ball's importance to the novel's political themes. Walking toward the palace, Frédéric is amused; "Il lui semblait assister à un spectacle" (p. 288). As the mob rushes up the stairs, Frédéric sees them, like the dancers, moving "à flots vertigineux" (p. 289). The people quickly acquire costumes: "La canaille s'affubla ironiquement de dentelles et de cachemire . . . des rubans de la Legion d'honneur firent des ceintures aux prostituées" (p. 290). Like the guests, "les uns dansaient, d'autres buvaient" (p. 291). As at the ball "le délire redoublait son tintamarre continue des porcelaines brisées . . ." (p. 291). There is soon a "nuage de poussière" and "toutes les poitrines haletaient; la chaleur de plus en plus devenait suffocante; les deux amis, craignant d'être étouffés, sortirent" (p. 291).

According to Tétu (pp. 88-90), such parallel episodes neutralize each other. But the sacking of the Tuileries is too easily made into a commentary on the mob's irresponsibility; unlike the June days, it hardly needs to be neutralized. Rather, the episode at the Tuileries is the fullest illustration of how the masked ball serves as a model, generating images that deform our perception of the political events. Flaubert suggests that the revolutionaries love role playing: "Comme chaque personnage se réglait alors sur un modèle, l'un copiant Saint-Just, l'autre Danton,

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<sup>6</sup>Gustave Flaubert, *L'Éducation sentimentale* (Paris: Garnier, 1964), p. 124. All quotations are from this edition and will appear in the text.

l'autre Marat, lui, il tâchait de ressembler à Blanqui, lequel imitait Robespierre" (p. 303). Such role playing signals inauthenticity or childishness. Thus the historical fact that the deputies of the new assembly were supposed to dress up like the men of '89 is put to advantage: Frédéric "était séduit par le costume que les députés . . . porteraient. Déjà, il se voyait en gilet . . . et ce prurit, cette hallucination devint . . . forte . . ." (p. 229). As the political climate changes, most of the characters assume new masks: Sénécal, Deslauriers, and Arnoux go through several professions; Pellerin's paintings acquire new subjects.

Characters change roles so easily in part because they need to be dominated. No sooner was the new government in power than "la réaction . . . se démasquait" (p. 296). People scorn weakness in those in power: "La France, ne sentant plus de maître, se mit à crier d'effarement . . ." (p. 297). Deslauriers complains that the masses prostrate themselves "tour à tour devant l'échafaud de Robespierre, les bottes de l'Empereur, le parapluie de Louis-Philippe" (p. 369). The narrator says the same of M. Dambreuse, who cherishes power "d'un tel amour qu'il aurait payé pour se vendre" (p. 378). The sexual origins of such love are as obvious in Flaubert's descriptions of the politics of Dambreuse and his friends as they are in the ball scene: ". . . ils auraient vendu la France ou le genre humain, pour garantir leur fortune . . . ou même par simple bassesse, adoration instinctive de la force" (p. 239).

The irrationality of political behavior is also reflected in two other themes established in the ball episode. The anachronisms of a masquerade become the anachronisms of politicians who borrow incompatible ideas from different periods. Deslauriers and the narrator again agree: Deslauriers describes the February government as composed of "débris louis-quatorziens, de ruines voltairiennes, avec du badigeon impérial par-dessus et des fragments de constitution anglaise . . ." (p. 177). Sénécal's ideal democracy, says the narrator, would have "le double aspect d'une métairie et d'une filature, une sorte de Lacédémone américaine où l'individu n'existerait que pour servir la Société, plus omnipotente, absolue, infaillible et divine que les Grands Lamas et les Nabucho-donosors" (p. 137). The artistic tribute to such thinking is Pellerin's painting "la République, ou le Progrès, ou la Civilisation, sous la figure de Jésus-Christ conduisant une locomotive . . ." (p. 300). And, as in the sacking of the Tuileries, Flaubert associates revolutionary moments with a dreamlike sense of unreality. Even when the harmless iris powder of the masked ball has become real gun powder, amid the horrors of prison, the June rebels are "tellement *hébétés* par la douleur qu'il leur semblait vivre dans un *cauchemar*, une *hallucination* funèbre" (p. 337; emphasis added).

Such reminders of the masked ball, projected onto historical scenes, form a negative commentary on them. These echoes also set up the expectation of a political outcome parallel to the end of the masked ball. Not only does a dictator seem inevitable, but the reader is conditioned to expect a vision of death to cut through the masquerade. At the ball, Frédéric observes the Sphinx coughing blood and shudders, "pris d'une tristesse glaciale" in a horrible epiphany of death, "les cadavres de la Morgue en tablier de cuir, avec le robinet d'eau froide qui coule sur leurs cheveux" (p. 124). M. Rogue's murder of the starving prisoner and Sénécal's of Dussardier have a similar shock value. Whatever political realities Flaubert ignores or displaces, he does not disguise violent death; rather, his text insists that it is the only reality that cannot be masked.

Stendhal's image of a gunshot in a concert assumes that an art form dependent on measured divisions of time cannot assimilate the unexpected, uncontrolled, once-and-for-all character of a political event. Yet if the composer incorporated the

sound of a firing gun into the score, a real gunshot would be harder to detect; it would be robbed of its singularity. The masquerade, as we have seen, serves a similar function. For Flaubert was well aware that the artist who describes history can use hindsight advantageously, as we see in his description of Delmar's successes: "Un drame, où il avait représenté un manant qui fait la leçon à Louis XIV et prophétise 89, l'avait mis en telle évidence qu'on lui fabriquait sans cesse le même rôle. . . . Brasseur anglais, il invectivait Charles Ier; étudiant de Salamanque, maudissait Phillippe II . . . s'indignait contre la Pompadour, c'était le plus beau!" (pp. 174, 175). In the richly imaginative masquerade scene, Flaubert, like Delmar, anticipates historical events in a way that was, of course, impossible for the real participants; doing so, he transforms the open-ended time of history into the closed time of a novel that approaches formal perfection. On all levels, then, the masked ball accomplishes what Sartre sees as the ideal of Flaubert's romantic phase: ". . . l'attitude *poétique* n'était que la fuite du réel dans l'imaginaire; l'activité *artistique* consiste à dévaloriser le réel en réalisant l'imaginaire."<sup>7</sup>

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*L'Idiot de la famille*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), II, 1488.

## HUGH KENNER

### *Ulysses*

Winchester, Massachusetts: Allen and Unwin, 1980. Pp. 182.  
\$15.95

About fifteen book-length studies of *Ulysses* have appeared in the last five years, but a new book by Hugh Kenner, consistently the most stimulating and enjoyable of Joyce's many critics, stands out from the rest. Kenner presents here his first extended reading of Joyce's masterwork since the still influential *Dublin's Joyce* of 1956. Without abandoning the emphasis on detail that is his hallmark and that has earned *Dublin's Joyce* a lasting place in Joyce studies, Kenner now offers a significantly revised interpretation of *Ulysses*, one that evolves not only from his thirty years of attention to the text but also from recent trends in *Ulysses* criticism. Specialists will appreciate Kenner's fresh readings of previously familiar passages, the consistencies and contrasts between his earlier studies and his one,\* and the

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\*Readers interested in tracing the development of Kenner's approach to *Ulysses* should consult three of his articles and the relevant sections of five of his books: *Dublin's Joyce* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1956); *The Stoic Comedians: Flaubert, Joyce, and Beckett* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962); *The Counterfeiters* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968; rpt. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1973); three articles in the *James Joyce Quarterly*: "Homer's Sticks and Stones," 6 (1969), 285-98, "Molly's Masterstroke," 10 (1972), 19-28, and "The Rhetoric of Silence," 14 (1977), 382-94; *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); and *Joyce's Voices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). The transition to the later approach can probably be located in "Homer's Sticks and Stones"; except perhaps for the frequently strident *Dublin's Joyce*, all the studies are delightful as well as instructive.