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Editing Flaubert: From Paper to Screen. Among Texts and Avant-textes.

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In order to deal with the editorial problems raised by the work of Gustave Flaubert, I would like here to focus on the point of intersection of two developments, both of them historical, although in different senses. The first one is related to a changing technological situation, thanks to the fast and widespread movement towards using digital supports for the publication of large-scale corpora. The networks for publishing research in France, nonetheless, remain strongly tied to the printed medium. The second problem, less historical than biographical, is rather in connection with my scientific career. I would like to explain how my work on Flaubert's *avant-textes* and their publication have transformed my vision of what the final edited version of a text should be, whether it be on paper or in digital form. I will thus especially try to emphasize the interferences at the crossroads (between history and my story), while describing various projects in progress.

The corpus of Flaubert's « complete works » is well defined and of approachable size; it has nothing in common with Balzac's *Human Comedy* or Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. It contains a collection of « short stories », entitled *Three Tales*, four novels: *Madame Bovary*, *Salammbô*, *A Sentimental Education* and *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, and a text of a problematic genre : *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, a hybrid between novella and play. The non-specialist generally thinks that each Flaubertian work in progress underwent a laborious drafting process, leading to a final validation by its author, as he sent it off to press. Any errors, the reader also assumes, should have been revised during each revision; in this way, the text is imbued with seemingly unshakeable authority. Part of the contract between the reader and the author of *Madame Bovary*, consists in having access to the text as the author conceived it, untainted by any possible corruption. This corpus, reduced and apparently stable and reliable, thus lends itself quite naturally to print publishing. It is “enclosed upon” itself, just like the formal and stylistic perfection of the texts it contains. The container must live up to what it contains -- an issue which is a commonplace in scholarship on Flaubert's working method: his search for the right word, that word which might contain the thought without deforming it. For these reasons, editors like to publish Flaubert's texts, and refer without problems to « the last authorized publication » of his works.

In France, the *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade* published by Gallimard is the most renowned series, both for its scientific and its material qualities: printed on Bible paper, with full leather gilt-edged covers, the texts often are the best ones available. When an author is published within the series, it is a consecration (generally posthumous) for him or her and his or her works. And the text in a « Pléiade » publication becomes untouchable, fixed for eternity, or at least nearly so.

How does Flaubert fit into all of this? As early as 1936, a set of two volumes was published in the *Pléiade* by two eminent specialists of the time: Albert Thibaudet and René Dumesnil. The edited works were not complete but the edition is still on sale nowadays because it continues to fill the expectations of a large part of the readership, embodied in this ideal reader

that might be called the *honest man*. However, progress in scholarship and the desire to satisfy a new kind of readership led Gallimard publishers to undertake a new editorial project at the beginning of the 1990s, this time entitled *Complete Works* and slated to fill five volumes. The first one, subtitled *Early Writings* was published in 2001 and is of great interest, insofar as it provides easy and global access to posthumous and partly unpublished texts which were otherwise difficult to find.

Nevertheless, some of the editorial choices of the series remain open to questions. Claudine Gothot-Mersch explains in her “Note on this edition” that works published by Flaubert in his lifetime are given in their last authorized version: no combination of different publications is allowed. This is a good working method, which provides a solid and irrefutable foundation to the text. Once published on Bible paper, Flaubert’s texts rise to their ultimate culmination, as if they were engraved on marble tablets. No word need ever be changed; the perfect contents have found their ideal container. However, some inaccuracies in the idea of considering the printed text as an ideal recipient for Flaubert’s works became apparent to me as I began to work on Flaubert’s *avant-textes* and to publish them.

During the time that genetic criticism became a full literary scientific field (from the beginning of the 1970’s to the end of the 1980’s), numerous debates arose within this scientific community as to how to best publish genetic dossiers, such as: What standards of presentation should be chosen? What type of dossier should be privileged? The majority of these questions were expressly connected to the shape of the printed book. I was personally confronted with this issue in my doctoral thesis: a part of this work consisted of publishing all the manuscripts related to a chapter of Flaubert’s last novel, *Bouvard and Pécuchet*. I had to transcribe and classify chronologically more than two hundred pages of documents. Through this study, I came to understand some of the general mechanisms which govern Flaubert’s writing techniques (the “complex mechanics” through which he explained how he built up sentences) and I was able to establish a detailed chronology of the drafting of the whole chapter. Nevertheless, it is important to recall that during the scriptural process, Flaubert seldom uses a page only once: it is written in several stages, then it is wholly or partially erased, only to be taken up again, several times and at different times. A printed publication is technically unable to reproduce this complex temporal dimension of the writing process; and what is perhaps more disconcerting is that this dimension tends to become obscure, even written off by a printed publication.

Fortunately, in the 1990s, while I was drafting my work, a true revolution started: with the generalization of access to digital technology, the issue of publishing *avant-textes* was completely renewed. Hypertextual publishing finally offered solutions which had remained mere dreams until then, to the specific problems raised by genetic dossiers. Breaking with the sequential, two-dimensional logic of the book, it allows for the re-introduction of time (the text’s third dimension) and permits non-sequential sequences. In the case of Flaubert, the initiative came from the Institute of Texts and Modern Manuscripts, a part of the National Centre For Scientific Research. The first-used corpus was the *incipit* of the tale entitled *Hérodias*. Already widely analysed from a literary and genetic standpoint, this very limited corpus made it possible to assess the technical operation and to evaluate the possibilities offered by a digital interface. A model of hypertextual navigation in the first lines of the tale was produced using HyperCard software. It allowed to connect and make minimally searchable eight large groups corresponding to the various types of documents available in the genetic dossier of *Hérodias*. The visual interface was not very attractive and there was very little interactivity. However, the results were convincing and showed that henceforth the hypertextual medium was *the* path to follow for the publication of genetic dossiers.

However, the hypertextual interface had still never been directly tested by the public. This stage of development was reached in 1995 with the diskette included with the publication of the *Plans and scenarios of Madame Bovary*. Various pre-defined modes of navigation were

proposed, but there, especially, the user of the floppy disk was finally able « to chart his or her own course through the *avant-texte* [...], to record, to modify, and annotate these peregrinations through the text ». Although not very visually convincing and moreover explicitly conceived to come with the printed edition and not to replace it, this « hyperscenario » was nevertheless the first offered, if not to the general public, at least to an audience of scholars beyond the limited circle of its own designers. Formatted for Macintosh, and technologically quite dated, the floppy disk is no longer easily exploitable today.

With the increasing role of the Internet in the scientific community by the end of the 1990s, the first large-scale project got off the ground with the goal of offering the complex genetic dossier of, if not one complete novel, at least of a significant corpus to the eyes of the public-at-large: scholars, high-school students, or simply to the curious reader. Named « History in the Making », this project aims to make available, in the form of facsimiles and transcriptions, all the manuscript pages related to the longest chapter of *A Sentimental Education*, that is, more than four hundred folios in all. The material is organized in typological layers: scenarios, sketches, drafts, the original manuscript, the copyist's manuscript and the first edition, all layers between which one can navigate thanks to numerous hypertextual links of various natures: some links allow the reader to follow the writing process syntagmatically or paradigmatically; others refer to the historical documentation consulted by Flaubert; and finally, some give access to a genetic commentary.

This is an impressive achievement which shows to what degree a satisfying treatment of *avant-textes* is now closely dependent on digital technology. Nevertheless, some problems remain. For instance, navigation is quite rigid: the user can neither call into question the typological identification of the pages, nor change the genetic classification imposed by the site. Also, personal navigating experiences through the site are not recordable; and finally no annotation can be added. But, moreover, some of the technical decisions which were made go against current encoding initiatives. The people in charge of the project chose to scan the transcriptions, so the site actually presents only "images" (for the facsimiles and for the transcriptions) which cannot be tagged or marked up. Even if this scientific choice does not eliminate the interest of the site, it considerably limits its chances of durability.

The next site I would like to consider in my survey, remedies the insufficiencies found in the previous ones: it tackles the *avant-texte* of a complete novel, *Madame Bovary*, and will offer, in due course, transcriptions of the images marked up in HTML format. The Flaubert Center of the University of Rouen, in collaboration with an international team of transcribers, has begun putting the forty-five hundred pages of manuscripts online. Two sites are available for consultation, one version with images in JPEG format, the other with images in DjVu format. The pedagogical aspect of the project, which as of now is only related to the sixth chapter of the first part (« Emma's education »), already partially online, is very promising and emphasizes the obvious interest of the hypertextual use of these manuscripts.

It is no longer necessary to demonstrate the utility, and even the necessity, of tapping the possibilities of the digital medium for the publication of rough drafts. But my experience with the shifting levels of the *avant-textes* was not without impact on my own understanding of what a definitive text should be. Previously, I thought that nothing prevented a printed edition from containing all the elements necessary for an informed reading of Flaubert's finished works. Now I am not so sure any more: a hypertext edition of these texts currently being completed could indeed prove as useful and necessary as that of the *avant-textes*.

Digital editions of Flaubert's finished works, with various interfaces, have been on the market for several years now. While they do allow simple textual searches, the hypertextuality and the interactivity remain at their earliest stages. The quality of the scan and subsequent character recognition are rarely satisfactory, and it is too often impossible to know exactly which

edition was used. The versions easily found on institutional or personal sites today frequently display the same defects. However, in spite of the fact that the publication is in "images" format, they do give access to texts which were never included in commercial products, such as the juvenilia or the correspondence which now belong to the public domain. But they are not at all real hypertext editions. The digital edition should not content itself with affording remote access to printed – and almost always old – reference editions. Its goal is not one of conservation, permitting yet another reprint, which would be no more than a return to the old age of mechanical reproduction. A hypertextual edition must offer something else, and in particular should reveal the textual fault lines running through the allegedly compact mass of Flaubert's definitive works.

Indeed, without his knowledge, a significant number of changes were made between the definitive manuscripts and the editions which were published in his lifetime. Modifications were first introduced at the stage between Flaubert's final handwritten manuscript and the rather more legible version of a professional copyist. For example, when Emma Bovary [becomes conscious again after her first act of adultery (Part II, Chapter 9), Flaubert writes that she « charmingly » hears a « vague and prolonged » cry. Yet the copyist substituted another adverb: « silently ». He also made some sequences of the text incoherent. The day after the ball at La Vaubyessard (Part I, Chapter 8), « there was a numerous company at lunch, which was all over in ten minutes », he wrote; whereas under Flaubert's pen, one can read: « there were few people at lunch, which was all over in ten minutes ». At the beginning of *The Legend of Saint Julien the Hospitaler*, peace has reigned in the country for such a long time that the moat of the castle is now « full of grass », as Flaubert wrote; however, for the copyist, it is « full of water ». Sometimes, the copyist even forgot parts of sentences, or complete sentences, in particular when they were located at the bottom of the pages. It is probably what occurred in *A Sentimental Education*, when Frédéric vainly knocks at the door of the painter Pellerin to find out the address of Arnoux's new residence (Part II, Chapter 1): « The vacuum alone answered him. A funeral presentiment invades him », can be read on Flaubert's manuscript, whereas the second clause is omitted on the manuscript of the copyist.

Then it was the printers' turn to introduce modifications, for the first or the following publications. For example, the unlikely presence of spring violets in an autumnal landscape from Normandy (*Madame Bovary*, Part II, Chapter 9) is explained by the inaccurate introduction of a simple partitive article within a noun group in the 1869 edition. This appearance was enough to transform some « nappes violettes » (« purple blankets »), which was a right depiction of heathers, into astonishing « nappes de violettes » (« blankets of violets »). As for the omissions due to the printers, they are innumerable! If Flaubert did not find them, it is because he hated proofreading. When it was printed, his own prose became unfamiliar to him.

However, I do not mean that Flaubert never made a voluntary correction on proofs and that no modification coming after the final manuscript of the works must be accepted. But I wish the reader had all the tools (that is to say all the informations and instantaneous access to all the useful documents) to evaluate with full knowledge of the facts what must justifiably be considered as the author's correction, and what can legitimately be called an error of the copyist or of the typographer. The textologic prescription which requires - whatever happens - to refer to the last authorized publication should not survive the revolution of the digital edition.

It is even more obvious if we take a look at the ultimate work of Flaubert, *Bouvard and Pécuchet*. This posthumous novel cannot take advantage of the usual guarantee of the writer's final decision: still today, every scientific edition brings its set of new readings and improves the material deciphering of this work which exists only in handwritten form: recently, « joncs » (« rushes ») became « ronces » (« brambles »), « cintres » (« semicircular arch »), « ceintures » (« enclosure »), et « la vie » (« the life »), « le vice » (« the vice »). But *Bouvard and Pécuchet* is also an unfinished novel, the first volume of which presents plural and polymorphic marks of this incompleteness, which make it almost impossible to be published in a traditional printed form:

for example, when two verbs were left together and the writer didn't chose between the two, or, even more serious, when two structures coexist on the same page for the same episode. Limits of printed publishing are then clearly exceeded. With regard to the "second volume" which Flaubert left as a huge documentary set, the printed publications which were attempted could only fail to render the complexity of the way it functions. That is why I plan to work soon on a hypertextual edition. This technical device will preserve the inherent plasticity of this collection of documents – currently artificially immobilized although it was in a process of narrative absorption or eviction; it will allow the user to see – spreading out before his or her own eyes – the unstable multitude of possible readings, contained in this singular documentary set, without having to freeze it in a given linear structure.

Incredible technological progress occurred during the past twenty years. This progress and the unsatisfactory printed editions of Flaubertian avant-textes made me reevaluate my conception of the « best edition » of Flaubert's finished texts. In fact, both aspects are not opposed at all; on the contrary, they may add up and one may dream of a « total edition » which would contain all Flaubert's finished texts and avant-textes, a sort of « Hyper-Flaubert » in a way. Every reader would then be able to freely navigate, choosing the desired quantity of information and level of complexity.

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