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Michael Fried, *Flaubert's 'Gueuloir.'* On 'Madame Bovary' and 'Salammbô.' New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012. ix + 184 pp. Figures, notes, index, and photograph credits. \$35.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-300-18705-2.

Review by Anne Green, King's College London.

The *gueuloir* of this book's title refers to Gustave Flaubert's working practice of reading out his latest draft at the top of his voice so as to detect any deficiencies of style. The method allowed him to hear and adjust the rhythm and cadences of his prose and to become aware of unwanted repetitions of sounds. What preoccupies Michael Fried are those "assonances, consonances and repetitions of all sorts" (p. 2) that nevertheless survive in the published versions of Flaubert's texts. *Flaubert's 'Gueuloir'* consists of two essays preceded by an introduction in which Fried explains the origins of his book: reading *Madame Bovary* in his twenties in French for the first time, he had been struck by the failure of English translations to convey any hint of the distinctive texture of Flaubert's writing. It is that untranslatable texture, "intermittently, albeit not infrequently, shot through with the sort of phonemic effects that [Flaubert] claimed he wished to eliminate" (p. 2) that intrigues Fried and is central to the essays that follow.

The first of these, "Style and Habit in *Madame Bovary*," focuses on Fried's observation that, despite having been subjected to the *gueuloir*, many passages in the novel still contain a wealth of alliterations and consonances and thus seem to him to have resisted or defied Flaubert's drive for perfection. Fried admits that "the French language is for me not an atmosphere I unreflectingly breathe nor an ocean in which I confidently swim," but he believes that this may make him more sensitive to "certain quasi-material features" of a text which might be missed by a native speaker (p. 31). Citing a series of lengthy passages from the novel (both in the original and in an English translation), he observes how frequently Flaubert's prose features dense alliteration, and he notes in particular the repetition of the consonants c, v, p, d, and t, asking whether they somehow escaped Flaubert's notice—"whether at least some of those repetitions are the result of automatisms of one sort or another" (p. 35). What Fried wishes to argue, as he does rather breathlessly, is that *Madame Bovary* "turns out to be marked by two seemingly antithetical characteristics: on the one hand, a new and altogether radical thematization of writerly intention, directed toward the actualization of an almost unattainable ideal of stylistic perfection and imagined as essentially divorced from the expression of any merely contingent feature of the writer's life and opinions; and second, the proliferation throughout the novel of an extraordinary range and variety of linguistic and proto-linguistic effects categorizable, more or less, with the aid of terms like assonance, consonance, alliteration, rhymes, off-rhymes, resemblances between words and names, repetitions and near-repetitions of all sorts, and so on, some significant portion of which is attributable, it would seem, to something other than authorial control." The coexistence of these apparently antithetical characteristics is, argues Fried, "the defining feature of *Madame Bovary* as a work of artistic prose" (p. 55, Fried's emphasis).

In part six of the essay, Fried turns his attention to the idea of habit, and in particular to *De l'habitude*, a short treatise published in 1838 by the philosopher, Félix Ravaisson.[1] Ravaisson's insistence on a fundamental continuity between will and nature is what interests Fried, for Ravaisson considers habit to

be the dividing line between the two. "Habit is the dividing line, or the middle term, between will and nature: but it is a moving middle term, a dividing line that is always moving, and which advances by an imperceptible progress from one extremity to the other. [...] Consequently, habit can be considered as a method—as the only real method—for the estimation, by a convergent infinite series, of the relation, real in itself but incommensurable in the understanding, of Nature and Will." [2] Although Fried admits that there is no evidence that Flaubert ever read *De l'habitude* or even knew of its existence, its interest for him lies in the fact that Ravaisson's argument seems to correspond to his own perception of a constant antithetical tension between automaticity and intention operating at a microlinguistic level in the prose of *Madame Bovary*. This is not the first time that Fried has written about *De l'habitude*, however; Ravaisson's treatise informed his work on *Courbet's Realism* [3] and part seven of "Style and Habit in *Madame Bovary*" is devoted to a lengthy summary and extract from that book. What Fried sees as Courbet's predilection for pictorial structures "that evoke a continuity between absorptive states and conditions" and his "tendency to thematize the mutual interpenetration of action and passivity" (p. 82), are indicative, he argues, of a "profound affinity between Ravaisson's metaphysics and Courbet's art" (p. 80). While at pains to deny that he is suggesting that *De l'habitude* in any sense lies behind the achievements of Flaubert or Courbet, Fried nevertheless claims that "something like a Ravaissonian conception of habit, or say a Ravaissonian intuition of the continuity between will and nature as mediated by habit, plays a role—different in the two cases—in Courbet's Realist paintings [and in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*]" (p. 84).

In the closing sections of the essay, Fried reviews related discussions of Flaubert by critics as diverse as Charles Baudelaire, Charles Du Bos, Marcel Proust, Albert Thibaudet, and Jonathan Culler, before ending with a coda on Emma Bovary's funeral. Arguing that Flaubert could not have been unaware of Courbet's monumental painting of *A Burial at Ornans* (1849-1850), which was exhibited in Paris in 1850-1851 and again in 1855, Fried contends that "even a cursory glance at an illustration of the *Burial* reveals how much it has in common with Flaubert's description [of Emma's cortège]" (p. 103). He speculates that Flaubert would have realized that the funeral in *Madame Bovary* offered him the opportunity to go beyond the realism of Courbet's painterly achievement, and that *A Burial at Ornans* may have spurred him to make a supreme effort when writing his own burial scene; thus by emphasizing sounds and smells and indicating the tiniest of movements with great linguistic delicacy he was able to achieve effects that went beyond the power of painting.

In this volume's second, shorter essay, "Willing *Salammbô*," Fried turns to the novel that followed *Madame Bovary*. With its setting in ancient Carthage and its roll-call of historical figures and alien deities, *Salammbô* of course differs from its predecessor in the most obvious ways, but the difference that interests Fried is a subtler stylistic one. Citing the novel's opening paragraphs, he asserts that "one has the sense (at any rate, I have the sense) of absolute authorial control, the impression, put more strongly the conviction, that all the alliterations and consonances and repetitions, and beyond that the complex phonic/visual phonemic pattern to which they give rise, have been intended as such by the writer" (p. 114). Fried's central claim is that, in *Salammbô*, Flaubert was attempting to produce a work that would be exclusively the product of conscious intention, devoid of the effects of automatism noted in *Madame Bovary*, and that his chosen style was "one designed to foreground the action of authorial will at every point" (p. 119). Flaubert's use of unfamiliar, exotic words and names is taken as evidence of his wish "to confront the reader with the sheer willfulness of the writing" (p. 122), just as the novel's scenes of gratuitous violence are seen as proof of Flaubert's "determination to subject the reader to his will" (p. 140). Fried even suggests we can see elements of Flaubert himself in both Hamilcar, with his tactical genius and impenetrable expression, and in the howling, wounded elephant ("*Fureur de Baal/ Flaubert*") (p. 141).

Although Fried's main argument about the relationship between intention and habit is interesting, this book has many puzzling aspects. The function of Flaubert's *gueuloir* was not to screen out *all* repeated sounds but merely to alert him to unwanted "mauvaise[s] assonance[s]" [4] and so the book's original

premise that *Madame Bovary's* phonic repetitions have somehow escaped Flaubert's attention seems dubious. And despite his focus on the central idea of habit, Fried does not try to explore Flaubert's acute awareness of the linguistic automatisms of his contemporaries, or his lifelong preoccupation with received ideas, or his fiction's frequent and varied thematization of the habitual.

In his introduction, Fried disarmingly admits that "the reader's patience is likely to be stretched thin" (p. 4), but the intended readership of this book remains unclear. Flaubert specialists will already be familiar with the views of major critics whose arguments are here summarised or quoted at great length, and they are unlikely to need a definition of *style indirect libre* or the many pages of quotations from *Madame Bovary* and *Salammbô*, complete with English translation. Moreover, their confidence in Fried's attention to detail will be undermined by the very large number of errors in the French transcriptions, and by factual slips such as his assertion that Maupassant was Flaubert's nephew (p. 52). Art historians will already be familiar with Fried's books on Courbet and Manet, whose arguments are extensively repeated here, while non-specialists may be unwilling to persevere with the book's mass of quotation and its discursive prose. In proposing analogies between the works of Flaubert, Ravaisson, Courbet and Manet, however, Fried does a service in pointing to hitherto unsuspected undercurrents of thought linking these major nineteenth-century figures.

## NOTES

[1] Félix Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, trans. and ed. Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair (London and New York: Continuum, 2008).

[2] Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, p. 59.

[3] Michael Fried, *Courbet's Realism* (Chicago and London, 1990).

[4] In a letter to George Sand on 10 March 1876, Flaubert wrote: "Quand je découvre une mauvaise assonance...dans une de mes phrases, je suis sûr que je patauge dans le Faux." *Correspondance*, ed. Jean Bruneau and Yvan Leclerc (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), vol. V, p.26.

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