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Flaubert: from dervish to saint

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Flaubert: from dervish to saint

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Le Conte Oriental fait place à la Tentation, dont il
constitue par bien des aspects les Prolégomènes.

Jean Bruneau (94)

La Tentation de Saint-Antoine [est] un idéal
mêlant époques et races dans une prodigieuse
fête, comme l'éclair de l'Orient expiré...

Stéphane Mallarmé (549)

The Oriental Tale from Imitation to Creative Borrowing

- 1 The Oriental tale is a European sub-genre developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Through it, writers used Oriental settings and characters to discuss issues relevant to Europe – but somehow suppressed in Europe – rather than explore the Orient as such. The translation and importation of Oriental texts, and particularly folktales from the Orient, inspired this mode. The European Oriental tale imitated Arabic, Persian, Turkish, or Indian tales as far as narrative elements are concerned. By defamiliarizing and exoticizing characters and settings, it was able to express what was politically, ethically, or aesthetically unacceptable or considered “incorrect” at the time. Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes* is a good example of saying what is politically risky by attributing it to the Other. The Oriental façade was thus the outside mask that allowed the inner tensions and deviations from the norms of the day to surface. The Romantic élan as well as the sexually daring or the politically incorrect took refuge in the Orient.
- 2 Traveling to the Orient was the dream of bohemian and artistic spirits to experience not so much difference of other cultures and mentalities, but to let loose pent up desires of power, possession, and sexuality. The dialectic of Self and Other was often not dislodged by such voyages, though what was modified was the dialectic between the latent and manifest selves. Writing the Oriental tale was also a means of excavating the depths of the Self without the dangers of doing so plainly and directly. As soon as breaking away from strict neoclassical norms and standard modes of narration became possible and acceptable in the realm of European poetics and aesthetics, the Oriental tale became subdued if not obsolete. It had no more a raison d’être. It had functioned as

a bridge, as a mediator between the imposed model and the rebellious imagination. As soon as the direct confrontation with the mainstream could take place without the use of Oriental masks and personae, the need for the Oriental tale subsided. The Oriental tale remains in the literary history of Europe a period genre that has become outdated.

- 3 The European Oriental tale is often a simplistic allegory or a fantastic narrative, whose characters have Oriental names, and which points either to a lesson or to a grotesque fantasy. The episodes of the tale take place often in some unidentified past or identified by legendary indices, so as not to anchor them historically; and thus drawing attention obliquely to the present. The European Oriental tale is aesthetically a pretext, a preface, for the destabilization of the norms. In some sense, it was a rehearsal for an alternative way of writing, before such writing could accomplish itself confidently. What succeeds the “Oriental tale” in Europe is a far richer narrative conflated with the eastern elements that goes beyond an Oriental varnish, coloring European motifs and fantasies, to embody the depth and profundity of the Orient. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is the Orient of the mind rather than the Orient of landscapes that fascinates western writers. The technique of mise-en-abyme from André Gide to Jorge Luis Borges and the self-reflexive narrative from the nouveau roman to John Barth owe their “originality” to creative borrowing from the narrative art of the Orient. The encyclopedic drive which attempts to be all-encompassing, striving to cover totalities – as we encounter in literature from Flaubert’s *Bouvard et Pécuchet* to James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* – originates in the Indian narrative mode known as the ocean of stories. This seemingly infinite narration was transferred to Europe via the mediation of *The One Thousand and One Nights*, which adapted the Indian matrix to its new context, and was later popularized in Europe through the many translations of the work.
 - 4 Thus the earlier imitations of oriental narratives in Europe produced the so-called “Oriental Tale.” The subsequent assimilation of the oriental mode of narration with its embedded stories proliferating and reproducing, creating a terrifying beauty, brought about in the West a more dazzling and cerebral tale, evoking the infinite. These non-classified tales of unusual structure and disturbing beauty were not seen as a sub-genre. Their affinities to the oriental tale did not get noticed as they rarely used oriental polish – exemplified in oriental figures and setting – though they did partake in oriental aesthetics from narrative embedding and dissemination to arabesque and exfoliation.
 - 5 T.S. Eliot once said that bad poets imitate and good poets steal. I would say bad narrators imitate other narratives; good narrators interact with other narratives. Thus modern European narration is the unacknowledged outcome of cross-fertilization between European letters and those of the Empire. Particularly influential in this literary exchange is the Arabian lore and more specifically the *One Thousand and One Nights* as well as the mystic narrative, such as Ibn Tufayl’s *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and Farid al-Din al-Attar’s *Mantiq al-tayr*, which became best sellers in Europe. Their different translations to European languages attest to their significance in western imagination.
- Flaubert and the Orient
- 6 Flaubert’s passion for the Orient since his young age and the incorporation of the oriental landscape in his works is revealing. In two of his works with oriental setting, *Les Sept fils du derviche* and *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, we find a similar pattern to that noted earlier in this article, namely a move from imitation in the former work to

creative borrowing in the latter. In both works the oriental dimension is present as well as the worldview of Flaubert with its strong emphasis on disillusionment. However the tale of the dervish's sons has the structure of an allegory which concludes that there is no road leading to happiness. On the other hand, the saint – who has already given up on the worldly – is tempted by all sorts of desires and doubts in his long night of the soul.

- 7 It is, thus, not surprising to find Gustave Flaubert writing and rewriting the scenarios of an Oriental tale which he never finished writing or publishing (see for the manuscripts: Bruneau 81-118). His tale of “The Seven Sons of the Dervish” distills the position which Flaubert espoused in his entire oeuvre, namely, that of tragic disappointment and pessimism about the possibility of fulfillment. Flaubert's oriental tale pointed towards the impossibility of satisfaction that was to be articulated in Flaubert's novels. A sense of disillusionment dominated Flaubert's works, from that of Romantic failure in *Madame Bovary* and *L'Éducation sentimentale* to that of philosophical failure in *La Tentation de saint Antoine* and his last and unfinished novel, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. Michel Foucault, in his introduction to *La Tentation*, points to the correspondence between the last two works mentioned: “Il y a dans Saint Antoine quelque chose qui appelle Bouvard, comme son ombre grotesque, son double à la fois minuscule et démesuré” (28).
- 8 Even more obvious is the correspondence between Flaubert's *Conte oriental* and *La Tentation*. This relationship between the two works invites a comparison. Flaubert thought of both works in the same decade, that of 1840s. He wrote different manuscripts of his *Conte oriental* in 1845-1849 and in 1853-1854. The first version of *La Tentation* is that of 1849 but he had started it earlier; the second is that of 1856 which is a summary of the first; and the final was a revised and shortened text, published in 1874. The earliest scenarios of the *Conte oriental*, then, as well as the first version of *La Tentation* go back to late 1840s – the years in which Flaubert took his famous trip to Egypt and the Near East.
- 9 Flaubert's *Conte oriental* was never published and the manuscripts of the work are “une suite de retouches à un plan initial” (Bruneau 83). In his conclusion, Bruneau explains the reasons why Flaubert never published his oriental tale. One of the reasons he cites is Flaubert's recognition of his lack of knowledge of the Orient. This lack, Bruneau argues, was made obvious to him when he visited Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey (Bruneau 186-187). But I think it is Flaubert's recognition or sensing that his oriental tale was a preparatory exercise for a more ambitious work that dissuaded him from finishing it, let alone publishing it. In other words, what I am proposing is a shift in Flaubert's aesthetics from espousing the simplistic structure of an oriental tale, a moral allegory of sorts, to a new awareness of the potentialities of the oriental narrative as a complex structure in which philosophical issues might be raised. Flaubert's oriental tale articulates a statement, structured in the form of a parable, about the futility of desires. *La Tentation*, on the other hand, articulates an open question on the issue of desire thus aligning itself more with the Socratic tradition rather than the dogmatic one, despite its theological motifs. In this shift, Flaubert condenses the paradigmatic shift in western narratives in the age of Empire, from its appropriation to interaction with the East.

From Dervish to Saint

- 10 The tale of the “Dervish and his seven sons” commonly known as Flaubert’s oriental tale is a moral tale about the illusion of worldly pursuits. *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, in contrast, is about a figure who has given up on worldly pursuits and dedicated himself to spiritual life in the desert, yet worldly temptations overflow unto the mind of this recluse.
- 11 The seven sons of the Dervish go on voyages, each seeking what he desires only to come back having failed to be fulfilled. Bruneau argues that Flaubert was trying to avoid allegory (169). But this could have only been on the level of intention, not on the level of execution. It is true that Flaubert tried to be less heavy-handed than Voltaire in *Candide* where we have Pangloss standing for unqualified optimism and Martin for unqualified pessimism, still Flaubert’s oriental tale remains not much more than the skeleton of a moral allegory. Flaubert himself wrote on the backside of folio seven of one of the manuscripts of his oriental tale:
Chaque personnage ne [doit] pas être un type, mais bien une individualité vivante compacte. Ils auront tous à peu près les mêmes passions, (mais une dominante) – cherchant bien à peu près à les satisfaire. Mais [dans] la satisfaction même de [tous] ces desirs communs à tous réapparaîtra, saillera l’idée qui constituera tel ou tel.
l’aspiration incessante d’iben et son état flottant, aura son corollaire dans l’ardeur vague & fiévreuse de Giaffar qui aura aussi un appétit de science, d’or, de guerre, mais l’inconnu, la lutte et le pouvoir convergeront & résideront toujours pr lui dans la femme. – ermezoun aussi aura des moments de tendresse – Ali verra bien qu’il [y] a qq chose au-delà de l’adresse, Hassan même essayera de faire tout ce que font ses frères – Zein restera dans son cercle restreint – (quoted in Bruneau 168-169).
- 12 Clearly, Flaubert was striving to individualize his characters but he could not do so, not because of his lack of knowledge of the Orient. He was very well read and could have read more, as he did for the writing of *Salammbô* and *La Tentation*, including volumes of mythology and comparative religion. I believe that he soon sensed the futility of orientalizing an allegory by giving its protagonists Arabic names and situating them in the desert. He gathered that such a project is not viable artistically though it might have been very popular given the oriental rage. However, Flaubert’s *Conte oriental* is a viable preliminary and probably necessary immersion into the Orient of tales. Like an anthropologist who first undertakes a visit to a field to form an impression before he actually settles in the community to be studied, Flaubert dabbled with oriental subject matter in order to be better prepared to penetrate the complex imaginative techniques used in oriental narration.
- 13 But rather than see the two works of Flaubert, le *Conte oriental* and *La Tentation*, in terms of aesthetic hierarchies, I view the oriental tale of Flaubert as a negative in the photographic sense of the term. *La Tentation* is the print from the negative, as if the process of development of an image has been completed in it. This becomes clearer when we examine the two works.
- 14 By opting for a historical figure, no matter how enveloped in legends such as Saint Anthony, Flaubert is perforce individualizing the protagonist. Anthony is not an insignificant saint. He is the father of saints; his exemplary influence on others is proverbial. St. Augustine speaks of him as a paragon of the converted and converting in his *Confessions* (Book VIII). Very much like Saint Paul, Anthony is an example of the converted who in turn converts others. His status demonstrates an inner complexity as both an object of conversion and as subject of converting. His very existence as a

hermit in the Egyptian desert shows a minimal way of life physically, but simultaneously by a maximum richness of imagination, what Robert calls “une imagination monstrueusement développée, une aptitude infinie à s’illusionner” (85). It is this juxtaposition of extremes, of “le néant” of the desert on one hand and this infinite succession of mirages that captivated Flaubert.

- 15 Saint Athanasius wrote a famous biography, *Antoine Le Grand*, not that Flaubert felt bound by the profile of Anthony sketched in it. In fact, Flaubert individualized his Anthony even more, by projecting himself unto the Egyptian hermit. Flaubert referred to Anthony as a reflection of himself (as he did with Emma Bovary). He wrote to Louise Colet on June 13, 1852: “Dans *Saint Antoine* j’étais chez moi” (quoted in Bollème 81) and on January 16, 1852 he had written “c’est que je me suis toujours mis dans tout ce que j’ai fait. À la place de saint Antoine par exemple, c’est moi qui y suis” (quoted in Bollème 83). In *La Tentation*. Flaubert found not only a saint, dervish, or sage, but someone akin to him in his ambivalent psyche swaying between two extremes and partaking in both.

- 16 Given the significance of Saint Anthony in Christianity, he has been represented in art as well as woven into legends. Flaubert himself was particularly struck by a painting of Anthony by the artist Breughel, which he saw on his visit to Genoa.

- 17 Foucault suggests in his essay on Flaubert’s *La Tentation* that it is this painting of Anthony reading the book, which inspired Flaubert to construct his work in this way suggesting phantasmagoria and madness:

dans le tableau de Brueghel le Jeune que Flaubert avait tant admiré en visitant à Gênes la collection Balbi et qui, à l’en croire, aurait fait naître en lui le désir d’écrire *La Tentation*, l’ermite, en bas, au coin droit de la toile, est agenouillé devant un immense in-folio, la tête un peu penchée, les yeux dirigés sur les lignes écrites. Autour de lui, des femmes nues ouvrent les bras, la longue gourmandise tend un cou de girafe, les hommes-tonneaux mènent leur vacarme, des bêtes sans nom s’entre-dévorent, tandis que défilent tous les grotesques de la terre, évêques, rois et puissants. (Foucault 14)

- 18 The tale of the desert revolving around the dervish became the tale of the desert revolving around the saint. In fact, Flaubert does not give a title to his oriental tale, but refers to it as “le conte du désert” (Bruneau 118). And the desert for him was neither the literal landscape nor the symbol of aridity. Rather the desert with its immensity, extended horizon, and mirages evoked for him an image of unrequited passions and cyclical traveling. This has nothing to do with Christianity or Islam; for Flaubert all religions are variations on the same boring theme: “Chaque dogme en particulier m’est répulsif, mais je considère le sentiment qui les a inventés comme le plus naturel et le plus poétique de l’humanité” (quoted in Bruneau 183).

- 19 Flaubert himself has written of the desert in practically erotic terms, seeing in it an overwhelming experience of pleasure and risks:

une caravane nous croise, les hommes entourés des coufiehs (les femmes très voilées) se penchant sur le cou des dromadaires ; ils passent tout près de nous, on ne se dit rien, c’est comme des fantômes dans des nuages. Je sens quelque chose comme un sentiment de terreur et d’admiration furieux me couler le long des vertèbres, je ricane nerveusement, je devais être très pâle et je jouissais d’une façon inouïe. Il m’a semblé, pendant que la caravane a passé, que les chameaux ne touchaient pas à terre, qu’ils s’avançaient du poitrail avec un mouvement de bateau, qu’ils étaient supportés là

dedans et très élevés au-dessus du sol, comme s'ils eussent marché dans des nuages où ils s'enfonçaient jusqu'au ventre (quoted in Knight 7).

- 20 The transformation of Flaubert's aesthetics in the two works is that of a move from an allegorical abstraction to a symbolic individuality. In *Saint Anthony* the concrete and the abstraction intersect – thanks to his presence in popular narratives, canonical works, paintings, and puppet shows. While the model of the saint came from visual images, that of the dervish came from yet another representation of an oriental sage, Voltaire's. The iconography that played a role in Flaubert's creation of his particular saint Antoine, and thus made him “visualize” him reading books even though he was illiterate, is summed up in Nadeau's work:

Although Breughel's picture was the immediate stimulus, one of the reasons it acted on Flaubert was it aroused in him a host of old memories. Every year in October, during the Foire Saint-Romain, an old man called Legrain put a puppet show which Flaubert would go and see on his way home from school. The subject was the temptations of Saint Anthony. The hermit was seen in his solitude, first in prayer, then in the toils of all the emissaries of the devil... When he wrote to Alfred Le Poittevin about his new project in 1845, Flaubert referred to ‘old Legrain's booth.’ [...] In August 1846 he put up on his ‘ramparts’ the Callot engraving on the same subject, a different treatment from that of Breughel but equally fantastic. (Nadeau 63-64)

- 21 The Dervish of the Oriental tale in contrast is likely to have been modeled on the fictional character of the oriental sage we encounter in *Candide*:

Il se peut même que le cadre choisi par Flaubert pour son projet d'œuvre remontât à l'épisode final du texte voltairien : le derviche qui, dans *Candide*, « passer pour le meilleur philosophe de la Turquie », incarnait la sagesse orientale dans les scénarios de son conte. (Lörinsky 53)

- 22 In fact, Flaubert foregrounded the influence of eighteenth-century philosophical tales and in particular Voltaire's, in his own manuscripts of the oriental tale:

dans les dialogues quand ils se rencontreront, (ainsi j'ai perdu mon or, moi ma femme etc ou autre ex semblable) ne pas faire les oppositions trop fortes, trop arrêtées de peur du sec [et de la ressemblance avec *Candide*], que ça ait plutôt une teinte triste qu'ironique que l'ironie soit en dessous (quoted in Bruneau 99-100).

- 23 Had Flaubert thought of an actual Dervish or Soufi in the history of Islam such as al-Hallaj or al-Suhrawardi, the oriental tale of Flaubert would have been completed, in my view. What blocked Flaubert is precisely this one-to-one correspondence between the Dervish's sons and the desires they represented. This mechanical equivalence cannot but produce flat characters, and this can be seen through Flaubert's pen:

il y avait autrefois un vieillard qui avait 7 fils 1 richesse = cupidité 2... gloire = guerre 3 amour = douleurs et délicatesse 4 volupté = de toutes façon vins mollesse ce sera à 1 qu'échoue ce qui eut fait le bonheur de 4. 5 idéal = recherche de la vérité dans la religion, ascension de la pensée... 6 sens commun desirs bornés (famille ?) 7 l'idiot au soleil – à qui l'on donne à manger (Bruneau 99)

- 24 It is clear that in the early 1840s Flaubert was under the influence of Voltaire before he could develop his own narrative poetics. He wrote in 1844 in a letter to Louis de Cormenin: “J'avoue que j'adore la prose de Voltaire et que ses contes sont pour moi d'un ragoût exquis. J'ai lu *Candide* vingt fois, et je l'ai traduit en anglais et je l'ai encore relu de temps à autre” (quoted in Bruneau, p. 131, n. 1).

- 25 From allegorical abstraction to realistic vividness in the literary career of Flaubert, *La Tentation* falls in between. It is, as Sylvie Laüt-Berr says, not quite a realistic work, but a subjective one:

On ne peut certes aller jusqu'à faire de *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* une œuvre réaliste, mais on peut au moins la considérer comme le lieu d'invention d'un fantastique subjectif qui précède et même accompagnera, dans les deux autres versions, le réalisme subjectif des grands romans (Laüt-Berr 191).

- 26 *La Tentation* is subjective in the sense that it combines the extremes, the juxtaposition of opposite poles, which Flaubert was so keen on and was hypersensitive to. *La Tentation*, ironically, joins faith to doubts, sanctity to temptations, and monasticism to orgies. Flaubert, himself, felt excited by nuns and prostitutes, by sublimation and indulgence, equally. He wrote: "My heart begins to pound every time I see one of those women in low-cut dresses walking under the lamplight in the rain, just as monks in their corded robes have always excited some deep, ascetic corner of my soul" (quoted in Steegmuller 9-10).
- 27 Needless to say that the oriental voyage which Flaubert undertook helped him add realistic touches to *La Tentation*. He makes the Queen of Sheba say of herself "Je danse comme une abeille" (64) which shows the impact of his eye witness experience of dancing in Upper Egypt: "Kuchiouk nous danse l'abeille" (quoted in Biasi 285). On the other hand, it was difficult to anchor his oriental tale which he referred to specifically as "anté-historique" (Bruneau 126), and wrote it as a tale of ideas rather than a tale of characters.
- 28 To emphasize difference is not to dismiss similarities and the process of progression and crystallization of elements of one tale into another. The negative (in the photographic sense) is not only essential to a print; it also resembles the print though it lacks its precision and wholesomeness. Both *le Conte* and *La Tentation* foreground desires. In both works we are introduced to the magical number of seven which stands for totality and eternal return (Ghazoul 71), seven sons in the first and seven sections in the second.
- 29 While in *le Conte*, we have seven brothers, each exhibiting a dominant desire, resembling the seven capital sins in Christian theology, in *La Tentation* we have several temptations – manifested as versions of desires – of one man, St. Anthony. Visions abound in both works: *La Tentation* is essentially one complex vision where Saint Anthony is tempted physically by food and drink, by women and warmth, followed by intellectual temptations. He is confronted by doubts put forward by his once disciple – Hilarion – who is now an advocate of the devil. Hilarion questions Anthony, trying to shake the very faith and certainty of his mentor. In the *Conte oriental* of Flaubert, visions play a decisive role in the psychological development of the seven brothers (Bruneau 153).

The Demon of Analogy

- 30 Bruneau in his studies of Flaubert's early works, gave the likely sources of Flaubert's *Conte oriental* as Arabian lore and particularly *The Thousand and One Nights*, while Seznec in his work on Flaubert's sources uncovered the scholarly and visual material from which Flaubert's *Saint Antoine* was made. There is very little done on the impact of the *Nights* on Flaubert's *La Tentation*, partly because the latter is considered essentially a variation on Christian hagiography, and partly because critics look for the material in their midst rather than contemplate the heritage of the Other and its impact. Edward

Said has pointed out – without elaborating – the impact of the imperial expansion on European letters, not just in terms of reference to the Orient but in the way the new poetics was made to adapt to the heterogeneous elements constituting the new commonwealth. For Said, irony as the privileged metaphor and structure in modern literature is the outcome of incorporating in the political body of Europe lands of the three continents:

I would like to suggest that many of the most prominent characteristics of modernist culture, which we have tended to derive from purely internal dynamics in Western society and culture, include a response to the external pressures on culture from the *imperium*. Certainly this is true of Conrad's entire *oeuvre*, and it is also true of Forster's, T. E. Lawrence's, Malraux's; in different ways, the impingements of the empire on an Irish sensibility are registered in Yeats and Joyce, those on American expatriates in the work of Eliot and Pound. (Said 227).

- 31 This is confirmed with a humorous touch in Irwin's companion to the *Arabian Nights*, where in a chapter entitled "Children of the Nights" he lumps together Voltaire, Diderot, and Joyce (among others) as parented by the *Nights*, and ends by the following:

In place of the writers discussed above, one might have substituted Goethe [...] Flaubert [...] and Angela Carter, for all these writers too have been influenced by the *Nights*. Indeed, it might have been an easier, shorter chapter if I had discussed those writers who were not influenced by the *Nights*. (Irwin 291-292)

- 32 Other studies of the influence of the *Arabian Nights* on European aesthetics and poetics have been undertaken by many, including Muhsin J. Ali [al-Musawi], Nargess D'Outreligne-Saidi, and Richard Van Leeuwen. Flaubert in particular is worth the effort because of his subtle use of Arabian techniques of story telling that I have called "nocturnal poetics". He is an example of the move from using local color to deploying local techniques thus producing a narrative that has interacted deeply and profoundly with alien poetic traditions without being imitative or insular. Flaubert, himself, adopted Arab critical imagery of narratology. He wrote to Louise Colet on Feb. 1, 1852 about his first version of *La Tentation*, which was completely rejected by his friends and advised to throw the manuscript in the fire: "C'est une œuvre manquée. Tu parles de perles. Mais les perles ne font pas collier; c'est le fil." He had in mind no doubt, as Bruneau suggests, Langle's statement: "Les orientaux appellent la poésie, l'art d'enfiler les perles." (Bruneau 127, n.1).

- 33 If we were to look at the *Conte oriental* of Flaubert we would be struck first and foremost by the Arab names, not that Flaubert really understood what they meant; Iben, for example, is not an Arabic name but means "son of". These names had simply Arabic resonance. Still the over-all effect of characters named Iben, Ali, Ermezoul, Nissir, Hassan, Giaffar, and Zein is undoubtedly Arabic sounding. The very plot of seven brothers undertaking seven voyages in search of happiness recalls both Sindbad voyages and his thirst for defamiliarization as well as the seven brothers in the story of the Hunchback in the *Nights* with their black humor (Sermain 7-8). The seven capital sins of Christianity come also to mind, but Flaubert refrained from referring to all of them through his characters. Rather he adjusted them to match his taste: "Ainsi Flaubert situe dans un cadre des *Milles et une Nuits* une théorie des passions d'origine chrétienne, mais qu'il a adaptée à sa propre conception de l'homme" (Bruneau 129). By introducing the pursuit of sensual love (Giaffar) and that of common sense (Zein), Flaubert adjusts the Christian typology of sins (Pride, Avarice, Envy, Anger, Gluttony, Laziness, and Luxury) to correspond to his personal taste, as Bruneau rightly points

out. What is interesting is the use made of the *Nights* in adapting the given set of the sins to one's own sensibility.

- 34 Flaubert introduces the notion of visions in his *Conte oriental*, each of the visions confirms the character in question: "Ils se trouvent tous ensemble et [vont] entrent dans un gd portique ruiné [...] ils avancent et ils trouvent 6 portes [...] ils entrent dans un souterrain particulier" (Bruneau 153). This underground structure with several doors is a leitmotif in many stories in the *Nights* including that of Ali Baba. One is instantly thinking of similar stories in Arabian lore, all the more because of the names of the characters and the setting as well as the way the story is classified (as oriental tale). When it comes to *La Tentation*, one is instantly looking into the history of early Christianity with its heresies and dogmas, because the saint firmly belongs to the history of the Church. Yet the saint was Egyptian moving between Alexandria and Upper Egypt. Christianity is – and here I am saying the obvious – an "oriental" religion and Egypt is part of the Orient that Flaubert dreamt about. There is no reason thus to exclude *La Tentation* – giving its protagonist and its setting – from the heading of "oriental tale" though played out in a different key. Certainly, Mallarmé recognized it as pertaining to the Orient in his introduction to *Vathek*. Furthermore, there might be more of the Arabian lore hidden under its skin, so to speak, that does not attract attention on first reading.
- 35 It seems that Hippolyte Taine, the historian and critic, was fascinated by the vision of the Queen of Sheba in the visions of Flaubert's Saint Antoine and wrote the author of the work: "Où diable avez-vous trouvé ce type moral et physique, et ce costume ? Car je suis persuadé que pour cela aussi vous avez des autorités, ou du moins des documents, des points de départ ? " (Ronse 280).
- 36 The Queen of Sheba is invariably associated with King Solomon and the hoopoe in the Arab-Islamic tradition. She is seen as a fabulous queen and Solomon the wise is presented in the *Nights* as the one who has imprisoned the jinn in bottles that an unfortunate fisherman comes across. At least the description she makes of all the rich products she brings the hermit in his desert resembles all the delights that the porter in the *Arabian Nights* carries for the beautiful mistress in Bagdad. The Queen of Sheba says in Flaubert's *La Tentation* :

Voici du baume de Genezareth, de l'encens du cap Gardefan, du ladanon, du cinnamome, et du silphium, bon à mettre dans les sauces. Il y a là-dedans des broderies d'Assur, des ivoires du Gange, de la pourpre d'Élisa, et cette boîte de neige contient une outre de chalibon, vin réservé pour les rois d'Assyrie, – et qui se boit pur dans une corne de licorne. Voilà des colliers, des agrafes, des filets, des parasols, de la poudre d'or de Baasa, du cassiteros de Tartessus, du bois bleu de Pandio, des fourrures blanches d'Issedonie, des escarboucles de l'île Palaesimonde, et des cure-dents faits avec les poils du tachas, – animal perdu qui se trouve sous la terre. Ces coussins sont d'Émath, et ces franges à manteau de Palmyre. Sur ce tapis de Babylone, il y a... mais viens donc ! viens donc ! (65).
- 37 This evocation of luxurious products along with a seduction scene is to be found in the story of the Ladies of Baghdad and the Porter. Names of places are attached to the products as if they are brand names:

there accosted him a female wrapped in an izar of the manufacture of El-Mosil, composed of gold-embroidered silk, with a border of gold-lace at each end, who raised her face-veil [...] She next stopped at the shop of the fruiterer and bought of him Syrian apples, and Othmanee quinces, and peaches of Oman, and jasmine of Aleppo, and water

lilies of Damascus, and cucumbers of the Nile, and Egyptian limes, and Sultanees citrons, and a sweet-scented myrtle, and sprigs of the henna-tree, and camomile, and anemones and violets, and pomegranate flowers, and eglantine. (Lane I: 120-121).

38 Even though in Galland's translation of this episode, the translator removes the place names thus the luxury branding of the goods, Flaubert is likely to have come across descriptions like the one above in other translations of the *Nights* or of other Arabic stories as this mode of description is typical of Arabic folk tales and epics. Flaubert was keen on attending story-telling sessions in Cairene cafes told by *hakawatis* (professional local and oral story-tellers).

39 It is not that Flaubert was reproducing the *Nights* as the description of the Queen of Sheba is different from that of the Lady from Baghdad, but what he was reproducing is the stylistics and mode of description by referring to place names well known for the quality goods. In the same vein we can see in the learned aspect of Flaubert in the discussions of different branches of theology and heresy, the story of Tawwadud in the *Nights*. This slave girl in a setting where she shows her superior knowledge is examined by learned men and she outshines them. This impulse for the scholarly detail and the encyclopedic drive we find in the story of Tawwadud as well as in Flaubert's *La Tentation* though for different purposes. Again, there is no point trying to establish whether Flaubert has read or not this particular tale from the *Nights*. It is the type of tale rather than the actual tale that matters. It is a tale that shows how a learned slave girl can outshine the scholar friends of her master in all fields of learning and thus the narrative is a compendium of learning about Islamic medieval knowledge the way *La Tentation* is a compendium of Christian medieval knowledge.

40 On the level of structure, we find *La Tentation* is a spiral like that of the *Nights*. Just as a story leads to another, so do the visions of Saint Anthony lead from one to the others. Like Shahrazad narrating at night and stopping at dawn, so do the visions unfold in the dead of night. Nocturnal poetics allows for the fantastic and the demonic to take form. In an earlier version of *La Tentation* (1856), Flaubert wrote in the carton that held it:

La tentation de saint Antoine
Messieurs les démons,
Laissez-moi donc !
Messieurs les démons,
Laissez-moi donc ! (Ronse 245)

41 While this is the way the Saint addressed the demons in Legrain's puppet show, it is also the way Shahrazad unleashed the demons for Shahrayar in her narratives. There is no telling that on the following night the saint is not going to be tormented again by the demons. In both cases, in the *Nights* and in *La Tentation*, it is the saint and the king, Antoine and Shahrayar who allow these fantasies to be. All those fantasies unfold in both works at night. When the dawn is announced the narration stops. There is no indication that Saint Anthony is not going to have such visions the following night. Both works have a similar ending. The closure employs *deus ex machina* – in the case of Saint Anthony, it is strictly the divine (Christ) that provides a resolution:

Le jour enfin paraît : et comme les rideaux d'un tabernacle qu'on relève, des nuages d'or en s'enroulant à larges volutes découvrent le ciel.
Tout au milieu, et dans le disque même du soleil, rayonne la face de Jésus-Christ.
Antoine fait le signe de la croix et se remet en prières. (Flaubert 219)

42 As for the case of Shahrazad it is the representative of the divine on earth, the king, who allows Shahrazad to be pardoned for no sin of hers and not to be condemned

perpetually, thus she can cease telling her stories. The *Nights* constitutes the myth of myths; the narrative of Shahrazad contains other narratives and explains imaginatively how they came about to defer death, so is the Queen of Sheba in *La Tentation*. She is not so much a woman as a world, as she says. Orr sees in her Ishtar and Isis as well as the priestess of Eleusinian Mysteries (123) and Donato refers to her as “a supreme fiction containing all fictions” (92)

- 43 By no means do I argue that Flaubert’s saint is an analog to the *Nights* protagonists, nor for that matter does he resemble the historical Anthony who was illiterate and surely had no idea of all those heresies and philosophies exposed in his temptations. What I am putting forward is that *La Tentation* came out of the overcoat of the oriental tale, combining the poetics of the *Arabian Nights* with the legendary character of Saint Anthony as portrayed in western imagination. It is precisely this hybrid aesthetic product which reflects Flaubert’s sensibility – an intersection between the painfully researched and “documentary” and the obsessively imaginative and “fantastic” – that is at stake. In this strange “métissage” it was important for Flaubert to work out step by step the assimilation of another poetics. The first step was a crude imitation, the second was a sophisticated interaction.
- 44 In order to understand how literary cross-fertilization takes place, it is important not to confine one’s view to handed-down classificatory systems that necessarily carry within them the presumptions of a certain time and place. It is also important to rewrite literary history from the standpoint of the subalterns just as political history is being revised and rewritten by those who were its victims. The European oriental tale was an excuse and a pretext, a fad and a curiosity – a narrative form that can be appropriated without even penetrating into its innermost being. Only at a later stage when the Orient came to be seen as an “interlocuteur valable” was the possibility of interaction possible. Flaubert shows us in his *Conte oriental* and *La Tentation* the progression from a narrative with an oriental crust to a narrative with an oriental core. When Flaubert was in Egypt, he donned the *gallabiyya*, the long and loose robe Egyptian peasants wear (photograph by Maxim du Camp in Bibliothèque de l’Institut, Paris [Steegmuller 40-41]), but that only produced a Frenchman masquerading as an Oriental. Flaubert’s *Conte oriental* is analogous to going ethnic in dress but keeping one’s identity intact. His *Tentation*, on the other hand, strives to penetrate the very poetics of the Other. This could only take place in a dialogical field where Self and Other can interact. Flaubert’s use of western medieval iconography of Anthony with the poetics of desert inhabitants could create such a brilliant “architecture du vide,” to borrow the term of Jean-Pierre Duquette. If Flaubert gave up on his *Conte oriental* yet persisted with *La Tentation*, it is because he sensed the difference between the negative and the finale, between a preliminary experiment and an accomplished work.

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RÉSUMÉS

Le conte incomplet de Flaubert, connu sous le sobriquet de son « conte oriental », raconte les histoires des sept fils d'un derviche. Cet article l'analyse sur les bases des schémas et des notes qu'il a laissés. Dans ce projet resté inachevé Flaubert emploie les couleurs locales afin de créer un cadre exotique pour l'exposition de la « déception », thème qui revient dans les œuvres de Flaubert. Le conte, tel qu'il est, fonctionne en tant que « négatif » (dans le sens photographique) pour *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, lui aussi un « conte oriental » mais plus réussi. Dans les deux textes, Flaubert s'inspire du sens du désert en tant que site de l'infini et des mirages. Dans « Les Fils du derviche » une allégorie morale assez simpliste présente des personnages qui incarnent des idées, tandis que dans *La Tentation* une interaction plus créatrice avec la poétique de l'Autre produit une narration symbolique et philosophique.

FLAUBERT: FROM DERVISH TO SAINT : The article analyzes Flaubert's incomplete tale on the seven sons of the dervish, commonly known as his "oriental tale", based on the outlines and notes he wrote. This unfinished project of Flaubert uses local color to create an exotic setting in order to present the theme of disillusionment, which recurs in the Flaubertian corpus. It functions as a "negative" (in the photographic sense of the term) to his *Temptation of Saint Anthony*, a more accomplished "oriental tale". In both works, Flaubert is inspired by the significance of the desert as a site of the infinite and of mirages. In the "Sons of the Dervish", a simplistic moral allegory presents characters standing for ideas, while in the *Temptation* a more creative interaction with the poetics of the Other produces a symbolic and philosophical narrative.

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