HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Sentim*ental Education* / *Education Sentimentale* (1869)

Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880)

Pathways into fictional time

Frederic Moreau, the aspiring pupil of the above caption, is the classic bourgeois youth, fresh and open to the new life expanding before him. Who does he remind us of, from among the many congeners taking the path beside him, crossing over into the nineteenth century with its new challenges and political threats—the world of Werther, Huck Finn, Holden Caulfield,--making their ways into a new kind of life-sensibility which takes its blend tone from the romantic, the realistic, and new registers of historical awareness. I look at photos of my father as a Viginia farm boy, born 1900, then of my son born in 1955, and see the latter's historicity landmarked all over his clothes, body pose, sadness-shyness and stubbornness.

Similarly marked—and down to the 6 AM smoke belch whistle-- Frederic Moreau, a young University student who couldn't care less about his historical setting, on break from his studies in Paris, his mind loose and at ease, settles back into his temporality—what the Dickens is a sentim*ental education?*-- and slides with his steamer into the already skiff-crowded current of the southward flowing Seine. The literary space lies open for the subsequent blend of soothing with aleatory events. There is first the multicolored patchwork of fields—hay slipping into oats slipping into rye—the incision of a small river valley, a pair of slate roofed barn s—then the briefest interval for a baggage transfer at an obscure hamlet; then off again into the flow, which has become the flow of Frederic's consciousness. One might want to insert, into the intimacy of that consciousness flow, the weary line that haunted the age, Musset's famous *o temps suspends ton vol!* Whether or not we are right to interpret thus the historicity of Frederic's mind, as he sails into the new, we cannot be wrong to see in Flaubert's introductory strategy, in *Sentimental Education,* the strategy of time he adopts in *Madane Bovary,* which unfolds so effortlessly into a simple bourgeois setting, or of *Salammbo,* which unpeels into a turmoil of seething mercenaries. Master of temporal landing places, Flaubert is equally gifted at providing the first step into the new world of built *time*. (That's the way he builds a novel!)

And where does Flaubert take us after having constructed the fist step into the fictional time of *Sentimental Education*? The eyes are the guides. Mme. Bovary spots Rodolphe, and is entranced ; the mercenaries, one by one, become aware of the radiant divine beauty descending the stairs of Hamilcar's palace, and the battle is on to possess Salammbo Where does the adventure of the 'aspiring' Moreau go this early morning? Not surprisingly the author opens out the perennially useful tactic of romance. Romance, of course, may take many forms, and for the writer of supreme mastery, like Flaubert, an oblique address to the problem promises several paths toward success. The path that is taken in the present case involves the introduction of a third party, neither lover nor loved-—note how easily this formula can be modified, as in a third set of moves designed to project the ingenu lover even more deeply, into a mounting number of options. (From which point on, obviously enough, the *number* of options multiplies exponentially, as in a well-played game of Chess. In the present instance Flaubert goes for the third party option introducing the jovial voice of a 'bon pere de famille,' who is being called below decks to where Mme. and a squalling offspring require his attention. There's a direction for Flaubert's 'aspiring pupil; just at that moment, instinct guiding, the jovial father. Moreau, the aspiring student, follows the footsteps of the jovial male voice—or rather—we see through Flaubert's precise angular eye –' follows the footsteps as he crosses a deck littered with "cigar butts, pear peelings, droppings of pork rinds," until he found himself coming face to face with a stunning apparition, Monsieur Arnoux's daughter, sitting on a bench in the First Class Lounge, stunning in a black dress with a beribboned straw hat on her head, and beside her a negress and a small crying child—the source of the call to M Arnoux to attend to his child. Frederic of course is blown away with the unexpected beauty facing him. Though

he cannot have seen, or wanted to see, far into the pathways along which the present fictional avenue was about to lead him, he knows that he is already part of literary history, fodder for sentiment, fodder for the all-consuming maw of is time.

We have seen literary figures, excavated from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, who, while growing with their centuries seem hardly to have passed a temporal red line, hardly seem to be creating a future for themselves, as Frederic Moreau here seems bent on doing. Moreau will step off the steamer, when it lands at the dock which by happy coincidence serves both the family of M Arnoux, the Director of the Establishment L'Art Industriel, which in the following narration will play a large role – and the needs of Moreau's own family, long settled as it is, adjacent to Arnoux's home. Moreau is on the *brink* of stepping into a new cultural century. A reset of our literary historical dial, a century's reversal, among the samples treated here, would carry us back to Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew* (1762), to Paul et Virginie (1788), to Constant's Adolphe (1816), to Fromentin's Dominique (1862), texts from whose inner directions driving figures hollow out no new imaginative worlds for themselves, refined though they may be in analyzing their own manners of description. Fascinating though those eighteenth and nineteenth century creations may be, they are not, like Frederic Moreau, breathers of the air of a new century.

And we do not, then, exaggerate the new world interest we devote to the beginning of Flaubert's *Education Sentimentale?* Let's cast a perspective outward, onto the nature of the 'Sentimentale' education' that awaits Moreau.as he steps out onto the landing that leads both to his own family house and to that of M. Amoux, who will turn out to be a major player in the world Moreau is entering. The stage is set for one of the early bourgeois search flights like this it goes.

Thanks to his susceptible openness –we have lived the openness with which Frederic awakens developmentally to the charms of his miniature voyage-- we have let ourselves follow Moreau downriver to his mother' house and to a congeries of involvements luminous with some version of a tew world. What could more properly satisfy the needs of the new than a reunion with an old new friend, Charles, and along with him the opportunity to grow and prevail a deux, during the course of sandy river walks and fishing excursions. The easy life discovery of two young men, the coordinate chit chat only sentimental education-- discovery of unique gender delights, the diffuse shared sense of belonging to a cultural whole of which they were part…how much more fluently could an *education sentimentale* coax itself from the roots of just being here? And then of course there is the new world of neighbors, the Arnoux family, neighbors by accident, who will scatter romance, business, political intrigue and the growing process throughout this text which in the end will have moved us within earshot of a World War One which bore within it the seeds of a bombing campaign over Karg Island.