

Online Reviews

Herschberg Pierrot, Anne, ed. *Œuvres & Critiques XXXIV (1). Écrivains contemporains lecteurs de Flaubert*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2009. Pp. 105. ISSN: 0338-1900

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This issue of the journal *Œuvres et critiques* explores the extent to which the nineteenth-century novelist Gustave Flaubert has influenced contemporary literature. Focusing on authors and works ranging from the latter part of the twentieth century to the present day, the six essays comprising the collection analyze an extensive number of topics including critical reception of the French novel, genetic criticism, and the writing process itself. In her brief introduction entitled “Flaubert, contemporain,” the “coordinatrice” of this *fascicule*, Anne Herschberg Pierrot, asks three essential questions that guide the reflective thinking of the issue: “Qu’est-ce qu’écrire à partir de Flaubert? Qu’est-ce que lire Flaubert quand on écrit? Comment cette lecture a-t-elle transformée l’image de l’œuvre?” (4). The different approaches found in this anthology provide several answers to these overarching questions, shedding light on how Flaubert’s novels have considerably changed both the reading and writing of modern authors and critics. Through a close study of Flaubert’s impact on writers such as Pierre Bergounioux, Jorge Luis Borges, Raymond Queneau, Roland Barthes, Italo Calvino, and Claude Simon, this resourceful group of essays proves that Flaubert is indisputably a powerful and unforgettable literary presence.

In his essay “Modernités de *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, Borges, Queneau,” for example, Jacques Neefs gives an account of how Jorge Luis Borges and Raymond Queneau interpreted Flaubert’s last and unfinished novel, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. As Neefs shows, the critiques of both Borges and Queneau were innovative because they raised an awareness of the novel’s philosophical significance, placing special emphasis on its skeptical critique of absolute knowledge. Although some scholars have criticized the chronological inconsistencies in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, Neefs points out that both Queneau and Borges attributed these temporal contradictions to the novel’s symbolic power as well as Flaubert’s epic ambition. Much like Queneau and Borges, Barthes also studied the use of myth, time, and self-reflexivity in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. Indeed, in her essay “Présence de *Bouvard et Pécuchet* chez Roland Barthes,” Herschberg Pierrot explains how Flaubert’s novel motivated a number of Barthes’s theoretical texts, notably his “Le mythe aujourd’hui” (1956) and “La mort de l’auteur” (1968).

Gisèle Séginger’s essay entitled “Le Flaubert de Claude Simon,” investigates the numerous connections between Flaubert’s literary aesthetic and Simon’s conception of the *nouveau roman*. As Séginger notes, the writing of both Flaubert and Simon adopts a critical, disenchanted, and non-anthropocentric outlook on history that allows their works to create not only a new descriptive style, but also a new form of vision. In Flaubert’s works, for example, narrative progression does not depend on a linear chronology, but rather on the power of memory to connect certain sensations and images. Flaubert’s use of discontinuity and fragmentation, Séginger explains, had a marked effect on Simon’s literary theories. Indeed, in many of Simon’s essays, namely his *Discours du Stockholm* (1986), the author explicitly references Flaubert, explaining that the formal qualities of Flaubert’s works have helped him understand the importance of concrete details.

In the final essay of the collection, “On ne se souvient pas de Flaubert,” Tiphaine Samoyault considers Flaubert’s perpetual presence within contemporary French literature, bringing to light modern

authors' continued encounters with the recurring themes of his works. As Samoyault explains: "C'est sans doute une référence qui s'impose toujours sur le mode de la présence et qui ne se place pas, contrairement à presque toutes les autres, sous les auspices de la mémoire" (88). In order to trace this presence, Samoyault outlines three essential directions of Flaubertian influence: la "ligne *Bouvard et Pécuchet*," la "ligne *Éducation sentimentale*," and la "ligne *Madame Bovary*." Much like the essays written by Neefs and Herschberg Pierrot, Samoyault explains that the "ligne *Bouvard et Pécuchet*" includes authors and artists who challenge positivism and absolute knowledge, as well as works that bring into question the notion of idiocy and the act of copying. While the "ligne *Bouvard et Pécuchet*" focuses on aesthetic creation, la "ligne *Éducation sentimentale*" is concerned with the psychological characteristics of the novel's hero, Frédéric Moreau, who has a melancholic and disillusioned outlook on history. Indeed, works inspired by Flaubert's *Éducation sentimentale* often include characters who have a nostalgic relationship to the past and whose identities are uncertain. Finally, in her discussion of the "ligne *Madame Bovary*," Samoyault shows that Flaubert's literary creation is directly related to both fragmentation and a tension between continuity and discontinuity.

Through the many different sources and references found in the collection, the reader is able to discover several visionary elements of Flaubert's style. Moreover, since the essays concentrate on a nineteenth-century novelist's pronounced impact on contemporary literature and theory, they demonstrate that the nineteenth century itself is a central and enduring field of study. For this reason, I also recommend this anthology to those who research twentieth- and twenty-first century literature.

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