"'Dried Fruits': Flaubert, Marx, and the Literary-Historical Event"[1]

How do we engage critically with a novel's efforts to represent historical events and make them legible? In this essay, I will approach this familiar question from the lens of what is and isn't changing (from the perspectives of French Theory and literary history) in order to argue that literature continually puts into question the relationship between change and representation. The novel is uniquely suited to help us grasp the unfolding of historical events, perhaps even more than an historical analysis can.[2] By drawing attention to the materiality of (literary) language and to the artificiality of fiction, novels construct their aesthetic unity in opposition to the supposed clarity of scientific language and the logical ordering of cause and effect.[3] Whereas positivistic discourses strive for transparency in language, novels draw attention to how language and representational conventions repeat, making us aware of the effects of literary form on our

[1] Portions of this essay appeared in French in my article "Les Fruits secs: Répétition, génération, et événement dans *L'Éducation sentimentale*" *Lectures de* L'Éducation sentimentale. Edited by Stephen Murphy. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes. (Bray 2017). All translations in this essay, unless otherwise noted, are mine.

[2] In his recent book *Les Bords de la fiction*, Jacques Rancière (2017) points out that for Aristotle, there is a distinction between history as chronicle (listing events in the order they happened) and fiction (a logical order of causality with a beginning, a middle, and an end). For Rancière, the 19th century saw positivist discourses borrow literature's fictions to explain social phenomena, and at the same time, literature began to question the links between cause and effect, through micro-narratives and anti-heroes. Flaubert's characters and narrative strategies certainly fit Rancière's model of a rejection of Aristotle's fiction.

[3] I explore the implications of literature's complicated relationship to theoretical discourse in my book *The Price of Literature: The French Novel's Literary Turn* (Bray 2019). Drawing on Jacques Rancière's notion of the aesthetic regime of art, which defines literature as the visibility of the art of writing, as well as Michel Foucault's characterization of 19th century literature as a "counter-discourse," I demonstrate how novels (by Mme de Staël, Balzac, Hugo, Flaubert, and Proust) after the birth of the concept of literature around 1800 manage to create aesthetic thought through a play of borrowed theoretical discourses.

thoughts and perceptions. The defining feature of an historical event is that it must be both singular and situated – new but also exhibiting features that can be inscribed within past historical events. As works of literature, realist novels create new forms to describe events as they might have unfolded (say Hugo's description of revolutionary crowds in *Notre-dame de Paris* and *Les Misérables*), and then build on prior forms to render events in recognizable patterns (for example the crowd as lexical field, taken up later by Flaubert and Zola). In this way, they allow us to perceive the event and at the same time register the impossibility of any totalizing understanding.

Scholars of nineteenth-century French literature such as Ross Chambers, Christopher Prendergast, and Richard Terdiman explored these questions in the 1980s and 1990s, but since then the field has largely favored cultural history approaches (a reengagement with the archives, a turn to reading the popular press) or genetic criticism.[4] If the interest in the historical novel as a form of thinking through the event as such has not been subject to critical debate in French (as for many scholars of English), that is perhaps because the realist novel as it was championed by Georg Lukács's *Historical Novel*, with its special emphasis on Balzac, is a problematic category in French literature. Flaubert, possibly the greatest French novelist of the nineteenth century, exploded the limits of Balzacian realism by introducing a rupture between the vain actions of protagonists and the greater society around them.[5]

[4] Outstanding examples of the cultural approach include Maurice Samuels (2004) *The Spectacular Past: Popular History and the Novel in Nineteenth-Century France*; Edmund Birch (2017) *Fictions of the Press in Nineteenth-Century France*,; and Bettina Lerner (2017) *Inventing the Popular: Printing, Politics, and Poetics*.

[5] Lawrence Schehr (1997 and 2007) argues persuasively, in dialogue with but against the Marxist position, that French realism – starting with Balzac himself – deconstructs its own rhetoric of realism by way of aesthetic concerns. Pasolini's film practice and criticism and Rancière's critique of Lukács in *Le fil perdu* (Rancière 2014) follow a similar argumentation. My own

Although the imbricated connections between the historical events of the long nineteenth century and the French novel are hardly new topics for scholarship, they nonetheless warrant consideration in a special issue that queries what is and isn't changing. To begin with, French Theory (as it is called even in France) continually interrogates the meaning of the "event." Moreover, one way of thinking of French theory's transformation of humanistic inquiry over the last several decades is that what unites the human sciences such as literary studies, anthropology, and geography, is their different but overlapping efforts to understand the event. In *May '68 and Its Afterlives*, Kristin Ross (2002) argued that French Theory emerged from the events of May 1968 as theorists attempted to come to terms with the supposed failure of that revolution to materialize. While Alain Badiou's *Being and Event* is the paradigmatic French text on the notion of the event, Derrida ("Signature, Event, Context"), Foucault, Deleuze (especially in *Difference and Repetition* but also in his book *Foucault*), Rancière, and countless others have explored the ontological, aesthetic, and political implications of what an event might be, which is of crucial importance to us now as what we take as representational democracies in the West go through multiple crises of legitimacy and political elites repeatedly deny the significance of mass movements and revolutionary events.

What has been obscured by the Cultural Studies turn broadly speaking is in fact French Theory's recurring need to return to literary texts not only to illustrate but also to work through the concept of the event. Badiou relies on mathematical models such as set theory to construct his theory of the event, but he also digresses into an extended analysis of Mallarmé's poetry; Deleuze's crystal image of time derives in part from Proust's novelistic thought; Derrida's

reading of Marx in this essay shows his understanding of the event to be much closer to Flaubert's than to many Marxist critics.

theories of the event come about in dialogue with Austin but also the poet Ponge; Rancière's with Flaubert and Mallarmé. I suggest that a return to the problematics of the event – by way of a reading of Flaubert's most explicitly "evental" novel – opens up a rich field of inquiry beyond formal and philosophical concerns and onto political and historical stakes. Such a return to the event rejects false dichotomies of formalism and historicism in order to address contemporary critical concerns such as the formation of new political identities, for example the Mouvement des gilets jaunes (the Yellow Vests Movement), in the wake of the crisis in representational democracies in the West. As we struggle to understand the relationship between democracy, representation, and political events or non-events, within our new and changing political landscape, Flaubert's literary experiment can give us, if not exactly an epistemological tool to understand with complete certainty how events unfold, then at least a warning to avoid jumping to conclusions about the meaning of revolts and upheavals.

In this essay, I will look at a specific "literary-historical event," by which I mean an event that only becomes legible, to the extent that it can be represented at all, by a literary text. "An event" defined as a singularity in a local site and a specific moment becomes "an historical event" when it is placed in a chain of events, explained away in a process that Badiou (2006: 176) calls "state normalization" as political elites erase the event's singularity in order to maintain the status quo. Literature participates in this normalization, by inscribing a singular event into the literary history of existing genre conventions and the relative order of narrative, and yet literature also emphasizes the irreducible nature of historical events, which always exceed the language used to represent them. The Revolution of 1848, which led to the formation of the Second French Republic and eventually to the coup d'état of Napoleon III, forever changed how we think of events as revolutions. It also ushered in new literary currents that

influenced modern French literature, especially Baudelaire's poetry and Flaubert's prose. Flaubert's 1869 novel *L'Éducation sentimentale* explores how perceptions of events change over time in the wake of 1848-51. These events received their most thorough analysis in Marx's essay *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, which uses literary and theatrical tropes to explain the events described in Flaubert's novel." Both Flaubert and Marx show us that literary form (irony, farce, attention to linguistic repetition) participates in the recognition and politicization of historical events even as literary form also comes to push back against the political forces that seek to consign the event to the past.

Just as a particular event is situated in a time (1848) and a place (Paris) – what Badiou calls an "evental site" (176) – a novel's title contextualizes and sets it apart from other texts. Flaubert had a flair for enigmatic subtitles and draft titles that were both unique and generic: for example, *Madame Bovary: Mœurs de province* (Provincial Mores); *Bouvard et Pécuchet*'s draft titles of "Les Deux cloportes" (The Two Woodlice) and later "Du défaut de méthode dans l'étude des connaissances humaines" (On the Lack of Method in the Study of the Human Sciences); as well as "Les Fruits secs" (Dried Fruits) and "Histoire d'un jeune homme" (Story/History of a Young Man), the draft title and subtitle of *L'Éducation sentimentale*. While there are countless explanations for the enigmatic phrase "sentimental education," the subtitle "Story of a Young Man" is no less mysterious, especially when set next to the abandoned title "Dried Fruits." The indefinite article "a" underlines the banality of this young man, who is no different from other men of his generation. If Frédéric's mediocrity, "a" young man like the others, makes him representative, then we can link this subtitle to Flaubert's wish to "faire l'histoire morale de ma génération" ("write a morale history of my generation") (Letter to Mlle. Leroyer de Chantepie, October 6, 1864, cited in the Préface, Pierre-Marc Biasi, 11). The final

title and subtitle accentuate the limits of an individual's ability to represent a greater collectivity, as well as the tension between his or her development in time ("education") and that qualification of this development as only "sentimental" (a word with a negative connotation in Flaubert's time). The plural of "Dried Fruits," however, might describe a whole generation without settling on any one representative – referring not just to Frédéric, but also to Deslauriers, Dussardier, Sénécal, even Rosanette, all of whom might fit under the obscure category of "dried fruits." It seems difficult to imagine the draft title paired with the subtitle "Story of a Young Man," and yet both title and subtitle suggest that the real question concerns regeneration and sterility. In a *Bildungsroman*, we expect to see the characteristics and the experiences of a generation to show up in the description of the young male protagonist, and expect the goal of his education to transmit values and knowledge to the succeeding generation. Yet, given that the education is only "sentimental" and that the man remains only "young," the title hints at the failure of this generation to reproduce in all senses of the word. Dried fruits are destined not to reproduce (to germinate) but rather to be conserved and intensified (whether their flavors taste sweetened or spoiled), maintaining a sterile, but also concentrated youth.

L'Éducation sentimentale thus explores the nature of the event by way of writing the history of the generation defined by 1848. While this generation tied itself to an event, the logic of that event is one of the singularity of an act in one place and at one single moment, and therefore far removed from the reproductive logic of a generation or even the logic of a novel within a literary "genre" such as the Bildungsroman. To complicate matters, the political stakes of 1848-1851 involved questioning the reproducibility of this revolutionary event – whether its history, its class relations, or its political illusions; as Marx's essay on the events showed, historical actors took on borrowed roles from the past in order to affirm the agenda they wanted

to reproduce. Flaubert's stylistic innovations, his novel's paradoxically tight structure and narrative breaks, attempt to represent and reproduce the creative and destructive energy of revolutionary events that can never be confined to their historical moment by reactionary politics or sobering historical analysis.

Defining the Literary-Historical Event

Flaubert's attention to minute details is legendary. He claimed to have read 1500 books while preparing his unfinished novel *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. When it came to the history of the 1848 revolution, he was no less meticulous, consulting and annotating over the course of a few weeks twenty-seven volumes on the year 1848 (Guisan 1958: 183) and composing several hundred pages of notes. Besides historical accounts and journalistic sources, he drew heavily upon his own experiences and memories, as well as those of his friends. The art of the novel, for Flaubert, consists in balancing two fidelities; fidelity to history, or to its spirit at least, and fidelity to a coherent vision of the novel. Flaubert strove to accurately represent historically verified actions, and when this wasn't possible, to invent plausible ones. Yet he was constantly worried about upsetting the balance between history, politics, and novel, since historical discourse and fidelity to facts may not always conform to novelistic form: "J'ai bien du mal à emboîter mes personnages dans les événements politiques de 48! J'ai peur que les fonds ne dévorent les premiers plans." ("I am having a hard time framing my characters within the political events of '48! I am afraid that the background might devour the foreground") (Flaubert 2001: 734). Tony Williams (2000), analyzing Flaubert's notes for the scene in which Dussardier is wounded in June 1848, has concluded that after gathering as much information as he could about the heroic acts during the street battles of June, the novelist reworked these anecdotes into

a denser, opaque, rendering. The very nature of an event produces uncertainty and endless questions: who took part, for what reasons, why at that moment and not later, etc. Historians must invent the names and motives of historical actors who, before the event, were anonymous and invisible (see Rancière 1993).

An event is a singularity of a moment and a time that escapes both language and an immediate recognition – only afterwards can an event's antecedents be recognized and inscribed in an historical continuity. An event breaks in time unexpectedly, rupturing the linearity of lived time, and therefore is both unforeseen and unpredictable. Any attempt to understand it comes necessarily after the fact, by finding retrospectively ready-made words to fit an ephemeral experience that was not pre-dictable. For Jacques Derrida, the event's singularity is paradoxical because it emerges outside of language, but can only be understood and read after the fact, when it is inscribed in an anterior context:

> Quand arrive un événement, il est illisible. Sa singularité est irréductible. *Ça arrive*, mais ça n'arrive qu'à son bord, car pour que l'événement soit lu, il faut qu'il s'efface.
>
> APORIE : Un événement est unique, mais nous ne pouvons dire qu'*il y a de l'événement* que s'il est cité, répété, et alors il a perdu ce qui fait sa singularité, son idiome, son unicité. L'événement se perd lui-même, il s'*ex-approprie*.[6]

Any attempt to re-present the event defines it *as* an event, yet at the same time this representation betrays the event by putting what happened in a series, as a repetition of a previous occurrence, since language necessarily functions through repetition (in order to recognize the meaning of

[6] "When an event happens, it is illegible. Its singularity is irreducible. *It happens*, but it only occurs at its border/edge, since for the event to be read, it must efface itself. APORIA: An event is unique, but we can only say that *there is an event* if it is cited, repeated, and then it has lost what makes its singularity, its idiom, its unity. The event loses itself, it *ex-appropriates itself*." (Derrida 2005: 34-5).

what is written as already having been inscribed before). In this sense, what is colloquially called an "event," say a wedding, has nothing singular about it, is not in fact an event in this sense, since it conforms to a ritualized ceremony, deliberately limiting its uniqueness.

What Derrida (and French Theory in general) means by event here, in the strongest sense, is an act in a place and time that brings previously unpoliticized people together. An event in this sense escapes any preexisting discourse because its very formation was outside of existing linguistic and social structures. Those who would represent a singular event in a written text (journalists, politicians, historians, novelists) necessarily inscribe it in a specific ideological context, making it "readable" and even "obvious" for those who recognize their own ideology in how the event is framed (and the literary frame chosen by the novelist marks a difference from the event even as it represents it). As an example, we can think of all the ambiguity of situating the dates of the French Revolution, which depending on any given historian's ideological perspective, was already finished in 1789 (the fall of the Bastille, the formation of the Estates General), 1792 (the beheading of Louis XVI), 1799 (Napoleon's coup d'état), 1804 (Napoleon becomes emperor), or perhaps the work of the revolution is still ongoing, as the apocryphal saying by Chairman Mao goes "it's too early to judge." A revolutionary perspective sustains the event's dynamism by refusing to constrain it into any discourse of finitude or repetition of the same.

The paradox of a novel that confronts events in their originary revolutionary character is that while, like any written text, a novel is made of citations, of repetitions, of fragments of borrowed discourse, and of formal and generic expectations, the literariness of a novel calls attention to these citations and to the visibility of itself as the art of writing. The form of the novel, in this sense, negates singularity, but by rendering its repetitions visible, a novel

problematizes the readability of an event, giving it back some of the ineffable quality it seeks to capture and convey. In order for an event to be represented in language, it must be rendered in borrowed discourse, with repeated clichés that approximate, without quite hitting the mark, the event's uniqueness. The novel form is ideally suited to representing the event's temporal rupture, because it makes its clichés visible and plays with the materiality of language. Flaubert's modernity, or at least his novelty, comes from his attention to the formation of "idées reçues" (received ideas), of bourgeois ideology as it forms what Roland Barthes called the "doxa," composed of myths. *Bouvard et Pécuchet* resembles an encyclopedia of nineteenth-century bourgeois stupidity (and social stupidity in general) that was meant to be completed in the second, unfinished, volume by the "Dictionary of Received Ideas." If *Bouvard et Pécuchet* is the apotheosis of Flaubert's destructive work with clichés, then *L'Éducation sentimentale* is his subtler attempt to free himself (and his novel) from the stupidity of a certain bourgeois thought of recent history by precisely representing the ridiculousness of a life lived according to romantic clichés.

From its first pages, the novel characterizes Frédéric as a young man with artistic pretentions:

> Un jeune homme de dix-huit ans, à longs cheveux et qui tenait un album sous son bras, restait auprès du gouvernail, immobile. À travers le brouillard, il contemplait des clochers, des édifices dont il ne savait pas les noms; puis il embrassa, dans un dernier coup d'œil, l'île Saint-Louis, la Cité, Notre-Dame; et bientôt, Paris disparaissant, il poussa un grand soupir.

M. Frédéric Moreau, nouvellement reçu bachelier, s'en retournait à Nogent-sur-Seine, où il devait languir pendant deux mois, avant de *faire son droit.* (Flaubert 2002: 41-2)[7]

As the representative of his generation, Frédéric embodies all the "received ideas" one could have about a young man from the provinces who travels to Paris ("monter à Paris" as the expression goes) to make a career, but who remains clueless about the political and economic complexity of his moment. His long hair and his sketchbook connote Romantic fashion, and his immobility contrasting with the movement of the "ship" on the river highlights his Romantic and precocious nostalgia for Paris, a city he doesn't even know yet. The atmospheric fog seems an inevitable detail that corresponds to Frédéric's blurred vision as he watches the buildings go by. We can imagine that he does know the names of the Île Saint-Louis, the Cité and Notre-Dame – all of Paris encapsulated in a single glance--but his "heavy sigh" as Paris disappears makes us understand that he is playing the role of a real Parisian, or at least a provincial who wants to love Paris. Highlighting the cliché, Flaubert italicizes the last three words "faire son droit" (study law); like any respectable young bourgeois man, he is going to study "his" law – an ambition that points to his desire to succeed and distinguish himself, yet which, because of its banality, will likely lead to disillusionment.

Frédéric is shot through with stereotypes, with fragments of discourses and quotations that he himself would hardly understand. Joined with narrative distance, the irony of the free

[7] "A young man of 18 years of age, with long hair and holding a sketchbook under his arm, stayed by the rudder, immobile. Through the fog, he contemplated the clock towers, the buildings whose names he didn't know; then, with a farewell glance, he took in the Île Saint-Louis, the Cité, Notre-Dame; and soon, Paris disappearing, he let out a heavy sigh. M. Frédéric Moreau, recently graduated with a baccalaureate, was returning to Nogent-sur-Seine, where he was to languish for two months before *studying law*."

indirect style, they keep Frédéric from ever forming a coherent subject. For Christopher Prendergast, Flaubert's "negativity" is actually a sign of his subversion of stereotyped definitions of reality (Prendergast 1975: 203). Indeed, Flaubert plays at breaking the novelistic illusion through an ironic art of repetition, and not only with regards to characters, but also by staging the trap of repetition within his representation of revolutionary events, which themselves are shown to be clichés. Flaubert's crushing of bourgeois ideology and clichés exposes how the *doxa* appropriates historical events as repetition (the grandest cliché of all being "history repeats itself"). By accentuating repetitions, clichés, and borrowed discourse, Flaubert's novel makes the ruptures of 1848 all the more apparent.

Marx and the Aftereffects of 1848

Before Flaubert, Karl Marx had described the nature of the events of 1848-51 in strikingly complementary terms. Both writers emphasize the problem of representing the event: political discourse at the time focused on what is repeated throughout history, whereas events had created something radically new in the rightist bourgeois "parti de l'ordre" which brought Napoleon III to power.[8] By comparing Flaubert to Marx, we can see that 1848 in Paris was a key moment for thinking about the revolutionary event, since two very different thinkers were able to lay bare the machinations that covered over the uniqueness of that event.

In his chronicle and analysis of this period, Marx makes the famous observation,

[8] Richard Terdiman (1985: 201) has described the counter-ideological strategies of Marx and Flaubert, arguing that the two share the same goal of staging the self-destruction of bourgeois discourse.

> Hegel says somewhere that all great historic facts and personages recur twice. He forgot to add: 'Once as tragedy, and again as farce.' Caussidière for Danton, Louis Blanc for Robespierre, the 'Mountain of 1848-51 for the 'Mountain' of 1793-95, the Nephew for the Uncle. The identical caricature marks also the conditions under which the second edition of the eigteenth Brumaire is issued.
>
> Man makes his own history, but he does not make it out of the whole cloth; he does not make it out of the conditions chosen by himself, but out of such as he finds close at hand. (Marx 1963: 15).

Placing his own observation under the sign of a quotation or repetition of Hegel (an original source from Hegel has not been found), Marx shows that the historical event is not only a repetition, but also markedly theatrical: a spectacle that can also be understood as a text ("Auflage" describes the coup d'état of 18th Brumaire as if the event were a printed work in two editions). For Marx, then, the representation of the event is always framed as a spectacle that draws on borrowed clichés from the past. For the French Revolution, the reference was ancient Rome, both as Republic and Empire. Note that Marx thus proposes two repetitions, and therefore three iterations, in such a way that the great events and characters of the French Revolution appear as a (tragic) repetition of ancient Roman history (Napoleon as Caesar), and the events and characters of 1848-51 appear inscribed as a second (farcical) repetition. Jeffrey Mehlman (1977) argues that the movement from tragedy (1789 to Napoleon I) to farce (1848 to Napoleon III) bypasses the intermediary genre of comedy – instead of a Hegelian dialectic moving from the high to the low in order to then sublimate it,

Marx's invented quotation ties the very high of tragedy to the very low of farce of the *Lumpenproletariat*. The representation of the event as only repetition, then occurs as a shock or a surprise, like a deus ex machina from a hokey play.

If the historical event is a spectacle, men and women are both the audience and the actors, making "their own" history (as Frédéric studies "his" law), by combining fragments of discourses inherited from the past. In German, Marx writes "nicht aus freien Stücken," which we usually translate as "they do not make it as they please," but "Stücken" also means pieces, fragments, and theatrical plays, while echoing "Lumpen," meaning rags. The historical actors wear costumes from another era made of rags and sown together pieces, as masks that keep us from seeing their true characters, just as Flaubert's characters take on successive political roles only to discard them when the political tide turns.

In *L'Éducation sentimentale*, the Revolution is predicted as early as the second chapter, when Deslauriers says to Frédéric, "Ces bonnes gens qui dorment tranquilles, c'est drôle ! Patience ! un nouveau 89 se prépare !" (These good citizens sleep soundly, it's funny! Patience! A new '89 is coming!") (63). The spirit or ghost of 1789 is summoned and our characters dream of being heroes of the revolution. When Sénécal appears in front of the "Club des Intelligences" in the first chapter of the third part, the narrator informs us that he takes himself as a new Louis-Auguste Blanqui: "et, comme chaque personnage se réglait alors sur un modèle, l'un copiant Saint-Just, l'autre Danton, l'autre Marat, lui, il tâchait de ressembler à Blanqui, lequel imitait Robespierre" (and, as each character fashioned himself at that time according to a model, one copying Saint-Just, another Danton, yet another Marat, he tried to resemble

Blanqui, who had imitated Robespierre) (450). Sénécal's job title is "répétiteur" (tutor or literally "repeater"), and is therefore the second repetition of Robespierre, with Blanqui, spending years in prison, as the tragic first copy); and if Sénécal appears "rigid," he is as far as possible from "incorruptible," as if the farcical image of Robespierre.

If it is possible to dream of a repetition of the Revolution as Deslauriers does, if it is possible to fantasize the present as past (as Sénécal does), then it is also possible to hallucinate a repetition of the Terror by misinterpreting signs. In an ambiguous passage that serves as the transition between the Republican deception of Regimbart and the capitalist paranoia of Dambreuse, we learn that, "Malgré la législation la plus humaine qui fut jamais, le spectre de 93 reparut, et le couperet de la guillotine vibra dans toutes les syllabes du mot République" (Despite the most humane legislation ever seen, the specter of '93 reappeared, and the guillotine's blade vibrated in all the syllables of the word Republic) (441). The three syllables would be perceived as an onomatopoeia of the guillotine, but they are also the three knocks that signal the rising of the curtain in French theater.

It is impossible to escape from the ghosts of the past. Deslauriers's naiveté becomes clear as he explains his political vision to convince Frédéric to start a newspaper: "Mais, principe signifiant origine, il faut se reporter toujours à une révolution, à un acte de violence, à un fait transitoire. [...] Assez de métaphysique, plus de fantômes!" (But principle signifies origin, such that it is always necessary to refer to a revolution, to an act of violence, to a transitory fact.... Enough metaphysics, no more phantoms!) (282). In the last chapter, Deslauriers tells Frédéric that he has seen

Regimbart, whose complaints about the provisional government had preceded the passage on the specter of '93:

> "Vit-il encore ?"
>
> — À peine ! Tous les soirs, régulièrement, depuis la rue de Grammont jusqu'à la rue Montmartre, il se traîne devant les cafés, affaibli, courbé en deux, vidé, un spectre ![9]

Regimbart, "The Citizen" as the other characters call him, haunts the streets and cafés, as an inconvenient witness to the disappearance of the Republic and he incarnates Deslauriers and Frédéric's disillusions.

As Marx remarks in *The 18th Brumaire*, "Wholly absorbed in the production of wealth and in peaceful fight of competitive, [French bourgeois society] could no longer understand that the ghosts of the days of Rome had watched over its cradle" (15). Robespierre and Napoleon had worn "Roman costumes" and pronounced "Roman phrases" in an invocation of ancient and noble ghosts in order to usher in the bourgeois reign of capital; yet when the bourgeois party of order, led by Napoleon III, borrowed the mannerisms and even the same dates for their theft of the democratic events of 1848 (Napoleon III's December 2nd coup was the same date as Napoléon I's 18th Brumaire in the Republican calendar), the circulation of old ghosts only throws the country back to a prior epoch, depoliticizing the masses that had briefly made themselves heard, as the inscription of the event into a linear history inevitably erases its singularity. This historicizing, depoliticizing gesture seeks to foreclose the threating upheaval of the event as such. As Charles Baudelaire (1973: 188) had written in 1851, echoing Marx but also perhaps the

[9] "Is he still alive?" "Barely! Every night, regularly, from the rue de Grammont all the way to the rue Montmartre, he drags himself from café to café, weakened, bent over, emptied, a specter!" 623.

character Regimbart, “le 2 décembre m’a physiquement dépolitiqué” (December 2nd physically depoliticized me).

Ghosting the Event: It was like an apparition

As tyrannical ghosts or revolutionary specters, the phantoms of the past haunt discourses over history’s repetitions, in both literature and the social sciences, but in novels the specter becomes a character in its own right. A specter is frightening because it doesn’t belong entirely to the past or to the present, it is neither absent nor present. A “revenant” evokes in French something that has come back, yet not entirely. The “revenant” does not completely escape its own virtuality, because it is a past oriented towards the future (like capitalist “revenue”). Even if you conjure up the specter of 1793, you will not incarnate it. The specter reveals the gap between our borrowed discourses from the past and the singularity of the (new) event. Since the fragments of past discourses cannot encompass the event in its entirety, and since other possible discourses might more fully describe it, no single representation – not even a work of literature – can capture every dimension of an event. The specter is, thus, a sublime remainder ensuring that history continues and that the elusive event will continue to trouble our image of forward-marching time. No matter how much we might wish for the end of history, no matter how much we might think we comprehend the pre-established patterns of mass movements, events continue to haunt us with all their disruptive changes to the political order.

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida (1993) finds an echo of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (“To be or not to be”) in the opening sentence of the *Communist Manifesto* from 1848, “A specter haunts Europe, the specter of Communism.” Derrida points to the paradox of waiting for a specter to make a first appearance, which would mean that haunting is outside of time, in other words,

Shakespeare's "time is out of joint." Derrida's "hauntology" is the very principle of the event, caught between being and not being:

> Répétition *et* première fois, voilà peut-être la question de l'événement comme question du fantôme: qu'*est-ce* qu'un fantôme? qu'est-ce que l'*effectivité* ou la *présence* d'un spectre, c'est-à-dire de ce qui semble rester aussi ineffectif, virtuel, inconsistant qu'un simulacre? Y a-t-il *là*, entre la chose même et son simulacre, une opposition qui tienne? Répétition *et* première fois mais aussi répétition *et* dernière fois, car la singularité de toute *première fois* en fait aussi une *dernière fois*.[10]

Each event, in its singularity, provokes repetitions in the future (its inscription after the event), but also repetitions that are thrown back into the past (seen retroactively as precursors to the event), in a phenomenon comparable to what Gilles Deleuze (1985: 108-9) called the "crystal image" of time. The representation of the event, then, crystallizes an image of time that inscribes both a past cause and a future effect in a teleology that varies according to the ideological lens of the observer. Derrida's choice of the word "simulacrum" to describe the representation of the event suggests that this representation can only be an approximation that creates the illusion of an origin (a move Derrida also makes when he theorizes the archive). With the representation of the event's force also comes an attempt on the part of political actors (whether politicians, journalists, or activists, as Derrida suggests) to circumscribe it in a cycle of repetitions in history (the trope of history repeating itself which, in this case, extends back to Julius Caesar, through

[10] "Repetition *and* first time, here is perhaps the question of the event as the question of the phantom: what is a phantom? what is the *effectivity* or the *presence* of a specter, which is to say of what seems to stay ineffective, virtual, as inconsistent as a simulacrum? Is there *here*, between the thing itself and its simulacrum, an opposition that holds together? Repetition *and* first time but also repetition *and* last time, for the singularity of every *first time* makes of it also a *last time*." 31.

Napoleon I and Napoleon III, and perhaps event "anticipates" Trump or Macron), making the singular event paradoxically not just a "first time" but also a "last time," something that is prevented from returning – this is politics in the sense of policing reified political actors in order to maintain the status quo. What novelistic accounts of the revolutionary event capture is not so much the event itself, or the ordered representations of time and identity which the event eludes, but, rather, the haunting or virtuality that is the event's remainder.

The French Revolution isn't the only ghost haunting *L'Éducation sentimentale*. In a novel that shows how the repetitions of discourse are unable to comprehend the reality of the event, specters, phantoms, and apparitions play an essential role. The most famous instance in Flaubert's novel is Frédéric introduction to Mme Moreau in the first chapter:

> Frédéric, pour rejoindre sa place, poussa la grille des Premières, dérangea deux chasseurs avec leurs chiens.
>
> Ce fut comme une apparition:
>
> Elle était assise, au milieu du banc, toute seule; ou du moins il ne distingua personne, dans l'éblouissement que lui envoyèrent ses yeux.[11]

The remarkably beautiful rhythm and alliteration of Flaubert's prose contrasts with the ridiculousness of the scene, in which Frédéric bumps up against dogs before seeing a woman he mistakenly believes is alone. It may be the first time he sees her, but she is "like" an apparition, which is to say she really is there before him, but he has the impression of imagining her as a ghostly presence from the past. She is his dream of an ideal woman, and so Frédéric has a vision of her as if she were coming towards him from an exotic place and time. The careful reader will

[11] "Frédéric, to get back to his seat, pushed the gate of the First-Class section, upset two hunters with their dogs. It was like an apparition: She was seated, in the middle of the bench, all alone; or at least he didn't notice anyone, in the blinding sparkle sent by her eyes" 46-7.

note that the introduction of M. Arnoux a few pages prior ends with the phrase “Il disparut” (he disappeared) (44), and that when Frédéric introduces himself to Mme Arnoux, he hears “le sieur Arnoux apparaissant” (the gentleman Arnoux appearing) (49). The “event” of our two protagonists meeting creates a simulacrum (“like an apparition”), a retrospective repetition (Arnoux disappeared), and a first iteration in Arnoux’s “apparition.” Here, sublime tragedy (Mme Arnoux’s apparition and Frédéric’s ill-fated love), comedy (bumping into the dogs), and farce (M. Arnoux’s appearance chasing away the would-be suitor) all coexist in Flaubert’s levelled language and ironic style that show the different characters’ perspectives in equal measure. In the extensive passages on the long period of revolutionary and political turmoil that take place eight years after this scene, Flaubert likewise portrays events from multiple and incompatible perspectives, using the same movement in three parts – political maneuvering and historicizing of events take the same triple form in Flaubert as we saw in Marx beginning with this seemingly innocuous Romantic passage.

The simulacrum-event or the spectral event with its two repetitions can also be seen in the tripartite structure of the novel. As Léon Cellier (1964: 6) observed, the “binocular” vision of Flaubert’s novel (with its multiple couples) transforms into a tertiary structure. Again, as with Marx (building on Mehlman’s reading), this tripartite structure at every level does not function as a dialectic, but rather as a deconstruction of the creation of bourgeois myths. The formal repetition seems almost mechanical, inhuman or automatic, which breaks down sentences and levels all references, as Marcel Proust (1971: 594) had noted in his analysis of Flaubert’s style. In a novel where almost nothing happens, where almost all drama is absent, the repetitive structure prevents any movement, any illusion of progress, any heroic action that would leave a

defining mark on the characters' stories or on the history of France.[12] The revolutionary potential of 1848 has been quashed by Napoleon III's coup d'état, yet lives on in the literary innovations, in Flaubert's and Marx's irony, and in the indignation we feel reading the novel.

Dried Fruits

Frédéric misses out on the great historical events of his time just as he misses every opportunity in his life, most notably evidenced by his confusion in February 1848 and his missed rendezvous with Mme Arnoux. Time seems "out of joint," the strange coincidence of the major moments in Frédéric's emotional life and political upheavals means that he doesn't participate in events, or at least he doesn't understand them. Frédéric is caught in the logic of Romantic repetition: he never manages to affirm what comes back to him with each repetition and sees only the non-coincidence of events and his desires.[13]

The turning point comes at the end of the fifth chapter of the third part when Frédéric witnesses the killing of Dussardier by Sénécal during the coup d'état of December 2, 1851 (614-15). This singularly dramatic act of the novel owes its force to Frédéric's recognition of Dussardier's heroism followed by Frédéric's belated recognition of Sénécal as both friend and executioner. For the first time, Frédéric is not elsewhere during an event, yet all he ends up doing, the reader may conjecture, is to let out the "hurlement d'horreur" (scream of horror) that

[12] Jacques Rancière (2014) explains the negative reaction contemporary critics, such as Barbey d'Aurevilly, had to the novel by the fact that Flaubert's novel rejects the Aristotelian logic of narration (with its beginning, middle, and end). The "hero" can no longer carry out great acts, but only lives in the banality of daily life..

[13] I am thinking here of Romantic repetition or "the circuitous journey" as M.H. Abrams (1973) described it in *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*, which as its title announces, treats what changes and what stays the same in the philosophical and poetic aspects of Romanticism in England, Germany, and France.

comes somewhere from the crowd. Hearing the scream, Sénécal glares at Frédéric, personally involving him in what just happened. This recognition in the moment does not, however, lead to Frédéric's understanding of the event or to a new discourse showing that an event has occurred. Instead, Frédéric stays "béant" (agape), silent after his scream, but we know nothing more about his thoughts and have to fill in what happened through our own knowledge of history. What Marcel Proust called the "blanc" between chapters five and six, between "Frédéric béant..." and "Il voyagea..." (he traveled) would be the silence structured by the novelist to show where discourse fails to capture the event and where no quotation can cover over the event (Proust 1971: 595). The modern novel starting with Flaubert modulates between narrating a continuous quotidian broken up by surprising ruptures (as Proust explained and countless others such as Maurice Blanchot, Gérard Genette, and Paul Ricœur have theorized); Flaubert's "blank" signals the moment when the force of the event is momentarily arrested and the revolutionary crowd silenced.

The last two chapters of *L'Éducation sentimentale* describe Frédéric as morose (his last name is Moreau), nostalgic, and closed in on himself. The sixth chapter closes the third part, repeating the structure of the first two parts. Moreover, in this chapter, Mme Arnoux and Frédéric relive their past love, as she tells him, "Quelquefois, vos paroles me reviennent comme un écho lointain, comme le son d'une cloche apporté par le vent; et il me semble que vous êtes là, quand je lis des passages d'amour dans les livres."[14] Their unconsummated love leaves only a textual trace because they themselves see it as a quotation from an old book. Without a future, their past only a series of quotations, their love is epitomized when she leaves the apartment:

[14] "Sometimes your words come back to me like a far-off echo, like the sound of a bell brought by the wind; and it seems to me that you are there, when I read passages of love in books" 618.

“Elle monta dedans. La voiture disparut. Et ce fut tout” (She stepped inside. The carriage disappeared. And that was all.”) (621); the apparition from the first chapter turns into a carriage that disappears, and there’s nothing more to say.

The seventh chapter breaks with the model created by the six chapters in each of the first two parts by adding an epilog or even a supplement to the ideal, but empty, love for Mme Arnoux through the friend Deslauriers. As epilog, it creates a sense of an aftereffect, as a discourse that exists outside the main text “epi-logos”; as supplement, it reveals the inadequacy of the couple Frédéric/Mme Arnoux. The two grown men tell stories about what happened to their mutual acquaintances: all of them have had the success one could have predicted according to their origins, even Sénécal, who has simply “disparu” (disappeared) (623).

As with Mme Arnoux, Frédéric discusses his shared past with Deslauriers, but the two friends project everything that happened to them back onto the seemingly insignificant anecdote from the beginning of the novel, from when they went to the “Turque” (a prostitute) in their adolescence; Frédéric was too scared, “sans avancer, sans rien dire [...] il s’enfuit” (without moving forward, without saying anything [...] he ran away) (just as he does when Deslauriers is shot) (626). The last two, justifiably well-known sentences of the novel could have been said by Bouvard and Pécuchet in their tautological complementarity: “C’est là ce que nous avons eu de meilleur! [...] Oui, peut-être bien? C’est là ce que nous avons eu de meilleur!” (That was the best time we ever had! [...] Yes, maybe it was? That was the best time we ever had!) (626). An event without consequences, a (sexual) fiasco, the story of the two adolescents becomes the sign of all the failures that will happen to them later, and so requires the repetitive affirmation of the two friends, “Oui, peut-être bien?” (yes, maybe it was?). This bitterly ironic and very Flaubertian ending still has a glimmer of hope, because the two find a real pleasure in telling their story –

narrative functions as compensation of sorts (they create something ostensibly new out of old clichés), undercut by proof of their assimilation to readily digested bourgeois doxa. If the "dried fruits" of the abandoned title denote Frédéric and Deslauriers, it is because they lived sterile lives, in permanent immaturity, protected from the great historical turbulence of their times through a kind of preservation or sublation. Yet as readers, we may be shocked and horrified at the banality of this ending and its erasure of the potential of 1848, while what nonetheless remains from that event, however, is the bitter taste of disillusionment. Mouths agape when faced with a world they do not understand, Frédéric and Deslauriers can only reflect and repeat what already is, as they themselves are conserved, preserved, dried up like a fruit that's meant to be eaten later by readers who enjoy, by turns, the novel's bitter-sweet irony.

Marx and Flaubert show that the real challenge for both ends of the political spectrum in 1848 was to impose a vision of ideology as a natural repetition of history, to make it seem as though a Second Republic (for the left), or a Second Empire (for the right), was an obvious, even natural, occurrence that had nothing new or revolutionary about it. Marx and Flaubert, in their writing practices, on the contrary, privilege irony and the self-reflexivity of critical language, which can serve, in turn, as a model for critics today, since it leaves open the possibility of radical change (aesthetic for Flaubert, political for Marx). What can Flaubert's novel, along with Marx's *18th Brumaire*, suggest to us literary critics in the twenty-first century? The lesson to be learned is that we should *not* look for direct historical antecedents in the immediate aftermath of an event and we should be weary of those who attempt to concoct such narratives too quickly. Napoleon III shared several qualities with Trump, from their physical height, dyed hair, foreign wives, and inherited power, as well as faux populism and lack of defined ideology. In France, every president of the Fifth Republic, including of course Macron, has been criticized by the left

as a reincarnation of Napoleon I. As scholars of the event, we must be careful to distrust these proclivities to see (only) what repeats lest we miss the different and the unique (just as Napoleon III's adoption of his uncle's legacy obscured his radicality). Similarly, the latest protest movements, from Occupy Wall Street to the Gilets jaunes, have eschewed any hasty identification and even any concrete demands. The Gilets jaunes in particular have been compared to the sansculottes of the 18th century, the Boulangistes of the 19th century, and the Poujadistes of the mid-20th century, and yet remain stubbornly difficult to pin down ideologically and sociologically. The press and established politicians have struggled to label and reduce these protestors to recognizable categories, or at their worst, have selectively focused on the racist or homophobic or other non-politically correct elements of these groups in order to denigrate any movement that resists the neoliberal machine (this tactic has been particularly effective in undermining the Sanders campaign in 2016 and, slightly less so in 2020).

Today, the left dreams of reenacting May '68 or 1789, and the right hallucinates the Terror and Stalin's purges, but as we have seen, in the literary-historical events that 1848 made possible, change happens in ways that could not be foreseen, in the unexpected and the unrepeatable. Flaubert and Marx warn us that we should be attuned to attempts to impose an historical narrative onto protean political events, lest change be halted and voices of protest silenced, leaving us, like Frédéric, "béant," agape at the erasure of emerging political identities.

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