

Title: Victorian Research Seminar Week 10 Outline

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Date: March 27, 2018

Outline Week 10

- Flaubert, selections from *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, The Dictionary of Received Ideas
- Explore http://flaubert.univ-rouen.fr/bouvard_et_pecuchet/ and <http://gallica.bnf.fr/to> and manuscript pages, but give yourself time.
- return to Roland Barthes, “The Reality Effect” + Buurma and Heffernan, “Notation After ‘The Reality Effect’: Remaking Reference with Roland Barthes and Sheila Heti”
- selections from Roland Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel*
- Stanford Lit Lab Pamphlet 11
- question: canon, archive, corpus: how do we think about all the novels?

Check-In

+What was it like to read this novel? + How does it fit with the other novels we have read in this course?

What did you think of John Sturrock’s review, “How stupid people are”?

- Biographical information about Flaubert
- Flaubert’s political frustrations

Flaubert’s research

What did you notice about Flaubert’s notational system? About his manuscripts? How did this relate to whether you know French or not?

How does Flaubert’s research for *B+P* compare to *Hard Cash* and Reade’s research practices? Flaubert’s satire vs. Reade’s sincerity LRB Sturrock review: it’s comic/ironic that Flaubert was misusing his own time the same way his characters are

Barthes

“The Reality Effect”

We first talked about the reality effect in relation to Trollope—where do we see the reality effect in Reade and Flaubert?

How do these novels change our understanding of what realism is?

Aly’s criticism summary - Does “The Reality Effect” raise questions that it doesn’t answer?

Buurma and Heffernan - Notation After the “Reality Effect”

What is the connection proposed here between “The Reality Effect” and *The Preparation of the Novel*?

The Real and the Meaningful in Criticism and in Practice:

“For in removing the possibility of insignificance, it reduces the horizon of meaning such that all realist details mean the same thing. And in making all realist details mean the same . . . the difference between the living and the meaningful looms up, always ready to reappear as a division structuring our writing and our lives” (82).

“Reorienting himself from the critic to writer allows Barthes to return the undernoticed detail of the realist novel to the moment it was first noticed, the moment when a writer took note of something and then made a note” (83).

The Preparation of the Novel

How does the shift from the critic’s point of view to the writer’s/producer’s point of view contribute or relate to: + The study of authorship and research methods? + The study of the novel itself? + Our perspectives as writers-and-critics?

Midlife crisis/wanting to write

- What do we think of this subjective approach to literary theory? The form of his lecture notes Tone, especially compared to the Stanford lit lab pamphlet

Fantasy of the novel/role of memory

- How can the fantasy of the novel help us reimagine what “canon” and “archive” mean? From Tristan’s summary: “. . . the fact that he describes the desired novel as the ‘Fantasy-of-the-novel’ implies that the novel that is actually written is not that idea of the novel.”
- Technology vs. Science; Production vs. Interpretation; Craft/Research How do Barthes’ objectives compare to those of Flaubert, as well as Flaubert’s characters?

Time and notation

- “Is it possible to make a Narrative (a Novel) out of the Present?” (17)
- “What notation presents is the problem of realism.” How does this reach back to Barthes’ discussion of notations in “The Reality Effect”?
- What do we think of realism and the haiku?

Willa’s close reading

For greater clarity, they took their own house as a mnemonic basis, attaching to each of its parts a distinct fact; the courtyard, the garden, the surroundings, the entire region soon had no purpose other than to aid their memory. The milestones in the countryside defined certain periods, the apple trees were family trees, bushes became battles, the whole world became a symbol. They peered at walls searching for a host of absent things, ended up seeing them, then couldn’t remember the dates they represented (107).

Increasing abstraction of Bouvard and Pecuchet’s interests + “Bouvard and Pecuchet seem to stray farther and farther from the practical over time, beginning with theories of agriculture and gardening but ultimately devoting their lives to simply copying over documents.”

The relationship between knowledge and reality + Symbolism and the natural world + What is Flaubert critiquing?

The Dictionary of Accepted Ideas

What did you think of the dictionary, and how was your experience of reading it?

The translator’s note

- Issue of translating cultural clichés into another language Issue of reading cultural clichés from another era -Note: the dictionary was mostly finished by 1850, while Flaubert began working on B+P in the early 1870s.

The Dictionary's Contents

- The relationship between dictionary entries and events/scenes in the novel?
- Tone/conversational style of the directions in the dictionary Ferguson: dictionaries, encyclopedias, and newspapers "...participate in a culture of correction, in which conversation is less likely to take place in the mode of agreement than as a revision of what someone else has just said..." (787) Flaubert writing Bouvard and Pecuchet as speaking as newspapers/dictionaries/encyclopedias themselves. (Katie: Is Flaubert questioning the concept that newspapers/dictionaries/encyclopedias are an accurate source of knowledge?)
- Compare to Reade. Katie: "what does it mean that fiction writers at this time are kind of trying not to be fiction writers?"

BREAK

Ana's Close Reading

Its four legs were dried out. The grimace of its muzzle revealed yellowed fangs in bluish gums. In place of its belly was a dun-colored mass, which seemed to palpitate from all the vermin swarming over it. They bustled about under the hot sun, in the buzzing of flies and that fierce, intolerable, all-consuming stench. Bouvard's forehead wrinkled and tears ran down his cheeks. Pécuchet said stoically, "Someday that will be us!" The idea of death had taken hold of them (207).

Cycles in B+P and the novel's philosophy

- Repetition despite foreshadowing and local changes
- "The tonal shift in this passage signals a thematic shift that the novel fails to deliver and thus ends up only emphasizing the circularity of the novel."

The Reality Effect within B+P

- The dog passage/tone shift feels potentially meaningful but its possible impact on the narrative isn't realized. How do we reconcile this phenomenon with Barthes' theory?

Stanford Literary Lab - Canon/Archive. Large-scale Dynamics in the Literary Field

Let's briefly discuss the lab's methods and what they discover.

The Canon

- How does canonicity relate to the Archive and to the Published?
- Leila's Summary: this work demonstrates that "Quantitative analysis can be used to lead a human mind to a specific text within a vast corpus"
- Barthes goes beyond the reality effect in canonical writing by turning to the preparation of the novel-to-be-written—Stanford's exploration of canon/archive also leads them somewhere else. Is there a connection here?

Ferguson - Too Much Information

What are the main points that Ferguson is trying to make in this article?

What is her claim about journalism's correctional style? How does it relate to reference works - dictionaries and encyclopedias? To the research of Flaubert and of his characters?

Connect back to our discussion of free indirect discourse; what is the contrast Ferguson draws between the use of FID in Austen, in earlier Flaubert, in B + P? Do you agree with Ferguson that the goal of B + P seems to be "a literature that is so purely descriptive as to amount only to the mere publication of what already exists"?

Bouvard and Pecuchet as characters

- Their relationship to one another (do we agree with Ferguson's reading?)
- Their relationship to the information assemblage in the text

The editorial narrative

- The constant self-corrections and contradictions of not only B + P but also the Dictionary/the narrative itself
"Rather, the two men intuitively embrace the notion that any view they encounter from the persons around them should be counterbalanced with an opposing view." (Ferguson 789)
- Flaubert's own research mirrored in the practices of his characters—critique of both the novelistic tradition and his own past work (801)

In presenting both the assemblage of the archive and its reception, Pierrot, Mouchard, and Neefs note that Flaubert establishes a kind of “equality between author and reader” and renders “the reality of the author almost as problematic as that of the reader.” For in the projected ending - in which Bouvard and Pécuchet simply sit at a common desk copying out a host of different kinds of materials - Flaubert aims at a literature that is so purely descriptive as to amount only to the mere publication of what already exists. This would be a literature that never corrects its protagonists, never brings them news from afar to qualify the things that those characters think they know here. It would be a literature as pure as the folktales of the oral tradition are pure - not in being authentic but in being available to a host of different speakers in positions of absolute equality and equivalence with one another. (802)

Closing thoughts/stuff about the novel?