

UCLA

Paroles gelées

Title

Review

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1581v1kr>

Journal

Paroles gelées, 9(1)

ISSN

1094-7264

Author

Armstrong, Piers

Publication Date

1991

DOI

10.5070/PG791003250

Peer reviewed

REVIEW

William VanderWolk. *Flaubert Remembers. Memory and the Creative Experience*. New York: Peter Lang, 1990.

VanderWolk's text characterizes Flaubert's creative development in two early works, *Madame Bovary* and *L'Éducation sentimentale*, in terms of the general ideas on memory and in terms of the psychological assimilation of fictions projected from the past onto the present in the lives of Flaubertian characters. The pivotal enigma of Flaubert's artistic enterprise—"être présent partout et visible nulle part"—is outlined in reference to the play of memory and Flaubert's gradual development from self-referential, auto-biographically based juvenile works to a pantheistic supra-self capable of embracing, or reading and writing, the world.

VanderWolk examines how memory, based in sentiment, is retained as a source of experience but is subjugated by the creative interference of the writer, who imposes a critical irony stemming from an impersonal, worldly intelligence. He also suggests that Flaubert, in appropriating *bovaryste* tendencies in artistic projects, forged a constructive tool from a potentially ruinous inclination to self-delusion.

Effacement of the narrative persona and its implications for the Subject, have become the process upon which hinges much post-modern Flaubertian criticism: in this work, the question of effacement is cast in a contiguous relation to the elimination of the present. VanderWolk shows that Flaubert's two key protagonists, Emma and Frédéric, interpret and redefine lived experience according to ar-

bitrary realities derived not only from literature but also from their own lives. Hence the special status of memory which by its nature makes artists of us all. If we accept that not only the future but also the past may be invented, we might then want to attempt to determine whether writing the past is a more radical procedure than prescribing the future and whether it is more invasive of the Subject. This issue would tie in with the broader theoretical question of the lost Subject, and it would have particular significance for *L'Éducation sentimentale*, where a fundamental issue for any analysis is the potential analogical relation between personal Subject and historical *Zeitgeist*. VanderWolk does not pursue this angle however. His interest lies in the reverse implication of the maxim, "Madame Bovary, c'est moi"—i.e., not just that the text is permeated with a unique Flaubertian style, but that Gustave himself had a strong dose of *bovarysme*. It would seem that the *thèse manquée* of this book would have revealed a kindred relation between Madame Bovary and Monsieur Flaubert, an empathy more profound than the cynical deconstruction of the protagonist's self-delusion which seems to constitute the denotative message of the text.

One would expect that attention to memory would offer more potential insight into *L'Éducation sentimentale* than into *Madame Bovary* given that, in addition to that of the protagonist, the collective memory of the nation is intended by the text. However the ultimate irrelevance of the latter to the former leads VanderWolk to a rather brusque conclusion that the novel is not historically analytic. The pairing of Emma and Frédéric opens up a rich comparative panorama, yet VanderWolk prefers to assimilate the two in a study of a consistent process of memory. Such a process is not then identified in relation either to the suggested Flaubertian affinity for his characters, or in terms of an overall theory of memory.

In fact, this key term is not specifically examined, and the lack of analytic precision in this book is consistent with the shortage of theoretical development. This can be anticipated from the general circularity of the preface as, for example, in the following statement about the particular significance of memory for Flaubert:

The fusion of art and life, of experience and imagination, can be found in memory, for it is through the mind's transformation of real memories that imagination creates fiction. For Flaubert, memory was the key to creation, the richest source of material and inspiration. (xiii)

Thus *Flaubert Remembers* has little theoretical contribution to make and the text never really responds to the title's suggestion that it contains insights into the memory of Gustave Flaubert. This is compensated, however, by the freedom it displays in assimilating previous readers of Flaubert in an organic reading of the juvenile works, *Madame Bovary* and *L'Education Sentimentale*. Critical theorists are invoked in reference to key themes in the text, rather than in speculative theoretical relation to each other, and as such, *Flaubert Remembers* is an extremely useful work for the critical debutant faced with an edifice of Flaubertian theoretical criticism tangentially related to its ostensible subject.

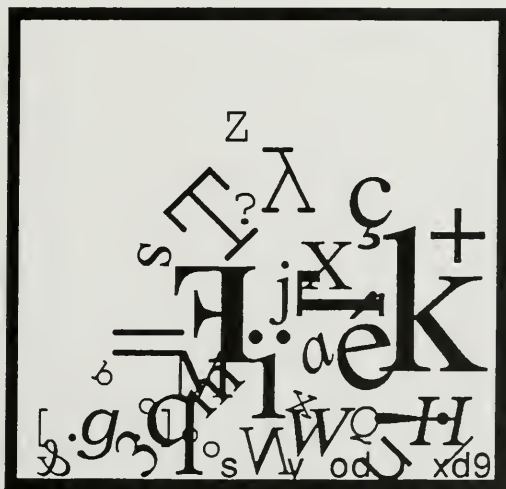
Piers Armstrong, UCLA


Piers Armstrong is a doctoral student in Romance Linguistics and Literature at UCLA.

PAROLES GELEES

UCLA French Studies

R



Volume 9  1991

PAROLES GELEES

UCLA French Studies

Ce serait le moment de philosopher et de
rechercher si, par hasard, se trouverait
ici l'endroit où de telles paroles dégèlent.

Rabelais, *Le Quart Livre*

Volume 9  1991

Editor: Sarah Cordova

Assistant Editors: Evelyne Charvier-Berman Paul Merrill
 Antoinette Sol Jeffrey Woodbury

Consultants: Florence Bellande-Robertson, Kathleen Brown-Noblet,
 Afi Esinam Gbegnon, Catherine Maiden, Anne-
 Marie O'Brien, Leakthina Ollier, Christine Peterson,
 Jayashree Ramanujan, Alicia Tolbert, Monica
 Verastegui.

Paroles Gelées was established in 1983 by its founding editor, Kathryn Bailey. The journal is managed and edited by the French Graduate Students' Association and published annually under the auspices of the Department of French at UCLA. Funds for this project are generously provided by the UCLA Graduate Students' Association.

Information regarding the submission of articles and subscriptions is available from the journal office:

Paroles Gelées
Department of French
222 Royce Hall
UCLA
405 Hilgard Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90024-1550
(213) 825-1145

Subscription price: \$8—individuals, \$10—institutions.

Cover art by Guy Bennett, a doctoral student in French at UCLA.

Copyright © 1991 by the Regents of the University of California.

CONTENTS

ARTICLES

Medievalism: Testing Ground for Historicism(s)? 1
*Round table discussion with Peter Haidu,
Alexandre Leupin, and Eugene Vance*

Between *fantasque* and *fantasmagorique*: a fantastic
reading of Balzac's *La Peau de Chagrin* 33
Nicoletta Pireddu

Une lecture des *Larmes d'Eros*, ou une autre
"nécessité de l'impossible" 49
Jean Mainil

Grammatologie or *Gramma Au Logis*: *Gramma's* Drama 67
James Arlandson

REVIEW 85

William VanderWolk, *Flaubert Remembers. Memory and
the Creative Experience*
[Piers Armstrong]

UCLA FRENCH DEPARTMENT
DISSERTATION ABSTRACT 89

