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‘UN ASSEZ VAGUE SPINOZISME’: FLAUBERT AND SPINOZA

A latter-day Plutarch intent on reviving, in the teeth of historicism, the genre of *Parallel Lives* might find it beguiling to compare Flaubert and Spinoza. Both the hermit of Croisset (not such a hermit) and the sociable and politically *engagé* ‘recluse’ of Rijnsburg and Den Haag made their strategic withdrawals from ordinary life in order to understand it better. For Spinoza, this meant turning from the ‘hollowness and futility of everything that is ordinarily encountered in daily life’.¹ It involved ‘incessant thought and a most constant mind and purpose’, and the adoption of ‘a definite mode and plan of life’.² It also led Spinoza to refuse a Chair in philosophy at Heidelberg, since such a post would not, for religious reasons, guarantee the absolute freedom of thinking to which he aspired. For Flaubert, the nervous crisis of 1844 led to a similar exemption from various forms of social integration, saving him from a career in law, enabling him to lead the life of a *rentier*, and fixing his resolve to abstain from marriage and family. In both writers, independence of lifestyle consorts with work of a high degree of formalist rigour: the *mos geometricus* of Spinoza’s *Ethics* adopts as far as possible the strict deductive order of Euclid, and Flaubert’s equally demanding labour of writing turns style into a ‘manière absolue de voir les choses’.³ Despite apparent aloofness, both Spinoza and Flaubert reacted intensely to the world around them. The impersonal deductiveness of the propositions-and-proofs of Spinoza’s *Ethics* is belied by the passionate denunciations of human folly and sectarian prejudice that run through the scholia.⁴ For all his rationalist desire to convince by cold argument rather than heated rhetoric, the common image of Spinoza as ‘the purest sage’ (Nietzsche), someone who will not laugh like Democritus or weep like Heraclitus but who seeks simply to understand, is undermined by an occasional tone of satirical disdain that anticipates none other than Nietzsche himself. This is not to play down Spinoza’s ‘serenity’, but to contextualize it, and perhaps suggest that it was hard-won.⁵ There is a much deeper split in Flaubert, between the ‘personnalité de l’auteur absente’ of the major novels and the unbridled expressiveness of the correspondence: it is as if the tightly controlled novels were the axioms, propositions, and proofs, and the letters the

¹ Baruch Spinoza, *Treatise on The Emendation of the Intellect*, in *Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected Letters*, trans. by Samuel Shirley, ed. and intr. by Seymour Feldman (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1992), p. 233.

² Letter 37, to John Bouwmeester, in *The Correspondence of Spinoza*, trans. and ed. by A. Wolf (London: Allen & Unwin, 1928), p. 228.

³ References to Flaubert’s letters up to 1868 are to the Pléiade edition of the *Correspondance*, ed. by Jean Bruneau (Paris: Gallimard, 1973–): Vol. I (1973) covers January 1830 to April 1851; Vol. II (1980) July 1851 to December 1858; Vol. III (1991) January 1859 to December 1868. Letters after 1868 are cited from the Conard edition of the *Œuvres complètes: Correspondance*, nouvelle édition augmentée, 9 vols (Paris: Louis Conard, 1926–33) henceforth *Pléiade Corr.* and *Conard Corr.* The phrase on style comes from a letter to Louise Colet (16 January 1852), in *Pléiade Corr.* II, 31.

⁴ See Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza et le problème de l’expression*, Arguments (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1968), p. 318.

⁵ Efraim Shmuely has noted ‘the difference between the restrained and detached, although controversial assertions dressed in the geometrical form, and the non-geometrical assertions loaded with harsh rebukes, refutations, ridicule, and scorn’ (‘The Geometrical Method, Personal Caution, and the Idea of Tolerance’, in *Spinoza: New Perspectives*, ed. by Robert W. Shahan and J. I. Biro (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), pp. 197–215 (p. 209)). Shmuely suggests that the geometrical method was a defence against inner doubt, as well as being a universally valid methodology. There is some risk of romanticizing (or modernizing) Spinoza in over-emphasizing his ‘split’ writing.

scholia, of Flaubert's own potential *Ethics*. Both Spinoza and Flaubert lived through the end of a political era with which they had come, with considerable qualifications, to identify, though there are otherwise few grounds for comparing the (for its time) relatively liberal, tolerant régime of the Grand Pensionary of Holland, Jan de Witt (murdered, to Spinoza's great distress ('*Ultima barbarorum!*') by a Dutch mob panic-stricken by the French invasion of the Netherlands in 1672), with the Second Empire whose fall, accompanied by the turbulence of the Paris Commune, added to the gloom of Flaubert's last years. Both writers were 'persecuted': Spinoza excommunicated for heterodoxy from his own Jewish community by an Amsterdam *beth din* in 1656 and cursed 'with all the curses which are written in the law', his *Theologico-Political Treatise* banned by the Calvinists in 1674, his works placed on the Catholic *Index* and forced to lead a posthumous underground existence for at least a century; Flaubert, somewhat more mildly, prosecuted (exactly two centuries after the Amsterdam *herem*) for *Madame Bovary*.⁶ Such biographical comparisons between Spinoza and Flaubert may not in themselves have much analytical power: imaginary resemblances more in the line of Charles Swann than of Plutarch. Yet these parallel lives did in one sense meet: Flaubert read Spinoza.

Indeed, Flaubert is regularly cited as one of the many disparate writers who 'admired' Spinoza, the philosopher referred to most enthusiastically in Flaubert's letters. On one level, Flaubert is thus simply an entry in the intriguingly heterogeneous list of nineteenth-century writers to take an interest in Spinoza, others being Coleridge, Goethe, Renan, Taine, George Eliot, Browning, Heine, Nietzsche, Arnold, and Plekhanov. (One of the great missing classics of Spinozism is the translation begun by Shelley of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, for which Byron would have written a biography of Spinoza.) For, after more than a hundred years of vilification, the nineteenth century saw Spinoza's influence spread unstoppably: it is the exception rather than the rule to find a major nineteenth-century writer completely ignorant (via whatever mediations) of Spinoza, especially in France.⁷ Yet Spinoza seems to have appealed to a broad and often non-philosophical public. He is the philosopher who, at second-hand, inspires that prince of the self-taught, Jude Fawley, as his first marriage collapses and his dreams of Christminster return: '*Bene agere et laetari* — to do good cheerfully — which he had heard to be the philosophy of one Spinoza, might be his own even now.'⁸ Flaubert took at least as great an interest in philosophy as many of the writers mentioned above, even if his career is often pictured as tracing a trajectory in which philosophy declines from being a source of thematic and methodological inspiration (in the *œuvres de jeunesse*) to being a storehouse of 'bêtises' (in the first and second volumes of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*). Of

⁶ The curse on Spinoza applies to his readers as well: it has not been lifted. As Spinoza's ideas were slowly diffused across Europe, it became almost *de rigueur* for them to be vilified by philosophers and theologians: see Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 48. Some of the 'insults' to Spinoza were to be cited by Flaubert in the projected 'second volume' of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, under the section 'Injures aux grands hommes': Manoury, for instance (in *Soirées d'automne ou la Religion prouvée aux gens du monde*), had called Spinoza a 'Ténébreux sophiste du XVII^e siècle, tour à tour juif et calviniste (!) et athée' (*Le second volume de Bouvard et Pécuchet*, sel. and ed. by Geneviève Bollème, Les Lettres nouvelles (Paris: Denoël, 1966), p. 105). The exclamation mark is presumably Flaubert's.

⁷ Paul Vernière traces Spinoza's more purely philosophical influence in France up to the end of the eighteenth century, though it also mentions later reactions (*Spinoza et la pensée française avant la Révolution*, 2 vols, Publications de la Faculté des Lettres d'Alger, 20 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954)).

⁸ Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, Wessex edn (London: Macmillan, 1912), p. 86.

course, there is more to the relationship between Flaubert and philosophy than this itinerary suggests. As Derrida has noted, philosophical buzzwords such as 'idée' recur in Flaubert's letters, yet it is never clear what *kind* of idea is involved.⁹ Having disarmingly reminded us that Flaubert was (unlike the professionals) a philosophical 'autodidact', Derrida notes a link in Flaubert between philosophy (a turning to the idea), love, and mourning. In a letter to Maxime Du Camp, written just over two weeks after the death of Flaubert's sister Caroline and three months after that of his father, Flaubert voices his 'peu de foi au bonheur', his nausea at the stench of life, his attempts to analyse his bereavements 'en artiste', and his need to work: 'Je ne me sens pas découragé; je rentre, au contraire, plus que jamais dans l'idée pure, dans l'infini.'¹⁰ The link between metaphysical broodings and death is of course not unusual, but there is also a more Spinozistic connection, for Flaubert's close friend Alfred Le Poittevin, who had as a young man played the part of a cynical nihilist, partly occupied his final days reading Spinoza's *Ethics*: here we have a constellation of *eros*, *thanatos*, and philosophy that recalls Montaigne and La Boétie.¹¹

If Flaubert read philosophers, he has also been read by them: hence what is probably the most 'énorme' attempt by a philosopher to encompass a novelist this century, Sartre's *L'Idiot de la famille*.¹² Sartre naturally brings his professional gaze to bear on Flaubert's early fascination for metaphysics, but suggests that Flaubert soon realized that he was not a philosopher, since he found it difficult to decide rationally between philosophical positions: 'Si les idées adéquates ne sont pas marquées, comment les reconnaître? Tout s'équivaut. Et Gustave nous fera savoir qu'il "n'a pas d'idées", qu'il ne faut jamais conclure, qu'il faut respecter toutes les opinions pourvu qu'elles soient sincères.'¹³ According to Sartre, Flaubert's passivity debars him from a fully 'active' (and thus Spinozan) use of his reason, leading instead to a baffled scepticism, Flaubert's 'doute absolu'. 'Tel est Gustave: réceptacle de sentences déposées par Autrui, apprises par coeur, éprouvées comme aliénation

⁹ Jacques Derrida, 'Une idée de Flaubert: "La lettre de Platon"', in *Psyché, Invention de l'autre*, La philosophie en effet (Paris: Galilée, 1987), pp. 305–24 (pp. 308–09). Derrida notes how 'idée' and 'idée reçue' need to be read together. On Flaubert's 'ideas', often linked to moments of vision, in harmony with the etymology of the word 'idea', it is worth pointing out the many references to Plato, rather than Spinoza, in the letters: Derrida quotes salient examples.

¹⁰ Letter of 7 April 1846, in *Pléiade Corr.*, I, 261–63.

¹¹ Flaubert, letter to Du Camp (7 April 1848), about Le Poittevin: 'Jusqu'au moment où il lui a été impossible de rien faire, il lisait Spinoza jusqu'à 1 heure du matin, tous les soirs dans son lit' (*Pléiade Corr.*, I, 495). Watching over his sister Caroline's corpse, Flaubert read Montaigne: after the death in 1869 of Louis Bouilhet, it was Kant and Spinoza. (In 1870 he was reading Spinoza and Plutarch in preparation for the final rewriting of *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*; in 1872 he was reading Kant and Spinoza again, as well as medieval bestiaries.) Derrida also points out the importance of another strand in the biographical context: a woman (Louise Colet) caught between a 'novelist' (Flaubert) and a Spinoza-admiring 'philosopher' (Victor Cousin): Flaubert 'and' Spinoza is, like most things, tied up with love and death. The end of Derrida's piece makes two interesting points: that Flaubert's 'idea', in Spinoza's sense (elliptically: the idea not as a representation but an affirmation) is not so much represented (mentioned) in Flaubert as performed in his 'écriture'; and, a suggestion I merely reproduce: 'l'idée de Flaubert, c'est Loulou, entre Caroline et Louise, et c'est d'abord Caroline la soeur morte, l'impossible' ('Une idée de Flaubert', p. 324).

¹² Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Idiot de la famille: Gustave Flaubert de 1821 à 1857*, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1971–72). If Derrida's *Glas* is partly a response to Sartre's *Saint Genet, comédien et martyr*, 'Une idée de Flaubert' is perhaps a much slighter reply to the even more gargantuan *Idiot*.

¹³ Sartre, *L'Idiot de la famille*, I, 164. 'Adequate ideas' is a Spinozan turn of phrase, as if Flaubert's inability to philosophize were an inability to use his reason in a specifically Spinozan way.

donc crues, il se trouve en un monde où la Vérité est l'Autre' (*L'Idiot de la famille*, 1, 170). Philosophy may inspire but it does not allow Flaubert, in that telling phrase, to make up his mind.¹⁴

Still, some of Flaubert's letters, however merely ejaculatory in tone, show how intent Flaubert was to proselytize for Spinoza, as in a letter of 1857, to Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie:

A propos de Spinoza (un fort grand homme, celui-là), tâchez de vous procurer sa biographie par Boulainvilliers [. . .]. Oui, il faut lire Spinoza. Les gens qui l'accusent d'athéisme sont des ânes. Goethe disait: 'Quand je me sens troublé, je relis l'*Éthique*'. Il vous arrivera peut-être, comme à Goethe, d'être calmée par cette grande lecture. J'ai perdu, il y a dix ans, l'homme que j'ai le plus aimé au monde, Alfred Le Poittevin. Dans sa maladie dernière, il passait ses nuits à lire Spinoza.¹⁵

Later he is telling Mme Roger des Genettes that he is exasperated by the 'dogmatisme' of the Catholic books he has been reading: in response 'j'ai relu (pour la troisième fois de ma vie) tout Spinoza. Cet "athée" a été, selon moi, le plus religieux des hommes, puisqu'il n'admettait que Dieu. Mais faites comprendre ça à ces messieurs les ecclésiastiques et aux disciples de Cousin!'¹⁶ Spinoza is 'calming', as for Goethe (and both Goethe and Flaubert in their very different ways transcend an early romanticism, no doubt with some help from the analgesic or indeed anaesthetic *Ethics*).¹⁷ There are also times when Spinoza becomes one of Flaubert's predictable 'greats', a stick with which to beat the philosophical epigones of Flaubert's own France. Writing to George Sand, Flaubert says he has discovered the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, which 'm'épate, m'éblouit, me transporte d'admiration. Nom de Dieu, quel homme! quel cerveau! quelle science et quel esprit! Il était plus fort que M. Caro, décidément'.¹⁸ Perhaps the *Ethics*, with its careful architecture and its persistent allusions to the geometry of the triangle, was ultimately one of Flaubert's pyramids, something in front of which he could dream.

The 'Spinozistic' aspects of Flaubert's work as a whole have often been commented on.¹⁹ But the question of Spinoza's 'influence' on Flaubert is inevitably complex. For instance: is this influence operative on the level of themes, of philosophemes such as, for instance, determinism? Or is it both more diffuse and more urgent, formal rather than doctrinal? Barthes has noted how Nietzsche's

¹⁴ See also Timothy Unwin's detailed account of the young Flaubert's treatment of various philosophical themes in *Art et infini: L'œuvre de jeunesse de Gustave Flaubert*, Faux Titre, 53 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991). Unwin notes the sceptical crisis that runs through the early work, and points to an early emergence of a relativist Flaubert committed to art as a staging of points of view that cannot be rationally, but only aesthetically, reconciled: 'Le seul moyen de bien concevoir le monde sera donc de représenter ainsi la nécessité de l'idée qu'on s'en fait, et d'exposer la relativité de toutes les conceptions humaines' (p. 61).

¹⁵ Pléiade *Corr.*, letter of 4 November 1857, II, 774.

¹⁶ Conard *Corr.*, Letter 1911 (November? 1879), VIII, 327. Goethe called Spinoza 'theissimum et christianissimum', a superlative too many, but the phrase may have stuck in Flaubert's mind.

¹⁷ Flaubert seems to have first read Spinoza in about 1843, at about the same time he was embarking on the first *Éducation sentimentale*. According to Jean Bruneau, Flaubert's teacher in the *classe de philosophie*, Charles-Auguste Mallet, was an eclectic who admired Spinoza (*Les Débuts littéraires de Gustave Flaubert 1831-1845* (Paris: Colin, 1962), pp. 273-74). Flaubert's library included the 1802 Jena edition of Spinoza.

¹⁸ Conard *Corr.*, Letter 1098 (April or May 1870), VI, 113. Elme Caro (1826-87) was a philosopher with the reputation of being a 'professeur mondain'.

¹⁹ See especially Albert Gyergai, 'Flaubert et Spinoza', *Les Amis de Flaubert*, 39 (December 1971), 11-22; Roger Huss, 'Nature, Final Causality and Anthropocentrism in Flaubert', *French Studies*, 33 (1979), 288-304; Timothy Unwin, 'Flaubert and Pantheism', *French Studies*, 35 (1981), 394-406. See also Bruneau, *Les Débuts littéraires de Gustave Flaubert* (especially pp. 442-54), Unwin, *Art et infini*, and Sartre, *L'Idiot de la famille* (especially Vol. 1), all of which make frequent references to the Spinoza connection.

influence on his own work was, on one level, at least as much prosodic as philosophical.²⁰ It may be that Flaubert was attracted to Spinoza by a (philosophically vague, vaguely philosophical) likeness in 'tone' or 'temperament'. Thematically, there is an almost constitutive ambivalence in both Spinoza and Flaubert, between naturalism on the one hand (Spinoza as the philosopher of immanence, Flaubert as 'realist') and mysticism on the other (Spinoza as Novalis's 'god-intoxicated man', Flaubert as the mystic who believes in nothing, Sartre's feudalist, fascinated by comparative religion). This ambivalence can be observed in their respective successors: Spinoza inspiring both artists with a tendency to romanticism and more technical logicians and scientists, a kind of 'soft' and 'hard' Spinozism respectively; Flaubert helping to crystallize out, and perhaps to polarize, the two doctrines of symbolism and naturalism. The austere logistic Spinoza has, for better or worse, affected the imagination of his readers at least as much as their powers of reasoning. The words 'pantheism' (as a reaction against both orthodox theism and Enlightenment deism, or materialism) and 'infinite' (as in Schleiermacher's 'the infinite was his [Spinoza's] beginning and his end') are the keywords of this appropriation. Flaubert was one of these artistic Spinozists, and both pantheism and the infinite, together with the equally Spinozistic insistence that 'good' and 'evil' are relative terms, imaginary constructs of a self imaginarily isolated from the order of nature as a whole, occupy significant terrain in his writings. This is especially true of the letters and the early fiction (up to the first *Éducation sentimentale*). In a letter of 1842 to Ernest Chevalier, for instance, he writes: 'La bonne et la mauvaise société doivent être étudiées. La vérité est dans tout. Comprenons chaque chose et n'en blâmons aucune. C'est le moyen de savoir beaucoup et d'être calme; et, c'est quelque chose que d'être calme: c'est presque être heureux.'²¹ Similar demands for a cool, 'scientific' appraisal of human behaviour are typical of Spinoza's approach. Indeed, his methodological attempt to suspend judgement can sometimes seem counter-intuitive, as one of his commentators, Delahunty, suggests: 'The boldness, and the strangeness, of Spinoza's claim can scarcely be exaggerated; I know of no other great philosopher who has so forthrightly advocated that we recondition ourselves to think of one another without any shade of praise, blame, pride, shame, anger, envy, resentment, love, hatred, or indignation.'²² Yet Flaubert's aspirations to detachment run Spinoza a close second.²³

²⁰ See the fragment 'Qu'est-ce que l'influence?', in *Roland Barthes par lui-même, Les Écrivains de toujours* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), pp. 110–11: what comes from authors one reads without having to write about them? 'Une sorte de musique, une sonorité pensive, un jeu plus ou moins dense d'anagrammes. (J'avais la tête pleine de Nietzsche, que je venais de lire; mais ce que je désirais, ce que je voulais capter, c'était un chant d'idées-phrases: l'influence était purement prosodique)' (p. 111). It is interesting that Barthes here chooses a 'philosopher' to be prosodically influenced by: maybe Flaubert responded to something equally formal in Spinoza, at least as much as to Spinoza's 'ideas', but these elements are barely separable, and Barthes's 'idées-phrases' suggest as much.

²¹ *Pléiade Corr.*, letter of 24 February 1842, I, 95.

²² R. J. Delahunty, *Spinoza, The Arguments of the Philosophers* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), p. 268.

²³ See the programme sketched out in a letter to Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie: 'Le roman n'a été que l'exposition de la personnalité de l'auteur et, je dirais plus, toute la littérature en général, sauf deux ou trois hommes peut-être. Il faut pourtant que les sciences morales prennent une autre route et qu'elles procèdent comme les sciences physiques, par l'impartialité. Le poète est tenu maintenant d'avoir de la sympathie pour tout et pour tous, afin de les comprendre et de les décrire. Nous manquons de science, avant tout' (*Pléiade Corr.*, letter of 12 December 1857, II, 785–86): Flaubert goes on to say that the bias inherent in philosophy and religion are obstacles to this aim. Spinoza would, given Flaubert's praise of him, doubtless count as an exception.

Spinoza was often read, especially by the Romantics, as the philosopher of nature, the nature of rocks and stones and trees. An early letter to Le Poittevin emphasizes Flaubert's capacity for 'absorption' in this same nature: 'Tu me dis que tu deviens de plus en plus amoureux de la nature; moi, j'en deviens effréné. Je regarde quelquefois les animaux et même les arbres avec une tendresse qui va jusqu'à la sympathie; j'éprouve presque des sensations voluptueuses rien qu'à voir, mais quand je vois bien.'²⁴ Yet this romantic understanding of nature marks a definite swerve away from what Spinoza meant by the word: his *Natura* has little to do with trees and animals as such: it is not necessarily 'pastoral' as opposed to 'urban', as it to a large extent became in romantic sensibility, all country walks, sunsets, and chlorophyllophilia. Still, this reading was commonplace in the early nineteenth century, especially as a reaction against the more mechanistic and mathematical side of Spinoza. Heine, acting as a mediator for German philosophy for a French audience, produces an impressionistic pastiche of what 'nature'-loving Spinozists felt about their mentor:

La forme mathématique donne un air âpre et dur à Spinoza; mais c'est comme l'écorce de l'amande, la chair n'en paraît que plus savoureuse. La lecture de Spinoza [sic] nous saisit comme l'aspect de la plus grande nature dans son calme vivant, c'est une forêt de pensées hautes comme le ciel, dont les cimes fleuries s'agitent en mouvements onduleux, tandis que les troncs inébranlables plongent leurs racines dans la terre éternelle. On sent dans ses écrits flotter un certain souffle qui vous émeut d'une manière indéfinissable.²⁵

There is an echo of this kind of scenario in the Fontainebleau scene of the final version of *L'Éducation sentimentale*. Frédéric and Rosanette, absorbed in one another and in 'nature', come across chaotic rock-formations. 'Frédéric disait qu'elles étaient là depuis le commencement du monde et resteraient ainsi jusqu'à la fin; Rosanette détournait la tête, en affirmant que "ça la rendrait folle", et s'en allait cueillir des bruyères.'²⁶ Later Frédéric hears the drums beating the alarm for the defence of Paris: 'Ah! tiens! l'émeute! disait Frédéric avec une pitié dédaigneuse, toute cette agitation lui apparaissant misérable à côté de leur amour et de la nature éternelle' (pp. 382–83). Spinozan impersonal 'calm' could thus modulate into a diffuse, melancholy awareness of human ephemerality, despite the fact that Spinoza would have refused to see Fontainebleau forest as any more representative of the eternal laws of nature than the historic upheavals in Paris.

Indeed, even in the early works, despite Flaubert's use of certain characteristically Spinozan turns of phrase such as the language of modes, Spinoza is little more than an insistent if diffuse *conatus*: it is a Spinoza romanticized and overlaid by many other themes (that of nature-worship, in the case of pantheism, and of Faustian longings for ever more experience in the case of the infinite). But Spinoza's system is in any case so uncompromising that it is difficult to sustain his doctrine in any

²⁴ *Pléiade Corr.*, letter of 26 May 1845, I, 233–34. Flaubert's pantheism of the eye is part of what he means by 'idea': not a very Spinozistic idea (for Spinoza the aim is not to see, except perhaps with the eyes of the mind, which are deductive proofs) and not really philosophical at all, a kind of mystical empiricism, gazing at things until they start to appear interesting, or almost.

²⁵ From Heinrich Heine, *Zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Religion in Deutschland*, which appeared in French in *La Revue des Deux Mondes* (November 1834), reprinted as 'Sur Spinoza' in *Cahiers Spinoza*, 4 (1982–83), 231–41 (p. 231).

²⁶ References to Flaubert's fictional works are, unless otherwise stated, to the 'Pléiade' edition of the *Œuvres*, 2 vols, ed. by A. Thibaudet and R. Dumesnil (Paris: Gallimard, 1952): this quotation is from *L'Éducation sentimentale*, in *Œuvres*, II, 357.

pure form: what Romain Rolland called, in a phrase remembered by Deleuze, 'le soleil blanc de l'Être' is like a fissile radioactive mass: the monistic philosophy that attempts to show everything as flowing deductively from the one substance, *Deus, sive Natura*, whose two attributes of thought and extension are the vehicles of individual finite modes, inevitably decays into something else, into more mixed systems, or into options that Spinoza himself attempted to transcend (materialism as opposed to idealism, for instance). Pure Spinozism may in any case be an impossible ideal, since today's commentators find it no hard task to undermine Spinoza's aspiration to find a perfectly self-consistent system.²⁷ The instability of Spinoza's work, the strain imposed by its radical immanence, its attempts to marry strict determinist monism with a doctrine of human freedom and to recast the God of the religious tradition in terms acceptable to the new rationalism of the seventeenth century, is emphasized by Lewis Feuer: 'He tried with immense power to identify the God of his mystic vision with a Mathematical God of Science. His system broke apart; scientist and mystic warred within him unreconciled. He worked, a precursor of psychoanalysis, to make men free by helping them to understand their passions; but he also wondered if blessedness came only in unity with God.'²⁸ The sheer plurality of readings that this monism generates makes it difficult to speak of a Spinozistic school (the contemporary constellation of Deleuze, Althusser, Macherey, and Negri is an interesting example, though even here the divergences of approach are obvious), and it is equally true that most of the non-philosophical writers inspired by Spinoza also, at some stage, tended to turn against him, to register, implicitly or explicitly, a certain distance; some were at least as influenced by other philosophers: Goethe's 'Spinozism', for instance, with its fascination for the language of 'monads' and 'entelechy', is in many ways much closer to Leibniz. Sartre suggests that Flaubert's early works, with their need to get beyond individual points of view, embody 'un assez vague spinozisme' (*L'Idiot de la famille*, I, 514). Perhaps Spinozism, as a *Weltanschauung* rather than as material for close analytical discussion of the kind found in the *Ethics*, is doomed to be, in Sartre's phrase, 'vague'.

None the less, Flaubert's version is no vaguer than many others. Spinoza helps him out with the cosmological speculations of the early works, including *Smarh*, and provides him with a certain view of artistic form. The languages of logic and pantheism mingle in the first *Éducation sentimentale*, so much of which is taken up with Flaubert's attempts to formulate an aesthetic, and in which Jules has Spinozistic leanings towards abstraction, depersonalization, moral investigation and the contemplation of nature:

Il se retirait petit à petit du concret, du limité, du fini, pour demeurer dans l'abstrait, dans l'éternel, dans le beau. [. . .] Il tâchait d'avoir, pour la nature, une intelligence aimante, faculté nouvelle, avec laquelle il voulait jouir du monde entier comme d'une harmonie complète. [. . .]

²⁷ 'Spinoza was not good at close, rigorous reasoning' (Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's 'Ethics'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 28). It is unfair to take this provocative statement for granted without actually examining where Spinoza makes mistakes, but several recent studies of Spinoza have focused on the way Spinoza's system comes apart at the seams.

²⁸ *Spinoza and the Rise of Liberalism* (Boston: MA, Beacon Press, 1964), p. ix. This book gives an eloquent but, again, at times romantic picture of Spinoza.

Volontairement, et comme un roi qui abdique le jour qu'on le couronne, il avait renoncé pour toujours à la possession de tout ce qui se gagne et s'achète dans le monde, plaisirs, honneurs, argent, joies de l'amour et triomphes de l'ambition [...] chez lui, comme chez les autres, il étudiait l'organisme compliqué des passions et des idées; il se scrutait sans pitié, se disséquaient comme un cadavre, trouvant parfois chez lui comme ailleurs des motifs louables aux actions qu'on blâme et des bassesses au fond des vertus.²⁹

Jules's later attempts to formulate an aesthetic have the systematic aspirations, and are couched in some of the terms, of Spinoza's *Ethics*: 'Il entra donc de tout cœur dans cette grande étude du style; il observa la naissance de l'idée en même temps que cette forme où elle se fonde, leurs développements mystérieux, parallèles et adéquats l'un à l'autre' (p. 276), where the vocabulary ('parallel', 'adequate', as in 'adequate ideas', those which are conceptually coherent) echoes Spinoza's. There are many ways in which the mature Flaubert's aesthetic is being worked out in this first *Éducation*, and it has been claimed that Flaubert can be seen as putting Spinoza into aesthetic practice.³⁰ Spinoza's *Ethics* is holistic and systematic, meant to reflect a universe in which the principle of the structure of the whole is immanent in all its modes: this would not be a false characterization of one of Flaubert's artistic aims, and his hostility to the fragment underlines this: 'Travaille, médite, médite surtout, condense ta pensée, tu sais que les beaux fragments ne sont rien. L'unité, l'unité, tout est là! L'ensemble, voilà ce qui manque à tous ceux d'aujourd'hui, aux grands comme aux petits. Mille beaux endroits, pas une œuvre.'³¹ Hence his obsession with finding systematic links from one sentence, paragraph, episode to the next: it is as if he wished that the novel *could* have the Euclidean deductiveness of Spinoza's *Ethics*: 'Ce qui est atroce de difficulté c'est l'enchaînement des idées et qu'elles dérivent bien naturellement les unes des autres.'³² The mature Flaubert of an impersonal 'enchaînement des idées' is more Spinozistic than the Flaubert of the *œuvres de jeunesse*, who allows himself to express Spinozistic thoughts more directly and without such formal integration. And Spinoza's theory of truth is one of coherence rather than correspondence: truth resides in the unity of the system rather than in isolated one-to-one relationships, so that it is the 'order and connection' of ideas which overall maps the 'order and connection' of things. Coherence and correspondence are trends, though often contradictory, in Flaubert's aesthetic too: 'Ce qui me semble beau, ce que je voudrais faire, c'est un livre sur rien, un livre sans attache extérieure, qui se tiendrait de lui-même par la force interne de son style.'³³ This is style *as* the one substance in and from which everything flows, and in so far as Spinoza insists on logical thinking (on ideas, not images) he gives an invisible picture of the universe as pure form: the *Ethics* too as a 'livre sur rien'.³⁴

²⁹ *L'Éducation sentimentale*, première version, ed. by Jacques Suffel, preface by Antonia Fonyi (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1980), pp. 176–77.

³⁰ 'In his application of the analogy of nature to the novel, Flaubert sometimes appears to be attempting an aesthetic transposition of Spinoza's metaphysics' (Huss, p. 299). Gyergai, less guardedly, says that Flaubert's aesthetic exactly parallels Spinoza's procedures (Gyergai, pp. 18–20). Flaubert himself talked of finding 'pour l'esthétique ce que le stoïcisme avait inventé pour la morale' (*Pléiade Corr.*, letter to Louise Colet of 24 April 1852, II, 76): Spinoza is often next door to stoicism in Flaubert's scheme of things.

³¹ *Pléiade Corr.*, letter to Louise Colet of 14 October 1846, I, 389.

³² *Pléiade Corr.*, letter to Louise Colet of 26 June 1852, II, 118. Flaubert is of course describing work on *Madame Bovary*.

³³ *Pléiade Corr.*, letter to Louise Colet of 16 January 1852, II, 345–46.

³⁴ The *Ethics* is 'le plus beau et le plus heureux tableau invisible que le monde se soit donné de lui-même' (Pascal Quignard, *Petits traités*, 8 vols (Paris: Maeght, 1990), 'Dieu', I, 37–44 (p. 44)).

In the first *Éducation*, Jules even refuses the 'fantastic' (winged horses, for instance) by citing a thoroughly Spinozistic reason:

Le monde étant devenu pour lui si large à contempler, il vit qu'il n'y avait, quant à l'art, rien en dehors de ses limites, ni réalité, ni possibilité d'être. C'est pourquoi le fantastique, qui lui semblait autrefois un si vaste royaume du continent poétique, ne lui en apparut que comme une province; il comprit qu'on ne fera jamais rien de beau en inventant des animaux qui ne sont pas, des plantes qui n'existent point, en donnant des ailes à un cheval, des queues de poisson à des corps de femmes, existences impossibles, révélations d'un type insaisissable, rêves sans corps qui, n'offrant qu'une face selon le vague désir qui les a créés, demeurent isolés les uns des autres dans leur immobilité et leur impuissance. (p. 281)³⁵

But however much 'pantheism' is a keynote to Jules's reveries, his ecstatic longing for absorption in nature, and his desire to reproduce it in terms of art, are interrupted by the famous encounter with the mangy dog, perhaps a degraded replay of the scene in *Faust* I, where Faust meets Mephistopheles in the shape of a poodle (*L'Éducation sentimentale*, first version, pp. 265–66). The scene comprises a signifier of indeterminacy, in Jonathan Culler's reading, and despite the text's moves to recuperate the dog into the system (of Nature, or on the other hand of the meanings by which Jules lives his life), the *interruption* of pantheism is significant.³⁶

A Spinozistic discourse is disrupted at the other end of Flaubert's career, too, in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. Here, Spinozism makes a direct appearance in Flaubert's fictional world, becoming, so to speak, substance as well as style. The French translation of Spinoza that Flaubert used (as well as probably reading the Latin original) came armed with a preface in which Saisset, the translator, warned his readers that he had made his translation only in order that they could see for themselves how pernicious Spinoza was. It is a copy of this, originally belonging to a 'professeur Varlot' (significantly, given Spinoza's association with a wide range of forms of social dissidence, an exile from the Second Empire), which Bouvard and Pécuchet take up as their introduction to philosophy, only to be left aghast by what they find:

L'Étique [*sic*] les effraya avec ses axiomes, ses corollaires. Ils lurent seulement les endroits marqués d'un coup de crayon et comprirent ceci:

'La substance est ce qui est de soi, par soi, sans cause, sans origine. Cette substance est Dieu.

'Il est seul l'étendue — et l'étendue n'a pas de bornes. Avec quoi la borner?

'Mais, bien qu'elle soit infinie, elle n'est pas l'infini absolu, car elle ne contient qu'un genre de perfection, et l'absolu les contient tous [...].

'Dieu se développe en une infinité d'attributs, qui expriment, chacun à sa manière, l'infinité de son être. Nous n'en connaissons que deux: l'étendue et la pensée.

'De la pensée et de l'étendue découlent des mondes innombrables, lesquels en contiennent d'autres [...].'

Il leur semblait être en ballon, la nuit, par un froid glacial, emportés d'une course sans fin, vers un abîme sans fond — et sans rien autour d'eux que l'insaisissable, l'immobile, l'Éternel. C'était trop fort. Ils y renoncèrent.³⁷

I have left out the interruptions (Pécuchet's pinches of snuff, Bouvard's flushed exclamations) and yet the interruptions, the bathos of contextualization, may well be *philosophically* significant. Kierkegaard imagined a philosopher, *the* philosopher,

³⁵ For Spinoza, the 'winged horse' is the kind of fiction that only an irrational mind accepts as a reality: such a creature would be ontologically underdetermined, not mappable within the coordinates of causality: it would not have the power of actuality. The fantastic, repressed here by Jules, returns, of course, in Flaubert.

³⁶ Jonathan Culler, *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty*, Novelists and their World (London: Elek, 1974), pp. 62–68.

³⁷ *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, in *Œuvres*, II, 936.

no doubt, sneezing in the middle of his System: what is the relation between sneeze and system? *Bouvard et Pécuchet* is full of such sneezes: it is the repeated *coitus interruptus* of knowledge. (The two protagonists have somewhat better luck with Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*, one of the first systematic attempts at a rational, historical, and critical account of the scriptures: this at least enables them to score off the local priest, as their short-lived religious ardour starts to wane. Jehovah appeared to the prophets as a fire, a burning bush, an old man, a dove, says Bouvard: he has been alerted to the philosophical inadequacy of these images by Spinoza: has Juefroy read him? 'Dieu m'en garde!', replies the priest (p. 936).)

These interruptions suggest that despite all the parallels (pantheism, determinism, scientific study of human motives and emotions, unity of substance, the need to accept the world as a whole that surpasses individual points of view, quasi-geometrical formalism of method, quasi-deductive development of themes and ideas, impersonality), the 'and' of Flaubert and Spinoza is still a slippery conjunction. This is to be expected when a philosopher and a novelist are brought together. Philosophy does not coincide with its philosophemes (many terms, more or less satisfactory, attempt to characterize this excess: rhetoric, metaphor, style, vision, 'écriture': *Deus, sive Scriptura*), and it is even more difficult to isolate such philosophemes in Flaubert, who both in the letters and in the fiction is, with considerable existential commitment, exploring them imaginatively rather than argumentatively. The excess in Spinoza that is communicated to Flaubert is akin to a transference: it may be that which, through and beyond the philosophemes (or the 'ideology') enables Spinoza to be so inspiring (to Flaubert and others) and simultaneously makes this inspiration so difficult to define. How very vague: and yet what is conceptually vague (a 'vision') may represent a perfectly precise existential, formal, and historical response.

A brief comparison with two other writers of fiction who bring Spinoza into their work, Bernard Malamud, and Isaac Bashevis Singer, may put Flaubert's Spinozism in perspective.³⁸ It is not irrelevant that both these writers are Jewish, for the types of response just mentioned may all come into play in peculiarly acute forms when the philosopher in question, Spinoza, is both part of a deeply Jewish tradition and simultaneously (and, of course, sometimes in the same ways) one of the most radical questioners of that tradition.³⁹ Malamud's 'fixer', Yakov Bok, lives in pre-First World War Kiev; he owns a few tools and a few books, including *Selections from Spinoza*.⁴⁰ Bok becomes a victim of blood libel in one of the periodic anti-Semitic outbursts of Tsarist Russia. He tries to explain Spinoza's philosophy to Bibikov, the 'Investigating Magistrate for Cases of Extraordinary Importance', a sympathetic figure despite his Gogolian title:

What I think it means is that he was out to make a free man out of himself — as much as one can according to his philosophy, if you understand my meaning — by thinking things through and connecting everything up, if you'll go along with that, your honour. [...].

³⁸ Malamud, *The Fixer* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), and Singer, 'The Spinoza of Market Street', in *The Spinoza of Market Street* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981). Deleuze takes the epigraph of his *Spinoza: Philosophie pratique*, revised edn (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1981) from the Malamud novel.

³⁹ This is the aspect of Spinozism so vividly analysed by Yirmiyahu Yovel, who examines the response to Spinoza in a variety of more modern Jewish writers such as Heine, Marx, and Freud, in *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, 2 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), Vol. II, *The Adventures of Immanence*.

⁴⁰ Another Jewish freethinker, Bok's contemporary Leopold Bloom, has *Thoughts from Spinoza* in his library.

Maybe it's that God and Nature are one and the same, and so is man, or some such thing, whether he's poor or rich. If you understand that a man's mind is part of God, then you understand it as well as I. In that way you're free, if you're in the mind of God. If you're there you know it. (*The Fixer*, pp. 70–71)

Bibikov asks how we can be free if all is ruled by necessity. Yakov replies that freedom 'is in your thought, your honour, if your thought is in God [. . .]. It's as though a man flies over his own head on the wings of reason, or some such thing. You join the universe and forget your worries [. . .]. It sounds fine but my experience is limited. I haven't lived much outside the small towns' (p. 72). Many of Yakov Bok's attempts to explain Spinoza to himself or others are similarly comic, as if Woody Allen (or the metaphysically challenged character he plays in *Love and Death*, that well-observed homage to the philosophical profundities of Russian fiction) had had a hand in the script. YHWH — or *Deus, sive Natura*? 'In the shtetl God goes running around with the Law in both hands, but this other God, though he fills up more space, has less to do altogether' (p. 72). But Yakov in prison, awaiting trial, returns with desperate urgency to the question of whether Spinoza can help him understand his plight: the persecutions and exigencies of Spinoza's life give him courage. Led out of his cell to be taken to hear his indictment, he looks at the world from which he has been locked up for so long: 'Though the day was dreary and cold, the streets white in every direction, the leafless trees black against the frozen sky, everywhere he looked brought tears to the fixer's eyes. It seemed to him he was seeing for the first time how the world was knit together' (p. 197). These formulations, with their 'bêtises' and their Spinozan stereotypes (or, to put it differently, in the unprotected nakedness of their vision) are as deeply Spinozistic as many philosophical commentaries on the *Ethics*. Yet Yakov dissents from his mentor too: he realizes that he himself is (like Flaubert, among others) not a philosopher, and that 'his' philosopher had for all his persecutions never actually been in jail: 'Necessity freed Spinoza and imprisoned Yakov' (p. 188). Yakov has been caught between 'the intellectual idea of God' and 'the God of the covenant; he had broken the phylactery' and Spinoza's God was not a father, but a force: 'He's a cold wind and try and keep warm' (p. 231). What of Spinoza survives the fixer's questioning is ultimately something political, and in his final hallucination of meeting and killing the Tsar, Yakov comes up with a revolutionary reading of Spinoza, reminding us of the often radical reception of Spinoza: 'What is it Spinoza says? If the state acts in ways that are abhorrent to human nature it's the lesser evil to destroy it. Death to the anti-Semites! Long live revolution! Long live liberty!' (p. 299). The fixer does not satirize Spinoza: he reveres him and is perplexed by him (maybe Spinoza is a 'fixer' in a less practical way than Yakov would like): the struggle to understand, and the intimacy of response, are more explicit than anything in Flaubert.

Singer's 'The Spinoza of Market Street' tells the story of Dr Nahum Fischelson, a scholar in Warsaw in the years leading up to the First World War, who is writing a commentary on Spinoza's *Ethics*. He is ailing, but not afraid of dying, despite his coated tongue and the malodorous belchings that may portend a terminal illness. From his window he looks up at the starry heavens and then down into Market Street, with its swarming crowds of thieves, prostitutes, gamblers, and watermelon vendors: surely this chaos of life is the opposite of reason! He waxes indignant at modern philosophers who do not understand Spinoza: 'idiots, asses, upstarts' (p. 14). Despite his settled bachelor habits, at the end of the story, against

considerable odds, he marries an old woman called Black Dobbe: their conjugation on their wedding night is described as a miracle, that most un-Spinozistic of categories. When it is over, Nahum goes to the window and looks out at the stars.

Seen from above even the Great War was nothing but a temporary play of the modes [. . .]. Yes, the divine substance was extended and had neither beginning nor end [. . .]. Its waves and bubbles danced in the universal cauldron, seething with change, following the unbroken chain of causes and effects, and he, Dr Fischelson, with his unavoidable fate, was part of this [. . .]. He breathed deeply of the midnight air, supported his shaky hands on the window sill and murmured, 'Divine Spinoza, forgive me. I have become a fool'. (p. 25)

This is closer to Flaubert-on-Spinoza: the admiration, the *Bouvard et Pécuchet* unease at not being able to live up to him, the feeling that Spinozism may in any case be unlivable, the conjunction of Spinozistic abstraction and 'realist' particularities that keep comically slipping away from under, and interrupting, the very discourse that claims to explain and situate them: above all, the final duplicity of response, human foolishness asserting itself defiantly against a *ratio* that is none the less not rejected. These fictions by Malamud and Singer make points about Spinoza that are neither abstractly philosophical (since they are tied to very particular kinds of situation) nor merely anecdotal (since they invite the reader to question, philosophically, both the adequacy of the protagonists' responses to Spinoza, and the adequacy of Spinozism as a response to such situations).

This double response is one of irony, which inevitably brings us back to Flaubert. The little summaries of Spinozism proffered by Bok and Fischelson are vulnerable to irony, the passionate ways in which they live their ideas less so. Flaubert's passion for style is similarly incongruent with the demoralization of the utterances performed in it. Still, demoralization is one of Flaubert's most recognizable effects, and there is little it spares. It is thus worth dwelling a little more on the sheer momentum that builds up *against* philosophy, or philosophemes, in Flaubert's work. Does his revered Spinoza, who after all had the 'bêtise' to conclude ('Q.E.D.') as much as any other philosopher, escape unscathed? If Spinozism to some extent survives as method, it becomes the object of suspicion once posited as theme. The images of philosophy we find in Flaubert's fiction are not encouraging, if only because allusions to philosophy, or reason, or stoicism, are either attached to people who (this being Flaubert) appear dim or derisory, or else are set in contexts that *expose* lofty philosophemes to the chill wind of the ordinary. Sometimes it is merely a turn of phrase that acts to discredit, or at least neutralize, any philosophical uplift. When we first meet Charles Bovary he has 'l'air raisonnable' (*Madame Bovary*, in *Œuvres*, 1, 327): we later read how his mother had swallowed her rage at her husband's skirt-chasing in a 'stoïcisme muet', while Bovary senior, 'pour faire le philosophe', encouraged his son to run around naked (pp. 330–31). The young Emma has drawn a head of Minerva, most philosophical of goddesses, for her 'cher papa': it now hangs on the wall amidst the flaking green paint (p. 339). At the other end of the story, she and Léon are seen talking 'philosophiquement' about '[les] désillusions terrestres' (p. 570). A little later still, she goes to Rodolphe for money; her 'j'ai bien souffert!' meets with his response, proffered 'd'un ton philosophique': 'L'existence est ainsi!' (p. 608). Rodolphe's answer alerts us to an important feature of Flaubert's use of such stereotypes: they shrug off real communication under pseudo-philosophical generality. And Flaubert is a perspicacious guide to common usage: this is what, for many people, philosophy means. (Of course, it is not just philosophy

that is indicted here: the abbé Bournisien's emollient theological irrelevancies are equally useless.) Flaubert had found something similar in his admired *Candide*, in which the doctrine of this-the-best-of-all-possible-worlds is uttered by Pangloss against a background of perpetual catastrophe. But the example of *Candide* is dangerous. On the one hand, it is not for philosophy to avoid being counter-intuitive, at times scandalously so (Leibniz may have been right, despite the Lisbon earthquake): on the other hand, there are equally times when such philosophical affirmation, at least when brought into mere conjunction with disaster, is obscene. (Lyotard is one philosopher who explores the area between these two poles.) Flaubert is at times closer to the satirists of philosophy (Rabelais, Bayle, Sterne, Swift, Voltaire) than to Stendhal, Balzac, or Zola. Even his style is so deliberate as to sound apodictic (but what does it 'prove'?) and its ternary rhythms suggest a floored dialectic or cod syllogism. But literature, even as satire, is not just the shadow, carnival, parody, or demoralizing ironization of philosophy, for it is essential (as fictional *mise en scène*, as reality-testing and hypothetical narrative, as possible world, as counterfactual and conditional) to philosophy's own self-criticism (its exploration of the *consequences* of philosophical positions). In *Madame Bovary*, Rodolphe is ultimately concealing the concrete determinations of wealth, power, and gender under the aegis of a 'philosophical' reflection (*whose life is 'ainsi'?*). The vague, submissive stoicism he palms off, unsuccessfully, on Emma is part of the general *image* of philosophy: witness the eloquent vernacular that invites us to take bad news philosophically. Having seen Flaubert flirting with Spinozism, it is tempting to jump in the other direction, to deride philosophy as such, to subscribe vengefully to certain entries in the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* ('PHILOSOPHIE. On doit toujours en ricaner'; 'MÉTAPHYSIQUE. En rire: donne l'air (c'est une preuve) d'esprit supérieur'; 'STOÏCISME. Est impossible'). Though these ideas are not signed by Flaubert but occur in a *sottisier*, Flaubert's own works similarly indict many images of philosophy: in them, philosophy, which ought to be *the* discourse of *anti-bêtise*, cannot escape from the sway of banality, degenerates from *episteme* into *doxa*, is subservient to commodification and repetition; it leaves everything where it already was, without transfiguration or understanding; more commonly, it adds insult to injury; in any case it lives on because the moment to realize it is missed, or rather because the attempts to realize it (to 'change the world'), degenerate into farce (*Bouvard et Pécuchet*) or nightmare (the failed revolution in *L'Éducation sentimentale*). In Homais, we find philosophy as bric-à-brac: his *credo* celebrates a comically vague deism ('Je crois en l'Être suprême, à un Créateur, quel qu'il soit, peu m'importe') with an admixture of Spinozism consisting of a rather rustic religiosity (God in the woods and fields) harnessed to anti-clericalism and what is in its own way a perfectly articulate version of Spinoza's assault (in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*) on anthropomorphic images of God and on miracles:

Aussi je n'admets pas un bonhomme du bon Dieu qui se promène dans son parterre la canne à la main, loge ses amis dans le ventre des baleines, meurt en poussant un cri et ressuscite au bout de trois jours: choses absurdes en elles-mêmes et complètement opposées, d'ailleurs, à toutes les lois de la physique; ce qui nous démontre, en passant, que les prêtres ont toujours croupi dans une ignorance turpide, où ils s'efforcent d'engloutir avec eux les populations.

(*Madame Bovary*, in *Œuvres*, I, 395–96)

Spinoza's response to Albert Burgh, who converted to Catholicism, is equally colourful: 'O brainless youth, who has bewitched you, so that you believe that you

swallow the highest and the eternal, and that you hold it in your intestines?’ (*Correspondence*, Letter 76, p. 352). I have discussed Flaubert’s epistolary enthusiasm for Spinoza: here Homais, a character who for all Flaubert’s apparent textual neutrality inspires the reader with a strong desire not to be like him (some hope) comes out with ‘Spinozism’. Homais is after all one of the more ‘philosophical’ characters in Flaubert: philosophical to the point of nausea.⁴¹ But philosophy can also help to overcome the false generalities with which it is often identified. Spinoza is no exception: in the *Ethics*, determinations are concrete, the ‘universal notions’ of generality (examples would be the words ‘félicité’, ‘passion’, ‘ivresse’ that lure Emma on, or Rodolphe’s philosophical shrug: potentially, everything that Flaubertians have come to call the ‘stereotype’) are merely imaginary: true knowledge, difficult and rare, should be a return to particulars. In Flaubert, philosophy as metalanguage is (as in another philosophical satirist, Beckett) stripped of its transcendence, becomes not method but mere result, yet even this does not destroy philosophy as such: *Bouvard et Pécuchet* does not simply collapse into a self-referential vortex, but has a critical momentum: Flaubert at one time envisaged as a subtitle ‘Du défaut de méthode dans les sciences’, even if *all* sciences, perhaps even all existing methods, are included. And stupidity is less indeterminate than it may seem: *Bouvard et Pécuchet* was to be aimed ‘contre la bêtise, l’injustice et la cruauté des hommes’.⁴² ‘Bêtise’ is where moral failures cannot be distinguished from failures of intelligence or political sensitivity (and ‘bêtise’ as providing blanket coverage of all failure brings its own problems): still, ‘bêtise’ is more closely associated with domination, exploitation, and power than with vulnerability and defencelessness (which is why the great polyphony of stupidity in the ‘comices agricoles’ episode of *Madame Bovary* is more complex than it seems: some stupidities are more oppressive than others, ways of adjudicating between them may not be lacking).

So Flaubert tries out philosophy (especially Spinozism); he exploits its stylistic procedures and explores its themes: sometimes he savages it. In other words, he does what philosophy is always meant to do, even though he does it most effectively by montage rather than syllogism. Philosophical *énoncés* (the kind that may appear in a dictionary of philosophy, and/or of received ideas), when taken out of context, are neither more nor less stupid than any other decontextualized social practice, and taking them out of context is itself a philosophically charged manoeuvre. If other people (other peoples, in the case of anthropology, people of other ages, in the case of history, as in the historical material Flaubert assembled for the second volume of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*) seem stupid, this may be due to a failure to understand them. (It is true that much of the historical material amassed by Flaubert is silly and vicious: there is no reason to deprive history of its exclamation marks of laughter and indignation.)

I mentioned the ‘interruption’ of pantheism in the first *Éducation* and of Spinozism in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, where philosophemes are not given a chance to be properly debated but are left suspended, not ‘brought home’. There is a similar interruption in that ‘œuvre de toute ma vie’, *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*. What is interrupted here

⁴¹ Homais’s philosophical expertise comes in especially handy after Emma’s death: ‘Bien que philosophe, M. Homais respectait les morts’ (p. 626). ‘Le néant n’épouvante pas un philosophe’ (p. 628), and he admonishes the distraught Charles with “‘De la dignité, fichtre! de la philosophie!’” (p. 632).

⁴² Quoted in the introduction to *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, ed. by Claudine Gothot-Mersch, Folio (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), p. 18.

is again Spinozism, and Spinoza has a particularly articulate spokesman in the shape of the Devil. (There is a historical edge to this: Spinoza simply was, to orthodox Jews and Christians, devilish.) Flaubert's Devil appears to Antoine to tempt him with the absence of final causes, the identity of God's will and his essence, the infinity of the attribute of extension, extended matter as itself a divine attribute, God's indivisibility and impersonality, and the 'indifference' of good and evil from the perspective of the one substance. Antoine, like Bouvard and Pécuchet, is chilled by this frigid Spinozistic catechism. Perhaps stranded philosophemes of this kind, checklists of 'what Spinoza thought', are always diabolical: thought frozen solid. Of course, this vision of the world is mitigated by theistic and dualistic language (it could hardly be otherwise if we are going to have a Devil at all), and in the final version, as in that of 1849, the Devil's Spinozism is itself short-lived: he ends with a final 'mise sous rature' of what he has just announced, suggesting (like the sceptics Spinoza combatted) that substance may be a figment of imagination. Antoine, who is, after all, a saint in the making, refuses to adore either the Spinozistic or the sceptical Devil, and 'lève les yeux, par un dernier mouvement d'espoir', an un-Spinozistic move that rids him of the Devil (*La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, in *Œuvres*, 1, 182).⁴³ But having seen the Devil off, Antoine is still prey to Spinoza: after his encounter with the figures of Lust and Death, for instance, he continues to brood on what the commentators (from Kant onwards, though the objection itself goes back much earlier) have referred to as Spinoza's 'acosmism', the difficulty in deducing the plurality of modes from the one substance ('la Substance étant unique, pourquoi les Formes sont-elles variées?' *La Tentation*, p. 189).⁴⁴ Furthermore, Antoine is then beguiled by the 'Chimère' of fancy and a more logical, calculative Sphinx, as if the tension between imagination and reason were itself here being imaginatively figured. And after the parade of monsters, there is the final vision of a totally animate *Natura*, leading to Antoine's desire to 'pénétrer chaque atome, descendre jusqu'au fond de la matière, — être la matière!' Whereupon it is day, and in the sky, 'dans le disque même du soleil', Antoine sees the face of Christ, crosses himself and 'se remet en prières' (p. 198).

This ending is enigmatic. After the procession of transient deities and religions that has passed before Antoine, is the vision of Christ just one more? Or does it include or transcend them? We are given no indication. (There is some evidence that Flaubert himself viewed the end of the story as something of a defeat, but more because of its 'cellular' component.)⁴⁵ It is surely necessary to see the Last Temptation of Anthony as a problem, something that does not fit in. The appearance in the sky interrupts, even if it also completes, the longed-for (and grammatically infinitive) absorption into matter, just as the appearance of the

⁴³ Spinoza demoted hope from being a theological virtue to an error of imagination: *Ethics*, Part 4, proposition 47.

⁴⁴ Timothy Unwin finds acosmism to be a tendency in Flaubert himself ('Flaubert and Pantheism', pp. 398–99).

⁴⁵ See Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, *Journal. Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, 3 vols, ed. by Robert Ricatte, Bouquins, (Paris: Laffont, 1989), entry for 18 October 1871: 'En fiacre, il [Flaubert] me parle de son livre, de toutes les épreuves qu'il fait subir au solitaire de la Thébaidé et dont il sort victorieux. Puis, à la rue d'Amsterdam, il me confie que la défaite finale du saint est due à la cellule, la cellule scientifique. Le curieux, c'est qu'il semble s'étonner de mon étonnement' (II, 468). Victor Brombert picks this up in *The Novels of Flaubert: A Study of Themes and Techniques* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 201, but Flaubert's comment remains a little mysterious.

mangy dog had put a temporary stop to Jules's pantheist reverie in the first *Éducation*. Gyergai does not see the disjunction, claiming that *La Tentation* is a 'profession de foi panthéiste' ('Flaubert et Spinoza', p. 21). Likewise Bruneau, who contrasts the third version of *La Tentation* with its earlier avatars: 'La troisième version au contraire se termine sur la profession de foi philosophique de l'auteur, le panthéisme, fondé sur les expériences vécues par Flaubert et renforcé intellectuellement en lui par la doctrine de Spinoza et les théories scientifiques de son temps' (*Les Débuts littéraires de Gustave Flaubert*, p. 525). Even Queneau, in a preface to *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, argues: 'Dans *La Tentation*, le défilé lugubre et malsain des croyances religieuses se termine par une profession de foi spinoziste.'⁴⁶ These formulations are curious (even if they are interdependent). Who is making a Spinozistic 'profession of faith' here? Antoine? Flaubert? 'Flaubert'? At all events, *La Tentation* does not end with Spinoza (I am ignoring the difficult question of whether Spinoza was even a 'pantheist'): its conclusion is split. There is no argument, no dialectic: 'être la matière!' is replaced by a silent face in the sky and Antoine's prayer, as if pantheist absorption could simply mutate into an image of theistic difference: not an *Aufhebung*, but an uplift without upheaval. The leap from one to the other, from the penetrative depths of 'être la matière' (a kind of immanence) to Christ (a kind of transcendence) is at least possibly a silent dissent from the Spinozism that has been claimed as the book's conclusion. It might, for instance, be a reaffirmation of the monotheistic doctrine of creation (the beasts Antoine sees would then be creatures, not modes) as against a more Spinozistic view of nature as self-creating and self-sustaining. (Spinoza's nature appears as both productive and produced: *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*, but Spinoza does not use the traditional terminology of creation to describe what nature does when it natures.) It might be emphasizing the need for subject as well as substance.⁴⁷ It might also be anticipating Levinas's criticism of Spinoza. For Levinas, the *face*, 'le visage d'autrui', is the emblem of the true 'infinite', that of the ethical responsibility of human being, which goes beyond ontology, and beyond the mere 'totality' that he attributes (a little simplistically) to Spinoza.⁴⁸ For Levinas, the breakthrough of what he calls eschatology into totality is complex: he formulates it as a vision, but of the invisible, that which is beyond any totality since it cannot be seen by the panoptic or encyclopaedic gaze: it is a "'vision" sans image, dépourvue des vertus objectivantes synoptiques et totalisantes de la vision' (there is a pun by subtraction here: 'visage' is 'vision' without 'image') (*Totalité et infini*, p. xii). The infinity of the other is *figured* in a face which is situated 'above' (Levinas makes another pun, on the 'hauteur' of 'Autrui' (p. 59)). It is this which leads Levinas to reject Spinozism: 'La pensée et la liberté nous viennent de la séparation et de la considération d'Autrui — cette thèse est aux antipodes du spinozisme' (p. 78). The

⁴⁶ 'Bouvard et Pécuchet de Gustave Flaubert', now in *Bâtons, chiffres et lettres*, revised and enlarged edn, Idées (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), pp. 97–124, 121.

⁴⁷ This was Hegel's comment against Spinozism: it occurs in various forms, for instance in the preface to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Timothy Unwin states that Flaubert too sees the need for a subject — the infinite must include a subjective representation of it (*Art et infini*, p. 88).

⁴⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'extériorité*, *Phaenomenologica*, 8 (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1961). And the face of the other interrupts 'l'écoeurant remue-ménage de l'il y a' (*Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, *Phaenomenologica*, 54 (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974), p. 230): 'sans la proximité d'autrui dans son visage, tout s'absorbe, s'enlise, s'emmure dans l'être, s'en va du même côté, tout forme un tout, absorbant le sujet même auquel il se dévoile' (p. 229). The problem in Flaubert is that the face is vulnerable to becoming yet another entry in the encyclopedia.

separation and con-sideration of the Other, the Other as a star. But to interpret the interruption of Spinozism at the end of *La Tentation* as somehow 'Levinasian' is to burden oneself with yet more undischageable debts. The *facies Christi* cannot be a simple transcendence of what Spinoza called the *facies totius universi*, the totality of things: how can an image be transcendent?⁴⁹ And Levinas's face is not 'just' a face (it is certainly not *that* face: Levinas is aware of the second commandment), just as his 'hauteur' belongs to a different dimension. Far from being an image of Levinas's absolutely other (a fragile phrase in any case: how can the face of the other avoid being figured?), what Antoine sees may be yet another human projection, an all-too-traditionally anthropomorphic image of the divine. Even if it is logical that a Christian saint committed to the doctrine of the incarnation should affirm such an image, there is a serious problem with *this* image, in which Christ's face appears in the solar disc: Constantine's vision before the battle of the Milvian Bridge seems to have encouraged his identification of Christ with the soldiers' god, *Sol Invictus*, whose birthday the newly Romanized deity came to share. *In hoc signo* occurred the problematic yoking of the powers of church and state. Perhaps it is not the 'cellule' that represents a defeat for Antoine, but the 'soleil'. (Or is it the Spinozan White Sun of Being, in Rolland's phrase, that we are seeing?)⁵⁰ In the Flaubertian montage at the end of *La Tentation*, a longing for immanence (*Deus sive Natura*) topples over into a picture of an unimaginable transcendence (*Deus aut Natura*), pantheism is suddenly stripped of its panic totalizations, and the projected identity of self and world is dirempted: the end of the book of Job is litotically replayed (in Job, theodical temptations give way to a voice in a whirlwind claiming credit for monstrous beasts, leviathan and behemoth) only to slip into an even more condensed version of the end of Dante's *Paradiso* (a tour of the universe, of the totality, is summarized and displaced by the vision of an infinite face). Everything seems overdetermined to such a point as to constitute an ideological minefield: an explosion of *odium theologico-politicum* threatens every interpretative step. And part of the problem is that Flaubert is giving us images instead of arguments, but images that constantly allude to, and perhaps rekindle, arguments of a philosophical and theological kind. It is as if *La Tentation* ends with an image of *Natura* followed by an image (a figure) of a face, and that this collocation in turn reminds us of the debate between Spinoza and Levinas: but since both of these are philosophers, and thus suspicious of 'images', our reminiscences cannot touch ground. In this sense, the end of *La Tentation* can act as a multiple image of non-identity: the non-identity of *Deus* and *Natura*, and the (different) non-identity of literature and philosophy. Literature-in-inverted-commas and philosophy-in-scare-quotes are false generalities, like Emma Bovary's 'félicité', 'passion', and 'ivresse'. Neither can be sublated into the other, yet neither is safe from the other: they interfere with each other the whole time, mimic and exaggerate each other's procedures only to withdraw into haughty isolation and mutual mistrust — or, more affirmatively, they tell us a lot about each other precisely by keeping their distance. It is this *chassé-croisé* that

⁴⁹ The *facies totius universi* phrase is used by Spinoza in Letter 64 and translated as 'the face of the whole universe' by Shirley: the full quotation is: 'the face of the whole universe, which, although varying in infinite ways, yet remains the same' (*Ethics*, pp. 289–90). Shirley also notes that 'facies' is a problem-phrase, maybe metaphorical.

⁵⁰ Romain Rolland, in *Le Voyage intérieur*, speaks of escaping 'au gouffre de la substance, dans le soleil blanc de l'Être' (quoted in Vernière, *Spinoza et la pensée française*, II, 702).

Flaubert's protracted engagement with Spinoza shows. Literature is the realization (and one of the signs) that philosophy has not been 'realized': 'literature and philosophy' is a missed rendezvous, and 'Flaubert and Spinoza' is one of its many disappointments. If Flaubert was tempted, for most of his working life, by Spinozism, something in him resisted. But this resistance cannot simply be labelled 'literature', and thus neutralized, for it sends us back to Spinoza, perhaps to reread Spinoza's own difference from Spinozism. And Flaubert, the cataloguer of *idées reçues*, can thus alert us to the countless ways in which Spinoza's ideas have yet to be received.

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