

# Flaubert's *Tentation de Saint-Antoine*: Three Approaches

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## I. Introduction: A Nameless Genre

Gustave Flaubert's *La tentation de Saint-Antoine ou la révélation de l'âme* (first version 1848; final version 1874), its *sui generis* character notwithstanding, belongs in a recognizable, yet largely unrecognized, genre of mid- and late-Nineteenth Century literature that includes, among other items, Charles Kingsley's *Hypatia* (1850), Henrik Ibsen's *Kejser og Galileer* (1871), Richard Wagner's incomplete *Jesus von Nazareth* (1849) and his libretto for *Parsifal* (1882), Walter Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), General Lew Wallace's *Ben Hur* (1880), Anatole France's *Thaïs* (1890), and Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Quo Vadis* (1895). The genre has no name; it is a hybrid in that it assimilates drama, epic, the novel, the essay, and perhaps even lyric, without distinction and therefore quite promiscuously and un-generically. The nameless, promiscuous, un-generic genre nevertheless succeeds in constituting itself through its specific fascination with the breakdown of Classical Civilization and the growth of the successor-civilization that articulated itself through the codification of Christian orthodoxy and the establishment of a new central institution, the Church, with its precepts and rites. The writers who contribute to this nameless strand of often bizarre literary creativity necessarily also take interest in the relation of the Imperial centuries down through the period of Late Antiquity to modernity, which seems to them likewise imperial, fugacious, and overripe. The literary representation of Christianity's founding events or of the emergent Christian order's formative travails thus frequently furnishes the writer with the opportunity to conduct a critique, by indirection, of modernity, a tendency that joins the purely literary endeavor to the speculative endeavor of historiophilosophy.

In this way, *La Tentation* or *Kejser og Galileer* or *Marius* communicates with a related, non-fiction genre that takes up the discussion of Christianity either as apologetics or skeptical polemics, as in François-René de Chateaubriand's *Génie du Christianisme* (1801) and Søren Kierkegaard's *Practice in Christianity* (1850), on the one hand, or in Ludwig Feuerbach's *Wesen des Christentums* (1841) and Ernest Renan's *Vie de Jésus* (1863), on the other. The nameless genre tends to be partial although not uncritical with respect to Christianity while refraining from any blanket rejection of Paganism. Sometimes it seeks a dialectical reconciliation of the two.

This nameless but recognizable, yet largely unrecognized, genre, in which *La Tentation* figures both as typical and outstanding, identifies itself again through its erudition: Flaubert worked on *La Tentation* for more than twenty-five years, during which time he read through a sizeable library of primary and secondary works on Christianity, Philosophical Paganism, and the history of Late Antiquity. It was only by similar arduous preparation that Ibsen fitted himself to write his *Verdens-Historisk Skuespill* ("World-Historic Drama") about Julian the Apostate and Wagner the libretto for his *Bühnenweihfestspiel* ("Festive Stage-Consecration Play") about the Sodality of the Holy Grail, to cite but two of the other examples that have already been given. It goes beyond erudition. In *La Tentation* especially, with its form of an immense soliloquy between sunset and sunrise, Flaubert gives the impression of having immersed himself in the antique monastic exercise, the goal of that immersion being nothing less than to relive not only the crucial moment in the saintly life—to re-experience the Temptation—but also to grasp, in a kind of mystic vision, the total historical situation in which that life has its context and from which it takes its meaning. That the vision must be anthropological, a "revelation of the soul," as well as theological nearly goes without saying. That the vision arises in a *milieu* of ideological strife and raw violence also nearly goes without saying, whether one is speaking of the Fourth Century or the Nineteenth Century. In a border-situation of social dissolution, it becomes necessary to recapitulate an inaugural or originary event. Indeed, Flaubert's juxtaposition of sectarian warfare with its insistent rhetorical justification, and his intense empathy with the spiritual fugue that these controversies provoke, lends to *La Tentation* a powerful anticipatory relevance to the Twentieth Century, whose cohorts have experienced their time as a passage through ideologically driven catastrophe.

Take, for example, John Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers* (1921), an autobiographical novelization of the author's experience in the First World War in whose pages readers would perhaps little expect to find overt allusions to Flaubert's weird text. Even so, such allusions insistently appear. They are even central to the story. Dos Passos' protagonist, the cynosure personality among the three titular conscripts, is John Andrews, a young musician who hopes to become a composer. Andrews harbors the ambition, no less, to set *La Tentation* as an opera. Wounded by shrapnel while on the march to the front and invalided to a military hospital, Andrews suffers afflicting dreams while fighting to recover through pain and narcosis. Awakening suddenly to his first clarity, he thinks to himself, "Funny that the Queen of Sheba had come to his head." (200) The thought connects itself to a girl standing beneath a tree at a crossroads, one of the last things he remembers seeing before the shell struck. Andrews repeats to himself, "La reine de Saba, la reine de Saba." Once more in a fog, he mistakes the night-nurse for his obsession: "The Queen of Sheba carried a parasol with little vermilion bells all round it that gave out a cool tinkle as she walked towards him. She wore her hair in a high headdress thickly powdered with blue iris powder, and on her long train, that a monkey held up at the end, were embroidered in gaudy colors the signs of the zodiac." That is practically a *verbatim* lift from *La Tentation*. In M. Walter Dunne's English of 1904, the line reads: "As she comes forward, she swings a green parasol with an

ivory handle surrounded by vermilion bells; and twelve curly Negro boys carry the long train of her robe, the end of which is held by an ape, who raises it every now and then." (32)

Other details of *Three Soldiers* also originate in Flaubert. They relate directly to *La Tentation*. Regaining strength, Andrews requests Applebaum, a visiting fellow soldier, to "buy me a book . . . a special book . . . a French book." (202) Applebaum's response when Andrews writes the title on a slip of paper is: "Who's Antoine?" He adds quickly, "Gee whiz, I bet that's hot stuff"; and, "I wish I could read French."

Before being wounded, Andrews, while barracked in a village, becomes acquainted with a girl of easy virtue by the name of Antoinette, whom the soldier tends, in his fantasies, to identify with the Queen of Sheba. When Andrews brings his friend Chrisfield to the place of business, a run-down wine shop, Antoinette appears as "a girl in a faded frock of some purplish material that showed the strong curves of her shoulders and breasts," who "smiled when she saw the two soldiers, drawing her thin lips away from her ugly yellow teeth." (140-41) Once more, she "showed her bad teeth in a smile," after which her visage "became impassive and beautiful again." (142) As one might ask: *Qu'est-ce qu'une tentation?* The image of Antoinette vacillates between an ideal, which can hardly be anything else than an illusion, and the carious actuality, which eyes Chrisfield "admiringly," but walks away with another customer whose billfold is presumably bigger. Andrews tells Chrisfield, "There's always the Queen of Sheba," making the ideal a substitute for the reality, a consolation that is lost on Chrisfield. Later, in his hospital bed, Andrews stirs himself "to think about the music [that] he [had] intended to write about the Queen of Sheba." (204) That was before his conscription, before the basic training "stripped his life off" and "made a soldier of him." As the likelihood increases that he will recover fully, but will return to the battlefield, Andrews becomes increasingly fixated on Flaubert's text although it remains unclear how fully he has grasped its meaning. He imagines himself "in the dark desert of despair."

In a long Flaubertian descriptive sequence, Dos Passos gives it to Andrews to imagine the "Sheba" episode of *La Tentation*, with himself standing in for the saint: "Through the flare of torchlight, the Queen of Sheba would advance towards him, covered with emeralds and dull-gold ornaments, with a monkey hopping behind holding up the end of her long train. She would put her hand with its slim fantastic nails on his shoulder; and, looking into her eyes, he would suddenly feel within reach all the fiery imaginings of his desire." (204) Andrews reflects in a mood of *ennui*, "Oh, if only he could be free to work," a sentiment not foreign to the saint's monologue in Flaubert's version of his story. The original Anthony had forsaken home and family when still young to work on his soul in the solitude of the desert, but to fulfill that work he must refuse desire, and not facilitate its completion. Sheba's allure threatens the destruction of Anthony's *opus*, his *Imitatio Christi*. As for Andrews, "After he had eaten, he picked up the 'Tentation de Saint Antoine,' that lay on the cot beside his immovable legs, and buried himself in it, reading the gorgeously modulated sentences voraciously, as if the book were a drug in which he could drink deep forgetfulness of

himself." (208) In the mood of forgetfulness, Andrews blends a bit with Anthony in that Anthony's radical *askesis* entails systematic suppression of the ego.

Andrews awaits inspiration, which omits to descend: "When he tried to seize hold of his thoughts, to give them definite musical expression in his mind, he found himself suddenly empty, the way a sandy inlet on the beach that has been full of shoals of silver fishes, becomes suddenly empty when a shadow crosses the water, and the man who is watching sees wanly his own reflection instead of the flickering of thousands of tiny silver bodies." (209) Here again Dos Passos is not merely alluding to *La Tentation*; he is imitating Flaubert's style in homage to the master. *La Tentation* is replete with such lapidary constructions; so is *Three Soldiers*.

Andrews resembles Flaubert's Anthony in one way, perhaps, more than another. Famously, in Anthony's Dark Night of the Soul, the Devil in his legion assailed the hermit, tempting him to self-betrayal. Athanasius in his *Life of Saint Anthony*, on which Flaubert drew, describes the action vividly, noting that it prolonged itself for twenty years and remarking how the imps and demons physically battered the saint in their attempt to wring from him a denial of his faith. Demonic forces assail Andrews, too, in the form of the omnipresent Military Policemen or M.P.'s. "The M.P.'s sure won't get us tonight," (234) a character named Henslowe says, hopefully. When, during an absence-without-leave in Paris, "Two M.P.'s [pass] outside the window," Andrews senses himself to be "joyfully secure from them." (300) Later the paranoid certainty grows on Andrews that "the M.P.'s would get him." (368) The M.P.'s are the agents of the regime that *strips the life* from people; that herds and regiments them, as nations have done since Napoleon. Indeed, the M.P.'s get Andrews, leaving the unfinished sketch of his *Tentation*-opera on a table in a garret to scatter its leaves on the wind. This ignominy only happens, however, after one last arch-foregrounding of Flaubert's masterpiece. Andrews the deserter has made the acquaintance of Genevieve Rod, whom his friend Aubrey describes as belonging to a family "very advanced," *au courant* that is, and *correct*, holding all the properly vetted opinions. Aubrey tells Andrews that Mademoiselle Rod wishes to learn about American music. Andrews' usual intuition, when Sheba is present, fails; nor does he suspect until it is too late that Genevieve is, in her way, an M.P.

The Rods have invited Andrews to tea. He plays piano while engaging in *causerie* with Genevieve. Dos Passos writes, "As he played without looking at her, he felt that her eyes were fixed on him." (318) Suddenly "her hand touched his shoulder," a gesture that recalls the earlier phantasmagoria of Sheba, in which the fabled queen "would put her hand with its slim fantastic nails on his shoulder." The familiarity arrests his performance. Genevieve apologizes for distracting Andrews and asks what he was playing. He demurs to say but she guesses that he was experimenting with his own composition. What was it, she wants to know? He asks her, "Have you ever read *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*?" She replies, not affirming that she has read it, that, "It's not [Flaubert's] best work" despite being "a very

interesting failure though." Andrews, rising, throttling his temper, says, "They seem to teach everybody to say that." After that, although he sticks with Genevieve, Andrews experiences growing alienation that can lead only to a full break. Andrews has made statements to Genevieve, which indicate to her approval, his espousal of socialism. In his last conversation with her, however, he contradicts her assumption. He has had a vision of pervasive evil, of history as an inescapable cycle of suffering and purgation. "It seems to me," he says, "that human society has been always that, and perhaps will be always that: organizations growing and stifling individuals, and individuals revolting hopelessly against them, and at last forming new societies to crush the old societies and becoming slaves again in their turn..." (421) Dos Passos' ellipsis suggests Andrews' conviction of a world without end and without transcendence.

*Three Soldiers*, in absorbing *La Tentation* into itself, situates itself somewhat oddly in the recent evolution, or devolution, of Western consciousness, with its attendant variations, or deformations, of anthropology and esthetics. That Dos Passos saw himself continuing an *aesthetic tradition* with a French origin going back to Symbolism is made clear from the insistent self-conscious *stylism*, as it might be called, of his prose. (Just after the war Dos Passos became a student at the Sorbonne.) The passage representing the incident of Andrews' casualty furnishes an example. Andrews has broken from his march to bathe his feet in a pond whose cool green waters a chorus of frogs comically enlivens. "Absently," Dos Passos writes, "as if he had no connection with all that went on about him, he heard the twang of bursting shrapnel down the road." (193) He finds himself "sinking into the puddle" while "a feeling of relief came over him." He half-notices that "the frogs had gone, but from somewhere a little stream of red was creeping out slowly into the putty-colored water." Reality befalls Andrews "as if he were . . . in a box of a theater watching some dreary monotonous play." (194) Whereas in the usual classification of American writers the academic critics categorize Dos Passos as a high modernist—which, in his full phase he perhaps really is—nevertheless in *Three Soldiers* he works in an earlier *ethos* that defies the expectation of absolute realism associated with the war-narratives of Henri Barbusse, Rainer Maria Remarque, and Ernest Hemingway. Writing of the realist school in *Originary Thinking* (1993), Eric Gans argues that: "Just as *l'art pour l'art* is the radical extension of 'right' romanticism after 1848, realism is that of the 'left.' The former attacks bourgeois utility in the name of art; [but] the latter attacks bourgeois complacency in the name of truth." Gans adds that, "Realism insists on representing the ugly sides of life that art has traditionally passed over as un-ideal." Dos Passos spares his readers no ugliness in *Three Soldiers*, but in conflating bourgeois complacency and socialism, as he does, and in attaching his own text to Flaubert's anomalous and reactionary religious extravaganza, he takes a position at right angles to any historical scheme.

If, as Gans plausibly argues, realism should be defined as the literary phase in which "constraints are chosen by the artist and imposed on the audience," and if this imposition indeed prefigured "modern art's terroristic attitude to its audience," then it would become

possible to argue that Dos Passos sees in the anti-transcendent, proto-politically correct esthetic the articulation of a corresponding social prescription or code. It is an M.P.-enforced code and, abrogating freedom, it is dehumanizing. To oppose the code means to defend what it condemns or excludes, including a pre-modern view of the human, mediated by Late Romanticism and Symbolism, in which the word *soul* still makes sense. When the M.P.'s take Andrews away, finally, they do so in sight of the spires of Notre Dame de Chartres. Dos Passos' juxtaposition is not accidental.

The name *Andrews* is itself indicative of Dos Passos' position: It means "The Son of Man," with a strong Christological implication. *Three Soldiers* is unimaginable without *La Tentation*; and *La Tentation* is the *least* "realistic" of Flaubert's major works. In Dos Passos' story *La Tentation* indeed becomes an object of bourgeois snobbery, in a social context where the bourgeoisie has embraced realism as its settled esthetics, to the point of regarding anything else as hopelessly *passé*. *Three Soldiers* is a novel of extraordinary paradoxicality, but so is *La Tentation*—supposing that it is a novel, by no means a foregone conclusion. In being *about* Flaubert's probable masterpiece, *Three Soldiers* adopts the anomalous status of its chosen precursor-text, but the oddity of *La Tentation* far exceeds that of its textual progeny. In *Originary Thinking*, Gans writes that "the modernist solution to the discovery of guilty violence at the origin of culture was to posit the guiltless violence of a pre-cultural, prelinguistic human desire." In case of *Three Soldiers* and even more so in that of *La Tentation*, the pronouncement requires a slight modification: In the nameless genre invoked in the commencement of the present discussion, the writers discover the founding mendacity of the modernist dispensation—which is that *its* violence is guiltless—that *it* is not a sacrificial scene founded on the principle of radical exclusion.

It is the purpose of what follows—in three sections and an epilogue—is to revisit *La Tentation* in light, not only of Gans's Generative Anthropology, another formulation almost entirely anomalous to its time and place, but also of the late René Girard's Fundamental Anthropology, useful in conjunction with a Gansian exploration of the text because in distinction to Generative Anthropology it operates as a type of apologetics; and finally of Eric Voegelin's historical phenomenology of the Western Consciousness, his "noetology," as he worked that out in the five volumes of *Order and History* (1956-1985). Girard and Voegelin, like Gans, are anomalous presences on the self-denominating post-modern scene. Girard, like Gans, has written about Flaubert. Voegelin not only wrote about Flaubert, but he often wrote about or took critical inspiration from literature and indeed his *readings* of the touchstone texts of the Western Continuum in *Order and History* are remarkable instances of literary exegesis. Given Voegelin's thesis of modernity as a resurgence of Late-Antique heresies, the application of his view to Flaubert's achievement in *La Tentation* promises rich results. It has long been the opinion of the present writer that Voegelin is closely intellectually affined to Girard and Gans and that the threesome of them potentially completes certain incomplete aspects in the discourse of each. As all three are, moreover, radically eccentric, Flaubert's radically eccentric *Tentation* is likely to shed light on *them*,

too, and not just *vice-versa*.

Because *La Tentation* is historically and literarily erudite, and because the events and discourses that inform it belong to the terminal crisis of the great Ecumenic Age, in the dissolute twilight of Antiquity, it would seem most appropriate to begin by undertaking an exploration of Flaubert's odd book from a Voegelinian perspective. The argument will be cumulative, of course, carrying over the results of one view into the next.

## II. *La Tentation* from a Voegelinian Perspective

The previous section has gone into detail concerning a book, Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers*, which declares its genealogical relation to *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, but it has not properly characterized Flaubert's text except to call attention repeatedly to its oddity and to its relation to other equally odd books for which the contemporary literary seminar has no place. In its final form of 1874, *La Tentation* is a vast oneiric monologue in seven parts given to an historical personage, Saint Anthony of the Desert (251—356 [sic]), the subject of the first Christian Hagiography, *The Life of Saint Anthony* by Athanasius (296—373; also later beatified), who, paradoxically, by fleeing Alexandria to seek absolute solitude in the Egyptian desert, became the founder of the first community of Christian eremites or monks. Anthony famously battled with Satan himself, who strove to draw the holy man away from his faith, so as to prevent him from becoming a model for others. Flaubert's monologue extrapolates itself in numerous colloquies, inquisitions, operatic choral scenes; imaginary choreographic set-pieces, episodes of gross-out violence and pornography, and "special effects" sequences that anticipate the requirements of cinema. Flaubert's subtitle, as already mentioned, is *La révélation de l'âme*—"The Revelation of the Soul." But what is it? Is it a play, a kind of Theater of the Mind? Is it a novel, but disguised as a mono-drama? Is it a lyric effusion—a colossal riff on Hamlet's soliloquy—in prose? Or is it an allegory of Orthodoxy and Heresy? Making the work even more difficult to place generically, the subtitle implies that *La Tentation* belongs to the tradition of Apocalypse.

Dunne's translation gives helpful section-titles to the seven parts: "A Holy Saint"; "The Temptation of Love and Power"; "The Disciple, Hilarion"; "The Fiery Trial"; "All Gods, All Religions"; "The Mystery of Space"; "The Chimera and the Sphinx." The topical indicators suggest the range of Flaubert's exploration, beginning with his descent from *his* present to Anthony's Third and Fourth Centuries, and continuing from there into the remotest archeological strata of religion and religious experience.

Flaubert has composed his text to heighten its scenic character. The action of the seven sections being revelatory, hallucinatory, or in some way psychological, it confines itself, in the presumptive reality of the narrative, to Anthony's domicile and its immediate environment: "It is in the Thebaïd, on the heights of a mountain, where a platform, shaped like a crescent, is surrounded by huge stones." (1) [*C'est dans le Thébaïde, au haut d'une*

*montagne, sur une plate-forme arrondie en demi-lune, et qu'enferment de grosses pierres.]* The mountainous altitude already boasts mythic and religious connotations; the “huge stones” that surround Anthony’s mud-and-reed cell suggest the prehistoric monuments of the British Isles and France, with their implications of ritual activity, including sacrifice, but also telling of the cosmological orientation of their builder-societies. Anthony has fled to this remote spot, not exactly from some improbable antique modernity, but from its equivalent in the urban contemporaneity of the proto-Byzantine world—the heady ferment, mystical and philosophical, ascetic and orgiastic, of Late Hellenism. As Flaubert’s scene-setting puts it: “Some ten paces or so from the cell a tall cross is planted in the ground; and, at the other end of the platform, a gnarled old palm-tree leans over the abyss, for the side of the mountain is scarped; and at the bottom of the cliff the Nile swells, as it were, into a lake.” (1) [*A dix pas de la cabane, il y a une longue croix plantée dans le sol; et, à l’autre bout de la plate-forme, un vieux palmier tordu se penche sur l’abîme, car la montagne est taillée à pic, et le Nil semble faire un lac au bas de la falaise.*]

The Cross stands empty, but the Crucified Christ has displaced himself metaphorically into the twisted palm. Anthony’s work being the *Imitatio Christi*, the tortured character of the palm also stands for the agony in his soul and for the spiritual triumph of the martyrs. Like the palm, Anthony is poised in his itinerary over the abyss. The twistings of the Nile below will eventually transform themselves into the image of a serpent, one of the guises of Satan.

In the distance, importantly as it will prove, “Bushes, the pebbles, the earth, now wear the hard colour of bronze; and through space floats a golden dust so fine that it is scarcely distinguishable from the vibrations of light.” (2) [*Les buissons, les cailloux, la terre, tout maintenant paraît dur comme du bronze; et dans l’espace flotte une poudre d’or tellement menue qu’elle se confonde avec la vibration de la lumière.*] Flaubert, the master of symbols, is *symbolizing*. Readers stand before a moment of radical transformation in consciousness, or what Eric Voegelin liked to call a *leap in being*. Indeed, Voegelin has addressed Flaubert generally, and even *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, specifically. It is only a mention in passing, but the context is highly suggestive, an essay on Henry James’ novelette *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) that began as Voegelin’s personal letter to James scholar Robert B. Heilman and later appeared in *The Southern Review* in 1971 with an elaborate afterword. Voegelin interprets *The Turn* as a study in the puritanical deformation of the Platonic-Christian soul, which succumbs to the Gnostic temptation of total Godlike self-sufficiency through the prideful refusal of grace, which is also a refusal of what Voegelin denominates as *openness to being* or a *willingness to cooperate in the process of reality*. Concerning *The Turn of the Screw*, in an observation that applies quite relevantly to *La Tentation*, Voegelin writes that James’ Governess symbolizes “the demonically closed soul... which is possessed by the pride of handling the problem of good and evil by its own means.” The “closed soul” aims at “self-mastery and control of spiritual forces.” Such a soul runs the risk of becoming “rigid in its blindness to the supernatural.” This spiritual deformation, reaching beyond the individual, can afflict a whole society.



In Voegelin's judgment, Western society has, in the modern period, undergone just such "a fateful shift . . . from existence in openness toward the cosmos to existence in the mode of closure against, and denial of, its reality." In the afterword, Voegelin moderately qualifies his earlier enthusiasm for *The Turn of the Screw* by criticizing James for his deliberate obscuration of his own symbols. "James," he writes, "never used symbols with the intellectual mastery of a Flaubert in his *Tentation de Saint-Antoine*."

Another of Voegelin's essays from around the same time as the study of James, his "Equivalences of Experience and Symbolization in History" (1970), also speaks relevantly to *La Tentation*. In "Equivalences," Voegelin neatly resumes the analysis of consciousness that he had already elaborated in the first four volumes of *Order and History*. Voegelin insists that consciousness is historically cumulative: "If today a philosopher turns reflectively toward the area of reality called human existence, he does not discover it as a terra incognita, but moves among symbols concerning the truth of existence which represent the experiences of his predecessors." The question whether or not the philosopher will "find his bearings" nevertheless insists on itself. What answer the question produces will depend, Voegelin writes, on "the manner in which [the investigator's] own existence has been formed." Such a formation proceeds in one of two modes, either as "intellectual discipline in openness toward reality" or as "deformed by . . . uncritical acceptance of beliefs which obscure the reality of immediate experience." A typical deformation demotes the arduously created *symbol*, which it fails to grasp, to the level of a *doctrine*, consisting of propositions, which one may learn by rote. Any symbol, like any sacred object, provokes resentment; no one in the audience can claim authorship. The thing resists appropriation. Likewise paradox provokes anxiety.

The "fateful shift" at the cusp of modernity that Voegelin invokes in the essay on James undertook resentfully and anxiously the systematic demotion of symbols into doctrines with the result that, beginning in the Nineteenth Century, the West had become a "spectacle of dogmatomachy—with its frustration, anxiety, alienation, ferocious vituperation, and violence."

A *milieu* of dogmatomachy is exemplarily "closed." But *to what* is it closed? As Voegelin puts it: "Man participates in the process of reality"; and man remains "conscious . . . of himself as being part of reality, and of his consciousness as a mode of participation in its reality." Expanding these basic intuitions, Voegelin writes: "Man is able to engender symbols which express his experience of reality"; and, "man knows the symbols . . . to be part of the reality that they symbolize." Finally, "Reality is not a given that could be observed from a vantage point outside itself but embraces the consciousness in which it becomes luminous." The terms *luminous* and *luminosity* stand centrally in Voegelin's discourse. The same terms have an important role in Flaubert's symbolism in *La Tentation*, as in the "golden dust so fine that it is scarcely distinguishable from the vibrations of light" that suffuses the atmosphere just before the saint's epic visionary experience, the projected form of his internally experienced

*Temptation*, commences. In the framework of Voegelin's "noetology," the first major allurements, that of the Queen of Sheba, is not significant. Its appeal is gross; it least challenges the saint's fortitude. With the appearance of Hilarion, Anthony's former disciple, in Section III, however, the fiendish inveiglement acquires a new subtle power. Flaubert has produced in Hilarion the monstrous outgrowth of "the demonically closed soul" whose field of contestation is dogma and whose dogmata are the ethical and intellectual equivalents of idols. This is the soul that attempts to extinguish "the bright morning star" [*claire étoile du matin*] in favor of nocturnal obscurity on the premise that "the moon affords us sufficient light" (45) [*La lune nous éclaire suffisamment*]. There are other madmen in the cortege of figures in *La Tentation*, not least Valentine and Apollonius, but Hilarion prefigures them all in his refusal of openness to being.

Hilarion would require that Anthony renounce the *Imitatio Christi* to declare his total self-sufficiency, but the saint insists stubbornly on his humble status: "Would that I were one of those whose souls are always intrepid and their minds firm—like the great Athanasius." (41) [*Que ne suis-je un de ceux dont l'âme est toujours intrépide et l'esprit ferme—comme le grand Athanase, par exemple.*] Athanasius, who earned the nickname "Pillar of the Church" for his defense of Orthodoxy, would become Anthony's hagiographer after the holy man's death at an advanced age. Revealing himself to be the visible form of the satanic principle of slander, Hilarion calumniates Athanasius: "He was unlawfully ordained by seven bishops"; he is "haughty, a cruel man, always mixed up in intrigues," who "tried to corrupt Eustatius"; and "he acknowledges that he knows nothing of the Word." (41-42) [*Il a été ordonné illégalement par sept évêques*; "*un home orgueilleux, cruel, toujours dans les intrigues, qui ait voulu corrompre Eustates*"; "*il avoue ne rien comprendre à la nature du Verbe.*"] Refining his doctrinal subtlety, Hilarion reports that, "At the Council of Nicæa, he said, speaking of Jesus, 'The man of the Lord.'" (42) [*Au concile de Nicée, il a dit en parlant de Jésus: 'Homme de Seigneur.'*] Hilarion appears in the last-quoted utterance as a veritable military policeman of grammar and diction, prepared on the basis of a single jot to issue an indictment and make an arrest.

Flaubert's pseudo-Hilarion corresponds to Voegelin's formulation in the "Experience and Symbolization" essay of "the philosopher who has made deformed existence his own," whose "existential faith [has] dried up to doctrinal belief," the result being a "scotosis of truth." Flaubert, in this single utterance, anticipates the Twentieth-Century dystopias, not to mention the Twenty-First Century actuality, in which slips of the tongue and false attributions occasion elaborate rituals of denunciation and public chastisement.

When Hilarion fails in his appeal to Anthony to betray his loyalty to Athanasius, he bursts out in a bilious accusation against his interlocutor: Hilarion calls Anthony a hypocrite; he flytes him for fantasizing about whores, feasts, and riches; and he scorns him for *lacking in faith* and for *not possessing truth*. Hilarion arrives at the last by a devious pseudo-syllogism: Whereas Anthony is inveterately lugubrious, truth stimulates happiness; therefore Anthony

must be in default of truth. Hilarion says: "The possession of the truth gives joy." (42) [*La possession de la vérité donne la joie.*] Flaubert's *possession* is related to Voegelin's *closure*. In Voegelin's reading, Christianity is the most *tentative* of revelations, even more tentative in its symbolism than Plato's philosophical vision because the Christian advances the quest for truth to a new level of differentiation. Voegelin's assertion partakes of a paradox, but not so much as to be irresolvable. The Gospel, according to Voegelin, absorbs the Platonic insight that the luminosity of consciousness illuminates an "in-between" (Plato's *metaxy*) where the questing subject invariably finds himself: Between ignorance and knowledge and therefore having to distinguish between truth and falsehood; between birth and death and therefore between mortality and immortality; and above all, always in motion, never coming to a stop. That condition of *never coming to a stop*, an equivalent of perpetual tentativeness, produces tension in the soul, which some subjects cannot bear. From this resistance arises the demand to bring all processes to a stop.

In the closing-down of experiential movement, the plastic symbols become rigid doctrines which a subject may *possess*. In *The New Science of Politics* (1952), Voegelin ascribed the emergence of the Idealist systems to a desperate craving, precisely in a failure of faith, for "massively possessive experience."

Faith, as Flaubert's Anthony senses, is other than a "massively possessive experience." Flaubert has placed Anthony's hut between the Cross and the twisted palm hanging over the abyss and has reduced his material possessions to the absolute minimum. In Section I, Anthony complains of his poverty, but he endures it all the same. Hilarion's new tactic consists in his trying to lure Anthony into accepting the empirically valid as the substitute for faith. Once more, Hilarion's style is pseudo-syllogistic. In a discussion of the relation of miracle to faith, Hilarion poses, "What, then, is a miracle," to which he gives his own answer: "An occurrence which seems to us outside the limits of Nature." (45) [*Qu'est-ce que donc qu'un miracle. . . . [il est] un événement qui nous semble en dehors de la nature.*] Hilarion plays verbal tricks. He reduces the cosmos, or reality, to *nature*; that is, exclusively to the material aspect of the whole. Simultaneously, he sneaks in the false premise that faith requires, and may perfectly satisfy itself with, the equivalent merely of a banal empirical demonstration. Yet that is not all. The real aim shows itself in the follow-up: "But do we know all Nature's powers? And, from the mere fact that a thing ordinarily does not astonish us, does it follow that we comprehend it?" (45) [*Mais connaissons-nous toute sa puissance? Et de ce qu'une chose ordinairement ne nous étonne pas, s'ensuit-il que nous la comprenions?*] Hilarion invokes an anti-principle of epistemological nihilism: The only real knowledge is naturally based and empirically verifiable; but really, we understand almost nothing; therefore in their ignorance people need a doctrine—a *thing* in whose *possession* their ceaseless and fruitless inquiries may find rest. It is a version of the Grand-Inquisitor argument.

Voegelin argues in *The New Science* no less a thesis than that "uncertainty is the very

essence of Christianity.” The gospel has banished the gods, leaving an unprecedented “de-divinized” world. “The life of the soul in openness toward God, the waiting, the periods of aridity and dullness, guilt and despondency, contrition and repentance, forsakenness and hope against hope the silent stirrings of love and grace, trembling on the verge of a certainty that if gained is lost—the very lightness of this fabric may prove too heavy a burden for men who lust for massively possessive experience.” Hilarion’s requirement for demonstrable doctrine suggests that Flaubert had arrived at a similar conclusion already, seventy-five years before Voegelin. For Hilarion (who is, of course, the apparition in Anthony’s dream, not the historical Hilarion), Scripture may be reduced to a textual problem, as though it was the stenographic record of testimony in a legal proceeding: “And yet the Angel of the Annunciation, in Matthew, appears to Joseph, whilst in Luke it is to Mary. The anointing of Jesus by a woman comes to pass, according to the First Gospel, at the beginning of his public life, but according to the three others, a few days before his death.” An ellipsis at the end of Hilarion’s four-sentence speech (truncated in the quotation) signifies that, as Flaubert sees it, the catalogue of discrepancies could continue indefinitely—and irrelevantly.

To obsess about factitious details in a revelatory text is to miss the symbolic point entirely. Additionally, no one cares about such discrepancies in the *Theogony* of Hesiod or the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnos, but only in the Lives of Christ by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Flaubert finds his *personae*, ideas, and events in a remote and exotic century, but insofar as *La Tentation* constitutes a critique, it takes its object in the modern Europe of the author’s day, proudly divesting itself of the superstition of faith. Voegelin’s insight thus bears appositely on *La Tentation* when, in *The New Science*, he writes that “the more people are drawn or pressured into the Christian orbit, the greater will be the number among them who do not have the spiritual stamina for the heroic adventure of the soul that is Christianity.” Authorization to go pedantically deconstructing among the symbols seems to be what Hilarion means when he tells Anthony that, among the free intellects, “entire liberty of research is permitted us” (47) [*toute liberté de recherché nous est permise*]. It is a way of pushing back against the articulation of truths in a new leap in being. The project to deconstruct those truths would then be a sign of spiritual anxiety. In place of what the pedants deconstruct, Hilarion’s program for filling the spiritual void offers magical operations. Hilarion questions Anthony, “Do you wish to become acquainted with the hierarchy of Angels, the virtue of Numbers, the explanation of germs and metamorphoses?” (47) [*Désires-tu connaître la hiérarchie des Anges, la vertu des Nombres, la raison des germes et des métamorphoses?*]

Esoterica such as those correspond to what Voegelin invokes when he writes how “the attempt at immanentizing the meaning of existence is fundamentally an attempt at bringing our knowledge of transcendence into a firmer grip than the *cognitio fidei* . . . will afford.” The esoterica, whose operation Hilarion invites Anthony to learn, constitute the Gnosticism

that, in Voegelin's assessment, has "accompanied Christianity from its very beginnings."

The vulgar interpretation of saintly agony, whether it is Anthony's or some other holy man's, is that the subject grapples with an underpowered will to believe. Flaubert offers a different thesis, which Voegelin's "noetology" greatly clarifies. Whereas Pagan faith was *maximal*, acquiring by the late Imperial centuries elaborate doctrines and rituals, the new faith is *minimal*; whereas a Mithraic baptism indeed left its participant in proprietorship of a massively possessive experience, the new faith is, by itself, so tenuous that its espouser, expecting a sensible metamorphosis but registering only the *minimum* of finding himself *in motion* in the "in-between," doubts whether he is in possession of anything at all. That doubt is inexorably constitutive of the belief. Now everything that occurs to Anthony in Flaubert's generically ambiguous text happens to him, of course, in his mind. His struggle, his temptation, unfolds on the internal scene of his symbolic imagination, the interlocutory figures being projections of that imagination. These observations lead to another comment by Voegelin that has relevance in respect of *La Tentation*. In the essay on James, Voegelin calls attention to the "afflicted . . . public figures" that dominate the contemporary, super-mediated commons. Not even the truly "critical" man can "escape from the scene that they dominate." Nevertheless, the "critical" man "is not obliged to pretend that disease is health, or that men who suffer in public do not bore him *à dormir debout*."

Flaubert's Anthony—reflecting probably the historical Anthony—resolutely refused to suffer in public. He never became a martyr, for example, although his influence on the formation of the emerging Christian society was likely as great as or greater than any martyr's. On the other hand, in Flaubert's treatment, Anthony restores the notion of martyrdom to its etymological minimum of witnessing in a cause: "Here, for more than thirty years, have I been constantly groaning in the desert! I have carried on my loins eighty pounds of bronze, like Eusebius; I have exposed my body to the stings of insects, like Macarius; I have remained fifty-three nights without closing an eye, like Pachomius; and those who are decapitated, torn with pincers, or burnt, possess less virtue, inasmuch as my life is a continual martyrdom!" (11) [*Voilà plus de trente ans que je suis dans le désert à gémir toujours! J'ai porté sur mes reins quatre-vingts livres de bronze comme Eusèbe, j'ai exposé mon corps à la piqûre des insectes comme Macaire, je suis resté cinquante-trois nuits sans fermer l'œil comme Pacôme; et ceux qu'on décapite, qu'on tenaille ou qu'on brûle ont moins de vertu, puisque ma vie est un continuel martyre!*]

### **III. *La Tentation* from a Girardian perspective**

Flaubert in *La Tentation* has confronted the epoch, summed up in Anthony's spiritual tribulation, in which the archaic sacred, passing through the urbanity of Hellenistic culture and mixing itself with the charisma of the Roman Empire, must acknowledge the new dispensation that accretes around the Passion of Christ and takes the form of a new, non-sacrificial religion, Christianity. Voegelin argues that Imperial "Summodeism" was so

similar to Christianity that the distance between them had become minimal; and yet that very brevity appeared, to many, as impassable. Flaubert and Voegelin, brought into juxtaposition, become mutually illuminative.

While it is always *très triste* to take leave of Voegelin, it is equally always *très plaisant* to find oneself *chez* Girard. *If only Girard might have slipped himself into Flaubert's text!* Hilarion takes advantage of the saint's naivety by pestering him with false syllogisms in a mode of aggressive, nit-picking skepticism. To the barrage of discrepancies that, as Hilarion sees it, qualifies Scripture only as a farrago, Girard might aptly have replied as he does to Michel Treguer, in a similar *imbroglio*, in *When These Things Begin* (1996; English version 2014): "I'm not bothered in the least. . . . I define Christianity as the event that wrenched the first Christians away from the power of myth, which is the power of the unanimous mimetic lie." Girard might have pointed out to Anthony's nightmare-inquisitor, again as he points out to Treguer, that "Christianity is the same drama as the fundamental myths and major foundation stories, and in both cases the result is religion. In the eyes of our 'wise and learned,' it has to be a myth." Girard even makes use of the luminosity metaphor common to Flaubert and Voegelin: "Christianity sheds light on mythical religion whereas mythical religion doesn't shed light on anything at all."

Looking at *La Tentation* in light of Girard offers the further advantage that Girard's "Fundamental Anthropology" more or less begins with the discovery, which Girard elaborates in *Deceit, Desire & the Novel* (1962), that the touchstone realist novels of the second half of the Nineteenth Century invariably put in counterpoint with their meticulous sociological descriptions of middle-class banality an implacable machinery of ritual and theological—that is to say, *sacred*—metaphors that seems at odds with the pretense of science that ostensibly motivates the authors. Yet in another way, the Girard of *Deceit, Desire & the Novel* offers slightly less overt help in the project of making sense of *La Tentation* than does Voegelin's essay on James. Girard surprisingly omits to mention *La Tentation* in his study of "Self and Other in Literary Structure." More surprising even than that, the Flaubertian title most closely associated with *La Tentation*, namely *Madame Bovary* (1857), receives only four dedicated pages of Girard's text out of more than three hundred in the English edition. Girard's theme in *Deceit, Desire & the Novel* of deviated transcendence nevertheless promises to illuminate *La Tentation*. Likewise what Girard *does* say about *Madame Bovary*, scant though his discussion is, will prove applicable, especially when it is coordinated with Girard's later work, to *La Tentation*.

The insight that *Madame Bovary* indeed tells the same story as *La Tentation* belongs originally to Charles Baudelaire, who knew the latter text only from the fragments of Flaubert's 1856 abridged reworking that appeared in *L'Artiste* in 1856-57. In a review (1857) of *Madame Bovary* and its attendant scandal, Baudelaire writes (P. E. Charvet's translation) how, had he been able to conduct a systematic comparison of the two works, he "would have found it easy to recognize, under the closely woven texture of *Madame Bovary*,

[Flaubert's] high capacity for irony and lyricism that lights up *La Tentation*." Extending the parallelism, Baudelaire remarks of *La Tentation* that: "Here the poet appears without disguise, and his Bovary, tempted by all the devils of illusion, of heresy, by all the lusts of the physical surrounding—in short, his St. Anthony, harassed by all the lunatic urges that get the better of us, would have provided a better apologia than his humble tale of bourgeois life." Baudelaire regards *La Tentation* as being "more interesting for poets and philosophers" than *Madame Bovary*. Given the considerable overlap between the concepts of *temptation* and *mediation*, it is easy to repair Girard's omission of *La Tentation* from *Deceit, Desire & the Novel*.

The chapter in Girard's first book most relevant to *La Tentation* is the one bearing the title "Men Become Gods in the Eyes of Each Other." Girard writes, "The denial of God does not eliminate transcendency but diverts it from the *au-delà* to the *en-deçà*." Every projection of Anthony's internal struggle in *La Tentation* involves a demonic mediator—a mediator-manipulator—who aims to *wrench back* Anthony from the *wrenching-away* from myth, that Christian version of the *periagoge*, which constitutes the glowing nucleus of his conversion. Thus, quite as Athanasius asserted in his *Life* of the saint, all tempters of the holy man were metamorphoses of Satan. One simple way of grasping the necessity of eremitic solitude is to see it as the surest way to remove oneself from the constant pressure to fixate on the neighbors and thereby to neutralize the nasty *peer-pressure* that existing vestigial Christianity rouses itself ritually now and then to denounce. Not only, according to Girard, does denial of God not abolish the vertical or spiritual dimension, but it ensures rather that "the imitation of one's neighbor" should replace "the imitation of Christ."

Flaubert gives to Anthony in Section I of *La Tentation* to describe the stages of his deliberate self-extraction from society: "When I left home, everyone found fault with me. My mother sank into a dying state; my sister, from a distance, made signs to me to come back; and the other one wept, Ammonaria, that child whom I used to meet every evening, beside the cistern, as she was leading away her cattle." (3) [*Tous me blâmaient lorsque j'ai quitté la maison. Ma mère s'affaissa mourante; ma sœur, de loin, me faisait des signes pour revenir; et l'autre pleurait, Ammonaria, cette enfant que je rencontrais chaque soir au bord de la citerne, quand elle amenait ses buffles.*]

The departure adds up to the first temptation: Not to wrench oneself away, but to yield to the cozy closure that reveals itself as sacrificial indignation as soon as anyone flouts its solidarity. In Anthony's recollection, Ammonaria tries to follow him, but the camels carry him away too swiftly. She too is detaching herself, but too late. Later, in a dreadful nightmare, Anthony sees Ammonaria being martyred, as her historical type was under the Decian persecution.

Flaubert sees the scene that Anthony physically, but also, and more importantly, spiritually, flees, as a society in a state of demonic crisis—what Girard would call a *mimetic crisis*. The

scene resists flight. Indeed, after initial tribulation in the desert, Anthony finds himself back in Alexandria, where, as Flaubert gives it to his *persona* to recount, “I became a pupil of the venerable Didymus.” (4) [*Alors, j’ai voulu m’instruire près du bon vieillard Didyme.*] Dunne’s English is a bit defective. Flaubert’s French emphasizes Anthony’s sense of stifling closeness (“*près du bon vieillard*”) in his unwilling homecoming. Whatever and whoever the historical Didymus might have been, even supposing him to have been a moral paragon and an intellectual prodigy, Flaubert will have attended carefully to the etymological basis of his name—from the Greek for *twins*, with its suggestion of imitative doubling and absolute proximity. Flaubert’s Alexandria is the *milieu* of Voegelin’s “dogmatomachy,” in an acute historical manifestation. Flaubert anticipates Voegelin in his characterization of ecumenic societies as shattered local societies forced into new and disturbing shapes by imperial conquest. He anticipates Girard in his intuition about the danger in proximity.

Anthony describes Alexandria as thronged by “men of every nation” [*hommes de toutes les nations*]. He recalls seeing in the Alexandrian commons “Cimmerians, clad in bearskin, and the Gymnosophists of the Ganges, who smear their bodies with cow-dung” (4) [*des Cimmériens, vêtus de peaux d’ours, et des Gymnosophistes du Gange frotté de bouse de vache*], images that suggest mythic undifferentiation *via* a descent into bestiality and in the form of mimetic contagion. “Besides,” as Anthony continues, “the city is filled with heretics, the followers of Manes, of Valentinus, of Basilides, and of Arius, all of them eagerly striving to discuss with you points of doctrine and to convert you to their views.” (4) [*D’ailleurs la ville est pleine d’hérétiques, des sectateurs de Manès, de Valentin, de Basilide, d’Arius—tous vous accaparent pour discuter et vous convaincre.*] The notions of *discussion* and *conviction* take from the context an ominous coloration. Discussion becomes *inquisition*; and the question of *conviction* becomes the agenda *to identify the scapegoats*, as demanded by the crisis.

Girard remarks in *Deceit, Desire & the Novel* that whenever the distance separating the subject and the mediator shrinks so that the mediator becomes the rival, the stature of the mediator seems to the subject to increase. The subject makes of the mediator, now become a model-rival, “a monstrous divinity,” as Girard writes. Flaubert undertakes in Anthony’s colloquy with Hilarion in Part III of *La Tentation* that Hilarion should demonstrate this tendency of perceived aggrandizement in nearness. “What an air of authority,” says Anthony to Hilarion; “it appears to me that you are growing taller.” (44) [*Quel air d’autorité! Il me semble que tu grandis.*] Flaubert adds in the scenic description that, “In fact, Hilarion’s height has progressively increased; and, in order not to see him, Anthony closes his eyes.” [*En effet, la taille d’Hilarion s’est progressivement élevée; et Antoine, pour ne plus le voir, ferme les yeux.*] The trouble is that Hilarion goes on talking while Anthony goes on mistaking his aggression and mood-swings as intrepidity. Hilarion has meanwhile changed his tactic: He now ceases speaking for himself and becomes, in Part IV, the master of ceremonies for a review of preachers, ranters, and sectarians.



The review takes place in a vast basilica with numberless galleries, niches, and chapels, through which the saint wanders. The cast of characters consists in a nearly exhaustive round-up of Late-Antique theo-maniacs drawn from every aspect of terminal Paganism and both Orthodox and heretical Christianity. Mani is there; so are Valentinus, Bardesanes, Simon Magus, Origen, Irenaeus, and Basilides. The Elkhasaites, Carpocratians, Nicolaitans, Marcosians, Helvidians, and Messalians put in appearances. Every shouting voice propagates a doctrine that purports itself to be truth; a prescriptive ritual regime, usually sadomasochistic in one way or another, accompanies every doctrine. About a third of the way through Section IV, after the appearance of the Cainites, Anthony witnesses a bizarre performance: “The Audians draw arrows against the Devil; the Collyridians fling blue veils to the ceiling; the Ascitians prostrate themselves before a wineskin; the Marcionites baptise a corpse with oil. Close beside Appelles, a woman, the better to explain her idea, shows a round loaf of bread in a bottle; another, surrounded by the Sampsians, distributes like a host the dust of her sandals.” (61) [*Les Audiens tirent des flèches contre le Diable; les Collyridiens lancent au plafond des voiles bleus; les Ascites se prosternent devant une outre; les Marcionites baptisent un mort avec de l’huile. Auprès d’Apelles, une femme, pour expliquer mieux son idée, fait voir un pain rond dans une bouteille; une autre, au milieu des Sampsiens, distribue comme une hostie la poussière de ses sandales.*]

The performance reaches its climax when “the Circoncellions cut one another’s throats; the Velesians make a rattling sound; Bardesanes sings; Carpocras dances; Maximilla and Priscilla utter loud groans; and the false prophetess of Cappadocia, quite naked, resting on a lion and brandishing three torches, yells forth the Terrible Invocation.” (61) [*Les Circoncellions s’entr’égorgent, les Valésians râlent, Bardesane chante, Carpocras danse, Maximilla et Priscilla poussent des gémissements sonores; et la fausse prophétesse de Cappadoce, toute nue, accoudée sur un lion et secouant trois flambeaux, hurle l’Invocation Terrible.*] The exhibition, provoked by the competitive oratory of the doctrines, descends from the level of discourse to the level of ritual action, and finally, through sacrificial suicide, to beastly “groans” and the equally non-verbal “Invocation.” Flaubert’s chain of events reverses the process of cultural development, as summed up in Girard’s brief formula in *The One by Whom Scandal Comes* (2014): “Historical chronology should begin with the evolution of the human race, accompanied by the rising power of mimetic desire, which gave birth to crises of murderous and destructive violence for human populations.” Rituals of sacrifice channel violence until the Passion reveals the underlying scapegoat mechanism. As in Voegelin’s reading of history so too, in Girard’s, does the appearance of the new dispensation exacerbate the feebleness of the already weakened sacred of the superannuated Greco-Roman world, producing desperate reactions right down to the present day.

In the second half of *La Tentation*, Part IV, Flaubert brings on stage the embodiment of Late-Antique resistance to the action of the Gospel *Logos*—none other than the man proposed under the official syncretism of Septimius Severus to fill the requirement for a

Pagan Counter-Christ, Apollonius of Tyana (15-100). The writer Philostratus (172-250) composed his *Life of Apollonius*, Flaubert's source, on a commission by the emperor's wife, lady Julia, around 220. Flaubert remembers to let the herald of Apollonius, Damis, go before him, announcing the approach of the "Master," who, to Anthony, "has the appearance of a saint" [*il a l'air d'un saint*]. Apollonius, whom Flaubert portrays as a psychopath, rehearses to Anthony his *curriculum vitae*. He tells Anthony, "I will first describe to you the long road I travelled to gain doctrine; and, if you find in all my life one bad action, you will stop me—for he must scandalize by his words who has offended by his actions." (86) [*Je te raconterai la longue route que j'ai parcourue pour obtenir la doctrine—et si tu trouves dans toute ma vie une action mauvaise, tu m'arrêteras—car celui-là scandalisera par ses paroles qui a méfait par ses œuvres.*] Violence has followed Apollonius along his route. A priest in jealousy slits his own throat; a governor who threatens the mystic with death, dies. Apollonius recalls how "the plague ravaged Ephesus" and "I made them stone an old mendicant," to which Damis adds, "and the plague was gone!" (91) [*La peste ravageait Ephèse; j'ai fait lapider un vieux mendiant. . . . Et la peste s'en est allée!*]

Whereas Girard never wrote about *La Tentation*, he did write about Apollonius of Tyana. In particular, in *I See Satan Fall like Lightning* (2004), he has written about the episode in *The Life* of the plague at Ephesus and the stoning of the old beggar. Girard reminds his readers concerning Apollonius that "among pagans his miracles were viewed as superior to those of Jesus." The details of Philostratus' account of the episode that pique Girard are the reported persistence of the plague, the fact that Apollonius convenes the Ephesians in the civic amphitheater, the initial reluctance of the Ephesians to heed Apollonius' admonition to stone the beggar, and the transformation of the victim after the stoning, when the bloody corpse is no longer that of a human being but of a large, rabid dog. As Girard writes, "If [Philostratus had been] a Christian, he would have been accused of slandering paganism." For Girard, the epidemic of Philostratus' story functions in the typical mythic way to designate a state of communal or civic crisis, similar to the pestilence that afflicts Thebes in the Oedipus Myth. "The miracle," Girard writes, "consists of triggering a mimetic contagion so powerful that it finally polarizes the entire population of the city against the unfortunate beggar." According to Girard, "Apollonius' miracle embodies the kernel of a teaching rightly termed *religious*, which would escape us if we took the miracle to be imaginary." By instigating the lapidation in the theater, moreover, Apollonius reinforces the ritualistic character of the purification—bringing it close to the *catharsis* that Aristotle attributes to tragic performance.

Flaubert offers Apollonius as a summation of Late Antiquity's religious contentiousness, which frequently led to riots, killings, and massacres. Flaubert disdains to exclude Nicene Christians from being bodied forth along with the Pagans and the heretics in Apollonius. The heresiologist Irenaeus is part of the bellowing crowd of dogma-worshippers, as is the church-historian Eusebius. It seems, given the erudition of *La Tentation*, that Flaubert's train of thought anticipated Girard's. In *I See Satan Fall*, Girard remarks that "Eusebius of

Caesarea, . . . aware of the harm that *The Life of Apollonius* did to Christianity . . . set out to show that the miracles of Apollonius are not impressive at all." Yet, Girard continues, Eusebius "never denounces the monstrous stoning," but rather he "reduces the debate, just like the partisans of the *guru*, to a mimetic rivalry between miracle workers." Girard goes on to compare Apollonius' lapidation of the old beggar to Jesus' refusal to sanction lapidation in the famous episode in the Gospel of John of the woman taken in adultery. "Saving the adulterous woman from being stoned, as Jesus does," Girard writes, "means that he prevents the violent contagion from getting started."

Flaubert's Apollonius sufficiently frightens Anthony that the latter, crying out to God to help him, "flings himself against the Cross" [*il se précipite vers la Croix*]. Apollonius wants to know of Anthony, "What is your desire?" [*Quel est ton désir?*] When Anthony prays aloud for Jesus to aid him, Apollonius mistakes the petition as a request *to him* to "make Jesus appear" (97) [*Veux-tu que je fasse apparaître Jésus?*]. Apollonius tells Anthony that Jesus shall not only appear, but "He shall cast off His crown, and we shall speak together face to face" [*Il jettera sa couronne, et nous causerons face à face*]. The *guru's* rhetorical figure, "face to face," communicates with Flaubert's invocations of closeness and thronging elsewhere in *La Tentation*. The prophesy, which is really a demand in disguise that, coming "face to face" with Apollonius, Jesus shall "cast off His crown," also speaks to the mystic as a personification of rivalry and resentment. Jesus, of course, remains absent. The metaphysical rivalry belongs to Apollonius alone, revealing what Girard, writing of Flaubert in *Deceit, Desire & the Novel*, calls "the emptiness of oppositions" that stems from "metaphysical desire." Girard indeed credits Flaubert with having invented "the style of false enumerations and false antitheses" that aims at the representation of "double nullity." Every model is his rival and *vice versa*.

Girard's commentary in *Deceit, Desire & the Novel* concerning Flaubert's last (incomplete) novel *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (Opus Posthumus 1881) applies equally to *La Tentation*: "In that novel, modern thought loses what dignity and strength remained, with the loss of continuity and stability. . . . Ideas, systems, theories, and principles confront each other in opposed pairs, which are always determined negatively." Rightfully, then, at the very beginning of *La Tentation*, Part V, looking back on the encounter with Apollonius, Flaubert gives these words to Anthony: "That was really hell" (99) [*Celui-là vaut tout l'enfer*]. Readers must remind themselves, however, of what Dos Passos reminds them in *Three Soldiers*: Whereas Flaubert sets his action in the Fourth Century he uses that action to comment on modernity. The indignity of the dogmatomachy is identical with the indignity of ideological contentions in the Nineteenth or Twentieth or Twenty-First Century. A cross-section of any day in 2016, as reported in the *New York Times* or on the Cable News Network, may serve as a mirror to Anthony's vision in *La Tentation*, Section IV, complete with bloody persecutions, throat-cuttings, and actual stonings-to-death. Demonic heads bark at one another across the ether. In *Evolution and Conversion* (2007), responding to João Cezar de Castro Rocha, Girard opines that "the idea of the end of history as the end of ideologies is simply misleading"

because “the ideologies are not violent *per se*, rather it is man who is violent.” Nevertheless, “ideologies provide the grand narrative which covers up our victimary tendency”; ideologies are, “the mythical happy endings to our histories of persecutions.”

#### **IV. *La Tentation* from a Gansian Perspective**

In *La Tentation*, Part I, as night falls and the saint’s vision begins to take shape, Flaubert gives an odd detail: “Through the deepening shadows of the night pointed snouts reveal themselves here and there with ears erect and glittering eyes. Anthony advances . . . the animals take flight . . . a troop of jackals.” (7) Anthony notices that “one of them remains behind, and, resting on two paws, with his body bent and his head on one side, he places himself in an attitude of defiance.” That is Dunne’s translation. Kitty Mrosovsky renders the same phrase with a slight but significant difference: “One of them remains, *standing on two paws...*” [“*Un seul est resté, et qui se tient sur deux pattes, le corps en demi-cercle et la tête oblique, dans une pose pleine de défiance.*”] Anthony remarks out loud that it would mitigate his loneliness were he able to pet the attractive canine, but when he whistles invitingly, the creature runs off “to rejoin his fellows” (8) [“*il s’en va rejoindre les autres*”]. The little episode, likely to escape the attention of the reader, piquantly insists on a necessarily central theme of *La Tentation*, that namely of the saint’s humanity, or rather of his essential nature *qua* human. Flaubert never editorializes; he never announces his themes, but he works always by the most subtle indirection. Given that bringing his central personality into face-to-face confrontation with numerous contrasting *others* is a structural device in the narrative, this early instance of the contrasting gesture must be important to what follows. How so?

The jackals first appear in search of prey; Anthony, weak and alone, is potential prey. The pitched ears and bright eyes of the predators indicate, however, noticeable animal intelligence. The pack’s cooperation indicates its social character. By separating from the pack and by rising in a quasi-human stance, the alpha jackal resembles something halfway between animal and human rather like the satyrs and werewolves of myth. The semblance proves false; he returns to the pack. The animal-human mixture will recur in Part V of *La Tentation*, where Anthony reviews the totality of known religions from the earliest Mesopotamian cults through to the modern god who calls himself “Science.” It will recur one more time in Part VI, where the chief figures are the Sphinx and the Chimera. An animal might rise towards human status; but then so might a human being lapse back into animal status. Flaubert’s category of *bêtise* communicates with such a lapse. Flaubert’s idea of consciousness is, moreover, a thoroughly historical idea: For the humble anchorite to represent the struggle of consciousness to ascend to the highest, the visionary or revelatory, *niveau*, the subject of that consciousness must resume the totality of human experience beginning at the first glimmer of self-awareness.

The episode of the jackal has another meaning: In it Anthony is the tempter rather than the

addressee of temptation. The alpha jackal's "defiance" functions as a paradoxical mute model for Anthony moments before the serial temptations of his phantasmagoric experience commence. The alpha jackal has followed his nature and Anthony must now summon the fortitude to defend his ascetic commitments against the seduction of détente at a lower level of consciousness. Anthony feels the tug of self-pity. At that moment: "The two arms of the cross cast a shadow on the sand; Antony, who is weeping, perceives it." (8) [*Les deux bras de la croix font une ombre sur le sable; Antoine, qui pleure, l'aperçoit.*] The symbol calls Anthony back to himself in a notable way. Picking up his Bible he begins to read, by the light of a torch, in the Acts of the Apostles. What he reads, however, far from consoling him provokes his resentment: "Arise, Peter! Kill and eat"; "The Jews slew all their enemies with swords"; "Ezechias . . . showed them his perfumes, his gold and silver, all his aromatics, his sweet-smelling oils, all his precious vases, and the things that were in his treasures." (8-9) [*Pierre, lève-toi! tue, et mange*"; "*Les juifs tuèrent tous leurs ennemis avec des glaives*"; "*Ezéchias . . . leur montra ses parfums, son or et son argent, tous ses aromates, ses huiles de senteur, tous ses vases précieux, et ce qu'il y avait dans ses trésors.*"] It is the mood of resentment that triggers the sequence of temptations, the first phase of which culminates in the Queen of Sheba.

The way out of the *imbroglio* is to recognize, as Flaubert has, that resentment is constitutive of consciousness. As Gans reminds his readers in *The End of Culture* (1985), Western consciousness, as represented in the literary continuum, commences with Achilles' expression of resentment against Agamemnon in Homer's *Iliad*. Gans writes: "Resentment may be defined as the scandal of the peripheral self at the centrality of the other which transforms the equality of the original scene of representation into an absolute polarity of significance." It is not merely Western consciousness, of course, but consciousness *per se* that necessarily integrates resentment. For Gans, resentment "differs from mere envy in being directed not at contingent but at communally significant and hence ethically necessary differences." Indeed, Anthony's mood of resentment prompts a vision in which the saint sees himself *acting out* his resentful impulses in the most extravagant ways. Imagining himself back in Alexandria, Anthony sees "monuments in various styles of architecture . . . an uninterrupted succession of Royal structures . . . [and the] glass, perfume, and paper factories" (22) [*monuments d'architecture différente . . . une suite interrompue de constructions royales . . . [et les] fabriques de verre, de parfums et papyrus*"]. He sees, in other words, the signs of the social and cultural establishment from which he originally exiled himself precisely so as to escape the charisma of their attraction. A militant crowd forms and begins to march through the streets. Anthony thinks to himself that these must be the monks of the Thebaïd—his followers—who have mobilized themselves to kill the heretics, the Arians, who dominate the Church in Alexandria.

When the slaughter begins, Anthony joins in. He "meets all his enemies one after another. . . . Before killing them, he outrages them . . . rips them open, cuts their throats, knocks them down, drags the old men by their beards, runs over children, and beats those who are

wounded." (23) ["*Antoine retrouve tous ses ennemis l'un après autre . . . avant de les tuer il les outrage . . . il les éventre, égorge, assomme, traîne les vieillards par la barbe, écrase les enfants, frappe les blessés.*"] Later, Anthony is led by the Emperor to witness a humiliation: "Anthony perceives slaves at the end of the stalls," who turn out to be "the fathers of the Council of Nicæa, in rags, abject." (27) ["*Antoine remarque des esclaves au fond des loges . . . les pères du Concile de Nicée, en haillons, abjects.*"] Anthony has experienced, in the form of a nightmare-hypothesis, what Gans, in *The End of Culture*, describes as the horror that resentment might burst out in practical realization that informs Christian morality. "This is to say," Gans writes, "that the form of sublimation carried out within the Judeo-Christian tradition is ultimately vulnerable to the prior reduction or sublimation of resentment by means *internal* to the operations of the social structure." Resentment is "sublimated" when it is deferred, as Anthony defers it by the practical expedient of absenting himself from the social structure. Since his consciousness necessarily takes the social structure with it, however, Anthony can never eliminate resentment—no more than anyone else.

Anthony suffers the seizure, as it were, of resentment even though he grasps that his ascetic discipline draws nourishment from a leap in consciousness that, in a decisive way, leaves the *ethos* represented by the hoary monuments of Alexandria far behind. One telling sign of this is that in the panorama of Alexandria with which the dream of slaughter commences Anthony sees among the museums and palaces rows of religious statuary representing Hermes on the one hand and Anubis, on the other, with his dog's head and long snout. As sophisticated as the Late Hellenistic society is, it has not fully disentrained itself from its primitive origins. Here one might also pause to recall Flaubert's representation of Apollonius of Tyana, who mentions to Anthony his dispelling of the plague in Ephesus through fomenting the lapidation of a beggar. The invocation of Anubis also forcibly recalls the encounter with the jackal, which seems momentarily to yearn towards human status but which retreats into its animality. Religion is, with language, one of the distinguishing marks of the human. Religion articulates itself as revelation. *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine* is a revelatory text. In *Science & Faith* (1990), in a discussion of revelation, Gans remarks that "human self-discovery" is *not* "an eventless accumulation of knowledge on the model of the evolution of an academic discipline." Rather, "Man's ability to extract general laws from a series of empirical observations depends on a language each word of which bears the marks of its origin in a particular event." A new revelation will constitute "the necessary source of a new human order." Flaubert's protagonist participates in the spontaneous formation of such a new order.

In *Science & Faith*, Gans also writes this: "Even in the highest cultural accomplishments of the old hierarchical societies, from the Egyptian 'novels' to the Babylonian epic of creation, we breathe the dead air of *ideology*. The entire cosmos is depicted as having been conceived and created only to lead up to this monarchy and this monarch, whose authority receives from these texts a broader cultural consecration than that which ritual can provide." When

Anthony first went into the desert, as Flaubert gives it to him to say: "I selected for my abode the tomb of one of the Pharaohs." He fled when, as he says, "from the depths of the sarcophagi I heard a mournful voice arise, that called me by name—or rather, as it seemed to me, all the fearful pictures on the walls started into hideous life." (3) [*"D'abord, j'ai choisi pour demeure le tombeau d'un Pharaon. . . . Du fond des sarcophages j'ai entendu s'élever une voix dolente qui m'appelait; ou bien je voyais vivre, tout à coup, les choses abominables peintes sur les murs."*] The tomb and the hieroglyphs that repel Anthony, repel him because they breathe the stale air of an ideology under which a man claims the status of a god, the ultimate blasphemy and yet one that is as necessary in the articulation of the human as it is contingent. When, at the conclusion of *La Tentation*, Part V, the final "god" announces itself as "Science," readers may rightfully infer that Flaubert implies a large degree of identity between idolatry on the one hand and ideology on the other.

Hilarion continues his role as master of ceremonies in *La Tentation*, Part V, which Dunne in his translation subtitles, "All Gods, All Religions," but it is the gods who come to the fore. The Anthony of *La Tentation* departs from the Anthony of Athanasius' *Life*, among other ways, by having been something of a lifetime student of comparative religion. The holy man in his monologue at the beginning of Part V tells how, as he says: "I recollect having seen hundreds of [gods] at a time, in the Island of Elephantinum, in the reign of Dioclesian. The Emperor had given up to the nomads a large territory, on condition that they should protect the frontiers; and the treaty was concluded in the name of the invisible Powers." (99) [*"Je me rappelle en avoir vu des centaines [de dieux] à la fois, dans l'île d'Éléphantine, du temps du Dioclétien. L'empereur avait cédé aux nomades un grand pays, à la condition qu'ils gardent les frontières; et le traité fut conclu au nom des 'Puissances invisibles.'"*] Immediately thereafter in the text, Anthony reports how: "When I dwelt in the Temple of Heliopolis, I used often to contemplate all the objects on the walls: vultures carrying scepters, crocodiles playing on lyres, men's faces joined to serpents' bodies, women with cows' heads prostrated before the ithyphallic deities; and their supernatural forms carried me away into other worlds." (100) [*"Quand j'ai habité le temple d'Héliopolis, j'ai souvent considéré tout ce qu'il y a sur les murailles: vautours portant des sceptres, crocodiles pinçant des lyres, figures d'hommes avec des corps de serpent, femmes à tête de vache prosternées devant les dieux ithyphalliques; et leurs formes surnaturelles m'entraînaient vers d'autres mondes."*]

Once again the images drag the viewer in the direction, not of openness to the prospect of human being, unfolding in its potentiality, but backwards, into the sacred and totemistic phases of human development. The images are materialistic. Anthony remarks that "in order that matter should have so much power, it should contain spirit" (100) [*"pour que de la matière ait tant de pouvoir, il faut qu'elle contienne un esprit"*—words that suggest the absence, not the presence, of that selfsame "spirit." Such idols do in fact constitute the center of a scene that gives rise to representation and the mutual awareness of being suddenly in communion with others, but in a way that has gone flat, so to speak. In the

cortege of the gods, all the apparitions partake in the same staleness, fascinating though they are. Buddha appears first, hovering in space, surrounded by a myriad of gods who themselves seem to be his worshippers. Buddha's self-explanation reaches its climax in a kind of Armageddon in which Anthony sees the gods "fall into convulsions and vomit forth their existences" (108) [*tombent dans les convulsions, et vomissent leurs existences*"]. The primordial Mesopotamian deity, Oannes, comes next, describing himself as: "The first consciousness of chaos" (109) [*le première conscience de Chaos*"]. Oannes has "arisen from the abyss to harden matter, to regulate forms" [*j'ai surgi de l'abîme pour durcir la matière, pour régler les formes*"]. Oannes, who has "the head of a man and the body of a fish" [*une tête d'homme sur un corps de poisson,*"] also recounts how he taught men how to worship the gods and to fish.

Flaubert extends his catalogue until it constitutes something like an encyclopedia of gods and religions. In every case, the divine manifestation entails violence. All of the Olympian gods, for example, commit suicide or sink down into humiliated oblivion. It is a *tour de force* both of erudition and deadly repetition. The voice of Yahweh, when it comes, is an anticlimax, to be followed by the ravings of a capitalized Science, who declares his domain to be "as wide as the universe" (141) [*de la dimension de l'univers*"]; and who says of himself that "my desire has no limits" [*mon désir n'a pas de borne*"]. Oannes, the most primitive god, claims to incarnate "consciousness," in French *conscience*; but the name (Science) of the self-proclaiming ultimate god offers up a morphological deficiency with an ontological implication. The initial syllable, signifying communal awareness, has gone missing. Science tells Anthony that, "I am always going about enfranchising the mind" (141) [*je vais toujours affranchissant l'esprit*"]. Science describes himself as "without hate, without fear, without pity, without love and without God" [*sans haine, sans peur, sans pitié, sans amour et sans Dieu*"]. Flaubert's fearsome irony calls attention to itself: The earliest god, Oannes, surpasses the ultimate god, Science, in human qualities. Having taught men how to fish is an ethical act after all. Science defines himself as an entity possessing unlimited desire, but at the same time he boasts of being unencumbered by capacities that would seem to be inextricably related to desire. One suspects that the phrase "enfranchising minds" means subordinating minds to an imperious, a *closed*, system. In other words, enfranchisement means obliteration—of mind and of any possibility of contingency that might reawaken mind. Anthony, hearing all this, immediately suspects that Science is the Devil in disguise.

In *La Tentation*, Part VI, Science has morphed into the Devil, but the Devil's shadow has been present since the moment in Part I where the shadow of the Cross looks for a passing instant like a pair of demonic horns. Anthony says that the Devil's voice sounds familiar to him: "It appears to him an echo of his thought—a response of his memory" (143) [*elle lui semble un écho de sa pensée—une réponse de sa mémoire*"]. Flaubert here alludes by extreme indirection to two Biblical events, the revelation of God to Moses in the form of the burning bush that is not consumed from which issues a bodiless voice, and the revelation of



Jesus to Saul, henceforth Paul, on the Road to Damascus in the form of a blinding supernal luminosity and a bodiless voice. Flaubert's Devil does not offer revelation; nor does he articulate any symbol or set of symbols. Rather he systematically abolishes the symbols articulated through previous revelations by declaring in effect that nothing whatever exists save for matter and the void. Readers cannot fail to notice the relish with which the Devil "de-reveals" the layers of mythic and philosophic symbols while he conducts Anthony on a planetarium-style tour of the cosmos. As the earth dwindles beneath him, Anthony strains his ears to detect the Music of the Spheres. The Devil says: "You cannot hear them! No longer will you see the antichthon of Plato, the focus of Philolaüs, the spheres of Aristotle, or the seven heavens of the Jews with the great waters above the vault of crystal!" (144) ["*Tu ne les entendras pas! Tu ne verras pas, non plus, l'antichthon de Platon, le foyer de Philolaüs, les sphères d'Aristote, ni les sept cieux des Juifs avec les grandes eaux par-dessus la voûte de cristal!*"].

As Gans writes in *Science & Faith*: "The fundamental subject-matter of religious revelation is not the mysteries of nature, with which pre-human being could never have concerned itself, but the mystery of the human community that the scene unites around its center." Likewise, the Satanic falsification of cosmological hypotheses cannot disestablish the anthropological truths of revelation. Thus the Devil's many syllogisms, in resembling Hilarion's syllogisms from *La Tentation*, Part III, mirror their emptiness. They are sophistical in that they aim, not at articulating any truth, but simply in installing the speaker indomitably in the center of the scene. Anthony, whose intellectual resources, as opposed to his basic intuition, are small in comparison with those of the demonic sophist, experiences simultaneously two types of bedazzlement. First, he reacts to the sublimity of what he takes for God's creation, hence as a proof of God; second, he totters on succumbing to the rhetorical devices of the Devil's travelogue. In addition, the things whose supposed non-existence the Devil supposedly demonstrates never had any empirical existence to begin with, and to interpret them that way is to miss their essentially symbolic function in the philosophical systems from which they come. "Resentment," as Gans writes in *Science & Faith*, "is negative revelation." Flaubert's Devil may therefore be "read" as the figure of the resentment generated by the theological minimalism of Christian revelation, represented by Anthony's radically ascetic discipline. To the extent that, "to take a god's place is always a sacrilege; and such a sacrilege can only be authorized by this or another god" (*Science & Faith*), this very event has already occurred. The most the Devil can do is to *shadow it* in the form of an empty imitation.

In *La Tentation*, Part VII, amidst the zoological and teratological phantasmagoria, which include the apparitions of the Sphinx and the Chimera, the most significant manifestation is that of the Cynocephali: "A forest appears in which huge apes rush along on four paws—they are men with dogs' heads" (163) ["*une forêt paraît, de grands singes y courent à quatre pattes—ce sont des hommes à tête de chien*"]. Flaubert has lifted his characterization of the cynocephali from Swift's Yahoos or their equivalent in French

literature. Yet, like everything else in the proliferation of hybrid life-forms, they can speak; they participate in language. They thus reveal themselves as having crossed the threshold from animal to human status. This puts them in contrast to the jackals in *La Tentation*, Part I. The hybrid forms belong, no doubt, to the totemic figures and sacrificial monstrosities of myths and tribal rituals. Anthony himself has gone far beyond such representations, enabled in his transcendence of them by the refinements of the new faith. In his study of *Madame Bovary* (1989), writing of the final version of *La Tentation*, Gans interprets Part V as showing that, “Anthony goes beyond the question of grace or damnation to achieve spiritual peace in a pantheistic union with protoplasmic matter.” A close look at the text suggests that Anthony’s achievement might consist in something more specific than that, which nevertheless affirms a Generative Anthropological reading of the text.

The final vision in *La Tentation*, following the anchorite’s prayer-like wish “to become matter” [“*être la matière*,”] which seems to enfold Anthony as much as he stands apart witnessing it, consists of “the dawn . . . and, like the uplifted curtains of a tabernacle, golden clouds, wreathing themselves into large volutes,” in the middle of which “in the disc of the sun itself, shines the face of Jesus Christ” (170) [“*le jour . . . et comme les rideaux d’un tabernacle qu’on relève, des nuages d’or en s’enroulant à larges volutes découvrent le ciel . . . et dans le disque même du soleil rayonne la face de Jésus Christ*”]. The phenomenon of luminosity is important—for light is equivalent with consciousness. More important, however, is the final line of Flaubert’s text: “Anthony makes the sign of the cross and resumes his prayer” [“*Antoine fait le signe de la croix et se remet en prières*”]. Thus, what begins in Part I in a *scene*, ends in Part VII with the production of a *sign*, which is the minimal expression of a new minimal revelation.

## **V. Some Further Thoughts about *La Tentation***

If *Three Soldiers* by Dos Passos were *La Tentation*’s progeny then *The Life of Saint Anthony* by Athanasius would be *La Tentation*’s progenitor. *The Life* is itself worthy of consideration. *The Life* is of interest, for example, for being the *first* Christian hagiography. Earlier writers had produced hagiographies by other names. *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* by Philostratus has already been cited; there is a *Life* (Middle Second Century) of the philosopher Demonax by his student Lucian of Samosata and there is Porphyry’s *Life* (Late Third Century) of his teacher Plotinus. Where both Philostratus and Porphyry were Pagan anti-Christians, Lucian seems more neutral in his attitude towards Christianity than Philostratus or Porphyry. Lucian’s subject, Demonax, could quite easily be Christianized with only a few alterations of the text. Athanasius, well educated, was undoubtedly aware of such works, and he had another model in the Acts of the Apostles. In *The Life of Apollonius* Philostratus created a self-consciously literary work, as did Lucian in writing on Demonax, something which cannot be said of Porphyry on Plotinus. The aim of Athanasius in writing *The Life of Saint Anthony* was not literary refinement but plain documentation of the holy man’s exemplarity, but his text is not lacking in interest.

The relation of *La Tentation* to *The Life* is peculiar. The protagonist of the Flaubertian theater-of-the-mind differs from the saint of the Athanasian portrait in any number of ways. For example, Flaubert's Anthony reads and writes and in the course of the narrative recites passages aloud from his Bible, but according to Athanasius, Anthony "while he was still a boy refused to learn to read and write" (Carolinne White's translation). On the other hand Flaubert represents Anthony as much less intellectual than does Athanasius. Flaubert's Anthony listens to long disquisitions but rarely responds at length; he speaks mostly in short speeches that are remarkably un-rhetorical. The Anthony of *The Life*, although illiterate, is a skilled rhetorician among whose achievements is his facility in dialectic. Three times in *The Life* Anthony disputes with Pagan theologians. On one occasion, when the Pagans mock Anthony's illiteracy, he responds with a sophisticated construction that might make for a problem in Athanasius' text, *as a text*. "Answer me," he requests of his disputants: "What comes first, mind or letter? And which is the cause of which?" The disputants can only acquiesce in the thesis that mind is the cause of letters whereupon the saint says: "So if anyone's mind is sound, he has no need of letters." According to Athanasius, no one was present "who did not exclaim in astonishment," and everyone "marveled at such great sagacity."

On another occasion, Anthony makes a long speech, rehearsing what astute readers will recognize as a version of Plato's condemnation of the myth-poets in *The Polity*: "Is it not better to endure the cross or a death of this kind inflicted by wicked men than to bewail the unsettled and dubious travels of Isis in search of Osiris? Are you not embarrassed, I ask, by the plots of Typhon, the flight of Saturn and his most cruel devouring of his children?" It goes on with a wealth of mythic detail which might be known, on the basis of tradition, by a letterless man, but which gives off an aura of literate and even scholarly knowledge in its precision of detail. Several paragraphs later in the same speech, Anthony critiques what he calls the "distorted logic" of the allegorical interpretations that Alexandrian Late Paganism used to salvage the appearances of myth: "You claim that the obscene and cruel behavior of your gods, their deceptions and their deaths are but myths and so you veil them in allegory. . . . The rape of Libera represents the earth, the half-lame and weak Vulcan represents fire; Juno, the air; Apollo, the sun; Diana, the moon; Neptune, the seas; while Jupiter, the foremost, represents the sky." A bit later, Anthony does say that he invests nothing in dialectics but is only turning the instruments of "secular wisdom" against the secularists; yet that too is sophisticated. In *La Tentation*, that is the type of rhetorical subversion given by Flaubert to Pseudo-Hilarion.

In *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, in the chapter on "The Horrible Miracle of Apollonius of Tyana," Girard notes that the Church Father Eusebius (260-340), in commenting on the stoning at Ephesus, fails utterly to condemn it. Instead, Girard writes: "Eusebius sets out to show particularly that the miracles of Apollonius are not impressive at all. He never denounces the monstrous stoning . . . he reduces the debate, just like the partisans of the guru, to a mimetic rivalry between miracle workers." What Girard says of Eusebius applies

to the portrayal of Anthony in Athanasius' *Life*. Another way in which the prototype of the hagiography differs from the literary adaption of him in *La Tentation* is that the prototype is much more prone than the adaptation to entering into rivalry. Consider the episode of the Alexandrian Inquisitor, Balacius, who undertakes to prosecute Anthony for religious subversion. Balacius is an Arian; Anthony is an adherent of the Nicene Creed. According to Athanasius, Balacius "was persecuting the Church of Christ so violently that in his madness he would have virgins and monks stripped and beaten in public." Anthony, hearing of these outrages, sends a letter, presumably dictated, to Balacius in which he warns that, "I see God's anger coming upon you." Athanasius writes: "The accursed man read the letter and laughed; spitting on it he threw it to the ground." Organizing a posse, Balacius heads toward the remote desert to see to Anthony personally, but before he can get to his destination, he is attacked by his lieutenant's horse, which then "ripped his thighs apart and devoured the pieces." Balacius is transported back to Alexandria but dies of his wounds three days later, having lived long enough to feel the full humiliation and pain of his rebuke. "And so," Athanasius writes, "everyone realized that Anthony's threats . . . had swiftly been fulfilled and that the persecutor had come to a fitting end."

Elsewhere, in respect of Anthony's many exorcisms and cures, Athanasius carefully makes the saint the mediator of divine power, not its originator, but those qualifications do not accompany the Balacius episode, whose climax has a sparagmatic quality. Whereas Anthony, assailed by the Devil and his minions on the one hand and the Devil's human allies in the form of the Pagans and heretics on the other, functions as the scapegoat *in* the hagiography, Balacius functions as the scapegoat *of* the hagiography. In the Balacius episode, at least, *The Life* is quite as mythic as the myths that Anthony so eloquently denounces. Anthony's hatred of the Arians is likewise un-Christ-like; or at least one must say that Athanasius' narrative is often myth-like in its construction rather than resembling the Gospel: "He loathed the Arians . . . warning everyone not to go near them." Sufficiently aroused, Anthony leaves the Thebaïd and goes to Alexandria where he preaches against "the Arians' madness." Flaubert's Anthony sticks to his Nicene faith; he experiences the intoxication of violence representationally, in his vision, not in actuality. As the vision is Anthony's temptation, he is obliged in actuality to renounce ire. Flaubert makes Anthony over to be much more *irenic*, a better word than "passive," than does Athanasius. In this sense, *La Tentation* might qualify as more essentially a *Christian text* than its Late-Antique source, whatever was Flaubert's faith or lack thereof.

An impressive figure of Satan as the spirit of resentment appears in *The Life* that undoubtedly exerted suggestive influence on Flaubert. One night Anthony hears a voice telling him to get up and go outside. Athanasius writes: "Raising his eyes to heaven, he saw something tall and terrifying, his head reaching as far as the clouds; he also saw some winged creatures attempting to fly up to heaven, but the tall being stretched out his arms to prevent them getting through." Some aspirants make it past, but others the monstrosity catches and dashes back to the ground. Anthony, interpreting what he sees, thinks to

himself that, “Those who got the better of [the monster] caused him grief but those who were beaten back gave him the greatest joy.” This image reappears in Flaubert’s text both as the gigantic Pseudo-Hilarion of Part III and the Devil of Part VI, both of whom relentlessly try to discompose the saint’s faith by ferocious dialectical iconoclasm.

The vision of Satan finds its antipode in *The Life* in an apparition of the Savior. It is early in Anthony’s exodus into the desert. The Devil has sent an army of demons to terrorize Anthony. “The face of each bore a savage expression. . . . Anthony, beaten and mauled, experienced . . . atrocious pains in his body but he remained unafraid, his mind alert.” Raising his eyes, Anthony sees the roof of the shack where he has taken refuge vanish whereupon “a ray of light poured in on him.” Anthony identifies the light with Jesus, but utters what might be taken for a complaint: “Where were you, good Jesus?” The response comes in the form of a bodiless voice: “Anthony, I was here, but I was waiting to watch your struggle.” Many years later, drawing on this experience, Anthony preaches a long sermon to the monks of the desert in which he argues that Satan’s demons torture the righteous because they—that is, the demons—“are tortured by their envy of us.”

Athanasius’ hagiography is a peculiar mixture of mythemes and the transcendence of mythemes. Anthony takes preemptive revenge on Balacius around whose gruesome death the early readership of the text would undoubtedly have experienced a sacrificial unanimity at odds with the non-sacrificial epistemology of the Gospels or of Paul’s conversion, on which Athanasius draws in the episode just now related. A passage from Girard is relevant to the *mélange* of insight and crudity in *The Life*. In *I See Satan Fall*, in the chapter entitled “The Victory of the Cross,” Girard writes: “Before Christ and the Bible the satanic accusation was always victorious by virtue of the violent contagion that imprisoned human beings within systems of myth and ritual. The Crucifixion reduces mythology to powerlessness by exposing violent contagion, which is so effective in myths that it prevents communities from ever finding out the truth, namely the innocence, of their victims.” The events of the Passion needed, however, to pass through the visionary experience of Saint Paul before they could become the foundation of Christianity. In *A New Way of Thinking* (2011), Gans identifies “the key event of Christian revelation” as the moment when, on the famous Road to Damascus, “Jesus appears to Saul as the one he persecutes.” Gans argues that, “By accepting to make this one human being responsible . . . for transcendence itself, by accepting the divinity of human firstness, Saul freed himself from the burden of resentment.”

As Girard’s observation about Eusebius—in a refutation of Apollonius of Tyana, Eusebius has nothing whatever to say about the malicious stoning—suggests, however, the revelation of the scapegoating mechanism although *present* in the Passion does not immediately communicate itself. The victimary mechanism continues to function, but now does so in an increasingly ineffective way that, itself, constitutes a crisis and requires more victims. Similarly, while Paul was able to overcome resentment and achieve transcendence through

his vision of Christ as the one whose divinity is certified by his persecution and murder, and while a small minority was able to share Paul's understanding, most people, the vast majority, did not participate in the theophany. They continued to be confined within the immemorial closed horizon of ritual. The progress of the Christian *Logos* has been all at once immensely slow and yet immensely destabilizing. Flaubert's insight in *La Tentation* is that one way in which the progress of the Christian *Logos* is slowed is by the reduction of symbols to doctrines.

In *The Ecumenic Age*, in the chapter on "The Pauline Vision of the Resurrection," Voegelin writes how "in the letters of Paul, the central issue is not a doctrine but the assurance of immortalizing transfiguration through the vision of the Resurrected." Voegelin adds that "transfiguration is experienced [by Paul] as an 'historical' event that has begun with the Passion and Resurrection of Christ." Voegelin distrusts the Patristic Christianity that emerges through the Church Councils and prefers—as Flaubert seems to also in *La Tentation*—the pre-doctrinal Christianity. "Paul . . . moved," as Voegelin writes, "in an open field of theophany." In Voegelin's characterization, Paul's Christ "is presented as a superior divinity in competition with the 'elemental spirits' (*stoicheia*) of the cosmos." Voegelin finds evidence for his thesis in Paul's Letters to the various congregations in which he rebukes them for "backsliding to the cult of *stoicheia*." In Voegelin's argument, "the early Patres . . . found one or another subordinationist construction to be the most suitable symbolism for expressing the relation of the Son to the Father-God." For Voegelin "the Athanasian victory" at Nicaea in 325 "put an end to this generous openness." Voegelin indeed finds *ditheism* preferable to *tritheism* precisely because in the latter there is a "transition from the open field of theophany to the realm of dogmatic construction." Voegelin insists that "the 'Christ' of Nicaea and Chalcedon is not the reality of theophanic history that confronts us in the Pauline vision of the Resurrected."

What Girard refers to as the action of the *Logos* in the events of the Passion would certainly qualify under Voegelin's notion of a *leap in being* through a new differentiation in consciousness. Generative Anthropology too is a theory of consciousness wherein, once consciousness, language, and culture make their appearance on the Originary Scene in the grammatical form of the ostensive, they then develop through the grammatical phases of the imperative and the negated imperative to the stage of mature language: And beyond that, by baroque effusion down through the millennia, into every possible form of ritual and myth and the recovery from myth. All three discourses must grapple with historical forms in and through which consciousness has self-articulated across the ages. While all three discourses trace a path of increasing anthropological self-clarity emerging from signal events, all three also admit the possibility of regression—of a collapse back into less differentiated states. Voegelin and Girard are more wary of Modernity as a likely case of cultural backsliding than is Gans; although latterly, in light of the rise of victimary culture, Gans too has begun to express alarm concerning socio-cultural trends. Whereas Modernity prides itself on its critical stance towards inherited wisdom, Voegelin, Girard, and Gans doubt the veracity of

an exclusively modern critique that detaches itself from the cultural continuum while demoting religion, particularly Christianity, to superstition thereby making it disposable. On the contrary, all three are remarkably sensitive to the ethical implications of myth on the one hand and revelation on the other, in which they find echoes of human origin and, in the two testaments, the bases for a non-arbitrary morality that, epochally, refuses to designate victims.

Modernity, experiencing itself as a new apocalypse that abolishes all others, can make neither heads nor tails of *La Tentation*. Michel Foucault, in his essay (1967) on the topic, simply assumes that Flaubert must have been concerned with everything except a serious study of comparative religion or anthropology. For Foucault *La Tentation* consists in no more than its own fiendishly elaborate intertextuality; it is a palimpsest of readerly associations summed up in the title of his essay, "Fantasia of the Library." Thus Flaubert could have been interested in Jacques Matter's *Histoire critique du gnosticisme et de son influence* (1828), as Foucault sees it, only as a resource for furnishing his own text with the mass of references required by a project of bibliographical bricolage without a real meaning. Matter's treatise will, itself, have been for Foucault no more than another text, now having a certain antiquarian interest because of its relation to Flaubert's weirdly virtuosic bricolage of religious exoticism. Yet Voegelin, writing in *Science Politics and Gnosticism* (1968) characterizes the *Histoire critique* as belonging to a body of profound self-knowledge that is now lost—a loss that marks a catastrophic contraction of consciousness currently afflicting the West.

Voegelin admired Flaubert as a master symbolist and singled out *La Tentation* as a masterful exploration of the symbols by and through which the Western consciousness has articulated itself or by and through "pseudo-philosophical terms" obscured itself. In Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers*, John Andrews, whose first name goes back to that of the primordial Mesopotamian god, while recuperating, has been reading *La Tentation*. He lets the basic spirit of the book penetrate his existence: "His mind was full of intangible floating glow, like the ocean on a warm night, when every wave breaks into pale flame, and mysterious milky lights keep rising to the surface out of the dark waters and gleaming and vanishing. He became absorbed in the strange fluid harmonies that permeated his whole body, as a grey sky at nightfall suddenly becomes filled with endlessly changing patterns of light and color and shadow." (208) A YMCA man, visiting the wounded in hospital, tries to proselytize Andrews, who, however, replies that "I make no pretensions to Christianity." (210) That thought would represent Dos Passos' understanding of *La Tentation*, and perhaps also Flaubert's: The paradox that Christianity must at last make no pretensions to itself.

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