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The excerpts below come from between p. 127 and p. 169.

1851

to Louise Colet

Sep. [no specific date]

I began my novel yesterday evening. Now I foresee terrifying difficulties of style. It is no small thing to be simple. I am afraid of turning into a Paul de Kock¹ or a kind of Chateaubriandized² Balzac.

1852

to Louise Colet

Jan. 12 or 14 *"I AM TIRED AND DISCOURAGED."*

I am hideously worried, mortally depressed. My accursed Bovary [*sic: not italicized*] is harrying me and driving me mad. Last Sunday Bouilhet criticized one of my characters and the outline. I can do nothing about it: there is some truth in what he says, but I feel the opposite is true also. Ah, I am tired and discouraged. ...

No – it is possible that the whole thing hasn't had enough spadework, for distinctions between thought and style are a sophism. Everything depends on the conception. So much the worse! I am going to continue, and as quickly as I can, in order to have a complete picture. There are moments when all this makes me wish I were dead. Ah! No one will be able to say that I haven't experienced the agonies of art!

Jan. 16 *FLAUBERT'S DUALITY AS A WRITER (WE MIGHT SAY, THE "ROMANTIC" AND THE "REALIST" BUT THESE ARE NOT HIS WORDS)*

There are in me, literally speaking, two distinct persons: one who is infatuated with bombast, lyricism, eagle flights, sonorities of phrase and the high points of ideas; and another who digs and burrows into the truth as deeply as he can, who liked to treat a humble fact as respectfully as the big one, who would like to make you feel almost *physically* the things he reproduces; this latter person likes to laugh, and enjoys the animal sides of man . . .

What seems beautiful to me, what I should like to write, is a book about nothing, a book dependent upon nothing external, which would be held together by the strength of its style, just as the earth, suspended in the void, depends on nothing external for its support; a book

[¹ Paul de Kock (1797-1871) was a prolific and popular French writer. "Kock's novels were composed hurriedly and his style was careless, but his combination of vigour, coarseness, sense of plot, keen observation, sentimentality, brisk narrative, and descriptive power made his books widely appealing." (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Paul-de-Kock>.)] *T.L. footnotes are marked with []*.

[² François-René, Le viscomte de Chateaubriand (1768-1848) was one of the first French romantic writers and greatly influenced others of his generation: Byron and Hugo were filled with admiration for him.]

which would have almost no subject, or at least in which the subject would be almost invisible, if such a thing is possible. The finest works are those that contain the least matter; the closer expression comes to thought, the closer language comes to coinciding and merging with it, the finer the result.

Feb. 1 "NO LYRICISM, NO COMMENTS, THE AUTHOR'S PERSONALITY ABSENT."

Bad week. Work didn't go; I had reached a point where I didn't know what to say. It was all shadings and refinements; I was completely in the dark; it is very difficult to clarify by means of words what is still obscure in your thoughts. I made outlines, spoiled a lot of paper, floundered and fumbled. Now I shall perhaps find my way again. Oh, what a rascally thing style is! I think you have no idea of what kind of a book I am writing. In my other books³ I was slovenly; in this one I am trying to be impeccable, and to follow a geometrically straight line. No lyricism, no comments, the author's personality absent. It will make sad reading; there will be atrociously wretched and sordid things. ... I shall certainly not be through by the beginning of next winter. I am doing no more than five or six pages a week.

Mar. 3 [Flaubert describes reading children's books, because] for two days now I have been trying to live the dreams of young girls, and for this purpose I have been navigating in milky oceans of books about castles and troubadours in white-plumed velvet caps.

Mar. 20-21 "[I AM] SEIZED WITH CRAMPS AND LONG TO RUSH OFF AND HIDE"

The entire value of my book, if it has any, will consist of my having known how to walk straight ahead on a hair, balanced above the two abysses of lyricism and vulgarity (which I seek to fuse in analytical narrative). When I think of what it can be I am dazzled. But then, when I reflect that so much beauty has been entrusted to me, I am so terrified that I am seized with cramps and long to rush off and hide – anywhere. I have been working like a mule for fifteen long years. All my life I have lived with a maniacal stubbornness, keeping all my other passions locked up in cages and visiting them only now and then for diversion. Oh, if I ever produce a good book I'll have worked for it!

Mar. 27

Tonight I finished scribbling the first draft of my young girl's dreams. I'll spend another fortnight sailing on these blue lakes, after which I'll go to a ball and then spend a rainy winter, which I'll end with a pregnancy. And about a third of my book will be done.

Apr. 24 "[I] AM SUSTAINED ONLY BY A KIND OF PERMANENT RAGE, WHICH SOMETIMES MAKES ME WEEP TEARS OF IMPOTENCE BUT NEVER ABATES."

The day before yesterday I went to bed at five in the morning and yesterday at three. Since last Monday I have put everything else aside, and have done nothing all week but sweat over my *Bovary*, disgruntled at making such slow progress. I have now reached my ball, which I will begin Monday. I hope that may go better. Since you last saw me I have written 25 pages in all (25 in six weeks). They were tough. Tomorrow I shall read them to Bouilhet. As for

³ Flaubert refers particularly to the first *Education sentimentale* and the first *Tentation de Saint Antoine*. [Stegmuller's footnote]

myself, I have gone over them so much, recopied them, changed them, handled them, that for the time being I can't make head or tail of them. But I think they will stand up. ... I am leading a stern existence, stripped of all external pleasure, and am sustained only by a kind of permanent rage, which sometimes makes me weep tears of impotence but never abates. I love my work with a love that is frenzied and perverted, as an ascetic loves the hair shirt that scratches his belly. Sometimes when I am empty, when words don't come, when I find I haven't written a single sentence after scribbling whole pages, I collapse on my couch and lie there dazed, bogged in a swamp of despair, hating myself and blaming myself for this demented pride which makes me pant after chimera. A quarter of an hour later everything changes; my heart is pounding with joy. Last Wednesday I had to get up and fetch my handkerchief; tears were streaming down my face. I had been moved by my own writing; the emotion I had conceived, the phrase that rendered it, and the satisfaction of having found the phrase – all were causing me to experience the most exquisite pleasure. At least I believe that all those elements were present in this emotion, which after all was predominantly a matter of nerves. There exist even higher emotions of this same kind: those which are devoid of the sensory element. They are superior, in moral beauty, to virtue – so independent are they of any personal factor, of any human implication. Occasionally (at great moments of illumination) I have had glimpses, in the glow of an enthusiasm that made me thrill from head to foot, of such a state of mind, superior to life itself, a state in which fame counts for nothing and even happiness is superfluous. If everything around us, instead of permanently conspiring to drown us in a slough of mud, contributed rather to keep our spirits healthy, who can tell whether we might not be able to do for aesthetics what stoicism did for morals? ...

Jul. 8 REFLECTIONS ON THE EFFECTS OF HIS EPILEPSY

Musset has never separated poetry from the sensations of which it is the consummate expression. ... Nerves, magnetism: for him poetry is those things. Actually it is something less turbulent. If sensitive nerves were the only requirement of a poet, I should be superior to Shakespeare and to Homer, whom I picture as a not very nervous individual. Such confusion is blasphemy. I know whereof I speak: I used to be able to hear what people were saying in low voices behind closed doors thirty paces away; all my viscera could be seen quivering under my skin; and sometimes I experienced in the space of a single second a million thoughts, images, associations of all kinds which exploded in my mind like a grand display of fireworks. But all this, closely related though it is to the emotions, is parlor talk.

Poetry is by no means an infirmity of the mind; whereas these nervous susceptibilities are. Extreme sensitivity is a weakness. Let me explain:

If my mind had been stronger, I shouldn't have fallen ill as a result of studying law and being bored. I'd have turned those circumstances to good account instead of being worsted by them. My unhappiness, instead of confining itself to my brain, affected the rest of my body and threw me into convulsions. It was a "deviation." One often sees children whom music hurts physically: they have great talent, retain melodies after but one hearing, become over-excited when they play the piano; their hearts pound, they grow thin and pale and fall ill, and their poor nerves writhe in pain at the sound of notes – like dogs. These are never the future Mozarts. Their vocation has been misplaced: the idea has passed into the flesh, and there it remains sterile and causes the flesh to perish; neither genius nor health results.

It is the same with Art. Passion does not make poetry, and the more personal you are, the weaker. I have always sinned in that direction myself, because I have always put myself into

what I was doing. Instead of Saint Anthony, for example, *I* am in my book; and I, rather than the reader, underwent the temptations. *The less you feel a thing, the fitter you are to express it as it is* (as it *always* is, in itself, in its essence, freed of all ephemeral contingencies). But you must have the capacity to *make yourself feel it*. This capacity is what we call genius: the ability to *see*, to have your model constantly posing in front of you.

That is why I detest so-called poetic language. When there are no words, a glance is enough. Soulful effusions, lyricism, descriptions – I want them all embodied in Style. To put them elsewhere is to prostitute art and feeling itself.

Jul. 22 “A GOOD PROSE SENTENCE SHOULD BE LIKE A GOOD LINE OF POETRY –
UNCHANGABLE...”

I am in the process of copying and correcting the entire first part of *Bovary*. My eyes are smarting. I should like to be able to read these 158 pages at a single glance and grasp them with all their details in a single thought. ... What a bitch of a thing prose is! It is never finished; there is always something to be done over. Still, I think it is possible to give it the consistency of verse. A good prose sentence should be like a good line of poetry – *unchangeable*, just as rhythmic, just as sonorous. Such at least is my ambition. (I am sure of one thing: no one has ever conceived a more perfect type of prose than I; but as to the execution, how weak, how weak, oh God!). ...

Jul. 27 “BOVARY IS AN UNPRECEDENTED TOUR-DE-FORCE: ITS SUBJECT, CHARACTERS ... –
ALL ARE ALIEN TO ME.”

Yes, it is a strange thing, the relation between one's writing and one's personality. ... From my appearance one would think me a writer of epic, drama, brutally factual narrative; whereas actually I feel at home only in analysis, in anatomy, if I may call it such. By natural disposition I love what is vague and misty; and it is only patience and study that have rid me of all the white fat that clogged my muscles. The books I most long to write are precisely those for which I am least endowed. *Bovary*, in this sense, is an unprecedented tour-de-force (a fact of which I alone shall ever be aware): its subject, characters, effects, etc. – all are alien to me. It should make it possible for me to take a great step forward later. Writing this book I am like a man playing the piano with leaden balls attached to his fingers. But once I have mastered my technique and find a piece that's to my taste and that I can play at sight, the result will perhaps be good. In any case, I think I am doing the right thing. What one does is not for one's self, but for others. Art is not interested in the personality of the artist. So much for him if he doesn't like red or green or yellow: all colors are beautiful, and his task is to use them ...

Sep. 4 “[AN] AESTHETIC MYSTICISM...”

I am turning toward a kind of aesthetic mysticism (if those two words can be used together), and I wish it were stronger. When you are given no encouragement by others, when you are disgusted, frustrated, corrupted, and brutalized by the outside world, so-called decent and sensitive people are forced to seek somewhere within themselves a more suitable place to live. If society continues on its present path I think we shall see a return of such mystics as have existed in the dark ages of the world. Unable to expand, the soul will withdraw into itself. ...

Sep. 19 “NEVER IN MY LIFE HAVE I WRITTEN ANYTHING MORE DIFFICULT ... TRIVIAL DIALOGUE.”

What trouble my *Bovary* is giving me! Still, I am beginning to see my way a little. Never in my life have I written anything more difficult than what I am doing now – trivial dialogue. ... The language itself is a great stumbling-block. My characters are completely commonplace, but they have to speak in a literary style, and politeness of language takes away so much picturesqueness from any speech!

Nov. 22 ON BOURGEOIS LITERARY TASTES

I am going to read *Uncle Tom*⁴ in English. I admit that I am prejudiced against it. Literary merit alone doesn't account for that kind of success. A writer can go far if he combines a certain talent for dramatization and a facility for speaking everybody's language, with the art of exploiting the passions of the day, the concerns of the moment. ... If Tacitus were to return to earth he would sell less well than M. Thiers.⁵ ... The bourgeoisie (which today comprises all mankind including “the people”) has the same attitude towards the classics as towards religion: it knows that they exist, would be very sorry if they didn't, realizes that they serve some vague purpose, but makes no use of them and finds them very boring.

1853
to Louise Colet

Jan. 15 “I AM CONVINCED THAT EVERYTHING IS A QUESTION OF STYLE...”

Last week I spent *five days writing one page*, and I dropped everything else for it ... What worries me in my book is the element of *entertainment*. That side is weak; there is not enough action. I maintain, however, that *ideas* are action. It is more difficult to hold the reader's interest with them, but this is a problem for style to solve. I now have fifty pages in a row without a single event. It is an uninterrupted portrayal of a bourgeois existence, and of a love that remains inactive – a love all the more difficult to depict because it is timid and deep, but alas! lacking in inner turbulence, because my gentleman has a sober nature. I had something similar in the first part: the husband loves his wife in somewhat the same fashion as her lover. Here are two mediocrities in the same milieu, and I must differentiate between them. If I bring it off it will be a great achievement, I think, for it will be like painting in monotone without contrasts – not easy. But I fear that all these subtleties will be wearisome, and that the reader will long for more movement. But one must be loyal to one's conception. If I tried to insert action I should be following a rule and would spoil everything. One must sing with one's own voice: and mine will never be dramatic or attractive. Besides, I am convinced that everything is a question of style, or rather of form, of presentation.

[⁴ *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.]

[⁵ Adolph Thiers, “French statesman, journalist, and historian... His *Histoire de la révolution française*, which appeared in 10 volumes between 1823 and 1827, and his *Histoire du consulat et de l'empire*, published in 20 volumes between 1845 and 1862, made a notable contribution to the growth of nationalism in France.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*. (<http://www.britannica.com/biography/Adolphe-Thiers>)]

Feb. 27-28 “[AVOID] THESE MASKED BALLS OF THE IMAGINATION! ... EVERYTHING SHOULD BE DONE COLDLY, AND WITH POISE.”

You [Colette] should write more coldly. We must be on our guard against that kind of overheating called inspiration, which often consists more largely of nervous emotion than of muscular strength. At this very moment, for example, I am keyed up to a high pitch – my brow is burning, sentences keep rushing into my head; for the past two hours I have been wanting to write to you and haven’t been able to wrench myself away from work for an instant. Instead of one idea I have six, and where the most simple type of exposition is called for I find myself writing similes and metaphors. I could keep going until tomorrow noon without fatigue. But I know these masked balls of the imagination! You emerge from them in a state of exhaustion and despair, having seen only falsity and uttered nothing but nonsense. Everything should be done coldly, and with poise.

Mar. 27 “SOMETHING DEEP AND EXTRA VOLUPTUOUS GUSHES OUT OF ME, LIKE AN EJACULATION OF THE SOUL.”

As for me, the more I realize the difficulties of writing, the more daring I become; this is what keeps me from pedantry ... [T]hough I sometimes have moments of bitterness that make me almost scream with rage (so acutely do I feel my own impotence and weakness) I have others when I can scarcely contain myself for joy. Something deep and extra-voluptuous gushes out of me, like an ejaculation of the soul. I feel transported, drunk with my own thought, as though a hot gust of perfume were being wafted to me through some inner conduit. I shall never go very far; I know my limitations. But the goal I have set for myself will be achieved by others: thanks to me someone more talented, more instinctive, will be set on the right path. It is perhaps absurd to want to give prose the rhythm of verse (keeping it distinctly prose, however) and to write of ordinary life as one writes history or epic (but without falsifying the subject). I often wonder about this. But on the other hand it is perhaps a great experiment, and very original too. I know where I fail. (Ah, if only I were fifteen!) No matter: I shall always be given some credit for my stubbornness. And then, who can tell? Some day I may find a good motif, an air completely suited to my voice, neither too high nor too low. In any case I shall have lived nobly and often delightfully.

Mar. 31

... Poetry is only a way of perceiving external objects, a special sense through which matter is strained and transfigured without being changed. Now, if you see the world solely through this lens, the color of the world will be the color of the lens and the words you use to express your feeling will thus be inevitably related to the facts that produce it. To be well done, a thing must accord with your constitution. A botanist’s hands, eyes, and head must not be like those of an astronomer; and he must see the stars only in reference to plants. From this combination of innateness and education results sureness of touch, individual manner, taste, spontaneity – in short, illumination. How often have I heard people tell my father [*sic*] that he diagnosed illnesses without knowing how or why! The same feeling that made him instinctively decide on the remedy must enable us to hit on the right word. One doesn’t achieve this unless one has – first – been born to one’s calling, and – second – practiced it long and stubbornly.

Apr. 6 “[N]EVER HAS MY PERSONALITY BEEN OF LESS USE TO ME. ... I AM AT HOME IN THE REALM OF THE EXTRAORDINARY AND THE FANTASTIC...”

What is making me go so slowly is that nothing in this book is derived from myself; never has my personality been of less use to me. Later I may be able to produce things that are better (I certainly hope so); it is difficult for me to imagine that I will ever write anything more carefully calculated. Everything is deliberate. If it's a failure, it will at least have been good practice. What is natural for me is unnatural for others – I am at home in the realm of the extraordinary and the fantastic, in flights of metaphysics and mythology. *Saint Antoine* didn't demand a quarter of the mental tension that *Bovary* is causing me. It was an outlet for my feelings; I had only pleasure in writing it, and the eighteen months I spent writing its five hundred pages were the most deeply voluptuous of my entire life. Think of me now: having constantly to be in the skins of people for whom I feel aversion. For six months I have been a platonic lover, and at this very moment the sound of church bells is causing me Catholic raptures and I feel like going to confession!

Jun. 25-26 “[A] WANT OF PROPORTION” AND “AN ACT OF COITION”

At last I have finished the first section of my second part. ... I shall spend another week reading it over and copying it, and a week from tomorrow I shall spew it all out to Bouilhet. ... But I think that this book will have a great defect: namely, a want of proportion between its various parts. I have so far 260 pages containing only preparations for action – more or less disguised expositions of character (some of them, it is true, more developed than others), of landscapes and places. ... What reassures me (though not completely) is that the book is a biography rather than a fully developed story. It is not essentially dramatic; and if the dramatic element is well submerged in the general tone of the book, the lack of proportion in the development of its various parts may pass unnoticed. But then isn't life a little like this? An act of coition lasts a minute, and it has been anticipated for months on end. Our passions are like volcanoes; they are continually rumbling, but they erupt only from time to time.

Aug. 14 FLAUBERT AND THE “BATHING BEAUTIES”: “WHAT A HIDEOUS SIGHT!”

I spent an hour yesterday watching the ladies bathe. What a sight! What a hideous sight! The two sexes used to bathe together here. But now they are kept separate by means of signposts, preventive nets, and a uniformed inspector—nothing more depressingly grotesque can be imagined. However, yesterday, from the place where I was standing in the sun, with my spectacles on my nose, I could contemplate the bathing beauties at my leisure. The human race must indeed have become absolutely moronic to have lost its sense of elegance to this degree. Nothing is more pitiful than these bags in which women encase their bodies, and these oilcloth caps! What faces! What figures! And what feet! Red, scrawny, covered with corns and bunions, deformed by shoes, long as shuttles or wide as washerwomen's paddles. And in the midst of everything, scrofulous brats screaming and crying. Further off, grandmas knitting and respectable old gentlemen with gold-rimmed spectacles reading newspapers, looking up from time to time between lines to savour the vastness of the horizon with an air of approval. The whole thing made me long all afternoon to escape from Europe and go live in the Sandwich Islands or the forests of Brazil. There, at least, the beaches are not polluted by such ugly feet, by such foul-looking specimens of humanity.

[*Ibid*] “*POETRY IS AS PRECISE AS GEOMETRY. INDUCTION IS AS ACCURATE AS DEDUCTION...*”

The day before yesterday, in the woods of Touques, in a charming spot beside a spring, I found old cigar butts and scrap of paté. People had been picnicking. I described such a scene in *Novembre*, eleven years ago; it was entirely imagined, and the other day it came true. Everything one invents is true, you may be sure. Poetry is as precise as geometry. Induction is as accurate as deduction; and besides, after reaching a certain point one no longer makes any mistake about the things of the soul. My poor Bovary, without a doubt, is suffering and weeping at this very instant in twenty villages of France.

Dec. 23, 2 a.m.. “*I FEEL LIKE A MAN WHO HAS _____ ED TOO MUCH*”

My head feels as though it were being squeezed in an iron vise. Since two o'clock yesterday afternoon (except for about twenty-five minutes for dinner), I have been writing *Bovary*. I am in the midst of love-making; I am sweating and my throat is tight. This has been one of those rare days of my life passed completely in illusion from beginning to end. At six o'clock this evening, while I was writing the word “hysterics,” I was so swept away, was bellowing so loudly and feeling so deeply what my little Bovary was going through, that I was afraid of having hysterics myself. I got up from my table and opened the window to calm myself. My head was spinning. Now I have great pains in my knees, in my back, and in my head. I feel like a man who has _____ ed⁶ too much (forgive me for the expression) – a kind of rapturous lassitude. And since I am in the middle of love it is only proper that I should not fall asleep before sending you a caress, a kiss, and whatever thoughts are left in me. Will what I write be good? I have no idea – I am hurrying a little, to be able to show Bouilhet a complete section when he comes to see me. What is certain is that my book has been going at a lively rate for the past week. May it continue so, for I am weary of my usual snail's pace. But I fear the awakening, the disillusion that may come from the recopied pages. No matter; it is a delicious thing to write, whether well or badly – to be no longer yourself but to move in an entire universe of your own creating. Today, for instance, a man and a woman, lover and beloved, rode in a forest on an autumn afternoon under the yellow leaves, and I was also the horse, the leaves, the wind, the words my people spoke, even the red sun that made them half-shut their love-drowned eyes. Is this pride or piety? Is it a silly overflow of exaggerated self-satisfaction, or is it really a vague and noble religious instinct? But when I think of these marvelous pleasures I have enjoyed I am tempted to offer God a prayer of thanks – if only I knew he could hear me! Praised be the Lord for not creating me a cotton merchant, a vaudevillian, a wit, etc.! Let us sing to Apollo like the ancient bards, and breathe deeply of the cold air of Parnassus; let us strum our guitars and clash our cymbals, and whirl like dervishes in the eternal pageant of Forms and Ideas.

1854

to Louise Colet

Jan. 2 “*INFINITESIMAL CORRECTIONS...*”

[Bouilhet] was satisfied with my love scene. However, before said passage I have a transition of eight lines which took me three days; it doesn't contain a superfluous word, yet I must do

[⁶ Steegmuller's translation was published in 1953. The obscenity trials that cleared *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (and removed such Victorian ellipses) took place in 1959 (U.S.) and 1960 (U.K.).]

it over again because it is too slow. It is a piece of direct discourse which has to be changed into indirect, and in which I haven't room to say everything that should be said. It all has to be swift and casual, since it must remain inconspicuous in the ensemble. After this I shall still have three or four other infinitesimal corrections, which will take me one more entire week. How slow I am! No matter; I am getting ahead. I have taken a great step forward, and feel an inner relief that gives me new vigor, even though tonight I literally sweated with effort. It is so difficult to undo what is done, and well done, in order to put something new in its place, and yet hide all traces of the patch ...

Jan. 2 "[BOVARY] IS ESSENTIALLY A WORK OF CRITICISM, OR RATHER OF ANATOMY."
ALSO: INTIMATIONS OF A MORE EXOTIC NEXT NOVEL

How true it is that concern with morality makes every work of the imagination false and stupid! I am becoming quite a critic. The novel I am writing sharpens this facility, for it is essentially a work of criticism, or rather of anatomy. The reader will not notice, I hope, all the psychological work hidden under the form, but he will sense the effect. At the same time I am also tempted to write big, sumptuous things – battles, sieges, descriptions of the fabulous ancient East. Thursday night I spent two wonderful hours, my head in my hands, dreaming of the bright walls of Ecbatana⁷. Nothing has been written about all that. ⁸

[⁷ A city of ancient Persia, written about by Heroditus, but unexcavated in the 19th century.]

[⁸ Flaubert's next novel was *Salammbô* - set in ancient Carthage - and it marks a complete change in content and style. I've found some astonishing lists of what's in the book: gladiatorial combat, mutilations, cannibalism, the sacrifice of children (during which parents chant, "Lord Eat!") crucified lions, elephants with scythes strapped to their trunks, rites involving nude women and pythons. Here's an excerpt from the latter:

Salammbô unfastened her earrings, her necklace, her bracelets, and her long white simar; she unknotted the band in her hair, shaking the latter for a few minutes softly over her shoulders to cool herself by thus scattering it. The music went on outside; it consisted of three notes ever the same, hurried and frenzied; the strings grated, the flute blew; Taanach kept time by striking her hands; Salammbô, with a swaying of her whole body, chanted prayers, and her garments fell one after another around her.

The heavy tapestry trembled, and the python's head appeared above the cord that supported it. The serpent descended slowly like a drop of water flowing along a wall, crawled among the scattered stuffs, and then, gluing its tail to the ground, rose perfectly erect; and his eyes, more brilliant than carbuncles, darted upon Salammbô.

A horror of cold, or perhaps a feeling of shame, at first made her hesitate. But she recalled Schahabarim's orders and advanced; the python turned downwards, and resting the centre of its body upon the nape of her neck, allowed its head and tail to hang like a broken necklace with both ends trailing to the ground. Salammbô rolled it around her sides, under her arms and between her knees; then taking it by the jaw she brought the little triangular mouth to the edge of her teeth, and half shutting her eyes, threw herself back beneath the rays of the moon. The white light seemed to envelop her in a silver mist, the prints of her humid steps shone upon the flag-stones, stars quivered in the depth of the water; it tightened upon her its black rings that were spotted with scales of gold. Salammbô panted beneath the excessive weight, her loins yielded, she felt herself dying, and with the tip of its tail the serpent gently beat her thigh; then the music becoming still it fell off again.

Take *that*, Emma! – Contemporary critics find much art as well as sensationalism in *Salammbô* and make fascinating (even positive) comparisons with *Bovary* in terms of method and purpose, if not in achievement.]

Jan. 13 WHEN THE END?

As to when I shall be finished with *Bovary*, I have already set so many dates, and had to change them so often, that I refuse not only to speak about it any more, but even to think about it. I can only trust in God; it's beyond me. It will be finished when it is finished, even though I die of boredom and impatience – as I might very well do were it not for the fury that keeps me going. ...

Apr. 7 “THERE ARE ONLY TWO OR THREE REPETITIONS OF THE SAME WORD WHICH MUST BE REMOVED.”

I have just made a fresh copy of what I have written since New Year, or rather since the middle of February, for on my return from Paris I burned all my January work. It amounts to thirteen pages, no more, no less, thirteen pages in seven weeks. However, they are in shape, I think, and as perfect as I can make them. There are only two or three repetitions of the same word which must be removed, and two turns of phrase that are still too much alike. At last something is completed. It was a difficult transition: the reader had to be led gradually and imperceptibly from psychology to action. Now I am about to begin the dramatic, eventful part. Two or three more big pushes and the end will be in sight. By July or August I hope to tackle the denouement. What a struggle it has been! My God, what a struggle! Such drudgery! Such discouragement! I spent all last evening frantically poring over surgical texts. I am studying the theory of clubfeet. In three hours I devoured an entire volume on this interesting subject and took notes. I came upon some really fine sentences. “The maternal breast is an impenetrable and mysterious sanctuary, where ... etc.” An excellent treatise, incidentally. Why am I not young? How I should work! One ought to know everything, to write. All of us scribblers are monstrously ignorant. If only we weren't so lacking in stamina, what a rich field of ideas and similes we could tap! ... Ronsard's poetics contains a curious precept: he advises the poet to become well versed in the arts and crafts – to frequent blacksmiths, goldsmiths, locksmiths, etc. – in order to enrich his stock of metaphors. And indeed that is the sort of thing that makes for rich and varied language. The sentences in a book must quiver like the leaves in a forest, all dissimilar in their similarity.

Apr. 22 “...[W]E HAVE TO CONFINE OURSELVES TO RELATING THE FACTS – BUT ALL THE FACTS, THE HEART OF THE FACTS.”

I am still struggling with clubfeet. ... No matter; my work progresses. I have had a good deal of trouble these last few days over a religious speech. From my point of view, what I had written is completely impious. How different it would have been in a different period! If I had been born a hundred years earlier how much rhetoric I'd have put into it! Instead, I have written a mere, almost literal description of what must have taken place. The leading characteristic of our century is its historical sense. This is why we have to confine ourselves to relating the facts – but all the facts, the heart of the facts. No one will ever say about me what is said about you in the sublime prospectus of the *Librairie Nouvelle*: “All her writings converge on this lofty goal” (the ideal of a better future). No, we must sing merely for the sake of singing. Why is the ocean never still? What is the goal of nature? Well, I think the goal of mankind exactly the same. Things exist because they exist, and you can't do anything about it, my good people. We are always turning in the same circle, always rolling the same stone.

Ibid. ART IS NOT A “CHAMBERPOT” AND “*SENTIMENT, SENTIMENT EVERYWHERE! ... WE MUST PUT BLOOD INTO OUR LANGUAGE, NOT LYMPH...*”

... On what do you base your statement that I am losing “the understanding of certain feelings” that I do not experience? First of all, please note that I *do* experience them. My heart is “human,” and if I do not want a child of my own it is because I feel that if I had one my heart would become too “paternal.” I love my little niece as though she were my daughter, and my active concern for her is enough to prove that those are not mere words. But I should rather be skinned alive than exploit this in my writing. I refuse to consider Art a drain-pipe for passion, a kind of chamberpot, a slightly more elegant substitute for gossip and confidences. No, no! Genuine poetry is not the scum of the heart. Your daughter deserves better than to be portrayed in verse “under her blanket,”⁹ called an angel, etc. Some day much contemporary literature will be regarded as puerile and a little silly, because of its sentimentality. Sentiment, sentiment everywhere! Such gushing and weeping! Never before have people been so softhearted. We must put blood into our language, not lymph, and when I say blood I mean heart’s blood; it must pulsate, throb, excite. We must make the very trees fall in love, the very stones quiver with emotion. The story of a mere blade of grass can be made to express boundless love. The fable of the two pigeons has always moved me more than all of Lamartine, and it’s all in the subject matter. But if La Fontaine had expended his amative faculties in expounding his personal feelings, would he have retained enough of it to be able to depict the friendship of two birds? Let us be on our guard against frittering away our gold. . . .¹⁰

⁹ Flaubert, always severe about Louise's poetry, had particularly disliked some lines in a poem called *A ma fille*:

*De ton joli corps sous la couverture
Plus souple apparaît le contour charmant;
Telle au Parthénon quelque frise pure
Nous montre une vierge au long vêtement.*

[*T.L.'s rough, literal translation*: Your pretty body under the blanket
More supple appears its charming outline;
Such as in the Parthenon some pure frieze
Shows us a Virgin wearing a long robe. (“with long clothing”)]

He considered the first two lines “obscene”. “And then,” he wrote Louise, “what is the Parthenon doing there, so close to your daughter's blanket?” [Steegmuller’s footnote]

¹⁰ **This is the latest available letter from Flaubert to Louise Colet, though the affair still had several tumultuous months to run. Louise is said to have precipitated its end herself by violating Flaubert's privacy – bursting in upon him, one day, in his study at Croisset. She was ejected from the house. Madame Flaubert, a witness of the scene, is said to have reproached her son for his mercilessness, declaring that she felt as though she had seen him “wound her own sex.”** [Steegmuller’s footnote]