



PROJECT MUSE®

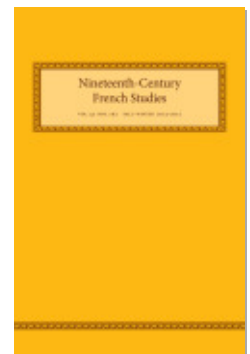
A Privileged Reader: An Editorial Collaboration Between Gustave Flaubert and Louis Bouilhet

Ramona Naddaff

Nineteenth-Century French Studies, Volume 43, Numbers 1-2,
Fall-Winter 2014-2015, pp. 17-33 (Article)

Published by University of Nebraska Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ncf.2014.0042>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/555872>

A Privileged Reader: An Editorial Collaboration Between Gustave Flaubert and Louis Bouilhet

RAMONA NADDAFF

Gustave Flaubert's writing of *Madame Bovary* has often been considered the work of a genius who labored intensely and in solitude on the writing and rewriting of his novel, first published in 1856 in serial form. This article argues that this is an illusion. In fact, one of the primary contributors in the process of writing *Madame Bovary* was Flaubert's dear and intimate friend, Louis Bouilhet. In an analysis of the genesis of a passage from the novel (part one, chapter eight), I aim to demonstrate how Bouilhet was an editorial collaborator whose suggestions and revisions allowed Flaubert the possibility of formulating multiple options in his search for the "mot juste."

"Réfléchissons ensemble, c'est merveilleux
de réfléchir ensemble, ne compliquons pas."

—Olivier Cadiot, *Fairy Queen*

"Quand nous crèverons, nous aurons cette consolation
d'avoir fait du chemin, et d'avoir navigué dans le Grand."

—Gustave Flaubert to Louis Bouilhet, 30 Sept. 1855

On 21 May 1870, Gustave Flaubert wrote George Sand about his grief over the recent loss of his beloved friend, the poet Louis Bouilhet. An intimate companion of Flaubert since 1846, Bouilhet occupied a crucial place in the genesis of Flaubert's writing style and practices. Indeed, in his letter to Sand, Flaubert identified Bouilhet as the sole audience of his writing, one of the few readers who "aiment ce que j'aime, qui s'inquiètent de ce qui me préoccupe" (4: 190).¹ Alienated from literary peers whose aesthetic code dictated, in Flaubert's words, the commands of "success, morality, utility, timeliness," the two writers found safe harbor in their mutual literary devotions to an art

that cultivated the ethical sentiment of a “vague exaltation” (Raitt 35). When Bouilhet died on 18 July 1869, Flaubert’s desire to write died as well. It was not only that Flaubert had lost a part of himself; he had also lost a partner who consistently excited a “need” and “taste” for writing. As he explained to Sand, his was a disinterested, unenthused form of writing: “Je ne sens plus le *besoin* d’écrire, parce que j’écrivais spécialement pour un seul être qui n’est plus. Voilà le vrai! Et cependant je continuerai à écrire. Mais le goût n’y est plus, l’entraînement est parti. [. . .] Il me semble que je deviens un fossile, un être sans rapport avec la création environnante” (4: 190).²

Decades of scholars have debated the nature of Flaubert’s relation to Bouilhet. Some have claimed a homosexual love between the two; others have envisioned Bouilhet as an enabling midwife, a literary conscience, a stern literary superego, a censor or a failed literary advisor who provided perfunctory technical aid.³ Benjamin Bart elaborates on the multiple roles that Bouilhet played:

Bouilhet’s roles have been many: he had supplied technical data or consolation and reassurance when needed; he had aided in bringing half-formed notions to birth or in keeping Flaubert from undue tampering when once they were complete; he had offered guidance in the choice of subjects or had provided specific suggestions of tone and point of view. Above all, he had joined in elaborating a new concept of literature, to which he and Flaubert gave allegiance, but which Flaubert was sometimes tempted to neglect. (198)

Indeed, at each stage of the slow, labored, exhilarating, and debilitating process of writing *Madame Bovary*, Bouilhet performed each of these roles. His “influences” on Flaubert were multiple; his identity and value *for* Flaubert changed as Flaubert confronted new as well as recurrent dilemmas in his writing. Flaubert found in Bouilhet a critical listener and reader who had the literary capacity and disposition to transform his functions, adapting them not only to the specific tasks but also to the aesthetic interests, style and aspirations of the work. To be so flexible, responsive, and informed an interlocutor says much about Bouilhet’s own resources.

But it also speaks as significantly about the privileged space of collaboration that existed between the two writers and about the unique set of conditions that allowed this dialectical conversation to emerge.⁴ This is not to say that Bouilhet collaborated with Flaubert in the strict sense of being a co-author. Rather, Bouilhet engaged in the type of collaboration that, as Seth Whidden writes, “inevitably develops between writers and editors, somewhere during the creative process, in which the latter shapes, defines, and certainly collaborates on an early version, leading up to a final published

work” (3).⁵ Now, the myth of the solitary author and genius has been exploded theoretically and empirically over and again.⁶ What Bouilhet offered Flaubert in terms of actual suggestions, hard-hearted counsel, or sensitive coaching is framed by his role as an editor by proxy, an authoritative voice that provided choices for Flaubert to accept and reject with due deliberation. Bouilhet provided Flaubert with “pregnant suggestions,” possibilities to turn around, “ideas around which his own ideas could cluster” (Bart 187).

In particular, as I argue in my discussion of Bouilhet’s revisions of a scene from part one, chapter eight of *Madame Bovary*, Bouilhet occupied the position of an editor whose participation increased choices for the author rather than imposing *a* choice or *the* choice. Bouilhet identified with Flaubert’s anxious concern to forge an inextricable link between form, style, content, and method. Bouilhet never imposed his words on Flaubert. He did, however, impose and project himself into the process of writing: he read and reread drafts of the novel, and he engaged in the struggle to find the “mot juste.”⁷ As Alain Raitt states: “Bouilhet est souvent venu en aide à Flaubert, pour le choix des sujets et pour l’agencement du plan de ses œuvres, aussi bien que pour des questions d’expression et de détail” (vi). Unlike Louise Colet whom Flaubert never consulted for concrete suggestions and textual revisions, Bouilhet was acknowledged as an editorial collaborator in the rewriting of *Madame Bovary*. As much as Flaubert needed Bouilhet’s counsel, he needed his company to proceed with the process of composition: “Quand viens-tu? J’ai bien besoin de ta compagnie pour arrêter ma Fin, ou plutôt mon avant-Fin” (2: 587). Flaubert allowed Bouilhet to trespass into the solitary space and time of writing in a collaborative relationship that presupposed a particular energetics of friendship, as I will discuss. Their friendship required interdependency; their individual identities were shaped and influenced by the effects of their intersubjective relation; and the identity of author and editor emerged in the process. To be part of the other, to be the effect of the other’s speech, was not experienced as an effacement of individual or original voice.⁸ Flaubert states it clearly: “En perdant mon pauvre Bouilhet, j’ai perdu mon *accoucheur*, celui qui voyait dans ma pensée plus clairement que moi-même” (4: 153). Bouilhet, as an editorial collaborator, prompted Flaubert to rewrite drafts; he criticized formulations and scenes as well as provided suggestions; and he was a writer writing alongside Flaubert and in the margins of his text, never supplanting the role of the author but only enhancing it. As Maxime Du Camp astutely specifies Bouilhet’s editorial position: “Bouilhet n’a pas ajouté un mot à *Madame Bovary* mais il a fait retrancher beaucoup de phrases parasites, et en le faisant, il a rendu à Flaubert un inappréciable service” (784).

Marie Durel argues that none of Flaubert’s interlocutors—including

Bouilhet—truly collaborated with and influenced Flaubert's writing (140). Carefully tracing the genesis of specific scenes of *Madame Bovary* from their initial drafting to their final exposition, Durel measures the weight of Flaubert's collaborations, empirically judging whether or not the author actually inscribed literary advice, technical suggestions, or recommended documentation into the published version of his novel. Where there is no evidence of direct causal influence on Flaubert's writing, Durel dismisses the possibility that Flaubert's writing process was collaborative and inclusive of voices and words other than his own. She thus reintroduces the myth of his authorial autonomy and the self-enclosed logic of the writing: "si l'auteur sollicite une aide pour finalement être conduit à y renoncer c'est souvent en raison d'une logique d'écriture qui rend l'intervention assez problématique" (80). Durel is right to suspect scholarship that overemphasizes the influence of Flaubert's friends by relying too heavily on the writer's correspondence and on the definitive version of the novel. Durel proposes, rather, to adopt a genetic approach that, in following the process of writing from draft to draft of *Madame Bovary*, shifts the indexical sites from external to internal sources.

The result of this exclusive focus on preliminary drafts of *Madame Bovary* is two-fold. First, Durel narrows the scope and breadth of the notion of influence, which exists only when its presence can be traced back to the manuscripts Flaubert himself writes. Influence must come as an act from the outside that transforms the internal processes and products of writing. Such vague and elastic notions of influence as a "contribution," "suggestion," "aid," "orientation," or "input" are thus excluded when there is no direct textual correlation. Second, while Durel emphasizes the actual process of writing, when it comes to judging the influences on Flaubert's writing she concentrates rather on the product of his writing. As such, she excludes a whole range of phenomena—for example, technical and editorial advice, archival research and documentation—that Flaubert incorporates (or not) into his text. In other words, the moment Flaubert includes or excludes these types of external sources into his prose, they are no longer agents of narrative change but rather a supplementary propaedeutics on which Flaubert inventively elaborates. In no way can Durel allow for the type of influence identified by Tony Williams, for example: "Ultimately subordinate but essential nonetheless, Bouilhet's role was to preside over the coming into being of projects which, without his support and guidance, might have been stillborn" (192–93).

The result of Durel's investigation is to eliminate the possibility of receptivity to collaboration and its crucial dynamic at various stages of Flaubert's writing process. This is particularly evident in Durel's analysis of

Bouilhet's involvement with *Madame Bovary* (85–94). Anxious to undermine the influence of Bouilhet on Flaubert—the “myth of Bouilhet” that envisages Bouilhet as a quasi “co-author” of the novel—Durel swings too far to the other side, limiting Bouilhet to an auxiliary, even dispensable, role. Dispossessed of his editorial role, robbed of his capacity to provide crucial documentary data and to suggest alternative scenarios, words, and character developments, Bouilhet is relegated to the corridor of inferior writers surrounding Flaubert. In the aftermath of this important deconstruction, Bouilhet is figured most importantly as a psychological support, a test reader who permitted Flaubert to understand not what he wanted but that which he did not want. His engagements no longer figure into an intra-poetic relationship of a “strong” literary figure of “capable imagination” who, as Harold Bloom aptly put it: “appropriates for [him]self [. . .] self-appropriation involves the immense anxieties of indebtedness, for what strong maker desires the realization that he has failed to create himself?” (5).

Flaubert addressed Bouilhet as a literary figure of “capable imagination” whose interventions crucially influenced Flaubert’s self-creation as a writer. Unlike Flaubert’s muse Louise Colet, whose aesthetic and writing Flaubert constantly attacked for being overly romantic, sentimental, and personal, Flaubert envisioned Bouilhet as his equal and counterpart.⁹ Their literary imaginations were sympathetic and conjoined; their aesthetic sensibilities converged as a unified force.¹⁰ This relation of equality allowed for intimate identifications and productive conversations to emerge that affected the process and product of creation. Directly opposed to the ancient Greek model and erotics of male relations that Michel Foucault developed in *The Use of Pleasure*, this literary friendship required an equality of social status, intellectual and political parity, and an exchanging of active and passive roles (187–203). As he wrote *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert found this reciprocity in his exchanges with Bouilhet, with both its freedoms and its limits. The basic equality furthermore provoked imaginary idealizations wherein Flaubert created Bouilhet as his “super-editor” whose instructions he internalized, rejected, and subverted. As Flaubert claimed upon Bouilhet’s death: “C’est une perte pour moi irréparable. J’ai enterré avant-hier ma conscience littéraire, mon jugement, ma boussole—sans compter le reste” (4: 70).

As correspondence between the two men reveals, Flaubert’s aspirations to and realization of aesthetic autonomy and originality emerged as an effect of his collaboration with Bouilhet. The specific principles of this collaboration in the literal sense of the term—“to work, to labor together”—assumed from the start that literary innovation was a collective endeavor wherein authorial identity and individuation were manufactured and originality discovered through ritualized exercises, philosophical and literary deliberation and

debate. Together, Bouilhet and Flaubert met three times a week in the winters of 1847 and 1848 to invent the scenes and acts of a new form of lyric theater, reenacting the literary exercise of their precursor Stendhal (Bart 184). Together, poet and novelist forged a formalist aesthetic theory that would supercede their Romantic and Realist heroes and rivals. Together, they meditated on scenes, characters, and plot of Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary* so that it would modernize the genre of the novel. Together, perhaps most importantly, they listened to the sounds and sense of Flaubert's prose.

Bouilhet was privileged. Flaubert invited him to listen in on his "gueuloir"—Flaubert's technique of reading aloud his prose in order, among other things, to test the rhythms of his written speech. Bouilhet listened not only "literally"; he also listened symbolically and from a legitimizing symbolic position. The auditory dialectics between the two writers fulfilled one of the necessary conditions of an aesthetic project. As Flaubert wrote to Colet on 22 July 1852, he envisioned creating a prose "[. . . qui] peut lui donner la consistance du vers. Une bonne phrase de prose doit être comme un bon vers, *inchangeable*, aussi rythmée, aussi sonore. Voilà du moins mon ambition (il y a une chose dont je suis sûr, c'est que personne n'a jamais eu en tête un type de prose plus parfait que moi; mais quant à l'exécution, que de faiblesses, que de faiblesses, mon dieu)" (2: 135–36). Bouilhet's ear, trained to hear poetic musicality, helped Flaubert invent the sounds of this new prose style. His attuned listening, both critical and approving, improved the execution of a prose that was rhythmic and sonorous. Attentive to sound, Bouilhet also helped Flaubert to make and find sense. As Flaubert commented to Louise Colet on 24 Apr. 1852, prior to a visit to Bouilhet where he would read the twenty-five pages of *Madame Bovary* that he had written over the past six weeks:

Depuis lundi dernier j'ai laissé de côté toute autre chose, et j'ai exclusivement toute la semaine pioché ma *Bovary*, ennuyé de ne pas avancer. Je suis maintenant arrivé à mon bal, que je commence lundi. J'espère que ça ira mieux. J'ai fait, depuis que tu ne m'as vu, 25 pages net (25 p[ages] en 6 semaines). Elles ont été dures à rouler. Je les lirai demain à Bouilhet. Quant à moi, je les ai tellement travaillées, recopiées, changées, maniées que pour le moment je n'y vois que du feu. Je crois pourtant qu'elles se tiennent debout. (2: 75)

Bouilhet's capacity for symbolic listening provided Flaubert a space of critical detachment from a solipsistic writing style that ceaselessly reviewed, copied, changed, and suppressed text until he could no longer write full sentences but could only scribble nonsense. In the midst of this process, Flaubert could no longer find meaning. Alone, left to his own devices and in

a solitary state of self-listening, his words remained meaningless: he couldn't "make head or tail of them" ("Quant à moi . . . je n'y vois que du feu"). Listening, reacting, and revising with Flaubert, Bouilhet arrested a process wherein Flaubert's prose had stopped making sense.¹¹ Where Flaubert alone saw only fire, he imagined that Bouilhet, upon listening and hearing him, would see light.

In other words, Bouilhet edited; in the original Latin definition of the word, he "put forth," "gave out," "brought to light," "uttered," and "produced." As such, he assumed a privileged editorial function in quelling Flaubert's fury to write, rewrite and suppress text. He would identify the specific places where words, sentences, and paragraphs failed and succeeded, blocking up the dam of self-loathing and hubris that propelled his writing forth from page to page and then to nothing: "Quelquefois, quand je me trouve vide, quand l'expression se refuse, quand après [avoir] griffonné de longues pages, je découvre n'avoir pas fait une phrase, je tombe sur mon divan et j'y reste hébété dans un marais intérieur d'ennui.—Je me hais, et je m'accuse de cette démente d'orgueil qui me fait haletter après la chimère" (2: 75). As a result, Flaubert no doubt idealized Bouilhet and relegated him to the role of his literary super-ego, as Yvan Leclerc has suggested (139). However, this was not his sole function: Flaubert represented Bouilhet's faculty of critical judgment as both compensating and surpassing his own, the proper functioning of which had been compromised by the all-consuming act of solitary composition. At the same time, Flaubert recognized that illumination emanated more easily and quickly from a non-personal source, and Bouilhet embodied this external critical gaze and agency exceptionally. Insight emerged even when Bouilhet was metaphorically blinded, his eyes closed tight: "Pour soi-même, on se trompe, mais pour les autres c'est plus facile. Hier par exemple, j'ai montré à B[ouilhet] le plan de 2 pages de mon bouquin, qui me satisfaisaient médiocrement sans que je puisse trouver quoi y reprendre. *En cinq minutes il m'a fait voir clair*. Et d'un bond, les yeux fermés, il a trouvé le défaut" (2: 269). Bouilhet's editorial insights allowed Flaubert the possibility of self-criticism without prejudiced error ("Pour soi-même, on se trompe". . . "En cinq minutes il m'a fait voir clair"). The detachment from his writing achieved by such encounters, in turn, allowed Flaubert to return to the solitary act of writing where he would rewrite his own text into words that were no longer his alone but were in the very process of becoming thus as he incorporated, appropriated, and transformed Bouilhet's suggestions.

Flaubert's composition of a conversation at the Vaubyessard Ball between the Marquis d'Andervilliers and the Counselor bears traces of this productive exchange. The entire chapter on the ball (part one, chapter eight) underwent heavy revisions up until the very moment of its publication in the *Revue de*

Paris. In particular, Flaubert fixated on rewriting conversations between the host, the Marquis, and his notable bourgeois guests, “le maire, le général, le président [du tribunal de commerce], plusieurs magistrats et des hommes d’affaires” (MS G 221, folio 103).¹² In one of the first versions of the novel MS G 221, folios 103–06, conversations between the male guests at the seven o’clock dinner party reproduced a series of vacuous exchanges about the miniscule nothings of the party, the table settings and the dinner food. For example, one dialogue reads thus:

— Le marquis rougit. l’invité (c’était un notaire) crut avoir touché juste, et ajouta:

“Le dîner vraiment était . . . d’une magnificence . . .”

Le marquis tourna sur ses talons.

— oui un joli dîner! continua l’autre, en s’adressant à son voisin qui répondit avec lenteur:

— Ce qui me plaît à moi dans un dîner, c’est le luxe.

ce sont les fortes pièces.

quel saumon [. . .]

— moi! J’aime beaucoup cette méthode de changer de couverts à tous les plats” dit le troisième monsieur

— Cela s’appelle le service anglais” fit le notaire. (MS G 221, folio 104)

Prior to the publication of *Madame Bovary* in the *Revue de Paris*, when Flaubert was reviewing the copyist’s manuscript, he suppressed not only this parody of bourgeois polite conversation but the entire conversation, which spans almost three manuscript pages. Dumesnil and Demorest have speculated on Flaubert’s motivations for this suppression: “Les conversations des bourgeois au bal de la Vaubyessard sont un tissu de clichés, d’idées reçues, le marquis, du reste, y ajoutant sa bonne part de banalité et de faux jugements politiques; toute cette longue scène est comme une première version de certains passages de *L’Éducation sentimentale* et surtout de *Bouvard et Pécuchet*” (498–99). And yet, as we know from his correspondence with Bouilhet, these conversations were anything but first drafts. Flaubert had self-consciously deliberated over the precise wording and structure of the conversation. In particular, one conversation between the Counselor and the Marquis was the subject of scrutiny between Flaubert and Bouilhet. The Counselor is speaking “little nothings” about the ball into the ears of the Marquis:

— “Vous m’excuserez, mr le marquis, mais je me dégourdis un peu les jambes; Pour nous autres gens de vie sédentaire, vous savez, c’est

un véritable plaisir que de se tenir debout. le spectacle de la fête est ici, d'un charmant coup d'œil. quelle plus ravissante perspective! On dirait une guirlande de fleurs, mr le marquis."

— toutes ne sont pas en bouton" reprit le mquis, à demi-voix. (MS G 221, folio 105)

The rest of the conversation is rather amusing, especially for the applause the Counselor commands with his invention of the turn of phrase: "Ah très joli! très joli! eh! eh! effectivement les femmes ne sont pas perpétuelles." The Marquis is delighted by this description of fading beauty: "Charmant [. . .] ne sont pas perpétuelles. Le mot est parfait. je le retiendrai" (MS G 221, folio 105).

Just as the Marquis looks to the Counselor for a poetic euphemism that is "perfect" and will suit future occasions, so too had Flaubert turned to Bouilhet when drafting this conversation in his search for the "mot juste" that the Marquis would utter. The precise problem that Flaubert confronted when writing was the choice between the metaphor of women as a "corbeille de fleurs" or as a "guirlande de fleurs." From the very first scenarios of the novel through the various drafts of MS G 223, 221 and 222, Flaubert oscillates between the two expressions. Bouilhet's letter (circa May–June 1852) to Flaubert concerning the wording and staging of this conversation has been understood, on the one hand, as evidence of Bouilhet's authoritative source of "influence" on Flaubert's writing. On the other hand, it has also been interpreted, most recently by Marie Durel, as a failed attempt on Bouilhet's part to influence Flaubert's prose (90–92). Even more provocatively, Durel concludes, it is not Flaubert who is influenced by Bouilhet but just the opposite. For example, when Bouilhet suggests the expression "guirlande de fleurs" instead of "corbeille de fleurs," he merely rewrites what Flaubert had already written in earlier drafts (Durel 91–92). Judging the product through Flaubert's process of rewriting the dialogue, Durel demythologizes Bouilhet's input in the redaction, saying that his suggestions fall on deaf ears. Shifting the focus from what Flaubert heard to how Bouilhet read and heard Flaubert, it becomes apparent, however, that the novelist's friend struggled to discover a critical and receptive editorial position that would allow Flaubert a series of choices from which he could select and about which he could deliberate. Bouilhet's influence is not over Flaubert's decision-making process; it relates, rather, to an enlargement of alternatives that allow subsequently for the possibility of self-conscious choice and deliberate decision. I quote at length Bouilhet's letter (Rouen [?] mercredi [May–June 1852]):

Posons en principe qu'il est plus facile de critiquer que de faire: c'est ce que je reconnais depuis hier au soir. J'ai gueulé contre le mot du marquis. Je peux ne pas avoir tort, mais je ne sais comment le

remplacer. Il m'est poussé dans la tête un amas de bêtises, à propos de cette maudite conversation, et j'ai été étonné moi-même de ce que la tête de ton ami pouvait contenir d'inepties.

Donc, ne change rien. Pourtant, voilà 2 idées, parmi vingt autres:

— C'est une véritable guirlande de roses!

— Avec *des tuteurs* (allusion aux hommes mûrs de la société).

— Et alors, retrouver un second mot pour le conseiller, en réponse à *tuteur* (pas forts!)

Autre exemple:

— C'est une véritable guirlande de fleurs, monsieur le marquis!

— Ah! Charmant! Vous êtes poète, monsieur le conseiller.

— Et j'ajoute que votre salon est une véritable serre-chaude!

— Coup-sur-coup! . . . *Bis in idem*!

— Avec les dames, monsieur le marquis, avec les dames!

. . . (petite intention cochono-galante)

(le *non bis in idem*, est, comme tu sais mieux que moi, un axiome de droit.)

Voilà, Mòssieu. Et je viens de rencontrer dans la rue de la Paix une charmante brune, des cheveux de jais, une taille, superbe! . . . Avec des moustaches (naturelles) un peu moins longues que les miennes.

Adieu, je te salue. (36)

Bouilhet's first reaction upon reading the banter is to distance himself from the role of author, recognizing the difference between the act of editorial criticism and that of writing: "Posons en principe qu'il est plus facile de critiquer que de faire: c'est ce que je reconnais depuis hier au soir." He firmly places himself, at this point, as a non-author, a critic who can only negate and not produce by bringing forth or editing authorial words. Granted, Bouilhet asserts this only "in principle" and insists on the facility of the critic's task but not on its ultimate impossibility. The "c'est ce que je reconnais depuis hier au soir" seems to indicate that Bouilhet first attempted both to criticize Flaubert's dialogue and to author another version; in other words, he attempted to assume the roles of editor and author. Faced with Flaubert's provisionally selected words—ones that he wants to but cannot perfect or replace—Bouilhet finds himself compromised by the effect of "cette maudite conversation." His editorial skills fail him: "Je ne peux pas avoir tort, mais je ne sais comment le remplacer." Furthermore, as the first sentence of Bouilhet's letter announces, the participants in the "gueuloir" have changed. Flaubert no longer reads his prose aloud to Bouilhet; Bouilhet reads Flaubert and "yells": "J'ai gueulé contre le mot du marquis." Surprised by the stultifying effect Flaubert's text produces, his head full of nonsense

and stupidities, Bouilhet can no longer think critically: “Il m’est poussé dans la tête un amas de bêtises, à propos de cette maudite conversation, et j’ai été étonné moi-même de ce que la tête de ton ami pouvait contenir d’inepties.” His editorial skills suffer; he suggests nothing—except to do nothing: “Donc, ne change rien.” This “donc,” however, yields to a “pourtant”: “Pourtant voilà 2 idées, parmi vingt autres.” His imagination activated, the literary effect of flawed prose and stupid conversation dissipated, Bouilhet intervenes by selecting two among at least twenty choices. Narrowing the field of possibilities, Flaubert’s reenergized reader rewrites the conversation that he would prefer to hear and to read.

The first suggestion overrides Flaubert’s initial instincts to depict women as a “corbeille de fleurs”: “—C’est une véritable guirlande de roses!—Avec des tuteurs (allusion aux hommes mûrs de la société)—Et alors, retrouver un second mot pour le conseiller, en réponse à tuteur (pas forts!).” Flaubert’s preliminary choices, as I have already mentioned, were between the former phrase and that of a wreath, a “guirlande de fleurs.” Bouilhet, however, does not reproduce Flaubert’s ambivalence. Both of his versions opt for the image of the garland. Further, this choice of imagery promotes the occasion to weave a more sustained and evocative imagining of women’s identities, collapsing them into either roses or flowers whose growth is redressed and tended by supportive stakes and by male protectors (the double meaning of “le tuteur”), growing in the “hothouse” (“la serre chaude”): that is, the Marquis’ chateau. The sexualizing gaze of the male is thus insinuated into the flow of conversation and the men’s controlled but lascivious appetite is transposed, even sublimated (not without jest), onto conversation politely disguised and coded in a poetic speech uttered *sotto voce* by the Marquis. In the first option, Bouilhet urges Flaubert to continue subtly elaborating his editorial suggestion of the theme of “les tuteurs.” At the same time, he abandons the rewriting process and commands Flaubert to reassume his rightful position as literary creator by rediscovering the Counselor’s suitable response: “—Et alors, retrouver un second mot pour le conseiller, en réponse à tuteur (pas forts!).”

In the second alternative, Bouilhet—as if reperforming the literary exercises wherein the two writers collaborated to invent specific scenes—writes out the full dialogue: “—C’est une véritable guirlande de fleurs, monsieur le marquis!—Ah! Charmant! Vous êtes poète, monsieur le conseiller.—Et j’ajoute que votre salon est une véritable serre-chaude!—Coup-sur-coup! . . . *Bis in idem!*—Avec les dames, monsieur le marquis, avec les dames!” Introducing a sarcastic self-referentiality into the text, “Vous êtes poète, monsieur le conseiller,” Bouilhet takes on the task of writing the conversation as well as of explaining his compositional intentions to

his legally savvy writing companion: “(Le *non bis in idem* est, comme tu sais mieux que moi, un axiome de droit).” Leaving Flaubert little space to maneuver the conversation, Bouilhet has arrested Flaubert’s indecision. When Flaubert returns to rewrite this conversation, he retains the expression “une guirlande de fleurs,” thus ending this once unsettled question. However, he deletes Bouilhet’s remaining suggestions, thereby erasing the obvious, direct signs of the poet’s interventions. Now acting as Bouilhet’s editor, Flaubert suppresses his text and in so doing he becomes the ultimate arbiter of his own prose. Flaubert’s final version of the conversation is as follows:

Quelle plus ravissante perspective! On dirait une guirlande de fleurs,
Mr le Marquis.

— “Toutes ne sont pas en bouton” reprit le Marquis, à demi-voix.

— Ah! très joli! Très joli! Eh! Eh! effectivement les femmes ne sont pas perpétuelles.

— charmant [. . .] ne sont pas perpétuelles. Le mot est parfait. Je le retiendrai.” (G222, folio 79)

Flaubert has found a precise way to describe the effect of a skilled and influential editor, especially for a writer like himself whose aesthetic energies were devoted to the capture of the one and only “mot juste”: “. . . le mot est parfait. Je le retiendrai.” The “I” who is the author retains and appropriates the word of the editor if and only if it is “perfect” and “perfectly” suited to the text. In the château’s ball scene and dialogue, Flaubert did not ultimately find that either he or Bouilhet had encountered the “perfect word.” The verbal transformation incited Flaubert to continue the search for just those words; he became his own editor, ultimately suppressing the entire passage, precisely because he had not found the perfect words. Despite the authors’ own revisions and Bouilhet’s attempt to influence Flaubert’s writing process, the ball conversation remains inept; it is “un amas de bêtises.”

Given that Flaubert refused Bouilhet’s suggestions, Bouilhet’s presence is nowhere visible in the text. This textual invisibility is the editorial effect par excellence. On the one hand, there is the obvious invisibility of Bouilhet’s editorial input. Flaubert, as already noted, deletes ultimately both his own text and Bouilhet’s editorial suggestions. On the other hand, there is a more metaphorical dimension to Bouilhet’s editorial engagement and to the work of an editor per se. Bouilhet walked the fine line of using the practice of “editing” to rewrite, if not to write, Flaubert’s text. Indeed, there is a small, but important, difference between how an author edits his own text—and therefore rewrites and continues to write it—and how an editor edits an author’s text—without overtly rewriting or even writing the text and therefore suppressing the author’s voice in favor of his or her own. An author,

in principle, need not heed an editor's interventions; the editor's words can and sometimes must remain invisible to the author. In his reworking of Flaubert's text, Bouilhet has revealed the most successful editorial techniques for retaining, and in fact constructing, this form of editorial invisibility: first, identification with authorial intentions insofar as they emerge immanently from the text as discursive, not psychological, effects; second, the suggestion of word and sequence changes that proceed along a metaphoric and metonymic axis rather than that of a linear and literal replacement and association of one word and/or sequence for another; and third, the selective deletion and addition of words, scenes, and even whole chapters that allow the text to be transformed such that the edited passages appear *après coup* to the author, as either illusorily integral or necessarily fragmentary.

When Flaubert finally began publishing *Madame Bovary* as a serial novel in the *Revue de Paris* (15 Oct. 1856), he dedicated it to Bouilhet. The inscription "À Louis Bouilhet"—the physical trace of Bouilhet's influence—was the return of a gift that Bouilhet had given Flaubert: the gift of reading and listening to him as he wrote, of being the privileged reader. Bouilhet's interventions gave Flaubert authorial choices; he provided a range of possible solutions to aesthetic problems. Choice opened up the possibility of an original voice. It is perhaps surprising to find this central function of the editor emerge not in the process of publication but in the process of writing. This process was neither, strictly speaking, a mode of influence nor collaboration; rather, the process revealed is that of editing, of allowing a writer to imagine himself an author. This role required relations of confidence and confidentiality; of dependency and interdependency; of balancing the constraints and freedoms of literary creation.

Flaubert realized his desire to write *Madame Bovary* through Bouilhet's commitment to a labored writing process that slowly evolved through multiple stages of rewriting. Identifying with Flaubert's aspirations to be a writer, Bouilhet paved the way for Flaubert himself to assume the role of editor; in turn, Flaubert independently authored his work in active response to Bouilhet's suggestions. To be an editor demanded that Bouilhet reawaken Flaubert's desire to write, especially at those times when the process appeared impossible and debilitating: "Dieu que ma *B[ovary]* m'embête! J'en arrive à la conviction qu'il est impossible d'écrire . . . Bouilhet prétend pourtant que mon plan est bon, mais moi je me sens quelquefois écrasé" (to Louise Colet, 10 April 1853; 2: 301). To free himself from the impossibility of writing, Flaubert needed an interlocutor who identified the problems not with the act of writing, but with the writing itself. Temporarily emancipated from the impossible task of writing a prose that would ever achieve perfect closure and completion, Flaubert transformed writing into an editorial process

of suppressing text. As Flaubert wrote to Bouilhet, upon delivering his manuscript to his “official” editor at the *Revue de Paris*, Maxime Du Camp: “J’ai enfin expédié hier à Du Camp le ms. de la *Bovary*, allégé de trente pages environ . . . Tu vois, vieux, si j’ai été héroïque. Le livre y a-t-il gagné?—Ce qu’il y a de sûr c’est que l’ensemble a maintenant plus de mouvement” (2: 613). To write was to edit text for the sake of the whole movement of the novel. Editing required the deletion of phrases that took days if not weeks to write, whose effects could only be seen in relation to the whole. As he wrote to Bouilhet on 6 June 1855:

Je vais bien lentement. Je me fous un mal de chien. Il m’arrive de supprimer, au bout de cinq ou six pages, des phrases qui m’ont demandé des journées entières. Il m’est impossible de voir l’effet d’aucune avant qu’elle ne soit finie, parachevée, limée. C’est une manière de travailler inepte, mais comment faire? . . . On n’arrive à faire de l’effet, que par la négation de l’exubérance. (2: 581)

Editing negated the exuberance of writing, but it was the sole condition of writing. For Flaubert, failure was always inscribed at the heart of writing *Madame Bovary*. Once writing became an act of being edited by another and by oneself, however, the possibility of aesthetic exuberance returned as a process—never to be completed—of rewriting both alone and in collaboration.

Department of Rhetoric
University of California, Berkeley

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful for the support of the University of California, Berkeley’s Committee on Research and The Mellon Research Grant. The Team Flaubert of Paris, France has provided me with invaluable access to many important documents and works. Danny Spina offered his editorial assistance at key moments of writing. Finally, I thank the anonymous readers of this article for their comments.

NOTES

1. All cited letters, unless otherwise noted, are from Flaubert’s *Correspondance*.
2. Raczymow regards Bouilhet as a replacement for Alfred le Poittevin upon his death: “Il enterre Le Poittevin, il ramène Bouilhet” (38). Raczymow describes the relationship between Bouilhet and Flaubert thus: “Bouilhet est un écrivain sans

gloire, moins célèbre même que Louise Colet, que Maxime Du Camp On dit de lui qu'il fut la "conscience critique" de Flaubert et ailleurs, sa "conscience littéraire." Or, chacun, de leur vivant, était la "conscience" de l'autre" (12). Raczymow further hypothesizes that Bouilhet's work with Flaubert took away from Bouilhet's own career. Flaubert owed Bouilhet his success: "Mais il est redevable à Bouilhet. Car c'est grâce à Monseigneur qu'il aura éclaté avec la *Bovary*, qu'il aura mené à bien tous ses livres, élaboré ses plans, corrigé ses bourdes, ses fautes, ses répétitions" (30).

3. See Bart 183–201; Unwin 207–13; Durel 77–98; Revel 28–30; Steegmuller 253–400; and LeClerc 139. De Man states that Bouilhet was not a very "judicious" editor (312n3). For a discussion of Bouilhet's collaboration on *L'Éducation sentimentale*, see Williams 186–203.

4. On the literary collaboration between Flaubert and Bouilhet see Raitt xlii–xliv; Unwin especially 213 and Williams 188–89. Flaubert imagined a literary collaboration in the "Préface" to Bouilhet's *Dernières chansons* that was modeled on the real collaboration between these intimate friends: "Flaubert invokes an imagined collaboration of two young writers who share their ideas and show each other 'les plans des ouvrages qu'ils voudraient écrire'. . . . In this thinly veiled account of their collaboration the extent of Flaubert's reliance upon Bouilhet, both literary and affective, is strongly stressed" (Williams 189). It is also important to note, as Cappello does, that Flaubert and Bouilhet wrote a number of texts together as coauthors—six to be exact (Bouilhet 7–10).

5. For an extended discussion of the notion of collaboration see Whidden 1–16, and in particular his distinction between collaboration *in praesentia* and collaboration *in absentia*. As I note above, the relationship resembled more that of editor and author than that of two or more writers co-authoring a text except in those instances cited in footnote 4 where they actually worked as co-authors in what Whidden would name a "collaboration *in praesentia*."

6. Collaboration, as Linda Karell has argued, is "something we already do, always, when we write 'alone' or with others and when we read others' writing" (4). See also Stillinger 3–24.

7. Bouilhet concretely assisted Flaubert by providing factual information. For example, when writing the second chapter of the second part of *Madame Bovary*, Bouilhet supplied the necessary scientific documentation for the pharmacist's description of the climate. See the letter of September–October 1852 (Cappello 37). Bart reproduces this letter as support for his argument on Bouilhet's crucial role in the process of literary creation (186).

8. On the two men's intimacy, influence and identifications see Dumesnil 126–27: "Il est impossible de concevoir plus étroite communion d'idées que celle de ces deux jeunes gens. Ils sont de même âge, à six mois près. Ils ont mêmes goûts, mêmes idées, s'exaltent aux mêmes admirations [. . .]. L'influence littéraire de Bouilhet sur

Flaubert fut énorme: la *Correspondance*, à chaque page, en fait foi. Celle de Flaubert sur Bouilhet ne fut past moindre. Ils furent l'un pour l'autre d'impitoyables censeurs, de terribles 'pions.' Ils mirent tout en commun, ambitions, joies et tristesses, et, pendant vingt-trois ans, vécurent sans jamais rien entreprendre, sans jamais rien écrire dont ils ne se fussent au préalable entretenus."

9. See Czyba 127–40; Beizer 59–83.

10. Williams succinctly describes the similarity of their literary ideals: "Having both originally been strongly influenced by Romanticism, they were both attracted by the ideas of Art for Art's Sake and developed a desire to make art more 'scientific.' [...] It could be said, therefore, that they occupied the same minority position within the 'champ littéraire' of their time and provided each other with much-needed mutual support. [...] The way in which each spoke of their collaboration suggests that it was fueled by the sublimation of a form of Romantic idealism that had not found an outlet in everyday life" (188–89).

11. Commenting on the after-effects of one of their reading sessions, Flaubert starkly notes his prior solitary state of incomprehension to Louise Colet on 26 Oct. 1852: "Je n'y comprenais presque plus rien moi-même, et plus la matière était tellement ingrate pour les effets de style!" (2: 173).

12. MS G 221, folio 103. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of the Flaubert manuscript refer to this version, and subsequent references will be indicated by their folio number.

WORKS CITED

Bart, Benjamin. "Louis Bouilhet, Flaubert's Accoucheur." *Symposium* (1963): 183–201.

Beizer, Janet. "Les lettres de Flaubert à Louise Colet, une physiologie du style." *L'Œuvre de l'œuvre: études sur la correspondance de Flaubert*. Ed. Raymonde Debray Genette and Jacques Neefs. Saint-Denis: PU de Vincennes, 1993. 59–83.

Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997.

Bouilhet, Louis. *Lettres à Gustave Flaubert*. Ed. Maria Luisa Cappello. Paris: CNRS Éditions, 1996.

Czyba, Luce. "Flaubert et 'La Muse' ou la Confrontation de deux mythologies incompatibles." *Écrire au XIX^e siècle*. Besançon: Annales littéraires de l'université de Franche-Comté, 1998. 127–40.

Du Camp, Maxime. *Souvenirs littéraires*. Vol. 1. Paris: Hachette, 1892.

Dumesnil, René. *Gustave Flaubert, l'homme et l'œuvre*. Paris: Nizet, 1967.

———, and Don Louis Demorest. *Bibliographie de Gustave Flaubert*. Paris: L. Giraud-Badin, 1937.

Durel, Marie. "L'Influence des amis de Flaubert sur la rédaction de *Madame Bovary*." *Bulletin des amis de Flaubert et de Maupassant* 4 (1996): 77–98.

- Flaubert, Gustave. *Correspondance*. 5 vols. Ed. Jean Bruneau. Paris: Gallimard, "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade," 1973–2007.
- . *Madame Bovary*. Ed. Paul De Man. New York: Norton, 1965.
- . *Madame Bovary*. Ed. Jacques Neefs. Paris: Librairie Générale, 1999.
- . *Madame Bovary*. Paris: Charpentier, 1873. Ed. Danielle Girard and Yvan Leclerc. <<http://www.bovary.fr>>.
- . *Pour Louis Bouilhet*. Ed. Alan Raitt. Exeter: U of Exeter P, 1994.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Use of Pleasure*. Vol. 2 of *The History of Sexuality*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.
- Karell, Linda K. *Writing Together, Writing Apart: Collaboration in Western American Literature*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1995.
- Leclerc, Yvan. *Crimes écrits: la littérature en procès au XIX^e siècle*. Paris: Plon, 1991.
- Raczymow, Henri. *Pauvre Bouilhet*. Paris: Gallimard, 1998.
- Revel, Bruno. "Bouilhet eut-il de l'influence sur Flaubert?" *Les amis de Flaubert* 4 (1953): 28–30.
- Stillinger, Jack. *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius*. New York: Oxford UP, 1991.
- Starkie, Enid. *Flaubert: The Making of a Master*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967.
- Steegmuller, Francis. *Flaubert and Madame Bovary*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1950.
- Unwin, Timothy. "Louis Bouilhet, Friend of Flaubert. A Case of Literary Conscience." *Australian Journal of French Studies* 30 (1993): 207–13.
- Whidden, Seth. "Introduction: On Collaboration." *Models of Collaboration in Nineteenth-Century French Literature: Several Authors, One Pen*. Ed. Seth Whidden. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009. 1–16.
- Williams, Tony. "Louis Bouilhet and the Genesis of *L'Éducation sentimentale*." *The Process of Art: Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Art Offered to Alan Raitt*. Ed. Michael Freeman et al. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998. 186–203.