Salaam!

Polybius

A

Histoires (Livre I)

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esp. pp 105 - 137

p. 123: (Nar'Havas): Hamilcar, en l'écoutant, fut tellement charmé du courage de sa démarche & de la droiture de son langage q non seulement il consentit à l'associer à ses opérations, mais encore qu'il s'engagea par serment à lui donner sa fille,(1) s'il restait fidèle à la cause de Carthage.

(1) Footnote: C'est ici le seul renseignement q nous possédions sur cette fille d'Hamilcar, dont le nom est inconnu & qui est devenue Salammbô, l'héroïne de Flaubert. — L'épisode de Nar'Havas est manifestement rapporté à la gloire d'Hamilcar, & tout le récit de la guerre des Mercenaires tend à faire l'apologie d'Hamilcar.

Salammbô a les inquiétudes de la vierge qui pressent on ne sait quel grand bonheur vers lequel elle se précipite de toute son âme et qu'elle n'atteindra jamais. Elle est avide d'aimer. Elle croit aimer la Déesse, comme la pauvre Emma Bovary croit aimer ses amants; mais elle n'aime que l'amour, c'est-à-dire, dans la pensée de Flaubert, l'ombre d'une ombre. Et lorsqu'elle s'imagine être au but de ses plus ardentes convoitises, lorsqu'elle touche enfin de ses mains ce voile de l'Immaculée, ce zaïmph, qu'elle a reconquis au prix de sa vie et de sa virginité, elle reste "mélancolique devant son rêve accompli", de même que la petite bourgeoise d'Yonville, dans toute la frénésie de la passion et dans tout l'adultère triomphant, s'avouait "ne rien sentir d'extraordinaire". Les mêmes phrases désabusées se répondent d'un roman à l'autre et elles traduisent la même aspiration immense et douloureuse, le même accablement devant l'impuissance du Désir.

Louis Bertrand, Gustave Flaubert, pg. 159.

Salammbô

back-to-front symmetry

a) (in 1st chap.) Mâtho first seen on top of palace at door, uplight p. 86

b) Salammbo ~~last seen~~ in last chapter seen similarly at top of temple at door uplight p. 308.

c) he first sees her by moonlight, she last sees him by sunlight.

d) the Barbarians & the dead lions in the 2nd chapter; the lions & the dead Barbarians in the 2nd last chapter.

Salammbô (1862)

Opening question to students: well, what don't you like about Salammbô?

1 characters: a) all impossible to identify with because i) beastly eg. Hamilcar, Narr'Havas
ii) miserable eg. Spendius, Mâtho
iii) remote & intangible eg. Salammbô

(F aware of this about Salammbô, in his long letter to Sainte-Beuve, dec. 1862, who wrote 3 articles on Salammbô, he says that la faute énorme of his novel is "1° Le piédestal est trop grand pour la statue. Or, comme on ne pèche jamais par le trop, mais par le pas assez, il aurait fallu cent pages de + relatives à Salammbô seulement..."

b) all anti-epic in stature, reduced delib.ly from what one might expect from a work of such scope & theme. i.e. gives a clue to the anti- ness of Salammbô

(a) anti-epic in intention despite theme & dimensions. epic usually about war & such epoch-shaking cataclysms in history of peoples, in early history of peoples; but not just about gigantic conflicts & war — an essential ingredient is that the conflict be between good & evil cf. Milton, Virgil, Tasso, Ariosto, Camoens, Chateaubriand's Les martyrs (1809), where the destiny of the peoples is important to reader. In Salammbô, no goodies, all equally unlikeable, whether Mâtho or Hamilcar, Hannon or Spendius.

ii) another aspect of epic is usually its historiographical intention — le pedigree [pédigri] to give a nation a sort of noble pedigree of myth, to tint in its background with heroism; i.e. patriotism is seen as a source of epic, poets in emerging nations are seen to write them, to ennoble the past of a whole nation & give it pride in some-thing to look back on. And the historical novel took over (and this aim from the epic did it not: to describe the becoming of a whole nation's destiny at crucial periods especially (Scotland in W. Scott is doubtless best example; but French hist. novels usually set in periods of doubtful destiny of France (16th Religious wars, Louis XIII with Fronde & Richelieu). Again F chooses an anti-historical novel period & theme, without importance for the west's destiny. A backwater insignificant on later development of Roman Empire: (this makes a criticism of F usually, that his historical novel makes no sense of later social or historical processes, in no way helps to explain France's (or Europe's present).

iii) no epic characters: no larger than life heroes; all ravaged & overwhelmed by magnitude of events; none seen in shaped events; events seem accidental; even Hamilcar Barca, most farsighted & determined in his initiatives is still a victim of circumstances more than a maker of history; F belittles these characters, by making them ordinary (Sôf is a princess, yet she behaves like a misled adolescent bourgeois in [illegible]); iv) no epic techniques of characterisation: no repetition of

attributes à la Homer, crafty Ulysses, or Virgil pious Aeneas, or à la Zola (cf. Germinal) > and ∴ no type characters, this repetition of attributes being irrevocably linked it seems to type characters. The type is he who embodies a certain quality, who is 2-dimensional, always showing same profile, illustrating the identical quality as last time he appeared whose function is to be representative of a superhuman force, of a trend in events, of an ideology, an embodiment ~~of a~~ of a moral quality cf. courage, guile, cowardice (Narr' Havas comes closest to it, perhaps? But then he is meagre).

F's pronouncement to Ste. Beuve on this is hermetic to my mind. Ste. Beuve had castigated him for not doing something like Les martyrs of Chateaubriand (prose epic in 24 Books, showing triumph of Christianity ~~of~~ over paganism).

"Or le système de Chateaubriand me semble diamétralement opposé au mien. Il partait d'un point de vue tout idéal; il rêvait des martyrs typiques. Moi, j'ai voulu fixer un mirage en appliquant à l'antiquité les procédés du roman moderne, & j'ai tâché d'être simple ..." (Correspondance, V 56).

Now, what does this mean? It suggests that there is a difference between inventing characters who are typiques & the procédés du roman moderne? And what is le r.m.? Does this mean Mme B? Surely not Balzac, who was somewhat given to the typical himself? Surely not Duranty & the realists, for F scorned them? The Goncourts, whom by now (1862) he has come to know & who did prefer to apply the techniques of historians to novel-writing, (& who had been historians)? But if this is his meaning, then why insert the unhistorical figment of the fille d'Hamilcar who is pivotal, crucial, to the action (without her, no motivation on Matho, no gaimph to turn the tide of campaign by dramatic appearance at right moment), in a way that is fundamental to the book, and thus makes fiction of what did historically happen?

2 Salammbô herself. What is the story of Salammbô?

"Quant à mon héroïne, je ne la défends pas. Elle ressemble selon vous à "une Elvire sentimentale [i.e. Lamartinian], à Velléda, à Mme. Bovary. Mais non! Velléda est active, intelligente, Mme. Bovary est agitée par des passions multiples: Salammbô, au contraire, demeure clouée par l'idée fixe. C'est une manique, une espèce de Sainte Thérèse..." (Corr. V, 57-58).

But, despite this, Salammbô *is* like Emma in a very important respect: she has been fed a diet of idealised, disembodied half-truths (from Schahabarim (religious & not sentimental) & suffers from a similar ignorance of experience, & yearns for real knowledge (for a transfiguring coherence through holiness (=sex) which she does not discover, only disillusions her (to begin with). She confuses love sex & god (Taanit for her) in Matho/Moloch, & does not see clearly into her experience, blinkered by a misfit of theory & mysticism, until it is too late. She is rapt, spellbound, by fictitious view of the world which is destroyed by reality. She has been given a false view of sex as something holy, as untouchable as the manteau de Tanit which falls on her as Matho frees her (her father's disapproval of her broken chain must surely help to confound her sense of potent evil eye kind of magic in sex); and she discovers simply that it is not true. To the outsider, she dies par avoir touché au manteau de Tanit, the prophecy fulfilled; for herself, she dies of despair & disillusion & horror & shock at what has become of the man she now realises she loves. Irony of F.

So the novel has a 2-component structure: a) the major theme of the conflict between the embattled Carthaginians & their rebellious Barbarian army; & b) the personal destiny of Salammbô's sentimental-cum-religious development. Two components woven closely together, culminating especially in the

climactic scene in the tent where she at last finds out what the truth of the mystery is that has been kept from her, or at least veiled by imagination & taboo for so long, and the tide of the war irrevocably turns against the Barbares; and also in final scene as the last Barbarian is killed by Carthaginian savagery just as she is killed by it too.

In this secondary story of Salammbô's disillusionment with the over-inflated theoretical view of life's mystery meaning through ether discovery of an unexpected reality in sexual love, one can see another echo, however pas. of Emma Bovary, who also seeks for some ethereal transcending ineffable transfiguring fulfillment through love, and fails to find it. (What she does find is similar to what Salammbô finds (though in Sal. it is merely limited at) the less idealized but more tangible rewards of sensuality & healthy physiology. Both discover love to be not ideal, not mysterious, not any transcendental fulfillment for ever and ever, not a life-transforming experience, not a coup de foudre, not a mystical revelation, but a physical revelation, a transforming experience of another sort. Emma finds in this discovery a source of dissatisfaction & further frustration of her metaphysical yearning; it is suggested that for Salammbô the revelation of the body & the demystification of love could have been a much more rewarding experience, if only circumstances had been different & she had been able to pursue her self-discovery with Mâtho. Both Emma & Salammbô go through a process of desmanticization, of demythicization, of demystification of their view of love. There can be no doubt that one of the themes of both books (& of l'Educ. sent.) is, in that form, an attack on the romantic aggrandisement of love into the grand transfiguring passion. Flaubert is at pains in both books to demonstrate the pernicousness of this idealized view of love. Both books are in a sense anti-love-stories, as is l'Educ. Sent.

A word on the caution required of the reader of Salammbô. In this novel as in Mme B, F still uses the style indirect libre & the point-of-view presentation which enables him to stand detached from his characters. This is not always understood by readers. Perhaps modern readers are more aware of this than F's contemps. but certainly learned readers chastised him for appearing to ~~say~~ assent things which he was merely reporting as someone's opinion: cf. most famous example: des escarboucles formées par l'urine de lynx — this is presented in the text just as a bald statement, & it could appear that F believed it himself. But this is again his way of immediately putting into contact the reader's mind & experience of the story & the mind of the character whose point of view F is thus articulating (& from whose conception) it may seem like stating the obvious to us, ~~to say~~ that this is not F's belief about the origin of carbuncle-stones, but certainly he was taken to task by erudite contemps. for believing it. Similarly, one sees this point of view presentation in many other places cf. the very last sentence

Ainsi mourut la fille d'Hamilcar pour avoir touché au manteau de Tanit.

It reads as though this is F's own statement of his belief that this taboo-breaking was the real cause of her death whereas it is the immediate presentation, without authorial explanation, of a mis-conception among the populace of witnesses of Carthage & Mat'Hawa's.

Or the first appearance of Salammbô in Chap I at the feast

son grand manteau ~~noir~~ de pourpre sombre, taillé dans une étoffe inconnue — (p. 36)

i.e. not a statement of F's ignorance, or to mystify readers (as some did think) but a presentation of viewpoint of witnesses who, Barbarians, have no idea of what material this robe is made of. Similarly, at top of same page the ~~MOS~~ described as

couverte de vêtements noirs, though here the

is seen to be in dark royal purple ~ unstated again, point of view presentation – at a distance, against the blazing lights of the open door behind her, her clothes seem black; closer up the cloak is seen to be of a different colour (cf. Emma B's eyes described differently in different moods, lightings & situations)

Or again the Barbarians & the holy fish of Salammbô's family p. 35 the fish "descendaient de ces lettres primordiales qui avaient fait éclore l'œuf mystique où se cachait la Déesse"

statement of belief, probably erroneous, held by witnesses, i.e. the Barca family & the Barbarians. Another subtler example at top of same p. 35 soldiers discover the cage of glass balls with vague reddish lights vibrating inside them – what could these be? Well, in the next sentence we read les soldats éclairaient avec des torches, tout en trébuchant sur la pente du terrain profondément labouré...

the red palpitating glow inside the glass balls caused obviously be the reflections of the soldiers' torches. And the soldiers don't know this perhaps because they have never seen glass before? Certainly this subtlety of suggestion is quite typical of Flaubert, showing how much one must keep one's wits about one when reading him. See also Salammbô's view of surroundings pp 287-288 while Narr' Havas is speaking – her gaze wanders over the gardens & we have this unstated wandering of her gaze set between "Nous irons ensemble sur la terrasse" "Nous irons ne point plus" – suggests her distraction, not listening to him still melancholic no doubt about the Zaimph & Matho episode – though nothing of this is said or suggested, cf. in L'Education sentimentale early scene where Frédéric sits in steamer's dining-room, leaves dropping on the Arnoux' conversation, we must guess this is what he does from the context & information we acquire later about the Arnoux pp 6-7 in Classiques Garnier.

Another question: why does Salammbô die?

Another: vivid graphic quality of certain scenes: her bed hanging in the room; the chariot in the distance, the lions crucified; the last mercenary being devoured; the head severed & floating into bath. – les éléphants qui écrasent les prisonniers

Romantisme comme obsession de la violence

Flaubert, G: SALAMMBÔ (Oeuvres complètes, Conard) 1936

Story:

The war between Carthage and its revolting army of barbarian Mercenaries, in the 3rd century BC. XV chapters. The soldiers' discontents at the city's ingratitude are fomented mainly by a freed Greek slave, Spendius, who becomes the Iago to an infatuated colossus, Mâthô, who is besotted by the glamour and exotic of Hamilcar's daughter, Salammbô, who is also desired by Numidian chief, Narr'Havas, who is plotting to become an important man by alliance with Hamilcar through the dolly. Salammbô herself seems besotted with the Moon goddess, Tanit, and her imagination, virgin, prowls about the fascination of the fertility symbolism of the goddess, forbidden attraction. Mercenaries lay siege to city, are routed by gross Hannon's elephants, which are in turn routed by Spendius's pigs. Spendius smuggles Mâthô into Carthage by night, through the water in the aqueduct, to steal the holy zaïmph, the shimmering robe of Tanit, hanging in the temple, which it is death to even see. Mâthô wears it and is drawn to Salammbô's bedside, to fascinate and repel her. He walks out of the city through hostile mobs, protected by the taboo he is wearing. Hamilcar Barca returns to Carthage, takes command of army against Barbarians, believing his daughter to have defiled herself with their leader(ie Mâthô, to whom the zaïmph gives authority), and after seeing what they had done to his grounds and belongings at their initial festin. He sneaks up on them at the river Macar, inflicts great losses on them, then leads them a dance about the landscape, before getting himself trapped in a mountain cone by the conjugated armies of Spendius, Mâthô, Autharite le Gaulois and the versatile Narr'Havas. Salammbô is persuaded by eunuch-priest of Tanit, Schahabarim, that she must go to the Mercenaries' camp and get back the spell-binding zaïmph, leaving it to her imagination how she must prevail on Mâthô to give it to her; Schahabarim is partly motivated here by sexual jealousy of her beauty and his impotence to defile it, as well as by his waning faith in his goddess. Salammbô is scented and prepared for her visit, does a sensual naked throe or two with her sacred python (Freud, you should have been living at that hour! the sexual symbols abound in that scene!), and is smuggled out of Carthage and away to the mountain-top camp where her Dad is trapped by Mâthô. Mâthô crawls and gasps for her, she falls on his lion-skin bed, he takes her by the heels and snaps her fine golden chain for her, her virginity-symbol and kisses her all over etc. Narr'Havas turns his coat, Hamilcar surprise-attacks, Mâthô dashes to war and Salammbô makes off with the zaïmph, catalysing at the right moment the Carthaginian victory. The demoralised Barbarians regroup, chase Hamilcar back to Carthage, besiege the city for good and all this time, Spendius cuts the aqueduct, hunger and demoralization spreads in Carthage. Massive sacrifices to Moloch bring relief (Hamilcar hides young Hannibal, substituting a slave's child). Hamilcar chases the remnants of the Mercenaries into the hills and leads them into another trap: le défilé de la Hache, where they starve, die and eat one another. Salammbô fianced to Narr'Havas. Siege of Tunis, Hamilcar crucifies Spendius and other leaders, Mâthô crucifies Hannon and other leaders. Last battle and slaughter of survivors. Narr'Havas takes Mâthô alive. Last scene is Salammbô's wedding, star turn being the municipal murder in the streets, by everyone who can hit him, of Mâthô. He makes it to Salammbô's seat and dies, staring at her. She drinks to a long happy life with Narr — and thereupon dies, too, pour avoir touché au manteau de Tanit.

Comment:

I first read Salammbô in 1955 (16 years ago!). Before rereading it this time, all I could remember of it was a phrase or two, the tent scene where Mâthô fucks her and little else. I even had the impression that Mathô was a Negro! I read it in France, without a dictionary or an encyclopaedia to help me with all the abstruse vocabulary and allusions. Mâthô is not a Negro, but a

But Stekel says he is a Negro (see his Fetishistic p.62)

North African, from roughly present-day Algeria. Also, I am amazed that I remembered nothing of the striking tableaux that the book is full of: gorgeous evocations of barbarism, savagery in technicolor epithets, memorable details the colour of blood and brass (the crucified lions, the chopped heads floating in the bath, the sound of chests crunching under elephants' feet, Salammbô's red bed hanging from the ceiling and gently swinging as she sleeps couchée sur des plumes noires, her hair). There is a welter of romanticism in it, in its high colours, its exotic setting, its fascination with sang, volupté, mort, with the grotesque and outlandish, the monstrous, the orgasmic climaxes of battles and sacrifice, the local colour, the enigmatic damned hero and heroine who sin, glory in it and are destroyed for it.

That the Flaubert who wrote Mme B, who was to write l'Education should be capable of this monstrosity, takes my breath away. As though Jean-Luc Godard really wanted to be Cecil B. De Mille all along. And all my training tempts me to find the common theme, the same man and the same fascinations, the exorcism of similar emotional conflicts in the different books, as though there weer something incomprehensible about the same man doing such apparently dissimilar books. It has been said that both Salammbô and Emma B are women infatuated with impossible dreams. But this, though possibly valid, suggests that the two characters are on the same level of conception. Yet the one is ironic, satiric and critical, though not without sympathy; and the other is devoid of these three qualities. It would be pointless to construct a critical model of an antique heroine; Salammbô does not set out to be a critique of any aspect of modern life, unless it be of the novel itself. And here may well be a connecting thread: just as Mme B and l'Education are anti-novels in the sense that they are demonstrations of a critique of fiction, so it may be that Salammbô is an implicit critique of another form of fiction, the Romantic historical novel, and of the comforting fictions that it gave its readers instead of the disturbing effects of the robuster unsweetened Flaubert.

Yet, immediately one wants to consider the book as a historical novel, one must face the question: well, if it was meant as a demonstration of how to compile one, with strict faithfulness to historical accuracy, no anachronisms, no prettyfying, no modernising of sensibilities, no tripatouillages with the basic documents, then why on earth did Flaubert have to invent the fictitious* character of Salammbô herself? And why give her such a catalytic role to play in the destiny of Carthage, Hamilcar and Mâthô? If a main concern WAS to reconstruct, to show how history happens, to demonstrate that certain causes will lead to certain effects, then why depart from Polybius's(?) account, which makes no mention of her*? Does this invention of Salammbô itself not invalidate the historical-reconstruction-with-total-fidelity-to-the-sources theory? And what price Flaubert's vaunted respect for the document, if he plays about in this fashion with the data of his sources and inspiration? And why bother inventing her, is another large question? She takes up so little space in the plot (as has been said: she takes up a disproportionate amount of room in the title), albeit granted that her role is an important one, helping to account for Mâthô's motives as it does, and her intervention is crucial (though not necessary) in the mountain-top battle, dramatically not structurally crucial that is. But given that, she has still little to do in the novel; she never becomes anything like a main character; her motives and feelings are those of a superficial extra (not that the psychology of any of them is convincing). Given this unimportance of her to the history that the book recounts and to the book's structure, why did he bother? Would the novel be any the poorer for her disappearance? The few gorgeous descriptions which she appears to be the justfication for need not disappear; he could easily have reincorporated them as the setting for a mundane scene of debauchery with a passing harlot; they need not have gone to waste, if that was why he felt impelled to include a character who could justify them. She also serves to dramatise the religious theme, such as it is, the fertility symbolism which he may have felt he needed to include as a necessary part of the culture he was recreating, and felt that it was impossible to merely burden readers with unpersonified erudition.

* actually, it does, see p.A my notes

Be that as it may, even if his reasons were of that incidental sort, they would still not justify his giving her name to the novel and thus directing the reader's mind to her significance as a clue to the sense of the whole book. Not that he could have given any ~~other~~ other character's name as a title, for there is not one of them who comes to life, nor who could any less misleadingly than Salammbô be used to represent the book's subject in a title. His original working-title was, of course, Carthage. Certes, the book may well have changed in the writing of it so much that he felt he must alter the title, but this brings us up againagainst the same question: why HER name? Since the subject of the book is much more Carthage, the ancient, savage, animistic, incomprehensible civilisation that he tries to resurrect and make us understand.

Nor will it do to think that Flaubert was attracted to Carthage as a possibility to show human barbarity juxtaposed with human beauty. For, there was a subject made to measure for that at hand: the Crimean War offered as much scope for demonstration of debauchery, savagery, sadness, pessimism, the thin skin of glory covering horrors, distant landscapes, etc. Sure, he had never been there, and had not been fascinated by the land and its people as in the Near East and North Africa during his younger days. But it won't do to say that it was only in an ancient setting that he could have found the theme that he chose for Salammbô. Unless, of course, that theme has little to do with gore and barbarity and has to do with making comprehensible a society and way of being alive very different from the censored, alienated, industrializing, faithless 19th century. Come to think of it, a novel on the Crimea would have been probably unthinkable in the climate of French patriotism during the first decade of the Second Empire. (& censorship.

The book is a glorious failure, I feel. It dissatisfies in too many ways: it has no credible, flesh-and-blood characters, none who affect you or touch you with their recognisable joys and griefs. They are two-dimensional and verge on the type, except that they lack even the solidity of the type. Nor does the book satisfy as an explanation of the force of things, of why the war had to happen, or why it had to develop the way it did, being flawed at its heart by the fictitious catalyst whose name it bears as its title. Nor does it satisfy dramatically: too many chapters are static tableaux, pretexts for displays of esoteric erudition about warfare in the days of battering-rams, religions in the days of human sacrifice, wealth in the days before banking. Possibly it might satisfy as an epic, for its scope, its bejewelled prose, its horrific and awesome events, its larger than life pretensions, its superhuman preoccupations. And Salammbô doesn't fail only because she is a fictitious addition put in for more or less spurious reasons, but also, and more importantly, as a fictional realization: why does she die? What do we know of her, her desires and feelings, her impulses or sadness? What effect does her knowing by Mthôhave upon her? How does she change, if she changes at all? And, if she does change, why does the reader not learn more of this change than he does? Sure, the romantic heroine bit, with the enigmatic bit etc, but this is just too bloody enigmatic. She dies on that last page to round the book off with yet another coup de théâtre, not because she has to. Admittedly, Flaubert prepares the death with some care, saying that when she goes to get the zaïmph she has a premonition of her death, but from then on we learn next to nothing about her reactions to what happens to her: the rapprochement with her Dad, the engagement to Narr'Havas, the capture of Mâthô, the torture of Mâthô. She seems to be a dispassionate observer, nothing more, of all these events, which yet concern her, or one imagines must concern her deeply. She seems absent, abstracted, absorbed by what is going on in herself. But what that actually is, is it strongly enough suggested? Presumably she is waiting to die for having known sex (sex being identified for her with the taboo of seeing the goddess's veil) and wants Mâthô to die too for his blasphemy and heresy in stealing the veil; yet, if sex is confused in her mind with the goddess, presumably too Mâthô is confused with something divine and she is fascinated with him, so that his death triggers off her own. Sounds vague and mixed up. Suffice it to say that the whole meaning of that later development of Salammbô's destiny escapes me, or is weak if I grasp it properly. Presumably, the last things that we are told about Salammbô mean this: she didn't really want Mâthô to die, she now realises the meaning of what she feels (= love?) and therefore she dies of grief and love and horror at what happens to him???