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William Olmsted, *The Censorship Effect: Baudelaire, Flaubert, and the Formation of French Modernism*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. viii + 226 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$65.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-1902-3863-6.

Review by Joseph Acquisto, University of Vermont.

William Olmsted's study is an engaging, important and insightful contribution to scholarship on the 1857 obscenity trials connected to the publication of two landmarks of French literary modernism, *Les Fleurs du Mal* and *Madame Bovary*. Olmsted's goal is to link politics and aesthetics by showing how consciousness of the risk of censorship on the part of Baudelaire and Flaubert shaped their approach to writing and contributed significantly to the establishment of key features of aesthetic modernism: "the stylistic features celebrated as hallmarks of modernism --Flaubert's free indirect discourse, Baudelaire's multiple poetic personae--are in fact the products of intense struggle with the institution of censorship" (p. 2). The argument thus challenges a canonical view that sees the modernist author beginning with Baudelaire and Flaubert's generation as increasingly autonomous and depersonalized.

It is to self-censorship that we owe not just the form these two works of literature came to take but also the fact that such "self-protective" (p. 2) moves allowed the works to escape "wholesale condemnation (and possible destruction)" (p. 2). Olmsted foregrounds the role of censorship in the process of revision itself, a practice which, for Flaubert in particular, was painstaking and thorough. When Flaubert makes authorial decisions about how to present, for instance, the scene where Emma and Leon take a carriage ride and (presumably) have sexual relations, he implicates the reader in the game of reading either with or against the censors: "Reading with the censors we could claim the text presents a string of all too easily decodable euphemisms; reading against the censors we could assert that Flaubert conceded too much to the proprieties and wish that he had, like recent filmmakers, let us have a better glimpse into the steamy carriage" (p. 5). Neither reading fully accounts for the impact of the scene, and here the technique of authorial indeterminacy, for which Flaubert is well known, can be seen, Olmsted argues, as Flaubert's "at once colluding with and thumbing his nose at the censors" (p. 5).

While awareness of potential censorship affects the author during the writing process, it also plays a role in determining new kinds of reading practices as well as in shaping the reception history of these two works and of modernism in general. "Before censorship," Olmsted claims, "there was no deep reading" (p. 176). In that way, potential and actual readers join authors, critics, and state officials in what Olmsted calls in chapter one the "waltz of censorship" (p. 14). The first chapter sets the tone for what will be Olmsted's approach throughout, namely, a rich and well documented argument that draws on the history of the trials themselves (in which we are reminded, for instance, that whereas the First Empire "had favored trial by jury" [p. 35], the tribunal of three judges before which Baudelaire and Flaubert appeared "stigmatized them insofar as this venue was customarily reserved for petty criminals and sexual deviants" [p. 35]), close readings of the texts, and ample samplings of reaction in the press within a convincing theoretical framework that puts genetic criticism at the service of the larger argument about the genesis of the formal innovations of literary modernism.

Chapter two focuses on Flaubert and explores some of the differences between Flaubert's sketches and the final published version of *Madame Bovary*, demonstrating numerous crude or shocking direct references to sexual acts in the sketches eliminated by Flaubert in an act of self-censorship. Olmsted studies the ways in which these omissions alter readers' perceptions of the characters, in one instance allowing Emma to retain "a few scraps of dignity" in the scene where she begs her former lover Rodolphe for money, an act which the novel calls "prostitution." In the absence of a once-planned actual sexual encounter, "the literal meaning has vanished, replaced by its judgmental and moralizing term from the sociolect" (p. 61). The chapter also includes analysis of illustrations of the famous carriage scene, which only serve to highlight the ambiguity of the author's representation of the scene. Given that the rocking movement of the carriage is what incites readers to imagine a sex scene, how would illustrators portray this without suggesting either far more or far less than the text itself suggests? Since the interior of the carriage would, presumably, be dark during the trip, there is literally nothing to see, and illustrators merely push readers further down the paths I have already described of having to imagine what the text itself never quite says and thus becoming complicit with the author by being led to accept "an invitation to read in what amounted in 1857 to a criminal way" (p. 73).

Chapter three shifts the focus back to Baudelaire in order to demonstrate that revisions to some of the poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, especially "Le Reniement de saint Pierre," served not only to respond to the risk of censorship but also to negotiate Baudelaire's shifting political and social views: "Baudelaire's struggles with the form and content" of the collection stem certainly from censorship, but also from "a profoundly revised identity, that of a newly converted reactionary coming to grips with his younger, politically radical, and religiously skeptical self" (p. 99). The prefatory note that Baudelaire affixed to "Le Reniement" when it appeared in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, and which had not accompanied the poem in its initial publication in 1852, establishes his distance from the politically progressive overtones of revolution in the poem and encourages the reader to consider the poem as a dramatic monologue rather than the personal expression of the poet. In effect, according to Olmsted, the prefatory note prejudices the poem as "a destroyer of Euro-Christian culture" before any censor could (p. 93).

Chapter four focuses on the ambiguity of what Olmsted, following Roland Barthes, terms the "pornogram" (p. 101), arguing that the deliberate lack of clarity involved in euphemism actually enables obscene reading. In that sense, Olmsted is surprisingly able to argue for Baudelaire's "fundamental agreement with the censors on the nature of literary obscenity" (p. 12). Given the ambiguity of much of Baudelaire's purportedly obscene language, the poet is able to shift responsibility, as the note about the syphilitic interpretation appended to "A celle qui est trop gaie" does, "from the text to the reader, in effect criminalizing the very act of reading" (p. 119). To adopt such a stance removes to some extent the censors' claim to the moral high ground and their power. Olmsted views Baudelaire's plans to expand *Les Fleurs du Mal* by adding more poems than were censored in the first edition as testament to Baudelaire's confidence that the collection would continue to shock its readers and his sense of "the futility of the proceedings against him, as though he felt relatively safe from accusations directed at the obscene word or phrase" (p. 121). Such security is possible only because his prosecutor Ernest Pinard indicted the poems primarily at the lexical level.

In the final chapter, Olmsted further develops the idea that Baudelaire's revisions react not only to the risk of censorship but also to his increasingly reactionary and, particularly, misogynist views, resulting in a "profound discounting of women as beings whose sexuality engages the Poet's" (p. 148). Censorship in this case becomes Baudelaire's censoring of women's sexuality. In the new "Tableaux parisiens" section of the 1861 edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, "antifeminine or even misogynist tones" darken "Baudelaire's earlier handling of the lyrical themes of love and abjection" (p. 160). Olmsted explores these social concerns in tandem with esthetic considerations of the putative "unity" of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, which Baudelaire repeatedly affirmed but which seems called into question by authorial decisions related to the censorship of the 1857 edition. These decisions included a reordering of the sections of the work

that would significantly alter the implied “plot” of the collection, as well as Baudelaire’s authorization of the foreign publication of *Les Epaves*, the condemned poems whose extraction from the volume would, he had claimed, violate the unity of the work.

Each chapter of the book is bolstered by close readings of poems from *Les Fleurs du Mal* (including, most extensively, “Les Femmes damnées,” “Les Petites vieilles,” and “Le Reniement de saint Pierre”) and key passages of *Madame Bovary*, in service of Olmsted’s convincing demonstration that “formal innovation and cultural subversion are linked inextricably by the censorship effect” (p. 179). Along the way, there is much of interest for those with a wide range of critical approaches to literature, from genetic criticism and formalism to feminism, visual studies, and cultural studies. It is that strong approach to integrating what are sometimes unnecessarily separate domains of literary studies that is one of Olmsted’s chief contributions to the ongoing study of the moment of origin of French literary modernism.

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