

LA TENTATION DE SAINT ANTOINE: GNOSTIC HERESIES IN THE FOURTH AND
NINETEENTH CENTURIES

by

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A Thesis
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements of the Degree
of
Master of Arts
Foreign Languages

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Date: April 9, 2014 Spring Semester 2014
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at George Mason University

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to the descendants of St. Anthony, the Coptic Christians of Egypt, who are the original Egyptians.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the wisdom, direction, patience and good nature of my three thesis committee advisors: Dr. Paula Ruth Gilbert, Dr. Christy Pichichero and Dr. Janine Ricouart. Also, I would like to thank Professor Mary Orr of the University of Exeter in England, upon whose research and direction I heavily relied in formulating my topic.

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ABSTRACT

LA TENTATION DE SAINT ANTOINE: GNOSTIC HERESIES IN THE FOURTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES

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George Mason University, 2014

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This study places Gustave Flaubert's play, *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, within his larger *œuvre*. It presents an overview of fourth-century Alexandria, Egypt, of St. Anthony, which is the historical setting for the play. Next, it explores the nineteenth-century Paris and France of Gustave Flaubert. Finally, it attempts to identify nineteenth-century French cults or religious movements, which may have prompted Flaubert to have chosen to feature fourth-century gnostic heretics so prominently in this play.

Introduction

My goal in this project is to identify and discuss selected Early Church Gnostic heresies which Flaubert includes in *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, compare them with any cults or religious groups existing in the nineteenth century of Flaubert's France, and establish, where possible, cases in which these nineteenth-century groups may have influenced Flaubert's choices in heresies he included in his play. My goal in doing this is to identify nineteenth-century beliefs which existed in France during or around Flaubert's lifetime which are identical, similar, or may have links to those gnostic heresies, which Flaubert chose to include in *La Tentation*. Finally, I will try as much as possible to establish links between Flaubert and the nineteenth-century beliefs, suggesting that perhaps, he was influenced in choosing at least some of the heresies to include in the play by having encountered similar beliefs during his own life.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I define some frequently used terminology. Also, I felt it necessary before delving into the above-mentioned comparison to first better understand Flaubert's works as a whole so as to better appreciate the place of *La Tentation de saint Antoine* among them. This will be the second section. The third chapter explores a select number of the heresies appearing in the play and existing before

or during the life of St. Anthony i.e., during the period of the Desert Fathers, during which Anthony lived¹.

The next chapter deals with the nineteenth century of Flaubert and contains a background for some of the beliefs which existed outside of the Catholic Church during this time. Finally, I will discuss similarities that I have been able to establish among beliefs of the two centuries with a focus on linking Flaubert to their nineteenth-century appearances as an impetus to his having included their fourth-century original appearances in the play.

On the penultimate page of her critical text, Professor Mary Orr clearly states the direction in which I am taking my research. Specifically, she writes that, “there is more work to be done on the many parallels between the multifarious Gnostic heresies and sects of fourth-century AD Alexandria and the many new cults and religious doctrines circulating outside the official Churches in nineteenth-century France” (Orr, *Flaubert’s Tentation* 252).

Though *La Tentation* itself is fictional literature, it is based on historic figures as well as beliefs that actually existed and, in some cases, reappear under different names throughout history. I shall be identifying trends, religious beliefs—including cults, the occult and heresies—and institutions or practices (for lack of a better word), such as sexual mores or prostitution, for example, that Flaubert may have encountered in nineteenth-century France and which may have influenced his choice of content in the

¹ The study of these Early Church Fathers is called Patristics. They are formative church theologians, who lived between the end of the New Testament Era and the middle of the Fifth Century AD.

section on the heretics in his play, *La Tentation de saint Antoine*.

After setting forth a fuller understanding of the importance of *La Tentation de saint Antoine* within Flaubert's *œuvre*, and exploring the religious currents prevalent in both fourth-century Alexandria as well as in nineteenth-century Paris and France, I will identify possible nineteenth-century personalities and religious movements which may have influenced Flaubert in his decision to feature the fourth-century gnostic heretics so prominently in this work, which he termed "l'œuvre de toute sa vie."

Terminology

Following is an assortment of key terms and their definitions used in this thesis. The term, “Extra-Catholic,” shall refer to any belief system, such as a cult, a philosophy or an organization that exists outside the main Catholic Church of the nineteenth century and whose beliefs conflict with those espoused by the Catholic Church. The word “orthodox,” with a lower-case “o,” refers to the main-line Christian denominations, which existed during a given time frame and geographic context. Thus, in the case of the play, the word “orthodox,” refers to the main Christian church from the first through the fourth centuries AD. The term includes both the Eastern Orthodox and Catholic Churches, as they had not yet split. Alternatively, a common delineating factor between orthodox Christianity and the heresies in *La Tentation* was the acceptance or rejection of the Nicene Creed—the doctrine of the Trinity and the dual natures of Christ. Acceptance of these doctrines constituted orthodoxy, whereas their rejection was considered heretical. In this way, “non-orthodox” is a synonym for heresy. In the context of nineteenth-century France, orthodox refers to the Catholic, and, in some cases, the Lutheran and other Protestant Churches. Similarly, “proto-orthodox” refers to members of what was to become the orthodox or main-line church before it was officially established i.e.—before the First Council of Nicaea, which took place in 325 AD.

I shall be using Harold O.J. Brown's characterization of the word, "heresy." In his study, *Heresies*, Brown explains many of the heresies prevalent during the early Christian Church and cites their later reappearances, which generally occur under different names, or in slightly modified versions. Brown works with a definition of heresy that is limited in the sense that it includes doctrines relating directly to God and Christ (Christology). To be considered heretical, these doctrines must "diverge so sharply from traditional Christianity that they split the church" (Brown 61-62).

I shall also be defining "Gnosticism" or "Gnostic" according to the criteria put forth by R.B. Leal, who writes that "the basis of Gnosticism is belief in a superior knowledge that sets one apart from other individuals and in most cases despises matter as evil" (336). Brown also makes some important generalizations of characteristics associated with most Gnostic groups. I am including these broader trends here in order to apply them to beliefs/philosophies/groups existing in Flaubert's France. Brown explains that Gnosticism is, at its core, an effort to fulfill the desire of understanding the "mystery of being" (Brown 39). Thus, Gnosticism claims to be better than orthodox Christianity because it offers secret information or wisdom as the key to understanding this important question. Furthermore, Brown explains that, for Gnostics, knowledge of this secret wisdom is restricted only to the spiritual elite, considered to be of the highest, most spiritual class (Brown 39).

Beliefs/Trends, Fictional Similarities, and Inspirations and Influences

Gustave Flaubert considered *La Tentation de saint Antoine* to be his masterpiece and his life's work. However, it is difficult to classify this play among his greater *œuvre*. Professor Mary Orr describes the utter "unclassifiability" of *La Tentation de saint Antoine* in her book entitled *Flaubert's Tentation: Remapping Nineteenth-Century French Histories of Religion and Science* (2008). She writes that the play refuses to be classified within any one critical framework, just as the work itself remains an outlier within Flaubert's entire *œuvre* (8). In addition, Aimée Israel-Pelletier asserts that "Flaubert's aim...is to demoralize and frustrate his readers in their efforts to make sense of the work" (5).

Breughel's portrait in Genoa's Balbi Museum, depicting the temptations of Saint Anthony, is credited as being Flaubert's primary inspiration for the work. Flaubert writes in May 1845 to Alfred Le Poittevin concerning his initial inspiration for writing the play: "J'ai vu un tableau de Breughel représentant *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, qui m'a fait penser à arranger pour le théâtre *La Tentation de saint Antoine*" (*Correspondance I* : 230). A mystery play on the life of Saint Anthony attended by Flaubert as a child in Rouen at the Foire Saint Romain is, likewise, credited as being a less immediate and more humble inspiration for his *La Tentation* (Starkie 213-14). Anne Green also cites the theater as a significant influence on Flaubert's interest in historical fiction. This is

evidenced in his correspondence between ages eleven and fourteen to his friend Ernest Chevalier in which he often makes reference to plays he was attending at a local Rouen theater or reading, writing or performing himself (“History and its Representation in Flaubert’s Work” 85).

Green further argues that Flaubert’s body of work is imbued with a concern for the past and making sense of it (“History and its Representation in Flaubert’s Work” 85). She divides Flaubert’s *œuvre* into two distinct categories: those set in his contemporary France (*Madame Bovary*, *L’Education sentimentale*, *Un Coeur simple*, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*), and the ones set in antiquity (most of his early writings, *Salammbô*, *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, *La Légende de saint Julien l’Hospitalier*, *Hérodias*). It appears that *Trois Contes*, *Smarh*, *Salammbô*, *Madame Bovary* and *Bouvard et Pécuchet* are all considered to have ties to *La Tentation* (“History and its Representation in Flaubert’s Work” 85).

Smarh, in particular, is a very early example of Flaubert’s interest in themes and characters, such as the Devil, which ultimately appear in *La Tentation*. Timothy Unwin argues that the 1863 mystery play, *Smarh*, is clearly a forerunner of the *Tentation* (38). Raitt asserts that the genre of *La Tentation* resembles a continuation of the mystery-type work he developed in *La Danse des morts* and *Smarh* (200). Additionally, Unwin points out that the more one becomes familiar with Flaubert’s early years, the more apparent it becomes that he was conducting a “dress rehearsal” for later works. In his early works—notably *La Femme du monde* (1836) and *La Danse des morts* (1838)—Flaubert allegorizes sex and death, in this way demonstrating a technique he will use in all three

versions of *La Tentation* (38).

Jonathan Culler cites *Salammbô* as being “about the consequences of an attempt to understand the sacred and its relation to the secular...” (135). Laurence Porter characterizes *Salammbô* as an “historical novel [that] presents invented protagonists and some historically prominent secondary characters limited by fate, motivated by passion and living far away and long ago” (123). One can also see the same characteristic holding true in the case of *La Tentation*: the protagonists of Anthony, Hilarion and the heretics, though based on historic personalities, are fictional in their capacity as characters in the play. Also, the milieu of the play, Alexandria, Egypt, is “far away and long ago.” Flaubert writes in May 1857 to Jules Duplan on placing Saint Anthony among his other works: “*Carthage* sera d’ailleurs plus amusant, plus compréhensible et me donnera, j’espère, une autorité qui me permettra de me lâcher dans Saint Antoine” (*Correspondance* II : 721). Thus, Flaubert considered the composition of *Salammbô* as preparation for work on *La Tentation*. In this sense, *Salammbô* becomes a “working up to” or an “anticipation of” *La Tentation*.

Porter also notes some similarities between *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and *La Tentation de saint Antoine*. First, he describes *Bouvard et Pécuchet* as a characterization of more contemporary Saint Anthonies: “The anatomy, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, depicts modern Saint Anthonies to whom grace is lacking; their ordeal is temptation, not by the Seven Deadly Sins co-ordinated by the Devil, but by the pretensions of the branches of human knowledge” (123). The theme of knowledge appears in both works— in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, it is “the branches of human knowledge,” and in *La Tentation de saint Antoine*,

it is the theme shared by the Gnostics for whom exclusive, secret knowledge is their salvation. It is also significant to note that the main characters of each work—the “Anthonies--” are tempted by this knowledge. Porter continues, citing another similarity between these two works: that both Anthony and Bouvard and Pécuchet return to the task in which they were engaged previously, before having been distracted by the temptation (123). After recognizing the devil’s temptations, Saint Anthony ends his saga by returning to his prayers in the very last line of the play: “Antoine fait le signe de la croix et se remet en prières” (Flaubert 237); “Bouvard and Pécuchet conclude by resuming their copying” (Porter 123). In addition to Porter’s review of themes common to both works, Culler cites a theme in *Bouvard et Pécuchet* that also appears in *La Tentation*. Specifically, he focuses on the importance of knowledge in the former work: “*Bouvard et Pécuchet* displays the failure of an attempt to master the universe through the mediations of human knowledge” (136). This theme of knowledge is the entire basis upon which the Gnostics depicted in *La Tentation de saint Antoine* found their theology: they believe their salvation to be contained in a secret, exclusive knowledge. They unsuccessfully tempt Anthony with this knowledge. The lines from the play, which best exemplify this temptation with secret or privileged knowledge are the series of heretics who rattle off their Gnostic gospels and writings:

LES CERINTHIENS Voilà l’Évangile des Hébreux!

LES MARCIONETES L’Évangile du Seigneur!

LES MARCOSIENS L’Évangile d’Eve!

LES ENCRATITES L’Évangile de Thomas !

LES CAÏNITES L'Évangile de Judas !

BASILIDE Le traité de l'âme advenue !

MANÈS La prophétie de Barcouf ! (Flaubert 116-17)

In his correspondence, Flaubert alludes to the relationship between *Madame Bovary* and *La Tentation*. He considers *Madame Bovary* to be the “antipode,” or a point so diametrically opposed to another, that it is on the other side of the world, of *Saint Anthony*. Writing to Louise Colet in February 1852, Flaubert clearly states this thought: “Ce [Madame Bovary] sera diamétralement l’antipode de *saint Antoine*, mais je crois que le style en sera d’un art plus profond” (*Correspondance* II : 46). The characters of Madame Bovary and Saint Anthony are diametrically opposed. On the one hand, Madame Bovary responds to the temptations of adultery and suicide by engaging in them. Because of her selfish acts, she hurts everyone in her family. On the other hand, Saint Anthony resists his temptations, preferring instead to engage in prayer. Each character reaps what he/she sows: Emma Bovary the destruction and misery brought about through her selfish acts and Saint Anthony the preservation of truth through his resistance to temptation and his leading a saintly life as pillar of the church. Whereas Emma puts herself before everyone else, Anthony subordinates himself to the greater good of the church, which he supports through his monastic life.

Later on in a June 1852 letter to Louise Colet, Flaubert contrasts how he felt in writing each work. He feels at home writing *La Tentation*, whereas, in writing *Madame Bovary*, he feels out of place—as if he were a guest at a neighbor’s house:

Mais franchement *Bovary* m’ennuie. Cela tient au sujet et aux retranchements

perpétuels que je fais. Bon ou mauvais, ce livre aura été pour moi un tour de force prodigieux, tant le style, la composition, les personnages et l'*effet sensible* sont loin de ma manière naturelle. Dans *Saint Antoine*, j'étais chez moi. Ici, je suis chez le voisin. Aussi, je n'y trouve aucune commodité. (*Correspondance II* : 103-04)

In addition, Flaubert writes another letter to Louise Colet in April 1853 in which he compares the relative level of effort he had to expend in writing each work:

Saint Antoine ne m'a pas demandé le quart de la tension d'esprit que la *Bovary* me cause. C'était un déversoir; je n'ai eu que plaisir à écrire, et les dix-huit mois que j'ai passés à en écrire les 500 pages ont été les plus profondément voluptueux de toute ma vie. Juge donc, il faut que j'entre à toute minute dans des *peaux* qui me sont antipathiques. Voilà six mois que je fais de l'amour platonique, et en ce moment je m'exalte catholiquement au son des cloches, et j'ai envie d'aller en confesse! (*Correspondance II* : 297)

Within Flaubert's *œuvre*, it was much easier for him to write about Saint Anthony, because he identified with him and, thus, enjoyed the work more than was the case with *Madame Bovary*. This point is reinforced by the fact that, despite having spent so much more time on *La Tentation* relative to *Madame Bovary*, and facing such negative and even brutal criticism for the play, he still considered it to have been the easier of the two works to write.

Jeanne Bem, after a detailed analysis, places *La Tentation de saint Antoine* at the apex of a collection of Flaubertian texts she terms "*œuvres mystiques*":

Les œuvres mystiques forment, avec *La Tentation*, un PARADIGME de textes, et qui a commencé à se constituer très tôt, puisque le premier texte conservé de ce type, *Voyage en enfer*, a été écrit par Flaubert à l'âge de treize ans:

- *Voyage en enfer*, 1er semestre 1835, ...
- *La Femme du monde*, 2 juin 1836, ... (quatorze ans)
- *Rêve d'enfer*, 21 mars 1837, ... (quinze ans)
- *Agonies*, avril 1838, ... (seize ans)
- *La Danse des morts*, mai 1838, ... (seize ans)
- *Smarh, vieux mystère*, avril 1839, ... (dix-sept ans). (107-8)

The common trait among these works is that, “Dieu est le personnage—central décentré, caché...,” and *La Tentation de saint Antoine* forms the apex of this grouping of “œuvres mystiques” (Bem 107). Other commonalities shared among these works are “de se dérouler en quelque sorte *sous le regard de Dieu* et de mettre en scène un ou plusieurs des personnages suivants: le Christ, le Diable, la Mort, des morts, un hermite [emphasis in original]” (Bem 107). Certainly, even a quick glance at the above list makes evident Flaubert’s progression towards themes found in *La Tentation*. This interest appears to have begun early in life.

Bem emphasizes, however, that the fundamental difference between *La Tentation* and the rest of Flaubert’s works written in his youth is that the play about Saint Anthony was meant to be published, and therefore, was a testament to his mettle or courage as a writer: “Ce qui sépare, fondamentalement, *la Tentation* des œuvres de jeunesse, c’est que *la Tentation* a été écrite pour être publiée. Elle est cette œuvre témoin, cette pierre de

touche qui doit indiquer infailliblement à Flaubert s'il est ou non un écrivain" (Bem 123).

Flaubert worked on the play throughout his life, composing three distinct versions of this work. Mary Orr succinctly summarizes the fate of each of the three versions of the play, which "preoccupied [Flaubert] at crucial periods of his life and writing" and which he considered to have been "l'œuvre de toute ma vie" (Orr "East or West?" 79). The first version of the play, completed in 1848 and having been resoundingly rejected by his peers, prompted Flaubert's voyage to Egypt and the Middle East. Evidence of this criticism is found in Flaubert's correspondence of the time. In a March 1850 letter, Flaubert writes to Louis Bouilhet about his reaction to the criticism of both Bouilhet and Du Camp:

Je t'avertis très sérieusement que mon intelligence a beaucoup baissé. Cela m'inquiète, ce n'est pas une plaisanterie, je me sens très vide, très aplati, très stérile. Qu'est-ce que je vais faire une fois rentré au gîte, publierai-je? qu'écrirai-je? et même écrirai-je? l'histoire de *saint Antoine* m'a porté un coup grave, je ne le cache pas. (*Correspondance I* : 601)

Flaubert did not publish the 1856-57 reworking of the play. The final version, completed in 1872 following his mother's death and published in April 1874, was "deemed incomprehensible" by his peers (Orr "East or West?" 79).

Next, Orr divides previous scholarship of the play into two groups, both of which seek to redeem *La Tentation* from its aberrant reputation, thus reaffirming Flaubert as a canonical writer, or at least, redeeming this one work. The first group sets its focus on "the erudition, psychological drama and intertextuality of the work" or portrays Anthony

as a “cultural icon” based on the saint’s image in painting by Breughel, Grünewald or Callot, combined with the Romantic tradition of Goethe’s *Faust* – that of the artist’s encounter and sparring with the devil (Orr “East or West?” 79). This school of thought transforms the theme of Flaubert as the “hermit of Croisset” from a religious calling to an aesthetic one, through secularization (Orr “East or West?” 79). In other words, while St. Anthony heeds his own calling to remove himself from the world, society or even the Church of which he was a member so as to more effectively maintain a spiritual clarity and purity untainted by Church politics (which were not differentiated from secular politics of the time), so too, Flaubert heeds his own calling to be the “hermit of Croisset.” He maintains solitude in writing so as to achieve that aesthetic purity, which replaces for Flaubert the ascetic purity so important to St. Anthony (Orr “East or West?” 79). The second school of thought professes Flaubert’s religious redemption through the text of *La Tentation*, which is heavily theological in content. The work serves to offset the profane content of novels such as *Madame Bovary*, *Salammbô* or *L’Education sentimentale*. Based on this sacred-profane juxtaposition, these critics hold that Flaubert’s writing of *La Tentation* is proof of at least his Catholicism if not his own religious faith. Orr cites Henri Guillemin as belonging to this second school (Orr “East or West?” 79). Orr dismisses both of these schools of thought as being too binary to account for the “ambiguities of the text” (Orr “East or West?” 79).

Flaubert’s works persistently reveal an ongoing tension between a serious detached, academic treatment of historical fact and an emotional, subjective engagement with it (Unwin 86). Unwin also points out that Flaubert’s willingness to look beyond

historical accuracy enabled him to recognize, “that creative ‘misunderstandings’ of the past could open up new literary possibilities” (88). This treatment of history in his works is not only restricted to *La Tentation*. It applies to both of his treatments of Christian saints in *La Tentation* and *La Légende de saint Julien l’Hospitalier*. In both cases, imagination becomes a dream, which becomes a nightmare (Unwin 17).

Unwin cites Flaubert’s subjective approach to history as a significant reason for the attraction the play proved to be during the course of his life: “The research Bouilhet thought would produce a scholarly reconstruction of antiquity instead serves as a springboard that frees Flaubert’s own imagination, like Antoine’s, to soar far beyond the ancient Egyptian desert. Such was the seductive approach to history that Flaubert returned to *La Tentation* throughout his life” (Unwin 90).

This creative use of or poetic license with history better served Flaubert’s needs as a fiction writer. In the specific case of *La Tentation*, we see that instead of presenting the reader with an historical analysis, Flaubert passes history through the prism of Anthony’s imagination or distorts it as if reflected through the concave mirror of the Devil (Unwin 89). In the play we read that the Devil tells Saint Anthony that reality should not be trusted (Unwin 89). Speaking to Anthony, the Devil tempts him to doubt, saying that illusion is the only reality:

Mais les choses ne t’arrivent que par l’intermédiaire de ton esprit. Tel qu’un miroir concave il déforme les objets; -- et tout moyen te manque pour en vérifier l’exactitude. Jamais tu ne connaîtras l’univers dans sa pleine étendue; par conséquent tu ne peux pas te faire une idée de sa cause,.... La Forme est peut-être

une erreur de tes sens, la Substance une imagination de ta pensée. A moins que le monde étant un flux perpétuel des choses, l'apparence au contraire ne soit tout ce qu'il y a de plus vrai, l'illusion la seule réalité. (Flaubert 214-15)

Through the character of the Devil, we see the main character of the play, Anthony, a significant pillar of the Early and later Christian Church, being told that the only reality is illusion, or, perhaps, that the only belief is deception. Going a step further to apply this line of reasoning to the episode of the heresies in the play, we see that Flaubert, by placing his documentation of historical heresies and religions into the context of Anthony's hallucinations, enables himself to treat history from a more subjective point of view (Unwin 89).

Enid Starkie argues that Flaubert did not seem as concerned with historical accuracy during the writing of the first two versions of the play. Conversely, for the final version, he tried to be as true as possible to the historical period (Starkie 224). A more practical side to Flaubert's subjective approach to history in *La Tentation* is pointed out by Starkie, who cites two instances in which Flaubert is not historically correct and one, a significant one, in which he respects history. First, she cites some minor anachronisms in the work. One of these is the scene in which Anthony holds a large, bound volume of the lives of the Apostles. There was no paper in fourth-century Alexandria, and the real Anthony was illiterate (Starkie 225). Another case Starkie discusses is linked to the question of Anthony's learnedness. She writes, "[M]any critics have considered that Flaubert made Anthony too learned for his time. Flaubert's long-time friend, travel companion and initial publisher of *Madame Bovary*, Maxime Du Camp certainly thought

so, and said that the hermit could not possibly have known all the heresies with which Hilarion tempts him” (225). Finally, she cites a significant section (in the sense of its location and not necessarily its length) of the play as maintaining an historical accuracy: “The real Anthony, in the fourth century, although suffering much from temptations, was able in the end to overcome them and bow down before God in prayer. That is why Flaubert had to end the work as he did, with the vision of Christ” (227). In my view, whether or not Anthony, the real Anthony, was literate is immaterial. For example, the scene in which he is holding a book does not necessarily suggest literacy. Instead, this book can be considered symbolic of Anthony as a supporter of Christian orthodoxy or the canonical church *of which he was a member*. This type of symbolism is used frequently in the play and in St. Anthony’s Coptic Orthodox Church. Just as the canonical gospel book is often depicted in religious art generally, so, too, the lives of the Apostles would suggest that its holder embraces and professes the teachings of the Church as expressed by the Apostles. Thus, I would place Starkie in one of the schools of thought that Orr criticized for being too binary. In this context of the play’s setting, I think symbolism is a much better framework for explaining things than literal understanding of the images described by Flaubert.

Neiland argues that Flaubert’s use of crowds in both the 1849 and 1874 versions of *La Tentation* is not coincidental. These portrayals of “menacing and infinite numbers” spring from an era of “great political upheaval and of mass movement” (92). Neiland further argues that since Flaubert wrote the first version of the play between May 24, 1848, and September 12, 1849, he was likely influenced in his portrayal of the crowds of

heretics inundating Saint Anthony by the masses of revolutionaries he witnessed during his February 1848 visit to Paris (Neiland 92-3): “[Anthony] encounters ‘real’ figures, such as Apollonius, Tertullian and Saint Hilarion who lived centuries apart, and the seething crowds that surround him owe as much to Flaubert’s experience of the revolutionary crowds of 1848 as they do to the early Christian period” (Green, “History and its representation in Flaubert’s work” 89-90). During his February 1848 visit to Paris, Flaubert was experiencing the Parisian crowds revolting against the constitutional monarchy of Louis Philippe (Traugott 638). The year 1848 witnessed revolutions throughout Europe. In the case of France, the February revolution of 1848 brought an end to the Orleans Monarchy and ushered in the Second Republic, to which Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte was elected president later that year. In 1851, he accomplished a *coup d’état* by dissolving the National Assembly and declaring himself Emperor Napoleon III. This established the Second French Empire, which existed until 1871 (Forbes 121-43). Neiland asserts that Flaubert’s opinion of humanity generally and of the masses in particular were deeply affected by the events of 1870-1871 (99)². During this time, Flaubert’s correspondence, especially to George Sand, contains a profound “despair and hatred” of the human events unfolding around him at the time (Neiland 99). He repeatedly refers to the “barbarity and savagery” which marked this period (Neiland 99). To George Sand in August of 1870, Flaubert writes, “l’humanité se voit à cru dans ces moments” (*Correspondance* IV : 218). In reaction to these events, Flaubert expresses a deep-seated fear of self-government (Neiland 99): “La masse, le nombre est *toujours*

² Here, I am referring to the Franco-Prussian War, the siege of Paris and the Paris Commune.

idiot. Je n'ai pas beaucoup de convictions. Mais j'ai celle-là fortement" (*Correspondance* IV : 384). Neiland asserts that the events of 1848 and 1870-1871 witnessed and read about by Flaubert served to fortify his earlier dim views of humanity (99): "L'humanité n'offre rien de nouveau. Son irrémédiable misère m'a emplie d'amertume, dès ma jeunesse. Aussi, maintenant, n'ai-je aucune désillusion" (*Correspondance* IV : 375).

Continuing on the theme of crowds, Mary Neiland points out the way in which Flaubert uses the portrayal of crowds in *La Tentation* to discredit them. She argues that Flaubert's portrayal of the crowd in his writing must be examined through the lens of events occurring around him in nineteenth-century France. She writes, that a "growing population, urbanization and industrialization brought radical social and economic change to nineteenth-century France. The advent of universal [male] suffrage and the steady expansion of the education system gave renewed force to public opinion, and 'mass' action played a decisive role in the repeated upheavals" (Neiland 89). Writing specifically about Flaubert's composition of the 1849 version of *La Tentation*, Neiland alludes to a common opinion among critics that Flaubert's portrayal of the heretics together in a crowd is a purposeful literary tool: "to describe the heretics and the gods in terms of a teeming mass is to destroy them, since the presentation of multiple beliefs and multiple truths undermines any notion of belief or of truth..." (Neiland 93). Green argues that the revolution of 1848 affected Flaubert more than any other political event in his lifetime. Despite his silence about it in his correspondence of the time, it colored his political views, which included "hatred of any form of constriction, any political dogma which attempts to force society into its mould" (*Flaubert and the Historical Novel* 74).

For example, Flaubert bristled at rules, which he believed fostered or enforced mediocrity: “La médiocrité chérit la Règle ; moi je la hais. Je me sens contre elle et contre toute restriction, corporation, caste, hiérarchie, niveau, troupeau, une exécution qui m’emplit l’âme...” (*Correspondance* III : 337). He wrote this letter to Louise Colet in September 1853. Despite the initial silence in Flaubert’s correspondence regarding these events, Green points out a consistency throughout Flaubert’s lifetime:

As one constantly finds in Flaubert’s writing, however, experiences and impressions had to be allowed to sink in and mature for a long time in his mind before he could come to terms with them sufficiently to transpose them into his work: only when distanced from them in time, he said, could he recreate experiences imaginatively, ideally—and only then did he feel he could handle them in safety. (*Flaubert and the Historical Novel* 75)

Green states that Flaubert expressed his reaction to the revolution of 1848 in one significant chapter of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. He gave it a much fuller treatment in *L’Education sentimentale*, and in *Salammbô* (*Flaubert and the Historical Novel* 75).

Further, Neiland elaborates on the effects of the events of 1870-71 on Flaubert’s work on the final draft of the play. She points out that Flaubert’s use of the literary structure of a play for this work makes the techniques described above particularly effective. The heretics as characters have no depth, for their lines are rote “formula, chant and repetition” (Neiland 102). This type of expression belies a lack of any “individual thought or conviction” among the heretics (Neiland 102). Thus, in *La Tentation*, Flaubert “clearly presents the crowd as a highly inarticulate entity. As we

have seen, for the most part it produces only incoherent sound and when it ventures into language stammers and stutters or repeats lifeless slogans” (Neiland 109). Just as Green argues in the cases of several other works, this portrayal of the mass of heretics is likely influenced by what Flaubert witnessed and read about during the political events in France during his writing of the play in its various versions. The above-mentioned excerpts from Flaubert’s correspondence support this assertion. Also, in an August 1870 letter to George Sand, Flaubert refers to the human nature, which he finds wanting: “Voilà donc *l’homme naturel!* Faites des theories maintenant!” (*Correspondance* IV : 218).

Despite Flaubert’s unflattering portrayal of the masses of heretics in the play, in reading the work, one is struck by the passion of each heretic in professing his own belief. However, as Bem points out, Flaubert’s effective use of the literary form of “enchainment” especially in the episode of the heresies makes the whole text appear as a constant metamorphosis.

Dans *la Tentation*, toujours, une apparition chasse l’autre. L’enchaînement que l’on observe ici (et qui est semblable à cent autres) autorise à voir ce texte comme *une métamorphose généralisée*. Chaque apparition peut être conçue comme la métamorphose de la précédente. C’est évident dans la séquence des hérésies, où chaque discours est comme une nouvelle mouture du discours qu’on vient d’entendre — Flaubert ayant soigneusement brouillé tous les repères. Mais il suffit d’observer les transitions, tout spécialement dans la troisième version. Ce ne sont que “fondus-enchaînés” effets visuels comme le cinéma peut en produire:

“Alors les deux ombres dessinées derrière lui par les bras de la croix se projettent en avant. Elles font comme deux grandes cornes...” (Bem 135)

By minimizing the amount of time each heretic enjoys in the spotlight through limiting the number of words and depth of monologue, Flaubert effectively minimizes or detracts from the enthusiasm of each heretic.

Neiland identifies three literary techniques used by Flaubert in his portrayal of the heretics to discredit them and their beliefs and, ultimately, to destroy them. First, Flaubert “identifies the individual, only to depersonalize and fragment it and finally absorb it within the mass” (100). Second, he emphasizes the “inarticulacy of the masses” vis-à-vis the heretics as portrayed in the play’s 1874 version (Neiland 101). Neiland points out that, “[t]he very essence of each of the groups of heretics lies in language through which they define their beliefs and therefore Flaubert’s subversion of their linguistic competence utterly destroys them” (101). Flaubert uses words such as “clameur” and “fureurs” to describe the inane noise created by the crowd of heretics (Neiland 102): “Alors, dans toute la basilique, c’est un redoublement de fureurs.... Cependant, --du fond même de la clameur, une chanson s’élève avec des éclats de rire, où le nom de Jésus revient” (Flaubert 113). Finally, Neiland points out that Flaubert “undermines [the heretics’] use of language itself” (102). Playing one heretic off another as they vie for Anthony’s attention in a series of short lines, Flaubert effectively uses this juxtaposition to allow this series of rapidly stated beliefs to “ironically destroy each other” (Neiland 102). The resulting confusion generated by the frenzy of heretics blurting out short lines in rapid fire encompasses all involved in the ridiculous scenario

(Neiland 102): “LES CERINTHIENS Voilà l’Evangile des Hébreux! LES MARCIONETES L’Evangile du Seigneur! LES MARCOSIENS L’Evangile d’Eve!” (Flaubert 116).

Within this nineteenth-century French context, Flaubert expresses a profound interest in “religions as systems of thought alongside other philosophies and moral frameworks” (Orr “East or West?” 80). This is not a pantheistic view, but rather, a highly researched view of comparative religions. Orr argues that Flaubert viewed Anthony at his original source in Egypt, not as distorted through the lens of Western Medieval and Renaissance understandings of him. While he was familiar with western sources on Anthony, I concur with Orr’s assertion here, as Flaubert took the trouble to travel to Alexandria, Egypt, in order to learn more about the area where Anthony himself lived instead of relying solely on a view of Anthony processed through, for example, French writings on him which would have contained a western and Catholic viewpoint. (While Flaubert, no doubt, did learn about the original setting of St. Anthony’s life, one of his main goals in travelling to Egypt was to visit the harems.) This shows a cultural openness and interest by Flaubert in an “orientalist slant on theologies” (Orr “East or West?” 80). I think that what Orr means here by using the words “orientalist” and “oriental” is not the exotic oriental other that is to be marveled at and viewed as a curiosity. Instead, she uses these words within the context of patristics. St. Anthony is among the early church fathers. Also, he was a member of the Coptic Orthodox Church, which is considered to belong to the larger group of Oriental Orthodox Churches. In non-Protestant Christianity, there are three main branches: The Western or Roman Catholic

Church, the Eastern Orthodox Churches and the Oriental Orthodox Churches. This latter group includes the Coptic (Egyptian), Ethiopian, Syrian, Indian and Armenian Churches. Used in this manner, the term “Oriental” is not derogatory. It refers to these Oriental Orthodox Churches, which are geographically even further to the East than the Eastern Orthodox Churches. It also denotes some theological differences, which resulted in a fifth-century schism over the nature(s) of Christ, which remains to this day.

Thus, following this logic, Flaubert’s portrayal of Anthony was informed more by the theology that Anthony was part of in the fourth-century Alexandria, Egypt, than by western theological ideas. Flaubert created a character of St. Anthony based upon his actual milieu— the Oriental Church (the Coptic Church of Egypt) rather than that of the Roman Catholic Church. The very fact that Anthony is tempted by a crowd of Gnostic heretics supports this assertion. Gnosticism originated in the Orient, predating Christianity and, in some cases, even influencing it. For example, the heresy of Arianism influenced the early Church to finally codify its beliefs in the form of the Nicene Creed in order to combat that very heresy. Arius appears prominently in the play among the other heretics tempting St. Anthony, who, himself, recites the Nicene Creed following a subsequent temptation. What Orr means here is that, by portraying St. Anthony in an historically realistic context, Flaubert is challenging the “Eurocentric” views on church history, doctrine and comparative religions. He accomplishes this by showing that the debates of nineteenth-century France had already taken place in the Egypt of St. Anthony, which predated even the existence of Western Christianity, based in Rome (Orr *East and West?* 80).

Fourth Century

Gnostics: Key Beliefs

In the *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, Flaubert includes a broad assortment of historical figures who originated various heresies in the early Christian church of Alexandria, Egypt. By and large, he focuses on the group of heretics considered to be “Gnostic.” Gnosticism or Gnosis is another way for saying “knowledge.” Though each heretic and heresy was unique and had its own teachings, Gnosticism as a whole exhibits several hallmarks. Generally, the Gnostic heretics were preoccupied with the attainment and preservation of secret knowledge, which they believed was available only to a select few who were deemed worthy of it. It was this secret knowledge upon which the Gnostics predicated their salvation. From a Gnostic point of view, knowledge, or Gnosis saves; grace does not.

Morris touches on a key difference between the Gnostic heresies and orthodox Christianity over the matter of salvation. He writes that for the Gnostics, “Ignorance enslaves, Knowledge frees. When the gospel writer quotes Jesus as saying ‘The truth shall make you free,’ he was flirting with a fundamental Gnostic tenant. For orthodox Christians, Jesus freed humanity from sin and suffering and death. For Gnostics, Jesus came into this world to free them from ignorance” (Morris 21). Thus, the Gnostics are not interested in salvation from sin, but they seek to be set free from “unconsciousness

and ignorance, or incomprehension” (Morris 22). This fundamental tenet of Gnosticism makes it exclusive and not inclusive. In every case it is a faith based on an elitism of the elect few, who are elected because they are worthy of being elected (Morris 18, 21). And, because they are elected to receive the secret gnosis, they will be saved. Thus, they are not saved by God, but save themselves through the attainment of gnosis.

Because the Gnostics’ theology emphasizes salvation through knowledge rather than through behavior, they had no reason to be concerned with chastity or ethics. Indeed, the early Church account of the Gnostics accuses them of having a low regard for ethics and little concern for morality (Morris 24). The Gnostics were described as “prodigal profligates who engaged in various and sundry acts of indecency and immoral sexual behavior, including murder and cannibalism” (Morris 24). Irenaeus of Lyons, for example, characterizes the Valentinians as

fearlessly practic[ing] everything that is forbidden....They eat with indifference food offered to idols...are the first to arrive at any festival party that takes place in honor of the heathen idols...[S]ome secretly seduce women....Others again who initially made an impressive pretense of living with (women) as with sisters were convicted in course of time, when the “sister” became pregnant by the “brother”.
(As quoted in Morris 24)

The Valentinians were one of the main branches of Gnosticism. They were followers of Valentinus, a second-century AD heretic, who is considered to have been “one of the most brilliant and most influential” among the Gnostics (Smith 39). Born and raised in the second century in the Nile Delta, he is credited with having Christianized preexisting

Gnostic teachings, removing elements which clashed with Christian theology, thus bringing these beliefs closer in line with Christianity (Smith 40). While the Valentinians accepted the writings which were becoming part of the Christian canon, they interpreted these writing esoterically in true Gnostic fashion (Smith 41-2). Thus, like most Gnostics, they participated in mainstream Christian life, but formed their own elite cliques within the wider Christian community.

The Carpocratians were followers of Carpocrates. They were gnostic heretics and were well known for their “antinomian” acts, or Gnostic libertine acts, which were committed deliberately because they were contrary to “contemporary mores or morality” (Smith 92). On the Carpocratians, the Early Church Father, Irenaeus of Lyons, writes that they

“are so abandoned in their recklessness that they claim to have in their power and be able to practice anything whatsoever that is ungodly (irreligious) and impious...according to their scriptures they maintain that their souls should have every enjoyment of life, so that when they depart they are deficient in nothing”.

(As quoted in Morris 24-25)

Similarly, the Church Father, Epiphanius, wrote about the Carpocratians, that,

The plain fact is that these people perform everything unspeakable and unlawful, which is not right to mention, and every kind of homosexual act and carnal intercourse with women, with every member of the body.... They perform all magic, sorcery and idolatry, and say that this is the discharge of their debts in the body, so that they will not be charged with anything further or required to do

anything else—and thus the soul will not be turned back after its departure, and come for another incarnation and embodiment (Epiphanius 102).

The Carpocratians were an early Gnostic sect, which existed from the first half of the second century AD. Irenaeus of Lyons and Epiphanius were both Early Church Fathers—this group of revered theologians who preached and wrote between the end of the New Testament era and the fourth or eighth centuries. Irenaeus was Bishop of Lyons in the second century AD, at which time Lyons was called Lugdunum and formed part of Gaul and the Roman Empire. He is most well known for his work, *Adversus Haereses* or *Against Heresies*, which is a refutation of Gnosticism in general, and Valentinianism in particular. He is believed to have had a connection with Polycarp of Smyrna (Osborn 1-3), for whom Flaubert himself felt an affinity.

In addition to being focused on the attainment of a secret, saving knowledge, available to a select few, Gnosticism is characterized by dualism, or a rigid belief in only two mutually exclusive spheres of creation—the physical or material and the spiritual, good and evil, soul and body. Gnostics did not see any middle ground between these two spheres. For them, the spirit was of ultimate importance, and they considered as unessential and evil anything that was material and not spiritual (Morris 17). In a dualistic system, reality is viewed as an exchange or interaction between these two core concepts. It is true that discussion of the conflict between body and soul, for example, exists in orthodox Christianity. Brown contends that it is not necessarily dualistic to entertain a discussion of the conflict between the spiritual and the material. However, it is dualistic, as in the case of the Gnostics, to make of this conflict “the ultimate and

fundamental nature of reality” (39-40). Manichaeism, named for its founder of the third century, is also called dualism, which refers to this Gnostic sect’s differentiation between the material and the spiritual, or the dark and the light (Smith 125).

The argument could be made that dualism is one of the main themes of *La Tentation* in the sense that Flaubert focuses on St. Anthony—a “good saint” being tempted by and interacting with “evil heretics,” pagans, and even the devil himself. In reading the play, one is struck by a dialogue marked by a constant dualistic exchange between the temptations logically and enticingly presented to St. Anthony, and his striving to resist them. We see in the play numerous examples of St. Anthony being tempted to agree with the beliefs of heretics. For example, Manès (Mani), attempts to entice Anthony with his sect’s dualistic beliefs. After summarizing his heresy’s world view, which includes, most significantly, the belief that there is but one soul from which all creation obtains its souls, Manès declares that: “D’abord elles [les âmes] s’arrêtent dans la lune, où elles se purifient. Ensuite elles montent dans le soleil” (Flaubert 99). Initially, a tempted St. Anthony, is unable to find a reason to disagree with this belief: “Je ne connais rien...qui nous empêche...de le croire” (Flaubert 100). But, as Manès continues to explain his beliefs, St. Anthony is eventually able to resist them: “Ah! l’abomination!” (Flaubert 101).

Historical Context of Gnosticism

Delineating the Gnostic heretics from the “orthodox” mainstream church was not as simple as the later, occidental duality of heretical teaching versus orthodox teaching. Instead, Egyptian or Coptic Christianity was a more all-encompassing and complex mix of various “orthodox” teachings. Archeological evidence discovered since the play’s writing has confirmed that the play’s setting, the early Egyptian Church, was “an undifferentiated Christianity based on a literary tradition encompassing both canonical and non-canonical works” (Griggs 32). These categories of “canonical” and “non-canonical” did not exist in the Egyptian Church of Saint Anthony, as they were developed later in the Catholic tradition (Griggs 32). Thus, what later “heresy hunters,” such as Athanasius of Antioch or Irenaeus of Lyons, criticized as “Gnosticism” in the Egyptian Church, may have formed part of what was the Christianity of that time in Egypt (Griggs 32-3):

Egyptian Christianity was founded on a more broadly-based literary tradition and a less defined ecclesiastical tradition than was the same religion in the region from Syria to Rome, and it was only when that more stringently defined Christianity made its appearance near the end of the second century along with the *Adversus Haereses* of Irenaeus, that “orthodoxy” and “heresy” began to be defined along lines now familiar to Christian historians. (Griggs 34)

It is important to note that while the majority of these gnostic heresies were prevalent from the first through the fourth centuries AD, the orthodox Church had not yet been established. It was only with the Council of Nicaea (325), which formulated the Nicene Creed, largely as an orthodox response to Arianism, that the Church's theological views were officially codified. This is why the early church is often referred to as "proto-orthodox."

Understanding that the "official" Christian Church did not yet exist during the time of Anthony lends support to Orr's view. Orr argues for a macro-level view of *La Tentation* as "a compendium of expressions of Christendom set in a literary, but no less ecclesiastical, theatre with the reader as spectator" (Orr, "East or West?" 81). Reviewing the play, we see how Anthony is tempted by the Gnostic heretics and how his own disciple, Hilarion, acts as a guide for Anthony, enabling the heretics to tempt him. Throughout this act featuring the heretics, we see either the originator of each heresy or a group of adherents to a given heresy proclaiming that heresy's teachings to St. Anthony, who, initially engages them, sometimes with genuine curiosity, and then responds with distraught exclamations, eventually responding by reciting the Nicene Creed. For example, during the long exchange among Apollonius of Tyana, Damis and Anthony, Damis, the disciple of Apollonius, exclaims to his master:

Maître! c'est un ermite galiléen qui demande à savoir les origines de la sagesse.

APOLLONIUS Qu'il approche !

Antoine hésite.

DAMIS Approchez !

APOLLONIUS d'une voix tonnante : Approche ! Tu voudrais connaître qui je suis, ce que j'ai fait, ce que je pense ? n'est-ce pas cela, enfant ?

ANTOINE ... Si ces choses, toutefois, peuvent contribuer à mon salut. (Flaubert 141-42)

Thus, we see that Apollonius is eager to teach Anthony of his beliefs, and Anthony is willing to listen, provided these beliefs are helpful in his life's work of attaining salvation. However, once Apollonius' propositions take a destructive turn after he suggests that Anthony rape Pythia, Anthony is quick to disengage from the conversation and cry out for help. We see this at the end of the interaction among Apollonius, Damis and Anthony:

APOLLONIUS J'arracherai devant toi les armures des Dieux, nous forcerons les sanctuaires, je te ferai violer la Pythie!

ANTOINE Au secours, Seigneur!

Il se précipite vers la croix.

APOLLONIUS Quel est ton désir? Ton rêve? Le temps seulement d'y songer...

ANTOINE Jésus, Jésus, à mon aide! (Flaubert 158).

Pythia was the priestess at the temple of Apollo at Delphi. Orr argues that both in *La Tentation* and *Vita Antonii* (356-392), which Flaubert consulted in writing the play, "the fixed point and 'authority' is Ant[h]ony's voice of response or reaction; the master owns the main monologue which, in Socratic mode, counters adversarial or competing voices" (Orr, "East or West?" 82). We see this assertion illustrated in the above example, where Anthony's reaction initially guides the reader to becoming further engaged with

Apollonius, as Anthony agrees to hear him out on the condition that his proposition is helpful to Anthony's goal of salvation. However, once Apollonius puts forth his destructive proposal to rape Pythia, Anthony quickly cries out for deliverance from the situation, and the scene with Apollonius quickly ends. Another example of this assertion is found in the exchange between St. Anthony and Simon the Magician. Simon states his beliefs to Anthony, who straightaway discredits him for his behavior:

SIMON...Viennent à moi ceux qui sont couverts de vin, ceux qui sont couverts de boue, ceux qui sont couverts de sang; et j'effacerai leurs souillures avec le Saint-Esprit, appelé Minerve par les Grecs! Elle est Minerve! Elle est le Saint-Esprit! Je suis Jupiter, Apollon, le Christ, le Paraclet, la grande puissance de Dieu, incarnée en la personne de Simon!

ANTOINE Ah! c'est toi!... c'est donc toi? Mais je sais tes crimes! Tue es né à Gittoï, près de Samarie. Dosithéus, ton premier maître, t'a renvoyé! Tu exècres saint Paul pour avoir converti une de tes femmes; et, vaincu par saint Pierre, — de rage et de terreur tu as jeté dans les flots le sac qui contenait tes artifices!

(Flaubert 137-38)

While the Christian faith existed during the first few centuries AD, it had not yet been officially defined. In this way, Gnosticism, as presented by its adherents and heresiarchs in the play, easily existed within the Christian communities of its time. A heresiarch is a founder or originator of a heresy. For example, Arius is the founder or heresiarch of Arianism, and Valentine is the heresiarch or founder of Valentinianism. There was no established gnostic denomination per se. One could not have found the

“Arian Church” or the “Carpocratian or Valentinian Churches.” Instead, the majority of Gnostics participated in the communities and rites of the Early Church. They were likely pillars of a given congregation, partaking in its sacraments, such as communion and baptism (Morris 36). Gnosticism crept in to Christianity before Christianity existed. In other words, Gnosticism, which predated Christianity, entered into Christian congregations during the first two centuries of the Church as two processes took their courses. At its origins, Christianity was a Jewish sect—a splinter group of Judaism, which accepted Christ as the Son of God and not just a prophet. It was later—following the Crucifixion and Resurrection—that Christianity became an independent religion. As the Church was transformed from a Jewish sect to its own religion and was gaining non-Jewish converts, during the middle of the second century AD, individuals who were adherents to pre-Christian gnostic sects began adopting Christianity, but interpreting it in a way they could understand—that is through a gnostic filter. Some of the early gnostic leaders, such as Basilides and Valentinus, who appear in the play, “were well-known Christians with strong followings. Early Church fathers knew them well” (Morris 37). It was only after the Early Christian Church Fathers identified them and called them out that they were considered dangerous heretics (Morris 37).

The Gnostic heretics are specifically suited for a literary work because Gnostic ideologies are predominantly “‘textual’ ideologies based on sacred writings, a multiplicity of gospels, secret books, occult names” (Donato 83). In addition, like Flaubert, the Gnostics were prolific writers: “For every Gospel, Acts, and Apocalypse that proto-orthodox writers produced, the Gnostics produced five or more” (Morris 39).

Morris gives a sampling of the massive Gnostic output, which included the *Gospel of Mary*, *Gospel of Philip*, *Gospel of Peter*, *Gospel of Thomas*, *Gospel of Nicodemus*, *Gospel of Truth*, *Gospel of the Nazarenes*, *Gospel of the Savior*, *Gospel of the Good Shepherd*, *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, *Proto-Gospel of James*, and the *Secret Gospel of Mark* (Morris 39). In addition, equally prolific output of Gnostic versions of *Acts of the Apostles*, Epistles and Apocalypses abounded (Morris 39). Flaubert includes several of the Gnostic gospels in the play: “Voilà l’Évangile des Hébreux!...L’Évangile du Seigneur!...L’Évangile d’Ève!...L’Évangile de Thomas!...L’Évangile de Judas!...Le traité de l’âme advenue!...La prophétie de Barcouf! ” (Flaubert 116-17). Here Flaubert is acknowledging the prolific writing of the Gnostics by having each group shout out in succession a gospel or sacred writing attributed to that group. While, on the one hand, critics have cited this passage as an example of how Flaubert minimizes the effectiveness of the Gnostics’ temptations by reducing their lines to rote cries in succession, on the other hand, by choosing lines for his characters from among the titles of the rich, Gnostic *œuvre*, Flaubert, if not paying homage to the wealth of Gnostic literature, is at least acknowledging it.

Next, Orr discusses the ideological purposes served by the representation of Anthony in the play. First, Anthony, as a monk, has renounced the secular world. Living as a hermit alone in the Egyptian desert removes him from being associated with and tainted by the politics of the Church. The main existing source of information on Anthony, *Vita Antonii*, was written by his disciple, Athanasius, who, in this work, subordinates Anthony’s spiritual accomplishments as a recluse to his “doctrinal authority

in spiritual matters at a time when the Catholic Church needed leadership” (Orr, “East or West?” 82). In addition, Anthony supported Athanasius’ opposition to the heretical views of the Arians, who taught that Christ was not consubstantial with God. These two facts combined in the *Vita Antonii* allow the Church to use it not only as a theological treatise, but also as propaganda to counter theological heresies, such as Arianism and the many others that existed in the early Egyptian context. In addition, it could also be used as a political weapon against the secular Alexandrian authorities who, though Christian, favored Arianism as a basis for their theocracy. In *Vita Antonii*, Athanasius defends the Church’s basic freedom to interpret its own theology even in a Christian state. Paragraph 81 in *Vita Antonii*, or *The Life of Antony* supports this assertion:

Ant[h]ony’s fame spread even to rulers. When Constantine Augustus and his sons Constantius Augustus and Constans Augustus learned of these things, they wrote to him as to a father and begged to receive responses from him. He did not, however, make a great deal of the writings, nor did he rejoice over the letters; rather, he was just as he had been before the emperor wrote to him. When the writings were brought to him, he called the monks and said, “Do not consider it marvelous if a ruler writes to us, for he is a man. Marvel, instead, that God wrote the law for mankind and has spoken to us through his own son.” (89)

This citation indicates St. Anthony’s response to a request from secular rulers for advice. It is emphasized that these rulers are Christian, but secular nonetheless. It is only after urging by other monks that St. Anthony responds to the requests. His response is careful to only give advice on “things pertaining to salvation”—indicating a clear distinction in

his mind of the separation of church and state.

Anthony represents knowledge of mind and body-integration rather than its separation. This is a significant point that Orr makes, because it marks a distinct difference between the Eastern and Western Churches, as well as the Gnostics' approaches to the Christian life. Whereas the Catholic Church and a majority of the gnostic sects emphasize enlightenment over wholeness in a rejection of the flesh and an emphasis on the soul or spirit, the thrust of Eastern Orthodox spirituality is not to reject the body, but to integrate it with the spiritual (Orr, "East or West?" 88-9). From Anthony's letters, Rubenson describes the saint's view that the body is not evil in and of itself, nor does it bear responsibility for being misused. Instead, it was created good and is meant to be restored to that original nature. Since it can be redeemed, it is not meant to be thrown away and written off. Rubenson cites Anthony's letter on repentance in which Anthony describes how he views the body and soul: "The eyes, the ears, the tongue, the hands, the belly, the sexual organs and the feet, all can become pure through the work of the mind guided by the Spirit" (Rubenson 71). Thus, Flaubert uses the character of Anthony to represent this spirit-body integration in the face of challenges by the characters representing the various divergent "heretical" beliefs in the "crucial central part of the work" (Orr, "East or West?" 89). Here, the many representatives of the Gnostic sects of Alexandria, such as Arius, Valentin and Basilide raise again the question of the immortal soul and mortal body, but within a theological and doctrinal context. They do this by challenging Anthony on the issues of the personhood of Christ and whether he is consubstantial to God the Father. In this context, Orr argues, monasticism

and its concurrent asceticism appear as nothing more than another choice from among the many variations of spirituality and theology present in the tumultuous times of third-century Egypt. Orr asserts that critics have not wanted to question why, how and for what ends Flaubert “restakes the claims of his Antoine” (Orr, “East or West?” 89).

Orr points out how Anthony figures into the juxtaposition of the Gnostics and the Catholic Church on the one hand and the Orthodox and Coptic Churches on the other. As Donato states, the “Gnostic heresies are primarily *oriental* heresies,” which would make them Coptic or Egyptian (Donato 81). Flaubert penetrated the many layers of Western processing of the original, *oriental*, theological ideas, which originated in the Oriental Church of Saint Anthony. By placing Anthony as well as his monasticism and orthodoxy in the Alexandrian context, Flaubert gives him a genuineness, which is “highlighted through other *oriental* versions of faith and philosophy imbued with Greek influences as *per* historical accuracy” (Orr, “East or West?” 88). Thus, Flaubert removes the many layers of the *idées reçues* covering areas of belief and dogma and their supporting institutions (Orr, “East or West?” 88). Essentially, by writing about St. Anthony in his proper historic context of fourth-century Alexandria, Egypt, Flaubert immediately strips away any beliefs about him, which may have become ossified through continuous processing by scholars over time in Europe. He returns St. Anthony to his historic milieu.

Finally, monasticism, its hallmark being a distinct spiritual and physical separation from the temporal or secular, figures as a key element in this whole scenario (Orr, “East or West?” 82). Rowan Williams clearly states the importance of

monasticism in the Church's pursuit of the right to maintain its own integrity.

“[M]onasticism was established by the mid-fourth century as a sign to the orthodox of the Church's essential freedom from even a professedly Christian state; of the Church's right to declare its own self-interpretation, even if the City disagreed . . . it saved the Christian east from total domination by the graceless theocratic ideology of Eusebius” (95). Thus, the institution of monasticism, founded by Saint Anthony in the desert outside Alexandria, Egypt, was an important factor in enabling the Church to defend herself against heresies as well as the encroachment of secular power.

Athanasius, it follows, is the *accoucheur*, or male midwife, vivifying the *Vita Antonii*, in the pursuit of goals relating to the study of the early Church Fathers (Orr, “East or West?” 83). Orr notes that Athanasius appears in the play as a passing reference (83): “ANTOINE Oh! non!...non! A chaque minute, je défaille! Que ne suis-je un de ceux dont l'âme est toujours intrépide et l'esprit ferme, —comme le grand Athanase, par exemple. HILARION Il a été ordonné illégalement par sept évêques!” (Flaubert 88). I would surmise that Flaubert's passing reference to Athanasius stems from the fact that Athanasius was a staunch defender of Church orthodoxy. He wrote the *Vita Antonii* for the political purpose of defending the Church against heresy. Since Flaubert's goal in his play is to *tempt* St. Anthony, featuring Athanasius, a staunch anti-heretical ally supporter of Anthony, any more than he did would have detracted from the goal of the play which was to focus temptations on St. Anthony.

The next section of the play, dominated by the Queen of Sheba, presents the reader with a distinguished, sexual, oriental woman, who tempts St. Anthony to consume

her in a sexual sense. Edward Said treats the concept of the Oriental woman and Oriental sex in depth in his book *Orientalism*. Flaubert reconstructs an Orientalist model in his literature by giving the reader a vivid alternative to the drabness of French life in the provinces (Said 185). Through painstaking research from both western sources, like Renan, and from travelling to the region, he realizes his goal of bringing the “Orient to life” for himself and his readers (Said 185). Said, perhaps, describes best Flaubert’s relationship to the Orient and sex: “Woven through all of Flaubert’s Oriental experiences, exciting or disappointing, is an almost uniform association between the Orient and sex” (188). It is within this “Oriental” or “Orientalist” context that Flaubert delivers the character of the sexualized or, even over-sexualized Queen of Sheba to the reader by allowing Anthony to be tempted by her.

Orr points out that in her last lines, the Queen of Sheba emphasizes her all-encompassing role as the ultimate “femme orientale” and “femme savante” (Orr, “East or West?” 86). She informs Anthony that, “Je ne suis pas une femme, je suis un monde. Mes vêtements n’ont qu’à tomber, et tu découvriras sur ma personne une succession de mystères” (Flaubert 84). Bem points out that the Queen of Sheba is distinguished in the text from all the other women who appear, in that her portrayal most closely approximates that of someone who lived during the ancient setting of the play: “Parmi les femmes innombrables qui apparaissent dans les pages du livre, celle qui se rapprocherait le plus d’un personnage à l’ancienne, ce serait La Reine de Saba. C’est la seule à qui Antoine soit directement confronté dans un tête-à-tête!” (85-6). The exchange between the Queen of Sheba and Anthony lasts for eight pages, and her lines are more

developed than those of most of the heretics. While it is unclear whether Flaubert himself saw any connections between the Queen of Sheba and the Empress Eugénie, the wife of Napoléon III, I see several parallels between the two women. Like the Queen of Sheba, she wielded considerable beauty, wealth and power. She

was still very beautiful. But her fortieth year was approaching, her complexion was becoming duller; encouraged by Princess Metternich she was now taking to rouge. And she was also dyeing a few white strands of her hair....In the evening, under the lamps, with her full skirts of light-coloured velvet and satin, with very low neck, and gorgeous jewels sparkling on her dazzling white skin, she remained incomparable for grace and majesty (Aubry 146).

She learned how to save money, accumulating a considerable sum: “Out of the considerable sums—more than two millions a year—the Emperor gave her, of which she saved at least half, she built up, assisted by the advice of the Pareiras, the Aguados, and the Rothschilds, a private fortune in house property and in shares, which might perhaps later on become a necessary stand-by for her husband and her son” (Aubry 147). Finally, she learned how to wield power in court:

Politics were her refuge. Seated beside Napoleon at the Council, she listened, usually in silence, to the ministers’ report. But if the subject interested her, she intervened at once and without beating about the bush. There was no shyness now. She spoke at first quietly, then presently, carried away by her ardour, her voice rose, vivid, full of images, exuberant. Napoleon went on drawing little men on the great sheet of paper placed in front of him. When he thought the Empress

was going too far he would murmur: “Ugénie, Ugénie...” or pluck her sleeve. In actual fact, she now shared the power with him. (Aubry 153-54)

As much as was possible in the era in which she lived, the Empress Eugenie was powerful, seductive and wealthy just like the Queen of Sheba. Both women appear to be forces to be reckoned with in their own rights.

This section of the play, though important in its own right for its portrayal of the Queen of Sheba, is primarily a transition, which refocuses the reader’s attention from the scene of vibrant Alexandrian society to the scene of the heretics. While most critics emphasize the sexual temptation represented by the Queen of Sheba, Orr argues that she is much more than that. Her sexual connotation, Orr points out, comes at the end of a lengthy scene of Alexandria’s wealth and opulence, which dwarfs those of the Queen. But, more importantly, the Queen’s role in the play is to act as a transition, introducing the play’s section on the heretics (Orr, “East or West?” 86-7).

It is the Queen of Sheba who serves as the link between the plethora of Alexandria’s mystery religions and sects and Anthony’s upcoming temptation at the hands of the various Gnostic heretics. These beliefs developed under a loosely defined category of “Gnosticism.” Flaubert’s use of the Queen of Sheba to introduce the section on the heretics is also significant in that women were allowed to practice in these heretical groups, whereas they were forbidden from doing so in orthodox Christian and philosophical groups (Orr, “East or West?” 86-7). While this is true, it is believed that the orthodox Church’s opposition to women fulfilling ecclesiastical roles was part of its campaign to differentiate itself from the Gnostic heretics. Richard D. E. Burton gives an

informative overview of the place of women in the French Catholic Church of the nineteenth century, characterizing the role of women in the Church of this era as both “marginal and central” (xxi). The woman’s role was marginal in that she had no official way to serve in the priesthood or among the clergy: “The role of the Catholic woman...was to serve, obey, care for the suffering, and to suffer herself” (Burton xxi). But, conversely, her role was “central to the political and social project of the French Catholic Church...” (Burton xxi). Among parishioners, she outnumbered men by two to one. Men were seen as “accompanying” their wives to Mass rather than participating in the life of the Church of their own accord. Women were the “foot soldiers,” heeding the call of the clergy to convert their husbands and to instill and maintain a Christian piety in the family (Burton xxii). Women were directly credited with having provided the bulwark to withstand the pressures of secularization of the time. Acknowledging this “new priesthood” (*sacerdoce nouveau*), a visiting Italian cleric in 1855 credited women with having withstood the secularization pressures:

« C’est à la femme que la France doit de ne pas être restée dans la religion du schisme, du déisme ou de l’idolâtrie que l’impiété [...] lui avait successivement octroyée [...] Ce que le clergé ne put faire alors [...] les femmes le firent [...] Le sacerdoce nouveau, pour avoir été exercé par des femmes, n’en fut pas moins sérieux et n’en eut pas moins les plus grands et les plus heureux résultats » (As quoted in Cholvy 37).

Female monastics established huge charitable enterprises during this time period, and it was in these endeavors that they exercised the most authority, freedom and

influence. An example of one of these endeavors is Anne-Marie Rivieu (1768-1838), who was still unable to read at the time of her first communion, by her mid-twenties had become a teacher of the catechism, accomplishing more than three priests could have. In the late eighteenth century, she founded a small convent in Thueyts, which by the time of her death, had grown to include three hundred nuns (Burton xxii-xxiii). Thueyts is located in the Ardèche Department and the Rhône-Alps Region.

In addition to the feminization of the faithful, the content of the religious art of the nineteenth century also underwent a feminization. The Virgin Mary was viewed in a hyper-feminized way and the angels, theologically androgynous, began to be represented in a more feminine way. Christ himself was even feminized: “Curiously androgynous, with his wispy beard, doelike eyes, and delicate, soft-limbed body, the nineteenth-century French Catholic Christ wept and bled like a woman” (Burton xxiii). Even the church buildings themselves were considered to be a “feminine space—‘boudoirs’ Charles Baudelaire called them—with their muted candlelight, incense, flowers, and laceworks, and religious feelings were considered a feminine quality and preserve” (Burton xxv). It would seem that this phenomenon occurred during the nineteenth century due to the absence of men in the congregation, that is among the laypeople. This could have been caused by men being physically unavailable to come to church or from their unwillingness to do so. Thus, while women were officially forbidden from participating in the ranks of the clergy of the Catholic Church, they exercised significant influence in the works of the church as well as its theology and art.

Alexandria, in addition to being a third-century secular and cultural amalgamation, was also a nascent urban, spiritual and intellectual hub. The build-up from the play's Part II scene with the Queen of Sheba, through Hilarion in Part III, to Anthony's confrontation with the heresies in part IV forces to the center stage the controversy of that time period: the theological place of the physical body and its relationship with or subordination to the soul (Orr, "East or West?" 87). Charlton makes the same assertion as Orr, but with respect to the nineteenth century in France. In the case of the nineteenth century in France, the discussions of the body and soul relationship were based on physiological and psychological studies: "mind and body are so intimately connected that it is impossible to believe either that man has a soul (which has never in any case, been observed) or that this soul could survive bodily death" (Charlton 23). The argument is the same in each century, and is essentially a theological question in each case, however in the nineteenth century, the theological question is approached not through theology, but through science.

In the fourth century, theology alone governed this question, as science had not yet developed to the point it had at the nineteenth century. The principal sources of unbelief were already prevalent in French nineteenth-century society before the advent of scientific advances, which further challenged the Catholic Church. Society already held the Catholic Church in contempt for its support of conservatism and its immoral practices and doctrines:

Intolerant and absolutist, corrupt, worldly and intriguing, socially apathetic except in support of the monarchy and aristocracy, preoccupied with the observance of

rites and dogmas rather than with the spirit of Christian charity: these were the charges made by social reformers, Romantic and Parnassian poets, positivist and eclectic philosophers, and historians like Michelet and Quinet. (Charlton 22)

Thus, this societal environment of unbelief, criticism and antagonism was renewed by “the science of the later nineteenth century” (Charlton 23). From the point of view of a socially conscious person during this era, it would seem that the Catholic Church, through its practices, doctrines and even intransigence created an atmosphere, or even a vacuum, which welcomed the later nineteenth-century science to fill.

We have seen that the Gnostics of the early centuries AD valued the attainment of a secret, saving knowledge, which, they believed, was available only to an elect few, who were saved by it and not by grace. Often accused of being sexual libertines by their critics, the Gnostics sharply and rigidly differentiated between the spiritual and the material. Before being called out by the Early Church fathers, they easily blended in with Christian communities. This blending was made possible by the fact that the Church had not yet been formally established. Because the Gnostics had generated extremely large amounts of sacred texts, they are especially well suited to a literary work. Anthony himself was paradoxical in that he was a pillar of the Church, but rarely participated in church rituals and sacraments. Also, he refused to become embroiled in secular politics. Thus, it could be said that he was “in” and not “of” the Church as well as the world. The exotic Queen of Sheba is a transitory character in the play. She has a possible nineteenth-century counterpart in Empress Eugénie.

La Tentation de saint Antoine presents Alexandria in its ecclesiastical significance, vying for spiritual supremacy with Antioch, Constantinople and Rome. Also, it presents the Gnostic heresies as part of the spiritual make up of that Alexandrian period and not as a heretical deviance from the orthodox norm. Next, nineteenth-century France will be examined along the same lines as the fourth century. Similar trends of change and flux in religious life were observable in nineteenth-century France.

Nineteenth Century

Alternatives to Christianity

In a fashion similar to that of fourth-century Alexandria, nineteenth-century Paris offered many alternatives to Christianity within a Christian atmosphere. This “religious atmosphere” began in the two centuries leading up to the nineteenth century. Charlton writes that the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were characterized by aggressive, rationalistic unbelief, deep antagonism towards the Church and a certainty that religion was a superstitious folly working against human progress. He emphasizes that this political-religious environment of earlier centuries in France changed in the nineteenth century to witness a scientifically based persuasion of the falsity of Christianity by men searching for its replacement. Scientific discoveries and theories prevalent in the nineteenth century seemed to directly contradict the teachings of the Church, directly challenging, if not forcing the Church to abandon biblical fundamentalism. For example, geology, through the study of fossils, discovered that the world is far older than the approximately 6000 years claimed by the biblical narrative. The theory of evolution appears to negate completely the Creation story of Genesis. Similarly, the legitimacy of the Old Testament Flood story was called into question by the scientific fact that animals, which are unable to swim or fly, exist on multiple continents. Also, the question was posed that if the Flood story was literally true, how

could kangaroos exist only in Australia and not in Europe? (Charlton 14). These developments pushed back a religious governance of the field of science.

Critics of the Church were convinced of a need for a religion and a belief in God, just not the Christian God. These new religious doctrines, formulated in a Christian atmosphere, frequently resembled Christianity. Indeed some of them claimed to have perfected Christianity, offering a “new” or “true” Christianity (Charlton 13).

Political Idealism Begets Religious Idealism

During the nineteenth century in France, there was a political idealism which influenced a new religious idealism. The beginnings of such new thinking and criticism of the status quo can be traced back to the French Revolutionary period, from 1789 to 1793. During this time, political actors like Robespierre looked back in history in selecting a new political system for the future of France following the rejection of the Frankish pre-Revolutionary system. One trend, which had been advanced by Rousseau and other political thinkers of the Enlightenment, leaned towards the classical Greek democratic and Roman republican ideals. These political systems from antiquity were attractive in that they maintained the value that “civic virtue...was superior to the hierarchical political structure of the *ancien régime*” (Linton 161).

The model based on classical antiquity surpassed several others during this time period. For example, it was favored over the American Republic and the ideal of rural life embodied in the American life of that time and also idealized by the Church. The classical model won out due to several of its ideals, which appealed to the

revolutionaries. The key among these had its roots in the Enlightenment: this was the belief that the citizens of the ancient republics had been “happier and more fulfilled than inhabitants of modern society” because the republics had been founded on virtue. The ideal of each citizen was to live for the betterment of society rather than for self-advancement. This ideal is very close to the Enlightenment theory of *bienfaisance*, or “active social virtue, and the idea that the only true happiness lay in helping others” (Linton 165).

In addition to looking to the political past in antiquity, some religious leaders advocated that the same thing be done in the case of the Church. The idealized view of the early Christian Church stood in stark contrast to the reality of the Catholic Church of the era. While the early Church was viewed to have “been founded on fundamental truths, on egalitarianism, brotherly love and the rejection of superfluous luxury,” the Catholic hierarchy was viewed as long ago having lost sight of these ideals (Linton 159).

This interest in the early church was also apparent among others besides Flaubert in nineteenth-century France. Charlton discusses Ernest Renan’s views on religion in the case of the French Catholic Church. This is important, as Flaubert uses several of Renan’s works as his own source material in writing *La Tentation*, including his seven-volume set *Histoire des origines du christianisme*, published between 1863 and 1881 (Charlton 17). Renan was born into a devoutly religious milieu, entered the seminary to train for the religious orders, but soon became disillusioned with Catholicism, which he renounced in 1845. He doubted the existence of the supernatural and disagreed with the literal infallibility of the Bible, which, in his view, is fraught with inconsistencies

(Charlton 16-17). He argued that if the Scripture is infallible, then it takes only one error to prove that the Church is not infallible (Charlton 17). Ironically, Renan used the critical and scientific thinking skills he learned at the seminary against the Church, claiming, “only scientifically verified knowledge could be acceptable to a modern mind” (Charlton 17). Next, we see that this sort of idealism was also embodied in the literature of the era.

Literary Idealism Embodies Religious and Political Idealism

This way of thinking by Renan mentioned above was also characteristic of the Parnassian poets, who were an offshoot of the movement called “Art for Art’s Sake,” which, in turn, was a response to the sentimentalities of Romanticism. Professor Robert T. Denonmé succinctly delineates these three movements:

[T]he great majority of the adepts of Art for Art’s Sake and Parnassianism subscribed to the idea that art was absolute, an end in itself, and that the beauty which emanated from a work of art constituted something divine. Yet all remained mindful of the fact that the cult of beauty to which they had submitted their art was linked to the visible world rather than to the invisible one of their metaphysical counterparts in social Romanticism. (13)

Thus, for the Parnassians, the art of poetry was inextricably linked to the real world, unlike social Romanticism, which was founded upon vague ideals: “Social Romanticism was the poetry of the limitless possibilities of man. The Parnassians found the basis for their expression in the sober and precise observation of nature and history and tended to

project the limitations of human design and accomplishment in the kind of verse which tacitly suggested a pondered and quiet resignation to such limits” (Denommé 23).

Mitzman defines Social Romanticism as, “the semi-religious quest for harmony in social existence, in nature, and in the cosmos of dissenting writers and ideologists during the 1840s” (663). This Social Romanticism was the precursor to modern-day socialism (Mitzman 663). Social Romantic writers included an eclectic group of famous names:

[Social Romanticism] pulled together diverse efforts of what Paul Bénichou has called the humanitarian Left to write the common people into society, politics, religion, and history. These efforts were the work of ex-Saint-Simonians like Leroux and Jean Reynaud, of Christian Socialists like Lamennais, of popular romantic novelists such as George Sand, Victor Hugo, and Eugène Sue, of left liberal men of letters like Michelet, Quinet, and the popular poet Béranger (Mitzman 663).

One can see the seeds, which grew into today’s socialists and progressives being planted by the Social Romantics in the 1840s.

The feature which distinguishes the Parnassians from the Romantics is a call for “rapprochement...between art and science” (Denommé 36). The mission of the Parnassians was to “restore art to its original purity” by using the scientific method to cut through the “dated and pragmatic considerations” which had obscured this purity (Denommé 35). While perhaps not completely manifested in Flaubert’s research for and writing of the play, this Parnassian ideal of attaining a pure and, thus, a truer version of art at least comes to mind upon examining Flaubert’s quest to attain a “truer Anthony” by

probing history for a more actual portrayal of him. Flaubert's methodical consultation of historic sources as well as his travels to Egypt resemble a sort of scientific method since he pursued his research so methodically and diligently.

The Parnassian poets were also among those groups which criticized the Catholic Church. If the Catholic Church's doctrines met with resistance among socially conscious thinkers, the same held true for the Church's practices in moral, social and political arenas. Social reformers, Romantic and Parnassian poets, philosophers and historians including Michelet and Quinet indicted the Church for being "[i]ntolerant and absolutist, corrupt, worldly and intriguing, socially apathetic except in support of the monarchy and aristocracy, preoccupied with the observance of rites and dogmas rather than with the spirit of Christian charity" (Charlton 22). Charlton points out that the French rejection of Christianity was really a rejection of the Catholic Church: "The Church's alliance with conservatism seemed to socially conscious thinkers one of its most damning characteristics. So strong was this hatred of 'la bête écarlate,' indeed, that much of the rejection of Christianity was in reality a rejection of the Catholic Church" (Charlton 22).

Social Religions in France

Together with this criticism of the Catholic Church's lack of "social action," there appeared social religions in France. Social religions were prevalent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in France up to 1848. Leaders of these groups were primarily concerned with the social effects of religion—how they could use religion to "to

unite...and inspire...a whole society and with men as citizens rather than as private individuals” (Charlton 65). The Saint-Simonian sect was founded in France following the death of the originator of its theology, Henri de Saint-Simon. Lasting no more than 20 years, the new religion was a failure, as its founders “opted for authoritarianism and against liberalism and this in an age of widening freedom of thought” (Charlton 78). Thus, they employed in their own cult the very Catholic authoritarianism which they found so objectionable. In fact, Flaubert characterizes this group in *L’Education sentimentale*. His character, Deslauriers, justly calls the Saint-Simonians “un tas de farceurs qui voudraient nous refaire le catholicisme” (Flaubert, *Œuvres complètes* II: 58).

The social thinker Pierre Leroux (1797-1871) was a primary figure among the founders of the many social religions that proliferated in France up to the year 1848. The particular case of Leroux lends itself to the discussion of Gnosticism, as he considered the Catholic Church to be guilty of Gnostic tendencies. This is a reversal from the situation in the early church in which the proto-orthodox theologians, such as Athanasius, abused the Gnostics for these heretical tendencies. Specifically, Leroux thought Christianity guilty of a “false dualism of spirit and matter. Hence it has concentrated on men’s spiritual salvation to the neglect of their physical well-being and has divorced religion from social life” (Charlton 84). Additionally, this gnostic tendency has resulted in the Church elevating God above man, making the love of God more important than the love of one's fellow man. It has turned Christ into an idol because he is considered to be the only “true son of God” (Charlton 84). Finally, Leroux believed man’s sexual desires to be holy and necessary and condemned Christianity for advocating their repression

(Charlton 84). In this way, Leroux, knowingly or unknowingly, took the criticisms applied to the Gnostics by the early Church and used them against the Church of the nineteenth century.

Also, Leroux welcomed the “second Renaissance,” claiming that the discovery of Oriental civilization will attain “la destruction du christianisme en faveur d’une religion nouvelle” (As quoted in Charlton 34). The connection between Leroux and Flaubert is via Renan, who read and respected Leroux (Charlton 83). Flaubert relied heavily on Renan’s writings in composing *La Tentation*. Flaubert mentions Pierre Leroux in an 1839 letter to Ernest Chevalier, in which he claims not to have a philosophic mind similar to the likes of others: “ce n’est pas de ma faute je n’ai pas l’esprit philosophique, comme Cousin ou Pierre Leroux, Brillat-Savarin ou Lacenaire” (*Correspondance* I : 47). In letters dated 1857 and 1863 Mlle. Leroyer de Chantepie mentions Leroux to Flaubert (*Correspondance* II : 723, III : 330). Finally, in an 1864 letter to Edma Roger des Genettes, Flaubert criticizes Leroux along with other “modern reformers”:

Je suis indigné de plus en plus contre les réformateurs modernes, qui n’ont rien réformé. *Tous*, Saint-Simon, Leroux, Fourier, et Proudhon, sont engagés dans le Moyen Âge, jusqu’au cou; *tous* (ce qu’on n’a pas observé) croient à la révélation biblique. Mais pourquoi vouloir expliquer des choses incompréhensibles par d’autres choses incompréhensibles? Expliquer le mal par le péché original, c’est ne rien expliquer du tout. La recherche de la cause est antiphilosophique, antiscientifique, et les Religions en cela me déplaisent encore plus que les

philosophies, quoiqu'elles affirment les connaître. Que ce soit un besoin du cœur, d'accord. C'est ce besoin-là qui est respectable, et non des dogmes éphémères.

(*Correspondance* III : 401)

George Sand, in her 1862 *Lélia*, describes a scene in which a new religion is about to dawn on humanity: “Une philosophie nouvelle, une foi plus pure et plus éclairée, va se lever à l’horizon” (Sand 2:156). Victor Hugo, writing the preface to *Les Feuilles d’automne* (1831), echoes the sentiment of Sand: “...au dehors comme au dedans, les croyances en lute, les consciences en travail; de nouvelles religions...; les vieilles religions qui font peau neuve...” (1). The reality was not one new religion, but many.

Alternatives to Catholicism

The variety of alternative creeds present in nineteenth-century France was truly staggering. There seemed to be something available for every level of sophistication. A quest for social unity, an earnest spiritual yearning and an increased interest in religion motivated these new religions (Charlton 35). Catholic apologist Jean-Baptiste Henri-Dominique Lacordaire elicited, for example, a genuine interest in Catholicism in the 1830s. His lectures drew huge crowds to Notre-Dame. Intellectuals pursued the metaphysical teachings of Spinoza and Hegel, among other German philosophers. Interest spiked in the occult and minor religious sects and leaders. These included the religion of the “Mapah” (Mater and Pater) and the Église Française of the Abbé Châtel to the “little religions of Paris.” Freemasonry marked an increase in membership. These

substitutes for Christianity included non-Christian religions that appealed to those interested in areas ranging from the metaphysical to the rational to the mystic. The one thing they shared in common was their claiming the term “religion” to describe their own belief systems (Charlton 35-6). Charlton characterizes this nineteenth-century development: “[P]erhaps no other century has so enthusiastically misappropriated and redefined the concepts of the Christian creeds or invented so many synonyms for ‘God’—*l’Idéal, le Grand Tout, le Grand Être*, even, it sometimes seems, *l’Inconnaissable*” (36).

Freemasonry was very popular and visible among these alternatives to Catholicism. The present form of Freemasonry dates back to the 1717 establishment of the Grand Lodge of London. It is believed that the first French lodge of Brotherhood and Friendship was begun in 1721 in Dunkirk, France. At the time of the 1789 Revolution between six and seven hundred lodges existed in France, totalling about 30,000 members. Freemasonry had a particularly strong following in the provincial cities. The masonic movement’s “closely-knit and federal structure” gave it the image of a counter-Church and was opposed first by the secular authorities and then was the subject of a papal bull issued by Pope Clement XII (McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* 19). Neither opposition was very effective (McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* 19). In a manner similar to that of the early Church, where gnostic believers participated in Christian congregations, so too, in France before the Catholic Church’s official opposition to Masonry, ties between the Masons and the Church were common. Catholic faithful and clergy were often Masons as well:

Across France the more prosperous clergy, not excluding *curés*, do not seem to have hesitated before joining either provincial academies or that archetypal Enlightenment expression of male sociability, the Masonic lodge. In Bordeaux, for example, the Archbishop's secretary, the abbé Jolly, was only one of numerous local clergy with Masonic links; the abbé Lapauze was designated in 1782 to preside over the General Lodge of the Grand Orient. Even regular clergy participated. The Benedictine congregation of Saint-Vanne had some Masons among them but stayed largely faithful to their vows, while nine monks at the great abbey of Fécamp in 1778 founded the lodge of the Triple Unity on their premises (Aston 88).

While I have not been able to establish a direct relationship between Gustave Flaubert and the Masons, I have established a link between Flaubert and the writings of a prominent nineteenth-century occultist and Mason, Eliphas Lévi. This relationship is explained below.

Flaubert, Eliphas Lévi and Apollonius of Tyana

While the Masons were a significant pseudo-religious movement in France, their beliefs contain many striking parallels to those of the Gnostic heretics in Alexandria between the first and fourth centuries A.D. Just like the Gnostics, Freemasonry appealed to its adherents because it claimed to be the lone repository of secret knowledge passed down from antiquity to the present: "The precise nature and provenance of this secret was

naturally a matter of some dispute, and when the movement began to split into factions it was inevitable that each new order that appeared should lay claim to being the only ‘true’ masonry” (McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* 20). Thus, apart from the other cults prevalent in France up to and during the time of Flaubert, Masonry itself can be seen to resemble the many flavors of Gnosticism in the Early Church of Saint Anthony, each vying with the other to establish itself as the “true” belief or church.

A former Benedictine monk, Antoine-Joseph Pernety renounced his vows and founded a group, the Illuminés d’Avignon, which flourished during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Avignon, which was under the governance of the Pope, and therefore, in constant danger of persecution. Believing that all ancient legends were hermetic allegories, he published a book in 1758 entitled *Les Fables égyptiennes et grecques dévoilées et réduites au même principe avec une explication des hiéroglyphes de la guerre de Troie*. Moving to Avignon, which was one of the main masonic areas, he became a Mason there because in masonry, he was given free reign to pursue his hermetic passion. There he founded a masonic rite based on alchemy (McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* 28-30).

The Masons gained popularity throughout Europe and France in the eighteenth century as part of a larger occult movement. Thus, in the nineteenth century, the stage had been set for one of the main French protagonists of occultism. In the nineteenth century, Eliphas Lévi was that century’s “most prolific and skillful proponent of occultism” (McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* 73). He was born in Paris in 1810 and christened Alphonse Louis Constant. He was a devout Catholic in his

early life and, while studying at a Paris seminary in his pursuit of the priesthood, was introduced to heresies by a professor studying them for the purpose of refuting them (McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* 74-5). Constant, having been ordained to the sub-diaconate, abandoned his plans to pursue the priesthood after he fell in love with and married a pupil at a girls' school (McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* 91). His young wife left him for another man in 1853 (McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* 101). This event is relevant because it was the impetus behind Lévi's more intense pursuit of Gnosticism in nineteenth-century France. Following this painful event, Constant changed his name to "Eliphas Lévi, the Hebrew equivalent of his two Christian names" (McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* 100-01). Constant changed his name in response to the pain and shock he had experienced from his wife having left him. This detail about Eliphas Lévi is germane to my topic since it establishes the existence of a well-known Gnostic leader in nineteenth-century France. While perhaps not as influential as the Gnostics of the Early Church, Lévi is an example of an, albeit, fringe Gnostic leader of nineteenth-century France.

Lévi, who had been attracted to Christian mysticism and Gnosticism earlier in his life (McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* 96), set off for London following the anguish of his wife's desertion. It was in London where Lévi evoked Apollonius of Tyana during an occult ceremony. McIntosh includes a lengthy excerpt from Lévi's book *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie* (1854-56) in which Lévi describes the ceremony in its entirety. An English woman who suggested that he perform the occult

ceremony approached Lévi. They agreed to ask Apollonius two questions—one of concern to the old woman and another of interest to Lévi. Lévi’s question was of a personal nature—whether reconciliation would ever occur between his estranged wife and him. Lévi wrote in his account of the first evocation that the apparition of Apollonius did not speak to him directly, but Lévi perceived the answer to his question in his own mind. The word that came into his mind was “Death.” Following his 1854 return to Paris, his wife sought and received a decree of separation. The couple’s marriage was annulled two years later. Lévi performed two more evocations of Apollonius of Tyana later in life (McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* 101-4).

Apollonius of Tyana occupies a conspicuous place among the Gnostic heretics in *La Tentation*. Flaubert mentions Lévi twice in his letter writing. The first time is in a September 1856 letter to Louis Bouilhet, in which Flaubert reminds Bouilhet to forward a book by Lévi: “Tu as oublié de m’envoyer le titre du livre de l’abbé *Constant* [Lévi] sur la magie. Je l’attends dimanche prochain” (*Correspondance* II : 634). The book to which Flaubert is referring is indicated in the footnote to this *Correspondance* citation: “Abbé Alphonse-Louis Constant, *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie*..., par Éliphas Lévi, Paris, Baillièrè, 1856... (II : 1316). In a January 1857 letter Flaubert writes to his friend, Eugène Crépet, “Vous connaissez l’abbé Constant, il doit pouvoir vous fournir des notes sur ceci, qu’il me faut ce soir: *Les plus de lubricités possible tirées des auteurs ecclésiastiques, particulièrement des modernes*” (*Correspondance* II : 676). In the footnote to this reference, it is explicitly stated that, “L’abbé Alphonse-Louis Constant, pseudonym: Éliphas Lévi, dont Flaubert connaissait les travaux sur la

magie...(Correspondance II : 1346). This is the very book in which Lévi describes his séance, during which he summons the spirit of Apollonius of Tyana. Though Flaubert does not explicitly state that Lévi inspired him to include Apollonius in *La Tentation*, it remains a possibility since Flaubert was familiar with Lévi's first-hand account of this séance connected to Apollonius of Tyana. In 1861, Lévi became a freemason, joining the lodge called Rose of Perfect Silence (McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* 115).

Comparison

Flaubert Uses Church History to Criticize the Catholics

Orr states in her article, “East or West?, Flaubert’s *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, or the Questions of Orthodoxy,” that no one has properly addressed the reasons for Flaubert having been drawn personally to Saint Anthony, not as an autobiographical representation of himself, but as the originator of the monastic life in both the Eastern Orthodox and Western Churches (79). Orr’s study focuses on “the context and central role of Egyptian spirituality and its influence on Western canon, authority and orthodoxy” (“East or West?” 79). Drawing parallels between the fourth century of Saint Anthony and the nineteenth century of Flaubert, Orr explores how “Ant[h]ony’s pivotal place as an exemplar of truth in a time of schisms, [was an] inspiration for Flaubert in a nineteenth-century France locked in ‘-isms’; positivism, materialism and philosophies of science and progress” (“East or West?” 80).

Orr observes that, because of how he researched and wrote *La Tentation*, Flaubert essentially “challenges the hegemony and ‘authority’ of nineteenth-century understanding of Roman Catholic and Eurocentric versions of church history, doctrine, and comparative religions by demonstrating in *La Tentation* that very similar debates were taking place in third century Egypt, but prior to the very existence of Western Christianity centred on

Rome” (Orr, “East or West?” 80).³ Many of the debates occurring in the early Egyptian Church are included in the play in the form of the arguments voiced by the heresiarchs in an attempt to sway Anthony from orthodoxy. For example, in support of Orr’s above assertion, one is reminded of the great Arian heresy of the fourth century, which was a doctrinal dispute over the nature of Christ.⁴

The Coptic Church’s seminal involvement translating biblical texts, the unquestionable authority of the oriental Church Fathers, the great originators of monasticism, Pachomius (d. c. 348) and Anthony (d. 356), concerning issues of faith and doctrine resulted directly in the proliferation of the original Coptic texts into Greek and Latin and to the tensions between heresy and orthodoxy (Orr, “East or West?” 80-81). These early church writings, called the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (Fifth Century AD), consist of a compilation of wisdom passed down from these early Coptic Church hermits and desert monastics, including St. Anthony. They have exerted a significant influence on Western Catholic as well as Eastern Orthodox theologians, thus influencing the Churches’ teachings. They continue to do so in modern times.

³ Orr refers to the third century when discussing the context of St. Anthony and the play. St. Anthony lived from the second half of the third and the first half of the fourth centuries AD. The heretics portrayed in the play lived from late BC through the fourth century AD.

⁴Arius taught that Jesus was not equal to God the Father, but of a different nature and created by God the Father and thus subordinate to Him. Emperor Constantine I called the church wide First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 to settle this issue. Arius was condemned as a heretic. The first part of the Nicene Creed was drafted setting out the Church’s teaching on the nature of Christ and a uniform date was chosen for the celebration of Easter.

St. Anthony and Flaubert have Similar Constitutions

While St. Anthony is a member of this esteemed group of early leaders in the Christian traditions, and while his wisdom has exerted an indelible influence on formulating what is Church “orthodoxy, Orr also characterizes some rather “anti-orthodox” details of Anthony’s life that would have had great appeal to Flaubert:

Ant[h]ony’s personal response of separation and withdrawal from this community was a spiritual and political choice and a choice for personal integrity and against the Authorities, both secular and religious. He was crucially never ordained, and while obedient to the bishop of Alexandria, was anti-cenobitic. [That is, he was a hermit and against living in a monastery community.] The fact that Ant[h]ony remained always under the umbrella of the Christian Church in Egypt of the third century was crucial to validation of his “alternativeness” in founding a spiritual community outside the walls of the established Church but in a way which was “orthodox.” It shocked commentators, however, that he seemed not to have taken Communion for twenty years although his status as theologian was unchallenged. This is exactly the kind of contradictory “fact” that would attract Flaubert to question consistencies of standpoint and doctrinal rules. (“East or West?” 84-5)

Of the above-mentioned details of Anthony’s life, one of the most striking is his abstention from Communion for twenty years. Whatever the reason for his not receiving Communion for so long, this behavior constitutes a significant paradox, which may have appealed to Flaubert: One of the most venerated saints in Christendom, who not only

exercised a huge influence on the development of its theology, but founded a lifestyle which permeates Catholicism and Orthodoxy to this day, did not participate in the most important sacrament of the Church of which he was a member.

Severing ties from civilization to pursue a celibate and reclusive life, Anthony also eschewed the values of his learned upper-class background. Orr argues that Flaubert's own constitution parallels that of Anthony, who chose not to fit in to the groups and acceptable behavior of the world ("East or West?" 85). By no means an ascetic, Flaubert's spirituality was driven by purity of ethics and aesthetics and rejection of the idolatry of a society which was becoming more materialistic (Orr, "East or West?" 85). I think that Flaubert identified with Anthony in the sense that both were nonconformists and more concerned with pursuing spiritual, in the case of Anthony, and literary, in the case of Flaubert, purity rather than supporting mainstream institutions non-critically. It does not seem that Flaubert was concerned with resolving or explaining the paradoxes in Anthony's life. Rather, it seems that Flaubert readily used the literary character of Anthony as a symbol for himself, as Flaubert considered himself to be "Anthony."

Alexandria and Paris

Orr points out that most critics have not dealt with the Alexandrian Egypt of Anthony, thus ignoring its dual power base: social and ecclesiastical. It follows that *La Tentation* has not been viewed as a criticism of nineteenth-century France from "Empire

to Republic” in the way his other works have (Orr, “East or West?” 85). Orr draws several significant parallels between the times and cultures of each city: “Alexandria was a cultural centre and melting-pot, a Roman window-piece of imperial progress, with its concomitant bureaucracy, legal and tax systems, urbanization, and secularization. Nineteenth-century France and particularly Paris as urban, industrial, financial, cultural and political capital offer many parallels” (Orr, “East or West?” 85). Orr, for example, points out the highly accurate descriptions of Alexandria’s architecture in the play:

Je le [Didyme] conduisais sur le Paneum, d’où on découvre le Phare et la haute mer. Nous revenions ensuite par le port, en coudoyant des hommes de toutes les nations, jusqu’à des Cimmériens [...] et des Gymnosophistes du Gange [...].

Mais, sans cesse, il y avait quelque bataille dans les rues, à cause des Juifs refusant de payer l’impôt, ou des séditeux qui voulaient chasser les Romains.

D’ailleurs la ville est pleine d’hérétiques, des sectateurs de Manès, de Valentin, de Basilide, d’Arius – tous vous accaparent pour discuter et vous convaincre. [...]

Quelques-uns s’assemblèrent autour de moi pour devenir des anachorètes. Je leur ai imposé une règle pratique, en haine des extravagances de la Gnose et des assertions des philosophes. [...] La soif du martyr m’entraîna dans Alexandrie.

[...] Une autre fois, Athanase m’appela pour le soutenir contre les Ariens.

(Flaubert 53-54)

A description of the architecture of late nineteenth-century Paris follows:

Third Republic politicians... warmly embraced the Second Empire politicians of urban grandeur. Paris needed to be shown off to the rest of the world to best

advantage. This entailed a good deal of patching up or hiding the damage done by the Communards, which took time. A decision was eventually made to demolish the damaged Tuileries palace, and the foreign ministry's office at the Palais d'Orsay remained a charred ruin until the late 1890s.... Many Parisians had been dismayed at the extent to which their city had been a glorified building site for two decades under the Second Empire; but the building did not stop once the Second Empire had been toppled. Napoleon III had presided over the creation of more than a score of public gardens and squares.... More than three times as many buildings were erected between 1878 and 1888 as between 1860 and 1869. (Jones 333-34)

Flaubert's description of fourth-century Alexandria, though historically accurate, is much more literary than the more academic description of the architecture and building trends during a period of nineteenth-century Paris.

Why did Flaubert Choose the Gnostics?

In his consideration of the reasons why Flaubert chose to "privilege the Gnostics" by including them so prominently in his play, Donato begins his study with a discussion of Sez nec's thorough work on Flaubert's "extraordinary use of his sources" (80-81). After establishing existing scholarship proving Flaubert's meticulous research behind his heretical characters, Donato delves into the reasons for Flaubert's choices (81). Having evaluated several of the key historic sources used by Flaubert in writing the play's section

on the Gnostics, he draws the conclusion that “[b]oth Gnostic ideology and Flaubert’s text are produced from repeated, ‘copied’ fragments handed over by past history; both are ‘mosaics’ which stand as original syntheses” (83). The Gnostic theology and teaching consisted of a borrowing of beliefs from various traditions. Many of the Gnostic beliefs predated Christianity. Upon the appearance of Christianity, Gnostics seemed to adapt by incorporating their pre-Christian beliefs into Christianity. The result was a Gnostic hybrid. Flaubert’s text incorporates many of these colorful Gnostic beliefs into an integral, synthesized text. Donato continues, writing that even the way in which Flaubert presents the fragments of Gnosis in the play is emblematic of the “multiplied... plurality of contradictory texts” (83): “Alors tous brandissent dans l’air des rouleaux de papyrus, des tablettes de bois, des morceaux de cuir, des bandes d’étoffes...” (Flaubert 116). Thus, not only does Flaubert have each heretic shouting out rote lines one following another, but he also paints a picture of each one holding a different medium—papyrus, wood, leather and fabric—upon which their heresy is written.

Donato asks rhetorically why Flaubert chose the Gnostic heresies when there were many other equally colorful and complex ones that could have been adapted to literary form. Donato answers the question by noting that for Flaubert as a writer, the Gnostic heresies comprised a

privileged history and a privileged geography. Gnostic heresies are primarily *oriental* heresies. If one were to set up an oversimplified opposition between Rome and the orient, the Gnostic heresies are typically oriental and characteristically belong to a land which, from a fictional standpoint, is

strategically privileged for the nineteenth-century writer. In the same way that the war between Carthage and the mercenaries is an oriental war peripheral to the dominant antiquity of Rome, the Gnostic heresies belong to a specific context: they are Alexandrian heresies. (81)

In this way, the Gnostic heresies are privileged specifically, *because they are not Roman*. Instead, they are Alexandrian and, thus, peripheral to Rome. Donato continues, citing the symbolism of fourth-century Alexandria as “the emblem of a belated syncretism of old, displaced, subverted beliefs” (81). And, citing Jacques Matter’s characterization of the intermingling of a great many diverse beliefs present in Alexandria, Donato posits that from a religious point of view, Gnosticism “represents a belated, decayed, and heterogeneous form of what were once original, singular religious beliefs” (81-82).

Jacques Matter explains this point:

En effet, depuis cet ébranlement général qui était [sic] résulté des guerres d’Alexandre dans les trois parties du monde, les doctrines de la Grèce, de l’Égypte, de la Perse et de l’Inde se rencontraient et se confondaient partout. Toutes les barrières qui jadis avaient séparé les nations étaient rompues, et les peuples de l’Occident, qui avaient toujours rattaché leurs croyances à celles de l’Orient, s’étaient hâtés de les y retremper... leurs Platoniciens... s’emparèrent-ils bientôt avec empressement des croyances les plus fortes que leur offraient la Palestine, l’Égypte, la Chaldée, la Perse et l’Inde.... (10-11)

Thus, Gnostic beliefs are, by their nature, “*secondary and composite*” and belong to a “particularly *late* moment in the history of ideas” (Donato 82). It follows, then, that for

Flaubert, the “historical and ideological context of Gnosticism,” far from being lost in a distant past, was remarkably reminiscent of the historical and ideological context of Flaubert’s nineteenth-century France. Flaubert “viewed the nineteenth-century writer as being at the end of another history and obliged to compose with its textual by-products... (Donato 82). Thus, Flaubert saw parallels among the various beliefs of Anthony’s Alexandria and his own Paris.

Seznec, in his *Nouvelles Etudes sur La Tentation de saint Antoine*, links the nineteenth-century interest in Gnostic theology with the vague hopes and dreams of nineteenth-century Romanticism. In defining the term “Romanticism,” the term “vague hopes and dreams” becomes more understandable. First, Ferber’s attempt to define Romanticism illustrates the vagueness of this term itself and the consequential difficulty in defining it:

Romanticism was a European cultural movement, or a set of kindred movements, which found in a symbolic and internalized romance plot a vehicle for exploring one’s self and its relationship to others and to nature, which privileged the imagination as a faculty higher and more inclusive than reason, which sought solace in or reconciliation with the natural world, which ‘detranscendentalized’ religion by taking God or the divine as inherent in nature or in the soul and replaced theological doctrine with metaphor and feeling, which honored poetry and all the arts as the highest human creations, and which rebelled against the established canons of neoclassical aesthetics and against both aristocratic and bourgeois social and political norms in favor of values more individual, inward,

and emotional. (10-11)

Thus, Romanticism is difficult to define as a literary movement. For the purposes of this study, the Romantic period in France shall be considered to have existed between approximately 1820 and 1850, having been firmly established by 1830. “Romanticism developed after the Revolution and reached its peak during the *Restauration* (reigns of Louis XVIII and Charles X, 1814-30) and the *Monarchie de Juillet* (Louis-Philippe’s reign, 1830-48). After the Revolution of 1848, came Realism, which flourished during the Second Empire (1852-1870)” (Mason 161). Like experts of Romanticism, scholars of Gnosticism also cite the difficulty of objectively differentiating Gnostic literature from non-Gnostic writings. As stated above, while Gnosticism exhibits several inherent traits such as secrecy and exclusiveness, it was still difficult for the early Church theologians to differentiate their orthodoxy from the heresy of the Gnostics.

Seznec also draws parallels in gnosticism between Flaubert’s *Tentation* and selected works of his contemporaries. First, he does this textually by citing writings of Flaubert’s contemporaries. These writings contain the same material as Flaubert’s Gnostics. André de Guerne’s poem, “La Passion de Pistis Sophia,” published in 1897, exhibits the closest parallel to the lines attributed to Valentinius and Helen-Ennoia in *La Tentation*. Seznec writes, “J’ai cité ces extraits de ce poème oublié parce qu’il forme un pendant exact aux couplets de Valentin et d’Ennoia chez Flaubert, et parce qu’il est (en vers) l’expression la plus précise et la plus érudite de ce mythe de ‘l’âme errante’ qui hanta l’imagination poétique du XIXe siècle” (42). For example, in the beginning of the Guerne poem Jesus appears to the Apostles in order to impart Gnostic mysteries to them.

We read, “ ‘...J’ai sauvé l’âme errante et Sophia punie’ ” (As quoted in Seznec 41). In *La Tentation*, Valentin explains to Anthony, “Cependant, l’effort de Sophia pour s’enfuir avait laissé dans le vide une image d’elle, une substance mauvaise, Acharamoth. Le Sauveur en eut pitié, la délivra des passions...” (Flaubert 103).

The concept of “l’âme errante”, the “wandering soul,” or “dybbuk” in Jewish folklore, is a “disembodied human spirit that must wander restlessly, burdened by former sins, until it inhabits the body of a living person” (“dybbuk”). Some parallels can be seen between this legend and that of the Wandering Jew, who was believed to have been an actual man, who, depending on the variant of the legend, was said to have been a Jew who mocked Jesus along the path to the Crucifixion or even the gate-keeper to Pontius Pilate’s estate. Because of his part in killing Christ he was cursed to walk the Earth until the Second Coming. While the legend itself is thought to be over 350 years old, (Edelmann 3), the novel, *Le Juif Errant*, was originally published in Paris in 1845 as a serial. It was written by Eugène Sue (Sue).

Flaubert and the Gnostics: Sex and Writing

While Flaubert was striving to express the ideal of Alexandrianism as it existed in nineteenth-century France, he personally identified with the prominently featured characters in *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, the Gnostics. He was partial to their sexual practices to the extent that they figuratively represented the act of writing. Flaubert included in much more explicit detail in his 1849 version of the play these bizarre sexual

practices which were attributed to the Gnostics. It seems that he voluntarily removed these references in his later version in order to avoid problems with censorship. These practices included a focus on not consummating intercourse, the practice of sodomy, promiscuity and infanticide (Donato 89-90). While infanticide is not a sexual practice, it is included among the Gnostics' sexual practices because it relates to sex generally, and, specifically, it is evidence of their unwillingness to accept paternity. Donato points out that the various descriptions of the Gnostics' sexual practices, while seemingly heterogeneous, actually "form a coherent unit. On the one hand, the Gnostics seem to overvalue sexuality; on the other, they systematically refuse paternity and generation. But then Flaubert will use a parallel set of sexual metaphors to describe the act of literary writing" (90).

While the Gnostics are sexual libertines, they categorically strive to not procreate so as to avoid any result from the sexual act; Flaubert feels unable to achieve any substantial result from writing, which he views as a sexual act. Donato best explains Flaubert's affinity for the Gnostics:

The failure to generate a *work* is a modern incapacity. To father a work with all the authorial authority it implies is a modern dilemma, that is to say, *the historical dilemma of the nineteenth-century writer writing at what he takes to be the end of history*. And it is perhaps in this importance, this inability to generate at the end of history, that Flaubert's affinity for the Gnostics, with all their presumedly bizarre sexual practices, lies [italics added]. (Donato 91)

In his correspondence, Flaubert allegorizes writing about a new subject with initially

approaching a woman (Donato 90): “Un sujet à traiter est pour moi comme une femme dont on est amoureux; quand elle va vous céder on tremble et on a peur, c’est un effroi voluptueux. On n’ose pas toucher son désir” (*Correspondance I* : 390). About the act of writing, Flaubert writes, “Ne nous inquiétons pas tant du résultat. Foutons, foutons; qu’importe l’enfant dont accouchera la Muse !” (*Correspondance I* : 677). Donato cites several additional instances in which Flaubert compares writing to sexual acts. Being incapable of ultimately bringing to fruition a sexual relationship with “the Muse,” the modern author is reduced to engaging in an unfruitful solitary activity (Donato 90) akin to literary masturbation: “Là peut-être, à force de masturber mon pauvre esprit, parviendrai-je à en faire jaillir quelque chose?” (*Correspondance II* : 709). Flaubert also wrote, “Masturbons le vieil art jusque dans le plus profond de ses jointures” (*Correspondance II* : 842). To summarize Donato’s logic: Writing is a sexual act. It is also a solitary activity. Therefore, writing is more akin to masturbation than intercourse. Thus, the sexual relationship with “the Muse” is never realized. The common factor between the Gnostics’ view of sex and Flaubert’s view of writing is the lack of result.

Donato cites other portions of the play in which this theme of writing equated to sex continues. Specifically, he cites the long passage in the play devoted to the Queen of Sheba, who personifies the ultimate sexual desire, as well as the ultimate literary work: “Je ne suis pas une femme, je suis un monde” (Flaubert 84). Thanks to her power, she appears in control of fiction itself:

Merci, beau Simorg-anka! toi qui m’appriis où se cachait l’amoureux ! Merci !
merci ! messenger de mon cœur ! Il vole comme le désir. Il fait le tour du monde

dans sa journée. Le soir il revient ; il se pose au pied de ma couche ; il me raconte ce qu'il a vu, les mers qui ont passé sous lui avec les poissons et les navires, les grands déserts vides qu'il a contemplés du haut des cieux, et toutes les moissons qui se courbaient dans la campagne, et les plantes qui poussaient sur le mur des villes abandonnées (Flaubert 83).

Just as the Queen of Sheba, who is “supreme sexuality,” and who possesses the supreme fiction, remains inaccessible to St. Anthony in the play, so, too, modern writers, like Flaubert, are denied the “supreme fiction” represented by her (Donato 91). Both “supreme sexuality” and “supreme fiction” are Donato’s terms. “Supreme fiction” is defined in terms of “supreme sexuality.” Just as the Queen of Sheba, who is the ultimate sexual conquest, remains unattainable by St. Anthony of antiquity, so too, the ultimate novel or work of writing remains out of the reach of the nineteenth-century writer: “Anthony, a character in a belated history, cannot have access to her [Queen of Sheba] as the emblem of a supreme sexuality any more than the modern writer can have access to the supreme fiction she represents” (Donato 91). Relating this to the search for the ideal, the Queen of Sheba represents the sexual ideal, which is unattainable because it does not exist, just as the ultimate fiction or written work does not exist. The ultimate fiction is just as mythical as the ultimate sexual conquest: they are both imaginary. Said makes a similar connection between writing and sex in the case of Flaubert: “Woven through all of Flaubert’s Oriental experiences, exciting or disappointing, is an almost uniform association between the Orient and sex” (188). Flaubert’s association is transferred to his writing: “In all of his novels Flaubert associates the Orient with the escapism of sexual

fantasy” (Said 190). Thus, while Donato directly equates the acts of sex and writing in Flaubert’s *œuvre*, Said points to Flaubert’s preoccupation with sex permeating his works. The Queen of Sheba is a literary personification of Flaubert’s sexual affinity for the Gnostics. After all, he chose to use her character to introduce the section on the Gnostics themselves.

Flaubert Uses Orthodoxy and Church History to Criticize Catholicism

Following the many challenges to his Christian faith and wisdom by the Queen of Sheba, the heretics and Hellenism, Anthony responds definitively by reciting in its entirety the Nicene Creed:

Je crois en un seul Dieu, le Père, — et en un seul Seigneur, Jésus-Christ, — fils premier-né de Dieu, — qui s’est incarné et fait homme, — qui a été crucifié — et enseveli, — qui est monté au ciel, — qui viendra pour juger les vivants et les morts — dont le royaume n’aura pas de fin; — et à un seul baptême de repentance, — et à une seule sainte Église catholique, — et à la résurrection de la chair, — et à la vie éternelle ! (Flaubert 189-90)

Orr argues that this line in the play should not be considered an “empty formula or platitude” (Orr, “East or West?” 89-90). Instead, it completely grounds Anthony’s character in Church History: “Flaubert’s Antoine reflects Egypt’s place in *Roman* Catholicism and also in the Eastern Orthodox and Coptic Churches which remain centred on an integration of body, soul, mind and spirit in ways often forgotten by later

‘Orthodox,’ that is Roman Catholic, Fathers of the Faith including Augustine and Aquinas” (Orr, “East or West?” 90).

Flaubert relies on accounts of the life of Saint Anthony, which are as authentic as possible to Alexandria. The *Vita Antonii* best exemplifies this. Instead of relying solely on Western accounts of the life of Saint Anthony, Flaubert portrays the truer image of Anthony, which is filtered only through Athanasius of Alexandria, the author of *Vita Antonii*, and not processed through centuries of Catholic theological scholarship. Orr argues that Flaubert was using his presentation of Anthony to be critical of Western Catholicism’s imperialistic tendencies. According to her, Flaubert’s accuracy in describing Egyptian spiritualities is evidence not of an erudite Orientalist and Historian of Religions, but of a novelist profoundly critical of Western Christendom in all its cultural imperialisms (“East or West?” 90).

Spiritual Disciplines of St. Anthony and Flaubert

Both Flaubert and Anthony needed to maintain a sort of spiritual discipline in order to keep the purity of their beliefs—Anthony as an Anchorite monk (a hermit), and Flaubert as a writer—against the temptation to become tainted by any one political faction of their times. Anthony was *in* the Church of fourth-century Alexandria but not *of* it in the sense that he resisted being made Patriarch to champion any one theological argument. Indeed, he was never even ordained to the priesthood. He removed himself from the theo-political struggles of his time by maintaining a spiritual discipline in the

desert, where he was physically removed from Alexandria, the center of the Oriental Church's power. Thus, Anthony became an indisputable pillar of the Church from which he maintained a certain distance. By placing Anthony in this proper historic context in his play, Flaubert applies this paradox of Anthony of the Fourth Century to his own time and place.

The pro-Egyptian and Patristics "spin" to *La Tentation* presents Flaubert as both heterodox and orthodox in the manner of Saint Ant[h]ony himself. Maverick in his need for isolation, in his political and intellectual world, but not of them, he remains separate from institutions and party politics (Orr, "East or West?" 90). In other words, Flaubert bases his character of St. Anthony on the historic *Egyptian* sources of Anthony rather than on Western European sources that might have presented a view of Anthony distorted by the Western European viewpoint. This "pro-Egyptian" spin is also "pro-Patristics" because it is based upon the *Vita Antonii*, the main historic account of the life of Saint Anthony. The *Vita Antonii* was written by Athanasius of Alexandria (or the Great), who is one of the Early Church Fathers.

Flaubert's use of oriental beliefs as a means to critique his own time allows him to remain outside of the nineteenth-century French fray by placing himself among the "writer visionaries of the past and of the Orient" (Orr, "East or West?" 91). Flaubert does not directly criticize his own milieu.

Flaubert and Anthony Each had their Critics

If Flaubert and Anthony are both pillars in their respective societies—Flaubert as a writer and Anthony as an ascetic, who founded the monastic life, each influencing his respective society—then within this context, Athanasius, as the biographer of Anthony, fulfills the role of the modern critic “as heresiologist or determinant of literary ‘purity’ or canonicity” (Orr, “East or West?” 91). Since a “heresiologist” is a theologian in the orthodox Church, who determines orthodoxy, and refutes heresy, Athanasius, then, who wrote the *Vita Antonii*, which not only chronicled the life of St. Anthony, but also supported his beliefs, acts in the capacity of a modern critic. In the way a critic is focused on maintaining literary purity or supporting a high caliber of literary excellence among writers, Athanasius was intent upon maintaining theological purity in the Church. Throughout literary history, the critic has been able to make or break writers based upon evaluations of their works “according to criteria of moral impact, social credibility, difficulty or amusement appeal” (Orr, “East or West?” 91).

Orr cites three cases in Flaubert’s life, which support the above-mentioned assertion. While the actual effects on Flaubert were minimal, the *Madame Bovary* trial illustrated the potential power of censorship in an attempt to figuratively throw Flaubert “to the lions” in martyrdom for his convictions (Orr, “East or West?” 91).⁵ Orr also

⁵ In January 1857, Flaubert was charged with an affront to public morality for the contents of *Madame Bovary*. He was acquitted and the publicity generated by the trial boosted the sales of this novel (Lottman 135-39).

mentions in a footnote that Saint Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, which is modern-day Izmir, Turkey, was martyred by being burned alive for opposing heresy and religious persecution. In addition to Anthony, Polycarp was a favorite of Flaubert and makes a significant appearance in the critical middle portion of the play. While *L'Education sentimentale* and *Salammbô* are judged socially unacceptable, it is "*La Tentation*'s 'critical' receptions that have kept it the most marginalized as irrelevant or abstruse because it is 'religious'" (Orr, "East or West?" 91). Orr argues that whether Flaubert was a "religious" or "anti-religious" writer misses the point: "Because his *Tentation de saint Antoine* speaks about the struggle to maturity and the constancy of one's beliefs regardless of critical reception, it is these values that need to be put before the closed-minded in the critical community" (Orr, "East or West?" 91). In an email to John DeTrana, dated 11 February 2014, Orr clarifies the previous statement, writing that she suspects she was referring to "Francophones unwilling to engage with religious issues in Flaubert (unlike excellent US critics like Bowman)" (Orr). One could deduct from the context of the above-cited e mail, that Orr was insinuating that the American critics like Bowman are excellent because they deal with religious issues in Flaubert and not only because they are American.

Evangelical Christianity: Modern Gnosticism

Joe Morris cites a continuous prevalence of Gnosticism over time—from the time of the Early Church to our present day—specifically as cited by the modern-day Gnostics:

These latter-day Gnostics will direct your attention to history and point out that the Cathars, Rosicrucians, Knights Templar, Esoteric Freemasons, and Theosophists had roots in Gnosticism. They will remind you that the study of Gnosticism was thriving in the nineteenth century, championed by well-known scholars and writers—such as William Blake (1757-1827), Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), Herman Melville (1819-91), and William Butler Yeats (1865-1939)... With pride they will tell you a Gnostic church was reestablished in France in 1890 and is still active today. (2)

Morris posits that modern-day Gnosticism is alive and well, mostly in the United States, in the form of Protestant Fundamentalism. He argues that while this group as a whole does not believe it has any secret, salvific or soul-saving texts or knowledge like the Gnostics of the Early Church, it does believe that its members, because they have “accepted Jesus as their personal savior,” and, thus, are “born again,” possess salvation to the exclusion of those who do not adhere to this formula. In addition, like the Gnostics of old, this concept of being saved by being born again removes any reason to live a chaste, moral life. That is not to say that all Fundamentalist Protestants are moral profligates, but

it does mean that this moral or religious framework can lead to the view that salvation is not dependent upon one's actions. The one geographic connection that can be drawn between these "American Gnostics" as Morris would call them and the France of Flaubert, is that the Protestant movement began in Europe.

Marcionism, Dispensationalism and Millennialism

In addition to tracing the journey of Gnosticism from its earliest iterations to current times, I have been able to identify at least three nineteenth-century French cults to have beliefs which can be tied to the Gnostic beliefs found in the play. One early-Church heresy that appears in the play reappeared in nineteenth-century France. This is the heresy of Marcionism, as formulated by Marcion, who appears in the play as the fourth heretic speaking to Anthony. He has one line of dialogue in which he states, "Certainement, le Créateur n'est pas le vrai Dieu!" (Flaubert 101). Later in the play's section on the heretics, the followers of Marcion, the Marcionites, cry out, "L'Évangile du Seigneur!" (Flaubert 116). Brown discusses the teachings of Marcion, whom he calls, "the first great heretic," and whose life straddled the first and second centuries AD (62). Marcion was radically at odds with orthodox Christianity on the imminent, personal return of Christ. He did not believe in a real incarnation of Christ and thus could not logically profess to his followers an expectation of the second coming. Marcion also drew a strong distinction between the Old Testament Law and the New Testament Gospel, concluding that the "Torah had been totally superseded by the Gospel" (Brown

63). Thus, his view was at odds with the Church's teaching that the New Testament does not replace or supersede the Old Testament. Instead, it *fulfills* the Old Testament. The two Testaments are complementary. Marcion taught that the orthodox Church was incorrectly mixing Old Testament Judaism with the distinctly different, and in many cases, contradictory New Testament Gospel. Incidentally, his critics in the Church reasoned that Marcion took such a position because his own personal conduct fell woefully short of the Old Testament teaching (Brown 63). I have not been able to establish that Flaubert was aware of this movement in his century. Brown cites the nineteenth and twentieth-century movement called "dispensationalism" as drawing on this early Marcionic heresy in its Old Testament/New Testament distinction (Brown 65).

The grounds on which both groups, the Marcionites and the dispensationalists, rejected the Old Testament for the New Testament was a matter of emphasis. On the one hand, orthodox Christianity teaches that the New Testament fulfills the Old Testament. On the other hand, these two heretical groups taught that the New Testament *replaces* the Old. The Marcionites believed this to apply to everyone, including the Jews while the dispensationalists taught that it was relevant for Christians only (Brown 65). These concepts and a connection among Marcionism, Dispensationalism, and the more modern "Millennialism" are further developed below.

Dispensationalism uses a different logic from Marcionism to arrive at similar conclusions on the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. In the Dispensationalist view, the Old Testament Law is not completely invalid as Marcion taught, but valid only for the nation of Israel—not as the nation-state of Israel, but as a

race of people. In other words, in the view of the Dispensationalist, Old Testament Law applies only to those with whom it originated: the Jewish people. In their view, Christians, conversely, live under the governance of the New Testament or grace alone. Thus, the Old Testament is a dispensation for “Jews,” whereas the New Testament created a completely new and different age and with it, the new dispensation of grace for Christians. Differing from Marcion who taught rejection of the Second Coming, the dispensationalists teach that the Second Coming will happen, and when it does, it will mark the millennium, a thousand-year reign of Christ on earth (Brown 63-65). While one could logically assume that Flaubert was familiar with the Lutheran Church, which has Dispensationalist leanings, it has not been possible to establish any evidence of Flaubert’s having known about Dispensationalism itself. There is no mention of it in his correspondence, for example. I have only been able to establish the existence of Dispensationalism/Millennialism in eighteenth-century France. In the nineteenth century, espousal of this theological view was growing especially in Ireland and North America. A brief overview of this is presented below.

All the above being said, there is a connection between Dispensationalism and Millennialism. Millennialism takes Dispensationalism to the next logical step. It is a loosely developed theology that looks for this Dispensationalist thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. In this way, Millennialism places an eschatological value on political events. And, as one would guess, millenarian groups gain popularity and larger followings during intense political events such as revolutions—such as the French Revolution, for example. Garrett cites three distinct groups of millenarians in

Revolutionary France. He emphasizes that the ability of these millenarian doctrines to “serve as a comforting explanation of events and conditions that would otherwise be threatening and incomprehensible” is one reason for their survival over the years (Garrett 13). The origins of the French Revolutionary millennialism are found in men and women using Christian religious Tradition to interpret events that would otherwise be upsetting or incomprehensible. I intentionally kept the eighteenth-century French millennialist examples rather vague, as this is not the time period under consideration for this study.

However, in the nineteenth century, we see a resurgence in the dispensationalist/millennialist doctrine especially in Ireland and then in the United States. “Irishman John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) is unquestionably the father of modern dispensationalism” (Bigalke xxii). In the nineteenth century, Darby developed the modern version of Dispensationalism in Ireland and brought it to the United States between 1862 and 1877 (Bigalke xxv). Thus, it appears that the second-century Marcionism, which Flaubert includes in *La Tentation*, was evident around but not during Flaubert’s nineteenth-century France. It is documented as having existed in eighteenth-century France and in nineteenth-century Ireland and United States, but not in nineteenth-century France.

D.G. Charlton, in his *Secular Religions in France 1815-1870*, mentions another nineteenth-century cult that bears a resemblance to the fourth-century Gnostics. The year of 1870 marked the demise of the Second Empire following defeat during the Franco-Prussian War and the proclamation of the Third Republic (Sowerwine 3). Charlton cites a nineteenth-century cult, which closely resembles both the above-mentioned Marcionism

as well as Arianism in its beliefs. This was a minor cult called the Abbé Châtel's Église Catholique Française. His creed is contained in a *Catéchisme* (1833) and the *Code de l'humanité* (1838). He "taught that God is pure spirit and, denying the doctrine of the Trinity, that Christ was a prophet" (Charlton 131). These teachings are identical to those of Marcion and Arius, who both denied the divinity of Christ, and, in so doing, rejected the Trinitarian doctrine. We read Arius' lines in the play in which he completely separates Christ from God:

le Fils n'est pas coéternel au Père, ni de même substance! Autrement il n'aurait pas dit: «Père, éloigne de moi ce calice ! – Pourquoi m'appellez-vous bon ? Dieu seul est bon ! –Je vais à mon Dieu, à votre Dieu !» et d'autres paroles attestant sa qualité de créature. Elle nous est démontrée, de plus, par tous ses noms : agneau, pasteur, fontaine, sagesse, fils de l'homme, prophète, bonne voie, pierre angulaire ! (114)

Seznec proves in his *Nouvelles Etudes sur La Tentation de saint Antoine* that Flaubert took almost all of the lines attributed to the Gnostic heretics in the play practically verbatim from ancient texts. Seznec does this by performing a painstaking comparative textual analysis between the play and the collection of source texts researched by Flaubert in writing the play. For example, he took the above lines almost verbatim from the early writings of St. Epiphany. Seznec compares Arius' lines from the play to the original St. Epiphany text (21-23).

In addition to these above-mentioned parallels among extra-orthodox church teachings of the fourth and nineteenth centuries, I have established several additional similar links between the two centuries.

Apollonius of Tyana, the Masons and the Rosicrucians

Another character, who appears in the play is Apollonius of Tyana. Occupying a significant portion of the play, he can be traced from his first-century semi-mythical existence to the nineteenth century. His dialogue and description occupy eighteen pages and close the act on the heretics. McIntosh mentions Apollonius of Tyana in his discussion of the nineteenth-century French Occult revival figure the Comte de Saint-Germain, who,

represents a recognizable type of semi-legendary figure who appears frequently in history. He has his counterpart in Appollonius of Tyana, the Greek sage, healer and wonder-worker of the first century A.D.; and in Christian Rosencreutz, the shadowy medieval figure, supposedly the founder of the Rosicrucian movement. Like both of these men, and like many other miraculous figures, Saint-Germain was credited with a journey to the East and a series of initiations into oriental mysteries. For example, at the court of the Shah of Persia, he is supposed to have gathered his prodigious knowledge of precious stones, and in India his knowledge of alchemy. (*Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* 18)

McIntosh gives a general definition of the Rosicrucian movement: “The mission of the Rosicrucian brotherhood is to bring about a new unity among the learned, based on an all-embracing tradition of universal gnosis handed on from the sages of antiquity” (*The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason* 26). Rosicrucian literature includes diverse selections, including from the Jewish Kabbalah, Arabian wisdom and even alchemy:

The Rosicrucian vision was therefore both traditional and radical, both theological and scientific. It drew its inspiration from an ancient source of wisdom and at the same time represented a break with the prevailing spirit in the world of learning. It was emphatically Christian yet looked forward to an age when religion and science would work hand in hand. (McIntosh, *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason* 26)

The Rosicrucian movement originated in antiquity and has long been a significant school of thought in European thinking, influencing Christianity and being influenced by Christianity. It is often in conflict with Christian ideas. The Rosicrucian movement was born from the Western esoteric tradition, which has its own roots in fourth-century Egyptian Gnosticism (McIntosh, *The Rosicrucians* 24). McIntosh notes how remarkable it was for such an irrational legend to have existed in eighteenth-century rational Europe, much less in the France of that era, which was exceedingly rational. He reasons that the eighteenth-century intellectual revolt against the Christian Church created a void that was ready to be filled by one or many new beliefs (*Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* 18-19).

McIntosh asserts that the nineteenth-century revival of Rosicrucianism in France is linked to French masonry: “One of the most vigorous of these revivals took place in France, and we can trace its origins back to the late eighteenth century when Rosicrucian degrees began to be introduced into French masonry” (*The Rosicrucians* 101). While there were Rosicrucian influences in masonry during this time, there were also Rosicrucian groups independent of masonry.

Rosicrucian groups separate from the masons appear to have come to France as early as the 1790s from Germany, where the movement originated geographically (McIntosh, *The Rosicrucians* 101-2). While the Rosicrucian movement entered an inactive phase in France during the first half of the nineteenth century, it enjoyed a revival during the second half of the nineteenth century. The “occult heyday” in France, which followed Eliphas Lévi, created an atmosphere in which the Marquis Stanislas de Guaita and Joséphin Péladan together founded *l’Ordre Kabbalistique de la Rose Croix* in 1888 (McIntosh, *The Rosicrucians* 104-5). De Guaita was introduced to occultism by his friend, the writer Catulle Mendès, who advised him to read Eliphas Lévi (McIntosh, *The Rosicrucians* 105). Flaubert himself read Lévi as noted above from his correspondence. Flaubert also mentions Mendès in his correspondence.

In an 1866 letter to his niece Caroline, he writes, “Je serai probablement témoin du mariage” (*Correspondance* III : 487). We read in the footnote accompanying this sentence that, “ Le mariage de Judith Gautier et de Catulle Mendès aura lieu le 14 avril 1866, en l’absence de Théophile Gautier” (*Correspondance* III : 1378). Thus, Flaubert attended Mendès’ marriage. In addition, Flaubert writes in an 1872 letter to his niece

Caroline, that he attended, “le jour de la première de Catulle Mendès. Sa petite pièce a réussi” (*Correspondance* IV : 538). He was referring to *La Part du roi*, a one-act comedy in verse, performed for the first time at the Comédie Française June 20, 1872 (*Correspondance* IV : 1281). In several letters written in October 1872, Flaubert blames Mendès for causing him to have missed the funeral of Théo Gauthier, the brother of Judith Gauthier, to whom Mendès was married. For example, in an October 1872 letter to Ernest Feydeau, Flaubert writes: “Si je n’ai pas été à l’enterrement de notre Theo, c’est la faute de Catulle qui, au lieu de m’envoyer son télégramme par télégraphe, l’a mis dans une lettre, que j’ai reçue trente-six heures après l’enterrement” (*Correspondance* IV : 596). Mendès was the director of an organization called “La République des Letters,” of which Flaubert was a member. He seems to have had a falling out with Mendès regarding this organization. Flaubert writes to Guy de Maupassant in 1876:

Tout ce que vous me dites du sieur Catulle ne m’étonne nullement. Le même Mendès m’a écrit avant-hier pour que je lui donne gratis des fragments du *Château des cœurs* et, moyennant finances, les contes inédits que je viens de finir. Je lui ai répondu que tout cela m’était impossible, ce qui est vrai. Hier je lui ai écrit derechef une lettre peu tendre étant indigné, exaspéré, par l’article sur Renan.... Bref, j’ai dit à Catulle que 1° je le priais d’effacer mon nom de la liste de ses collaborateurs et 2° de ne plus m’envoyer sa feuille. Je ne veux plus avoir rien de commun avec ces petits messieurs-là. C’est de la très mauvaise compagnie, mon cher ami, et *je vous engage* à faire comme moi, à les lâcher franchement. Catulle va sans doute me répondre, mais mon parti est bien pris,

bonsoir! Ce que je ne pardonne pas, c'est la basse envie démocratique.

(*Correspondance V* : 79)

The above selection from Flaubert's correspondence shows the breadth of his relationship with Mendès. It included family affairs, such as Mendès' marriage and Theo Gauthier's death, as well as business dealings. This correspondence also proves that Flaubert was in contact with Mendès, as he repeatedly refers to his correspondence with Mendès.

Mendès was also in touch with de Guaita. The above correspondence only suggests that there may have been some contact between Flaubert and de Guaita, but does not prove it. Flaubert and de Guaita were both in touch with Mendès. Also, as noted above, de Guaita was reading the same Eliphaz Lévi writings that Flaubert was reading.

Péladan broke away from the Rosicrucian group he and de Guaita founded together, and in 1890 founded his own, which was formed along the lines of his own fervent Catholicism (McIntosh, *The Rosicrucians* 107). This new Rosicrucian group was called *l'Ordre de la Rose Croix Catholique, du Temple et du Graal* (McIntosh, *The Rosicrucians* 107). While its main focus was "to carry out works of mercy with a view to preparing for the reign of the Holy Spirit," Péladan envisaged for his group the setting forth of "a whole set of religious, moral and aesthetic values" (McIntosh, *The Rosicrucians* 107). Taking charge himself in organizing events the fields of art, music and drama, Péladan enjoyed considerable success" (McIntosh, *The Rosicrucians* 107-8). Péladan organized a series of very successful exhibitions, beginning in 1892, called the Salons de la Rose-Croix. The only art that was allowed dealt with "Catholic, mystical or spiritual themes" (McIntosh, *The Rosicrucians* 108). Running over a five-year period,

these Salons attracted well-known artists including Gustave Moreau, Félicien Rops and Georges Rouault” (McIntosh, *The Rosicrucians* 108). There is an indirect connection between Flaubert and Péladan through Moreau. While Péladan’s Rosicrucian movement occurred after Flaubert had already completed the final version of his *La Tentation*, Flaubert mentions Moreau in two letters between 1868 and 1872. In an 1868 letter to Ernest Chesneau, Flaubert thanks Chesneau for properly admiring the work of Moreau: “je vous remercie d’avoir rendu justice à Gustave Moreau, que beaucoup de nos amis n’ont pas, selon moi, suffisamment admiré” (*Correspondance* III : 807). Next, Flaubert identifies with Moreau around their mutual disdain for “la foule.” To his niece, Caroline, in 1872, Flaubert writes: “J’ai appris à Paris que plusieurs personnes (entre autres Gustave Moreau, le peintre) étaient affectées de la même maladie que moi, c’est-à-dire l’*insupportation* de la foule” (*Correspondance* IV : 561). Thus, in a fashion similar to his relationship with de Guaita, Flaubert appears to have had at least an indirect relationship with both de Guaita and Péladan.

The Sethians and the Masons

In addition to the several heresies and cults listed above, another heretical group from the fourth century, which makes a brief appearance in the play, can also be confirmed to have reappeared in the nineteenth century in France. This group is the Sethians: “Sethians were members of a closed society that considered its members to be the seed of Seth, the third son of Adam and Eve, and they were the portion of humanity

that had received gnosis and could thus have a different fate to the rest of mankind who followed the pattern of Cain and Abel, murderer and victim” (Smith 35). Thus, the Sethians exhibited a hallmark of Gnosticism. By being followers or descendants of Seth rather than of Abel, and therefore, Cain, the Sethians removed themselves from the good (Abel) versus evil (Cain) binary inherent in the orthodox Christian teaching. They chime in during an argument over the *filioque* begun by Arius, who proclaims, “le Fils n’est pas coéternel au Père, ni de même substance!” (114). Anthony asks, “Qu’est-ce donc que le Verbe? ... Qu’était Jésus?” (114). Following a response by the Valentinians, the Sethians shout, “C’était Sem, fils de Noé!” (114). Churton writes that the “role of Seth in offering a new future to the human race after the denigration of Cain has inspired many myths. Josephus wrote in the first century C.E. of how Seth was ‘a virtuous man’ who left children of ‘excellent character’ who ‘were the inventors of that peculiar sort of wisdom which is concerned with the heavenly bodies and their order’” (“Aleister Crowley and the Yezidis” 198). Josephus wrote that following Adam’s prediction that the world would be destroyed by flood and fire, Seth’s descendants responded by engraving their discoveries on brick and stone pillars: “‘Now this remains in the land of Siriad to this day’” (As quoted in Churton, “Aleister Crowley and the Yezidis” 198). This legend is directly linked to the Masons: “This legend was familiar and significant to the first Freemasons, from at least the early seventeenth century” (Churton, “Aleister Crowley and the Yezidis” 198).

The Sethians are considered to exhibit evidence of having been a Jewish sect. They are thought to have been a baptismal sect on the model of John the Baptist,

spanning the transition from BC to AD (Smith 37). The Sethians appear to have predated Christianity, and after having come into contact with early Christians did they equate Seth to Jesus (Smith 37): “By the third century some Sethians identified Christ as an incarnation of Seth, the new man whose line was pure, founder of what they called ‘the immovable race,’ guardians of the gnosis, with the implications that come the predicted cataclysms of fire and flood, the Sethians would stand” (Churton, “Aleister Crowley and the Yezidis” 198).

Churton also writes about the phenomenon of wandering bishops in the Catholic Church: “Joseph René Vilatte (1854-1929) [was] a key figure in the history of the wandering bishops who obtained an episcopal consecration in 1892 in the Malankara Syrian Church in Ceylon, an Eastern Church whose orders are recognized as valid by the Roman Catholic Church” (Churton, “The Beast and the Prophet” 262). For example, Jules Doineau (1842-1902) founded a Gnostic Church in France in 1890, making no claims to apostolic succession (Churton, “The Beast and the Prophet” 262):

In 1913 the leader of one of its branches, Jean Bricaud (1881-1934), finally acquired a line of apostolic succession after being consecrated a bishop by Louis-François Giraud (1876-1950), whose line of succession originated from Vilatte. From this time, the various Gnostic Churches were strongly interested in occultism; prominent occult teachers such as René Guénon...and prominent European Freemasons were consecrated as bishops in one or another of these churches in the twentieth century. (Churton, “The Beast and the Prophet” 262)

While the content of the above information deals with a time period which falls well after Flaubert and his play, in order for this sort of official consecration to have occurred, the existence of these non-canonical bishops had to have existed well prior to this time frame. In other words, it is likely that this sort of Gnosticism existed in Flaubert's France without being officially recognized.

There are several general trends shared among the heretics existing in the historical setting of *La Tentation* and those prevalent in Flaubert's nineteenth-century France. Also, specific theological doctrines shared among heretical leaders of the two eras are identifiable.

I have identified several cases in which beliefs existing in Flaubert's nineteenth-century France had also existed during the Early Church time period in the Alexandria, Egypt of St. Anthony portrayed in Flaubert's play. While in most cases the reappearance of these beliefs in France while Flaubert was writing *La Tentation* appears to be coincidental, there are a couple which may have influenced Flaubert's decision to include certain Gnostic heretics in his play. These later cults and cult leaders include Eliphas Lévi, the Rosicrucians and the Masons.

Conclusion

After placing *La Tentation de saint Antoine* within Flaubert's body of works, I gained a better understanding and appreciation of this work both chronologically and symbolically. The play's significance to Flaubert became apparent to me, as it occupied him in one form or another for most of his life. Many of his early works were rehearsals for the play itself. The play alone was revised twice by Flaubert over the course of his life. Though all three versions were panned by critics and friends alike, he continued to refer to this work as "l'œuvre de toute ma vie." He personally identified with the play's main character, St. Anthony the Alexandrian hermit and father of monasticism. While Anthony was the hermit of Alexandria, Flaubert referred to himself as the "Hermit of Croisset." Though *Madame Bovary* was more successful commercially and critically for Flaubert than was *La Tentation*, he maintained that he felt much more at ease with Anthony rather than with Emma Bovary.

Flaubert incorporates the political and literary trends that were part of French and especially Parisian life while Flaubert was working on the play. For example, he exquisitely uses crowds, which were all over Paris during the political upheavals of 1848 and the early 1870s, as a literary tool to discredit the heretics in the play as they professed their beliefs. Thus, Flaubert includes in *La Tentation* political and literary influences from his own time and place. Along these lines, I have explored the possibility that

Flaubert may have been influenced by the many “new” religions which existed in his nineteenth-century Paris and France to include, specifically, the Gnostic heretics in the play. While many of the relationships between the play’s heretics and those beliefs prevalent in Flaubert’s France are tenuous, others suggest more causality through evidence in the similarities of the beliefs across the centuries and evidence in Flaubert’s correspondence.

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