



The Discourse of History in Gustav Flaubert's *Sentimental Education**

Amir Reza HAJINIA **/Nasrindokht KHATTAT***

COSTANT Political changes and struggles in the 19th century France have highlighted the presence of history in artistic works of this era, especially in realist and naturalist novels. As a leading figure of his time, Gustav Flaubert and his novels have been the subject of numerous researches on the topic of history and its emphasis in Flaubert's novels having the potential to uncover what historians have failed to perceive. Among these works, *Sentimental Education* is an amalgamation of concrete truths and an innovative understanding of the 1848 revolutionary events, and for the reason of closeness to objectivity and argument in this novel, according to some critics, Flaubert deserves to be accounted as a 19th century historian. Not only for his faithfulness to represent historical events, but also for a glorious capability that he had gained to interpret events (philosophy of history) and a structural quality to interpret them (poetics) the label of being a historian has attached to him. In this article, alongside with the rational aspect of the novel (history and reality), it is attempted, in a different manner, to survey the existence of time. By considering Flaubert's approach to contemplate history (philosophy of history) and structure of the novel (poetics) instead of this common inquiry which asks the Flaubert's intuition and argumentation about history, it is intended to respond to this question that what discourse of history Flaubert has provided in *Sentimental Education*.

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**Ph.D. student, Shahid Beheshti University, Iran, (corresponding author), E-mail:
amirrezahajinia@gmail.com

***Professor, Shahid Beheshti University, Iran, E-mail: nkhattate@yahoo.fr

Gustave Flaubert's correspondences and his vivid enthusiasm and interest in History represent the place of History in the author's formation and his aesthetic reflection on the subject. History possessed a central role in Flaubert's works because he is preoccupied with its representation. History also plays a role as a sample that the artistic works imitate it; hence, the representation of History is inseparable from the evolution of imaginative work. It is evident in Flaubert's correspondences that reflecting on the subject of History leads him to a more serious questioning of his own concepts and consciousness. These reflecting and questioning impact on his novels and poems. The 19th century is the century of History not because of inventing historical narratives of its events and studying past events, but because History has a vital place in the organization of consciousness and knowledge. There is a general problem in the History of literature which is concerned with the utilization of literary texts as sources of History of political beliefs. To what extent do novels assist us in our knowledge of a historical period or a society? It seems that it is an absurd attempt to discover authentic History out of imaginative work in which the author necessarily has traversed historical events through and by his subjective and fictional pondering. In spite of all, Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* is an invaluable and first-hand evidence to studying history since the political concept of the work is not reducible to recited incidences, acclaimed positions, or narrator's judgments. *Sentimental Education*'s goal is not to narrate a monumental history, but to elucidate the spirit of an epoch, an atmosphere, and a generation in order to represent the conflicting mechanisms in an individual manner, and accordingly, the destiny is to disclose the complexities of an epoch. Through this symbolic writing and fictional point of views, it is possible to reconstruct Flaubert's perspective on his epoch and historical forces of his time. In comparison with Frederic's love affairs, it seems that history takes a second place, but the most surprising characteristics of the novel lies in the way history is studied. Here, there is no separation in fictionality and historicity. The relation between History and imagination is constructed by omitting any borrowed characters from the real History. Not in a direct way but by an emphasis on narrative dimension, Flaubert invokes History solely through imagination. All the dimensions of social life are perceived through individual lives. Neither of fragment of History nor a particularly crucial historical moment is overlooked by the characters. Once again, the priority of imaginative, personal, and everyday dimension of the novel discloses itself over the historical dimension. History releases itself through dialogues and characters' discourses and actors' articulations, and consequently, the discourse of historian eradicates.

Everyday discussions and discourses in *Sentimental Education* are the most appropriate and available tools in regard to events' historiography and contact with History. Time can refashion itself through dialogues and given

information. Historical events represented through oral justifications of characters tell us where the characters belong to regarding their personal transformations and which social classes they represent, and also, where the whole society stands. More than disclosing real events of History, the novel retells the personal, subjective and internal beliefs of its characters. The goal of this way of retelling of History is to elucidate a general ambiance of the collective life of society as a whole considering all social classes, each of which standing as a social class code. Each of the characters represents a socio-political belief through which Flaubert symbolizes the whole society and an epoch by offering an account to its actors but not by narrating its historical events. Consequently, Flaubert has constructed ways for historical representations based mostly on historical reflection rather than portraying characters, giving descriptions, or dialogues in a mechanical and direct way. A historical evidence through a symbolic writing in an imaginative work like *Sentimental Education* is not a mere description of historical events.

The significance, fascination and modernity in Gustav Flaubert's sentimental education mostly arise from its association and relation with history. In order to avoid offering any systematic account of history in his fictional structure, most of the recent critics hold, Flaubert has deployed an innovative and avant-garde system. Hence, recent critics pay heed to historical poetics, or strictly speaking, a specific discourse by which he constructs, destructs and reconstructs the political facts of his era. In addition, it is aimed at studying the process which is associated with the arrangement, configuration and organization in order to reveal the fact that how the 1848 revolution, throughout the novel in a sporadic manner represented in scenes, dialogues and incidents has been exposed. To respond to this matter in a more satisfying way, it is attempted to focus on new ways and procedures by which Flaubert abandons any invention of explicit historical discourse. With the assistance of internal focalization and narrative functions of descriptions, these processes let him help history visualize itself in an interrupted fashion. In fact, it is through the sporadic fragments of descriptions that Flaubert succeeds in marginalizing history and then determining the presence of history by means of its absence and rendering an interesting reading to its readers.