

This is the first comprehensive study in English of Flaubert's least well-known masterpiece, the final version of his *Tentation de saint Antoine* (1874). If thanks to Michel Foucault calling it a 'fantastic library' it has the reputation of arcane erudition, its various manuscript versions putting complex creative writing processes on display have made it also the paradigm work for the specialist genetic critic. Both reputations distance the ordinary reader from the text which Flaubert himself described as 'l'œuvre de toute ma vie'. By assuming instead no prior knowledge of the work, its versions, debates, or contexts, Mary Orr opens up new readings of the seven tableaux which comprise it, and new ways of interpreting the whole. Newcomers and specialists are therefore invited to contemplate afresh this central work in Flaubert's *œuvre* and in nineteenth-century French studies.

Arguing that Flaubert was imagining his own epoch through the eyes of a visionary saint in the third to fourth century AD, Orr elucidates for the first time the dialogues between religion and science that constitute the dynamic of the text. By insisting on the work's meticulous accuracy and imaginative representation of science encapsulated by the 'remapping' analogy of her subtitle, Orr proposes that Flaubert's *Tentation* is a paradigm of nineteenth-century French and also European 'literary science'.

For specialists in nineteenth-century French literature and in Flaubert studies, this book challenges received critical wisdom on a number of fronts. Flaubert's 'realism', 'anti-clericalism', and 'orientalism' are all remapped through the text's unlikely protagonist-visionary speaking to the religious and scientific controversies of nineteenth-century France. Flaubert's 1874 *Tentation* is then indeed his 'temptation' to write the life of his times.

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