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Invoking The Senses In *Salammbô*: From Flaubert's Words To Druillet's Graphics

Natacha Guyot
University of Texas at Dallas

Abstract

Storytelling is a landmark in humankind's development and has been notably anchored in the arts. When examining storytelling in the Poetics, Aristotle defines beauty as "in magnitude as well as order." How could magnitude and order practically emerge in storytelling to make it beautiful? What specific elements provide magnitude and how should they be organized? These questions provide a frame of reference from which to examine two French works of art: Gustave Flaubert's 19th century novel Salammbô, and Philippe Druillet's eponymous Science Fiction graphic novel adaption from the 1980s. Aristotle's mention of magnitude leads to reflecting on how storytelling brings a narrative to life through the invocation of the senses; both artists' audiences are exposed to such a multifaceted experience of beauty. The way Flaubert and Druillet embed the senses through their storytelling is. As for the second part of Aristotle's citation regarding order, two points of analysis emerge. One is the notion of the mimesis, how the artist chooses to imitate and represent the world. The other regards the tragedy's key elements of diction (language). This paper thus aims at analyzing beauty's existence by comparing how these two versions of Salammbô invoke the senses through mimesis and diction

Introduction

Storytelling has been a landmark in humankind's development and has notably anchored itself in the arts for millennia. In the *Poetics*, ancient Greek thinker Aristotle discusses this specific topic with a focus on the nature of classical Greek tragedy. Beyond analyzing its six main elements of plot, character, reasoning, diction, lyric poetry and spectacle,he also writes about the history of the genre, and offers a comparative analysis with other forms of poetry, such as the epic, and sheds light on difference of formats. While beauty is not commonly brought up in art-related critical pieces, it is compelling to see that Aristotle mentions this very complex notion: "Beauty consists in magnitude as well as order." (14) Where beauty can be considered a fleeting experience as "one cannot hold on to beauty very long" (Turner 3), Aristotle brings forward two specific qualities of beauty: magnitude, which corroborates how poignant its experience can be as it 'makes life worth living" (Turner 8), and order, which can

be related to a specific way of approaching the artistic rendering of one's choice, or a certain expertise in the craft necessary to bring a creation to life.

Having chosen to focus on the interrelations between storytelling and beauty, Aristotle's quote was striking in its thought-provoking nature. How could magnitude and order practically emerge in storytelling to make it beautiful? What specific elements provided magnitude and how shall they be organized? These questions provided a frame of reference to examine the works of art I had chosen for this research project: Gustave Flaubert's 19th century novel *Salammbô*, as well as Philippe Druillet'seponymous graphic novel adaption from the 1980s. Flaubert (1821-1880) was a French novelist, mostly known for being a pillar to the literary realism movement, though he also drew from romanticism for some of his inspirations in his style. Druillet (born 1944) is a French graphic artist and a visual design innovator. He has been creating comics since 1966. With fellow illustrators, including Moebius, he created the publishing house *Les HumanoïdesAssociés*, as well as the magazine *MétalHurlant*, in 1975. Druillet's graphic novel adaptation takes ancient Carthage to space and brings the story to a Science Fiction universe. While most of the plot and characters remain the same as in Flaubert's narrative, the opening and ending of Druillet's work differs. Druillet's recurrent protagonist, since his first released title in 1966, a space rogue named Lone Sloane, finds out about Salammbô, and becomesMatho to seek her out. At the end, Sloane's damaged body is found and brought aboard another space ship where he can be treated.

Aristotle's mention of magnitude led to reflecting on how storytelling brings a narrative to life, whether the depicted universe is familiar to the audience or not. One aspect of Flaubert's storytelling that has been most praised and compelling is his vivid depictions. It is what drew me to focus this research on the invocation of the senses and how they could provide that magnitude to the experience of beauty to both artists' audiences. The way Flaubert and Druillet embed it through their storytelling is a crucial aspect of their creations' impact. As for the second part of Aristotle's citation regarding order, it helped to narrow down which elements to focus on for this analysis and allowed me to choose the appropriate methodology. Instead of selecting plot or characters, I picked two other important points. The first one is the notion of the *mimesis*, how the artist chooses to imitate and represent the world, although *mimesis*typically pertains to poetry, and even art, in general and not simply to tragedy. The second one is one of the tragedy's key elements of diction (language). The rest of this paper will thusanalyze the differences and similarities in how these two versions of *Salammbô* invoke the senses through *mimesis* and diction.

A fuller experience of mimesis

"Epic poetry and the composition of tragedy […] are all (taken together) *imitations*. They can be differentiated from each other in three respects: […] their different *media* of imitation or different *objects*, or a different *mode* (i.e. a different manner)." (Aristotle 3)This definition of *mimesis*and how the artist seeks to convey their vision of it, gives a purposeful approach to a foundational aspect of storytelling: worldbuilding. It provides a playground for both plot and characters, two other crucial elements in Aristotle's point of view in his critical work of classic Greek tragedy. Worldbuilding brings the whole *mimesis* to life, not only through sights or sounds, which are the two more commonly senses storytellers rely on, but also touch, smell, and taste. Invoking multiple, if not all, senses, can convey new layers of meaning and thus beauty to the audience because it makes the experience deeper and more visceral.

When depicting "literature as one of the "extraordinary" experiences, inciting not knowledge but ecstasy and trance" (130), Storey provides ground for the idea of the multi-layered and more global experience than one might first expect at reading a novel. The ability to delve beyond characters and plot and be engrossed in the fictional world requires not only a mental and emotional approach but one that will also unconsciously bring several senses into participation thanks to how the author articulates their uses in their stories. Such notion also plays into the biological and neurological research. Boyd's words concur in the idea of the importance of invoking the senses: "Art as cognitive play augments our capacities so that we can[…] efficiently produce ideas or actions: sounds, movements, visualizations, or representations […]." (95)

Invoking the senses immerses the audience in the storytelling, and is not limited to descriptions of nature, which often occupy a less significant portion of the words than we expect, although as Zunshine points out: "It is possible that our perception […] owes simply to the act that relatively rare as they are, they stand out and, as such, receive a disproportionate share of our attention." (26) It is interesting to note that such strong reactions occur and how the audience may be drawn to sections of possibly more immersive characteristics, which could be in part because they allowthe reader to feel more present to the story, and in turn the fictional world in which it takes place. It displays a degree of interaction that calls for more than identification with characters or plot events, even when those are noted are fundamental elements of storytelling. By looking for, even unconsciously, more information about the depicted world, the audience may seek for sense-rooted anchors that allow them greater interaction with the story with which they are engaging. Of course, this goes beyond descriptions of nature, because any detail can trigger the senses, including through depicted actions and characters' experiences, thus using the process of identification for the audience to immerse themselves in the fictional universe.

The idea of *mimesis* and wanting to create vivid settings is dear to both Flaubert and Druillet. Both artists seek to convey an immersive and complex experience to their audience, and this desire is an anchor to their creative processes. In 1852, Flaubert claimed how he was "viscerally enamored of screaming, lyricism, grand eagle flights, of all these sonorities of the sentence and of heights of ideas" but also how he"digs and searches the real as much as he can, […] who would like so much to make you feel in an almost material way the things he reproduces." (Lagarde et Michard456)Druillet's approach is slightly different, for his work is strongly Science Fiction-oriented, but by placing stories in times different from his own, he is not so afar from Flaubert's reimagination of ancient Carthage in *Salammbô*. Druillet realized his passion for drawingwhen he was a child and that "with a pen, you can create everything!" (Brunner 2016) That gave him a voracious appetite to develop new worlds and translate others' visions such as Flaubert's into his own appropriation. Both Flaubert and Druillet present a significant desire to bring universes to life, regardless of how far away from their own they may be. This is present in their respective visions of *Salammbô*.

The opening of Flaubert's novel depicts a large banquet begins with visual descriptions before moving onto invoking smell and taste about the served meal: "the smoke of the meats ascended into the foliage with the vapor of the breath";touch in regard to the containers if not the drinks themselves: "the Campanian wine enclosed in amphoras", before naturally moving to the ambient noises of the festivities, "the snapping of jaws, the noise of speech, songs, and cups, the crash of Campanian vases shivering into a thousand pieces" (Flaubert 5-6).This profusion of words and description gives life to the representation of how Flaubert pictured the universe he wrote about. While it is not limited to any aspect of the narrative, it is interesting to note that Salammbô is herself portrayed in a rich and sensory way beyond striking physical features and costumes, as early as her first scene. Various senses are sparked with lines such as"there was something from the gods that enveloped her like a subtle vapor" and "her eyes seemed to gaze far beyond terrestrial space"for sight;"in her right hand she carried a little ebony lyre. […] And she called them by their names" for sound; and "she crushed her nails against the gems on her bosom" for touch. (Flaubert 10-11) Over the course of the novel, Flaubert significantly relies on bringing the priestess to life through actions that strongly emphasize multiplesenses at once, including in a scene where the young woman prepares for a dangerous mission. This involves "something liquid and coagulated in an alabaster phial" that Salammbô"rubbed […] upon her ears, her heels, and the thumb of her right hand", before the "cithara and the flute began to play together."(Flaubert 121-122)

In Druillet's graphic adaptation, he uses Flaubert's texts on many pages, either verbatim or adapted for the Science Fiction universe he chose for the story. Where Druillet's

plot and characters mostly come from Flaubert's novel, the settings are heavily visual, partially due to both Druillet's forte as an artist and the choice of media, the graphic novel. The richness and vastness of the drawings provide a vivid experience to the audience, but it tends to work mostly on a visual level, whereas Flaubert's storytelling had a stronger capacity to engage multiple senses. The adaptation reorganizes the balance of the language but Druillet's graphics could have been self-sufficient without incorporating Flaubert's text in their worldly form. Druillet's style is stunning but nevertheless suffers from a heteroclite aspect sometimes confusing, especially for Salammbô's looks, whichappear extremely different depending on the time of the narrative.

The Heterogeneous Nature of Language

Aristotle defines diction as "verbal expression", which "has the same effect both in verse and in prose speeches." (13) He breaks down the construction of diction as "the following elements: phoneme, syllable, connective, noun, verb, conjunction, inflection, utterance." (Aristotle 32)Diction occupies a surprisingly significant portion of the *Poetics*, despite not being deemed as fundamental and crucial as plot or even characters. Aristotle provides a thorough introduction, then focuses on diction's basic concepts: the classification of nouns (simple or double, current or non-standard, metaphor, ornamental, coined, adapted), and qualities of poetic style. The detailed attention Aristotle gives to diction indicates how crucial verbal expression is in storytelling.

Words have held a special power, borderlining on magic, as Turner points out, regarding the "etymological roots of the word *grammar*"where "the Greek *grammatike* meant the art of letters, and the Middle English *gramarye*, […] meant magic or necromancy." (69)This idea of magical or beauty-creating power of words can explain why Aristotle gave it such importance in the *Poetics*. The choice of words in storytelling permeates its every aspect, including how an artist can invoke the senses. The depth, originality, and specificity of words—and how they construct phrases, paragraphs, chapters, pages, complete works—has a profound impact on how the audience will not only visualize, but overall experience the story with which they are engaging.

Aristotle delves further into the qualities of diction a storyteller should seek to achieve for strongest impact, for the "magnitude" the thinker finds in beauty: "The most important quality of diction is clarity […]diction is distinguished and out of the ordinary when it makes use of exotic expressions […] contrary to current usage." (36) Clarity is also akin to order, another determining aspect of beauty. Clarity is an often-praised quality of discourse, and was notably defined by French poet and criticBoileau in *L'ArtPoétique*: "Ce qui se conçoitbiens'énonceclairement" which means "what is correctly conceptualized is enunciated

clearly" (1674, translation mine). Aristotle's foundational work for tragedy structure thus carried on long-lasting consequences beyond theatric structure with influence on storytelling at large too.

Given Flaubert's strong opinion about finding the right word, "le mot juste" to have the most accurate and clear writing, places him in a suitable spot in Aristotle's legacy in terms of diction. That, combined with his important role in the development of literary realism, through in-depth research for novels, including *Salammbô*, participates to how he aims at conveying the most through his storytelling. By using specific words to notably invoke the senses, he seeks to bring the depicted universe to life and allows the audience to access an immersive experience, directly anchored into characters or in a more general approach with setting descriptions. Flaubert's opinion that "it's precision that gives writing power," is at the core of his writing in *Salammbô*. His consistent detailed choice to express his ideas in the most appropriate manner helps tremendously to invoke senses, a persistent pattern throughout the novel.

Flaubert is deliberate and specific in how he uses different imagery and appeals to different senses to give depth to the priestess's behavior with how "she had grown up with abstinences, fasting and purifications, always surrounded by grave and exquisite things, her body saturated with perfumes, and her soul filled with prayers. (32) The presence and persistence of the body is evident inhow Flaubert depicts the young woman; and how he places her in lively settings, such as when he writes "odors of balsam were exhaled" while "Salammbô's eyes, in the depths of their long draperies resembled two stars in the rift of a cloud" (186). Even the novel's ending involves the senses in the young woman's tragic death. The scene includes movement, once again giving a significant place to the body, even in the moments following her death: "Salammbô rose like her husband, with a cup in her hand, to drink also. She fell down again, with her head lying over the back of the throne – pale, stiff, with parted lips – and her loosened hair hung to the ground". (202) Sight is included but is not the only sense, for smell and taste are also incorporated with the drink, and touch takes on a macabre dimension with the impact of her fall. Flaubert's dual love for epic grandiosity and larger-than-life artistic pursuits, as well as a deep need for detailed research to do justice to his topic are exhibited through the choice of language to convey his storytelling in the most appropriate manner. Through his words, he is able to go beyond simple visual, or even audiovisual, descriptions. While those are useful by themselves, Flaubert's love of Aristotelian diction adds new and richer layers to the fictional universe. Through words, hecan rely on his audience's imagination to experience the story, because his choices nurture the readers' creativity and communicates to their senses, thus giving a more complex life to the novel's *mimesis*.

When it comes to Druillet's adaptation, it is important to focus on the work required to translate such an artistic exercise, moving from a novel to a graphic novel, altering the storytelling media, and transfiguring it into a new object with its own language. As Sanders explains: "adaptation can be a transpositional practice, casting a specific genre into another generic mode, an act of re-vision in itself" (18). There is obvious language in Druillet's graphic novel, but it takes plural forms, drawings and text, where Flaubert's novel was pure verbal expression. The difference of epochs and cultures, although they are both male French artists, asks for adaptive and creative process for Druillet's, not more but different than from his original creations. His personal views and language influence him as he states as a foreword of the graphic novel: "well I say S.F. (Science Fiction); my personal probable as a guy of the 1980s, […] my contemporary language […] so I don't think that Flaubert feels betrayed if I brighten Salammbô's face a little with a laser light, because I passionately love this sublime book" (1980, translation mine). He even describes language in visual terms, being a graphic artist himself, in how he talks about changes he may bring to his take on the priestess's appearance and renewed exotic settings, this time in a Science Fiction setting instead of Earth-bound ancient Carthage in Flaubert's narrative.In Druillet's adaptation, it is interesting to see how certain pages are mostly text-oriented, others solely visual, and some a combination of both to various degrees. Save for the opening and ending of the graphic novel, Druillet stays close to Flaubert's language, but the richness of both diction and visuals can make it difficult to follow both at the same time,or with equal attention. Druillet uses very different layouts from one page to the next, which requires a lot of attention solely devoted to the visuals, especially with how rich and detailed they can be. The amount of text he includes, whether as single focus on some pages or interwoven with visuals give an overwhelming feeling, that may place pressure on the audience for they may be more preoccupied with getting everything into account rather than have the inner space to embrace the full-fledge sensory experience which Flaubert originally intended with Salammbô's story. It is also noticeable that Druillet's opening and ending scene, especially the beginning of the graphic novel, has a very different type of language, more common and even vulgar, with his protagonist and his crew "not giving a fuck" and calling Salammbô a "slut". Not only does it seem unnecessary to mark the difference of universes and epochs, but it does not add anything to Druillet's rendition of Flaubert's epic and violent story, especially since in most of the graphic novel, he prefers using the novelist's words.

Conclusion

Salammbô's narrative provides a strong experience to the audience thanks to persistent and complex invoking of the senses. The rich *mimesis*allows audience to experience beauty thanks to Flaubert's carefully crafted verbal expression, his accurate diction and constant use of "le mot juste". The fictional universe created by Flaubert benefits from a mostly clever and yet again exotic adaptation in Druillet's eponymous graphic novel. Druillet's visual style is eye-catching and fascinating but his drawings might have stood out as more beautiful as textless illustrations, instead of incorporating such extended blocks of text. Whetherthe audience approaches Druillet's graphic novel with prior knowledge of *Salammbô* would unlikely change how the visuals are the most compelling aspect. Due to the imbalance between visual and verbal, combined with the jarring opening language, Druillet's rendition of Flaubert's novel does not reach the complexity of experience achieved by the 19th century novelist, despite its outstanding visuals and mostly clever transposition to Science Fiction settings.

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