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# *Madame Bovary*

## GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

# MADAME BOVARY

## Gustave Flaubert

Introduction and Notes by
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WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth Classics are inexpensive editions designed to appeal to the general reader and students. We commissioned teachers and specialists to write wide ranging, jargon-free introductions and to provide notes that would assist the understanding of our readers rather than interpret the stories for them. In the same spirit, because the pleasures of reading are inseparable from the surprises, secrets, and revelations that all narratives contain, we strongly advise you to enjoy this book before turning to the Introduction.

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## INTRODUCTION

> *Il ne faut pas toucher aux idoles: la dorure en reste aux mains.* [We must not touch our idols; the gilt sticks to our fingers.]
>
> FLAUBERT, *Madame Bovary*, p. 216

Few novels have been greeted by more high-voltage and paradoxical reactions than Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Prosecuted in 1857, in the aftermath of its publication, for offending against public decency, Flaubert's novel has over the past century and a half become one of the canonical texts of French literary syllabuses, both in its native country and elsewhere. Steeped in the hallowed traditions of nineteenth-century realism (how after all could a novel that had been published only six years after the death of Balzac not be marked by his influence?), *Madame Bovary* has long been seen as a further manifestation of realism's mimetic ambition (for example, by Erich Auerbach in *Mimesis*, by Anthony Thorlby in his *Gustave Flaubert and*

*the Art of Realism* or by Harry Levin in *The Gates of Horn*): and there is certainly no doubt that the novel's subtitle (*Provincial Manners*) has to it a profoundly Balzacian resonance and that it should be read as a tribute to the author of the *Human Comedy*. Despite this period flavour, several recent critical studies have on the other hand argued that Flaubert may be seen as one of the forerunners of literary modernism: according to such critics as R. J. Sherrington (*Three Novels by Flaubert*), Tony Tanner (*Adultery in the Novel*), Naomi Schor (in the volume of essays edited by her on *Flaubert and Postmodernism*) and especially Jonathan Culler (*Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty*), the formal innovations that characterise the works of Joyce, Proust, Woolf and the French New Novelists are already to be discerned in the fictions of Flaubert, and above all in *Madame Bovary*.

Adultery and its repercussions, the mainspring of the plot of *Madame Bovary*, is also one of the most conventional of realist subjects: one thinks, amongst a galaxy of other novels, of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1877), of Fontane's *Effi Briest* (1895), of Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* (1867) or of Galdos's *Fortunata and Jacinta* (1887). But Flaubert's novel, with its teasing narrative patterns, its kaleidoscope of constantly shifting viewpoints and its sustained exploitation of free indirect discourse (the literary device whereby a third-person narrative is used to express a first-person viewpoint, the forerunner of stream-of-consciousness techniques), its black humour and subtly ironic undertones, its artfully wrought web of images, has none the less provided the inspiration for a clutch of modern fictions (notably Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*, perhaps the most suggestive of recent books in English that have to do with Flaubert, and Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Perpetual Orgy*). Finally, notwithstanding its mimetic veneer, *Madame Bovary* remains one of the least conventionally visual of nineteenth-century novels: the all-knowing and all-seeing Balzacian narrator is largely absent from Flaubert's book. This has, however, not prevented it from spawning a series of (generally unsatisfactory) adaptations for both large and small screens. There have thus been at least three film versions (by Jean Renoir, Vincente Minnelli and, most recently, Claude Chabrol) and several television adaptations (including three for the BBC alone). Much more in keeping with the spirit of Flaubert is the recent *franglais* comic-strip version, Posy Simmonds's splendidly whimsical *Gemma Bovery*

It will be the purpose of this introduction to *Madame Bovary* to explore the significance of some of the paradoxes outlined above. It will seek at the same time to suggest approaches to Flaubert's novel

and, in particular, to promote a fresh understanding of the book's central couple.

*Madame Bovary* came to represent for Flaubert a kind of artistic hairshirt. Literary history has it that the novel was embarked upon as an act of mortification: it was to be a gesture of repentance for the technicolour exuberance, the wild exoticism and Romantic lyricism of the book that Flaubert had recently completed, *The Temptation of Saint Antony*. On the advice of his friends Louis Bouilhet and Maxime du Camp to whom *Saint Antony* had been read, Flaubert was enjoined to tackle a more down-to-earth project that would focus on an everyday subject taken from contemporary French life. This he did with enthusiasm, using as the basis for his new novel the banal story of the marriage breakdown of a middle-class Normandy couple, Eugène and Delphine Delamare. *Madame Bovary* was written between 1851 and 1856 with the painstaking method that was to become the hallmark of Flaubert's approach to the writing of fiction: his letters to his friends, in particular those sent to his mistress Louise Colet, provide a fascinating blow-by-blow, almost paragraph-by-paragraph, account of the composition of the novel. *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert's first published work, was serialised in the *Revue de Paris* at the end of 1856. Despite the cuts that had been made to the text of the novel, much to its author's displeasure, official anger was immediate and fierce: the novelist, his publisher and printers were accused of outraging public and religious morality and taken to court in Paris in January 1857; they were censured but acquitted the following month. By a strange coincidence Charles Baudelaire's book of poems, *Les Fleurs du mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*), was prosecuted in the same year and for similar reasons. The outcome for the poet was, however, less favourable than for the novelist: Baudelaire lost his case and was forced to cut a number of the more scandalous poems from his collection. Dedicated to Flaubert's defence lawyer (Maître Marie-Antoine-Jules Sénard, who also defended Baudelaire), *Madame Bovary* was published in book form in April 1857. Unsurprisingly in view of its sensational prehistory, the novel's success was enormous.

*Madame Bovary* tells the melancholy tale of the unhappy marriage between the country doctor Charles Bovary and his wife Emma. It is structured around Emma's vain attempts, both amorous and financial, to relieve the tedium that she finds in her marriage and culminates in her eventual self-inflicted death by arsenic poisoning. But, despite the title of Flaubert's novel, Emma does not provide its point of departure. Rather its first chapter focuses on Charles Bovary: we are told of the young man's education, of his parents and

of his family background, of his medical training and of the seemingly superfluous episode of his first marriage to the dried-out and domineering forty-five-year-old widow Héloïse Dubuc. In the process the reader, before meeting Emma, is introduced to two other characters who also bear the name Madame Bovary: Charles's mother and his first wife. The reader must ask himself or herself what contribution this curious preamble makes to Flaubert's novel. How in particular does it lead us towards an understanding of the eponymous heroine on whom the writer will principally focus?

By a characteristically cruel touch, the glimpses Flaubert provides of Charles's prehistory help in the first instance to foster the impression of foreboding that is central to the organisation of *Madame Bovary*. Fatality (the word recurs obsessively throughout the novel), a feeling that the outcome of the plot is in some sense inevitable and brought about by circumstances over which the characters have no control, is one of the book's key leitmotifs: it contributes in no small measure to what has frequently been seen as its tragic quality. It will be remembered in particular that, as he looks back on his lifestory, Charles reaches the conclusion that what has happened to him and to his wife is 'the fault of fatality': it is a sentiment with which the narrator concurs, judging it to be 'a fine phrase, the only one (Charles) ever made' (p. 268). In the context of Charles's pre-Emma years, the reader is made to realise from the outset, and before their marriage takes place, that it is unlikely that the impetuous and youthful Emma Rouault will find happiness through her union with the plodding and old-before-his-time Charles Bovary. Fate is already working against them. The readers are already rubbing their hands with *Schadenfreude*.

Our perception in the early chapters (and it *is* ours as Flaubert invites the reader to sit on the school benches and to be one of the mysterious 'we' through whom the opening scenes are focalised), and before Emma's point of view intervenes drastically to distort the reader's vision of her husband, is of an earnest, stolid and very ordinary schoolboy; gauche and clumsy, he has left little trace on the collective memory of his fellow pupils. His academic career is unexceptional: 'By dint of hard work he kept always in the middle of the class; once even he got a certificate in natural history' (p. 7). Success at his medical examinations comes only second time around, and it is important to realise that, when he does pass, Charles qualifies not as a fully-fledged GP but only with the less prestigious grade of health officer (*officier de santé*). His is in all respects a second-class performance; he is, it would seem, a born runner-up. Charles's

private life is no less mundane: games of dominoes in the local pub, recitals of the faintly scandalous verses of Béranger and banal encounters with Rouen prostitutes would appear to have constituted its high points. And when Charles does marry, the decision is in both cases taken by others: it is Madame Bovary senior who arranges her son's first marriage with the widow Dubuc just as it will be Emma's father who engineers the later marriage to his daughter.

The opening chapter of *Madame Bovary* also allows Flaubert to privilege certain motifs that will be central to his novel. Charles's school and university careers, the worlds of his family and first marriage are all surrounded by suggestions of mediocrity and philistinism. They are constructed around a series of endlessly repeated events, the absurd meaninglessness of which is perfectly synthesised by the new boy's punishment in the very first scene of the novel: ' "As to you 'new boy', you will conjugate '*ridiculus sum*' twenty times" ' (p. 5). These are worlds that bathe in a claustrophobic atmosphere, hostile to emotion and imagination, suspicious of anyone who stands out from the crowd, in which Romantic values (individualism, passion, inspiration, energy) have no place. School and university, the Bovary family and the marriage to the ill-named Héloïse are all institutions that constrain and paralyse the individual (the young Charles Bovary) who finds himself caught up in them. And these are precisely the elements (mediocrity, complacency, sterility, routine, boredom) that will also characterise the social, intellectual and institutional contexts that Emma Rouault (the name, echoing French *roue* [wheel], has clear connotations of circularity and repetition), later Madame Bovary, will come to inhabit. Her struggle with them and her eventual defeat by them will provide the principal matter of the plot of Flaubert's novel.

Flaubert's initial presentation of the woman who is to be his heroine is striking for its strongly visual, even sensual charge. The reader's perception of Rouault's daughter is mediated in the first instance through the eyes of the visiting Dr Bovary. Charles is immediately struck by certain of Mademoiselle Emma's physical characteristics: by the whiteness of her nails and her black-brown eyes, by the fullness of her lips and pinkness of her cheeks, later by the beads of perspiration that glisten on her shoulders. All of these must have formed a striking contrast with the asexual bony thinness and long teeth of his goatlike first wife (Dubuc = *du bouc* = of the [billy] goat). Although the reader is not at this point privy to her viewpoint, one may assume that Emma for her part must have been impressed by the prestige that was traditionally associated with the

country doctor (Balzac devoted an entire novel to the figure in his *Le Médecin de campagne*). And, contrary to majority critical opinion, Charles is not portrayed as being *that* incompetent a doctor: he certainly has no difficulty in mending Rouault's broken leg and his only real error comes when, against his better judgement, he is talked into attempting to cure Hippolyte's club-foot. Emma also harbours the (almost certainly erroneous) belief that her visitor is a grieving widower whom it will be her Romantic duty to comfort. The episode of his first marriage thus helps to make more plausible Emma's acceptance of Charles as her husband: its contribution to Flaubert's novel is accordingly considerable.

Temperamentally, where Charles is placid, bovine (the onomastic resonances of the name Bovary scarcely need underlining) and somnolent (he is throughout the novel a great sleeper), Emma is portrayed as volatile and emotional. The education she has received also contrasts markedly with that of her husband. Where Charles has laboriously memorised his medical syllabus, Emma's imagination and senses have been inflamed by a diet of Romantic literature of varying worth; she has also been deluged by a flood of lachrymose religious tracts. The chapter Flaubert devotes to his heroine's convent education (Part 1, Ch. 6) is crucial to an understanding of Emma's future: her behaviour is determined in large part by the 'fatal' (in Charles's sense of the word) impact of this education. The writings of *inter alia* Chateaubriand, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Lamartine and Walter Scott foster in the adolescent Emma a desire to search in life for more than life has to offer. She thus seeks to carry over into reality, at a specific moment in time (the historical context is deliberately understated by Flaubert but it can be deduced that his novel is set during the middle and later years of the bourgeois regime of the citizen king, Louis-Philippe) and in a particular provincial setting (deepest and most boring Normandy), what can only be experienced through the illusions of Romantic literature. Emma will set out to relive the scenes that are portrayed on her dinner plates. Unfortunately she fails to realise that these have been irredeemably scarred by the unglamorous realities of life: 'The explanatory legends, chipped here and there by the scratching of knives, all glorified religion, the tendernesses of the heart, and the pomps of the court' (p. 27). Emma in turn will be fatally scarred by the attempt.

The world that Madame Bovary comes to inhabit, first at Tostes and later at Yonville-l'Abbaye, is one that offers little on which her dreams can feed. It must be pointed out that Flaubert's seemingly

innocuous title reinforces the nature of the situation in which his heroine finds herself; it deprives her of her autonomy so that she becomes the property (*Ma-dame*) of another and it also forces upon her an identity that is not hers (*Bovary*). This will be something that Emma's lover, Rodolphe Boulanger, will be cunning enough to realise and crass enough to play on: ' "Madame Bovary! why, all the world calls you thus! Besides, it is not your name, it is the name of another!" ' (p. 118). The. novel would have been very different in its implications had it been entitled 'Emma' (already written), 'Emma Bovary' (the alternative adopted by Tolstoy with *Anna Karenina*) or even more so 'Emma Rouault' (Fontane's choice with *Effi Briest*).

The world of the Normandy countryside that provides the backcloth to *Madame Bovary* is constructed around the regular cycle of seasonal and agricultural activities: it is a world governed by repetition, monotony and routine. After early disappointments in Tostes, the second part of the novel sees Emma moving with renewed optimism to the larger town of Yonville-l'Abbaye. But, in another characteristically cruel touch, by transporting us to Yonville ahead of Emma (the normal Flaubertian technique is for setting and character to be presented simultaneously, for the setting to be presented via the character), Flaubert allows the reader to anticipate Emma's disillusionment before she reaches her new home. Far from being an improvement on Tostes, Yonville (which has lost the abbey promised by its name and does not even have its own division of the national guard) will in fact turn out to be as yawningly dull as ditchwater (the name is wittily rendered as Bailleville by Posy Simmonds: Yonville = Yawnville = Bailleville [*bailler* = to yawn]). As the Bovarys' carriage rumbles into town, Flaubert gathers together the notables of Yonville in the *Lion d'Or* (the name is as banal in France as the King's Arms or the Black Horse in England) to greet their new doctor and his wife. Emma's welcoming party turns out to be a production line of strutting puppets, a collection of darkly risible caricatures.

Flaubert then and later introduces Emma (and with her the reader) to the mayor of Yonville, the ruminating Tuvache (bovine imagery runs through the onomastics of the novel); to Binet, the local tax collector and captain of the fire brigade, whose interminable and pointless turning of wooden napkin rings marvellously emblematises the absurd world of *Madame Bovary* (and also, in all likelihood, the absurdity of the literary enterprise); to Lestiboudois, the beadle and gravedigger; to Bournisien, the village priest who is incapable of even comprehending Emma's spiritual malaise or of offering her any

consolation other than the purely material; to Lheureux, smug (*l'heureux* = the happy one) and dangerous, the despicable shopkeeper and travelling salesman who promotes and profits from Emma's downfall; to Guillaumin, the libidinous village lawyer; and above all to the chemist Homais, the grotesque leader of this pack of little men (Homais = *hommet* = little man). Constantly on the make, with children unassumingly called Napoléon (representing glory) and Athalie ('A homage to the greatest masterpiece of the French stage', p. 68), Irma ('perhaps a concession to romanticism', p. 68) and Franklin (after Benjamin, representing liberty), Homais stands as the embodiment of all the values that Flaubert detested.

Flaubert's chemist is the personification of July Monarchy complacency, of a dogmatic stupidity (*bêtise* in all its forms is a key Flaubertian theme) and of bourgeois smugness. These manifest themselves above all in the constant reiteration, by Homais and others, of pretentious platitudes, in the turning and polishing of posh ideas (*idées chic*): the finest specimens of both were masochistically collected by the novelist and gathered together in the celebrated *Dictionary of Received Ideas* that was to form the appendix to the unfinished *Bouvard and Pécuchet*. But the Yonville chemist, Flaubert's *bête noire*, the universal little man, also stands for each one of us, in Normandy and elsewhere, then and now. The novel ends not with Emma's death nor even with that of Charles but with the triumph of Homais and of his family; Flaubert deliberately switches his narrative to the present tense in its chilling final sentence in order to bring out the universality and permanence of Homais's victory. The chemist is thus recompensed by the award of the cross of the Legion of Honour for the services he has rendered the community, and chiefly for helping to rid *bien-pensant* society of potential threats to its stability: he has purged it of the twin menaces of the enigmatic blind beggar and of the erratic Madame Bovary. Later, in pursuance of his professional self-interest, he will see off Charles's three successors in Yonville.

Only a very few of the novel's secondary characters stand out from this dismal crowd: Félicité, Emma's maid (at least until she absconds with her mistress's wardrobe), old Rouault (Emma's father), Justin (Homais's pupil and assistant), the eminent doctor Larivière (said to be based on Flaubert's surgeon father) who comes to tend Emma at her end. These are all characters who have in common their real affection for Emma; they are also all genuinely moved by her death.

Forced to exist in this spiritual wasteland, surrounded by an army of hollow men, creator and character respond with a sense of almost

visceral nausea. Flaubert and Emma both sense that there ought to be something better, something for which they both yearn and to which they seek to give expression. A feeling of existential disgust (a feeling that is to a large extent at the root of Jean-Paul Sartre's later and lifelong sympathy for Flaubert) is repeatedly and explicitly articulated by Flaubert in his correspondence. It is the same feeling that underpins the moral significance of his three major novels (*Madame Bovary*, *Sentimental Education*, *Bouvard and Pécuchet*) and that helps to account for his declaration that he wrote *Madame Bovary* 'in hatred of realism'. It is a response to which Emma also instinctively gives voice but for which she can only find clumsy expressions. And it is surely this moral solidarity, this shared feeling of repugnance, that lies behind another famous declaration, Flaubert's much quoted statement that 'Madame Bovary, c'est moi' ('Madame Bovary is me'). But where Flaubert sought consolation in his writing, in his quest for an aesthetic utopia (for the *mot juste*, the telling image, the perfectly organised sentence) and in his attempts to create formal beauty out of the contemporary mediocrity that surrounded him, his heroine escapes, or tries to, through her attempts to recreate and relive the imaginary world of her convent readings. For Emma, however, such attempts must necessarily be flawed since they have to be constructed out of elements taken from the world that she inhabits: central to Flaubert's novel and to Emma's psychological condition (a condition that has come to be known as *bovarysme*) is the increasingly anguishing gulf that separates the fantasy universe of her adolescent imaginings from the tawdry realities of mid-nineteenth-century Normandy.

Perversely, in what is a highly perverse novel, it is at a very early stage in the plot of *Madame Bovary*, soon after her marriage to Charles, that Emma's real world most closely approximates that of her dreams; in this sense the climax of Flaubert's novel comes at its beginning rather than at its end (a back-to-front construction that will be taken still further in *Sentimental Education*, where the key epiphany occurs at the end of the very first paragraph of the novel). The Marquis d'Andervilliers's invitation to attend the ball at his La Vaubyessard château is described as 'something extraordinary' (p. 35) that falls upon Emma's life. The elegance of the ball (Part 1, Ch. 9), as Emma perceives it, contrasts sharply with the rustic quality of the Bovarys' wedding breakfast (Part 1, Ch. 4). The La Vaubyessard episode will accordingly turn out to be a defining moment in Emma's life: as she sips champagne (rather then cider) and waltzes with an anonymous viscount, whilst Charles dozes or

bemusedly watches other guests playing whist, Emma in her imaginings is transported away from the realities of the Normandy countryside, back to life at court under Marie-Antoinette and into the fantasy worlds of Scott or Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. Future events in her life and future encounters will as a result tend to be judged retrospectively: Emma will set them against the romantic images that she has glimpsed at La Vaubyessard. Their (predictable) failure to measure up continues to exacerbate Emma's sense of frustration.

Nowhere is the discrepancy between Emma's dreams and the realities of the world outside made clearer than in her choice of lovers. After her literary flirtation with the vapid Léon Dupuis, during which she and the law student exchange empty Romantic clichés, Emma succumbs to the well-practised charms of an expert womaniser, Rodolphe Boulanger. The contrast between her lover's first name and surname provides a telling symbolic expression of the gap that for Emma separates the ideal from the real. Rodolphe in mid-nineteenth-century France would have had a considerable Romantic resonance. It is the first name of the hero both of Eugène Sue's hugely popular Romantic serial novel *The Mysteries of Paris* (1842–3) and of Henry Murger's *Scenes from Bohemian Life* of 1848 (later to be adapted by Puccini as *La Bohème*), works that Emma might well have had in her private library. Flaubert's Rodolphe is however anything but mysterious, neither Parisian nor bohemian: 'Monsieur Rodolphe Boulanger was thirty-four; he was of brutal temperament and intelligent perspicacity, having, moreover, had much to do with women, and knowing them well' (p. 99). The connotations of Rodolphe's surname (*boulanger* = baker) help to underline the character's down-to-earth reality. It is not in fact by Rodolphe that Emma is seduced but more by her feverish Mills-and-Boonish imaginings, by her Romantic preconception of what a lover should be and of what the notion (rather than the fact) of having a lover should entail.

The tension between ideal and reality is forcefully brought out by Flaubert in two of *Madame Bovary*'s most memorable scenes: that set during the Yonville agricultural fair and most especially that centered around the seduction of Emma by Rodolphe. In the first of these episodes (Part 2, Ch. 8), Flaubert sets out in almost symphonic fashion to blend two linguistic registers, two levels of banalities and two sets of clichés: Rodolphe's private discourse as he chats up Emma is thus interwoven with the official discourse of the aptly named counsellor Lieuvain (*lieu vain* = *lieu commun* = commonplace, cliché)

and later of the president of the agricultural jury, M. Derozerays de la Panville (no less . . .), as they congratulate the community and award prizes. In both cases, language, rather than being a source of enlightenment, is used to seduce (to lead astray) and to deceive. In both cases again ideals (Romantic love, public service) are betrayed by the banality of the language in which they are expressed: language is used both by the civic dignitaries and by the Normandy Don Juan to further unworthy ends (personal promotion, the conquest of a married woman). Flaubert in the process provides a savage linguistic debunking of both the activities he describes, the public as well as the private, official and intimate. Commercial and amorous endeavours are both reduced to empty word-making, both emotions (civic pride and erotic desire) and both activities (farming and flirting) swamped beneath meaningless flows of rhetoric. A further account of the Yonville agricultural fair is provided by Homais in the pompous self-congratulatory report that the chemist writes for the *Fanal de Rouen*. After a stream of inflated journalese, of words without meaning, its conclusion is unwittingly ironic: ' "Let us state that no untoward event disturbed this family meeting" ' (p. 117).

A little later in *Madame Bovary*, the narrator himself (the pre-occupation is certainly not one that Rodolphe would be capable of entertaining) will reflect on a problem that is illustrated by and in the discourse of some of the novel's major characters, the problem of the shortcomings of language. Words, it is being suggested to us, are not up to the tasks with which they have been entrusted. Language, and in particular the linguistic register (the cliché) that most blatantly simplifies, freezes and sterilises reality, cannot but betray the multi-faceted richness and the protean versatility of that reality. The fullness of Emma's emotional message (the narrator's reflections are triggered by her declarations of love) is thus undercut by the cracked emptiness of the medium in which she is forced to express it. Applicable to Emma, but also to Flaubert (and to all writers?), the passage provides the reader with one of the novel's most memorable images:

> . . . as if the fullness of the soul did not sometimes overflow in the emptiest metaphors, since no one can ever give the exact measure of his needs, nor of his conceptions, nor of his sorrows; and since human speech is like a cracked tin kettle, on which we hammer out tunes to make bears dance when we long to move the stars.
>
> [p. 146]

Flaubert's awareness of the problem of the inadequacy of language,

his consciousness of the ultimate impossibility (even absurdity) of mimetic representation, is wittily demonstrated in his heroic, self-ironic but ultimately vain attempt to describe Charles's cap in the opening paragraphs of *Madame Bovary* (pp. 3–4). It is a motif that reoccurs obsessively throughout his correspondence and it is implicit in much of his creative writing. As such it makes a major contribution to the modernist fascination with his novels.

No less revealing of the gap between ideal and reality is the way in which Flaubert portrays Rodolphe's physical seduction of Emma (Part 2, Ch. 9), Unlike most of its screen renditions, the scene as depicted in the novel is sexually very discreet. This is due not to any reticence on the writer's part (few French nineteenth-century novelists were in fact more scabrous than Flaubert) and not just to the more conservative conventions of the period. More significantly, in terms of the organisation of the novel, the discretion of Flaubert's representation is a product of the angle from which the scene is visualised; it is Emma's viewpoint that the reader is invited to share and she, at this stage at least, is not principally interested in sex. What matters to her as her relationship with Rodolphe reaches a climax is the romantic aura that she associates with the fact of having a lover. Emma is in fact doing little more than copying certain fictional examples:

> Then she recalled the heroines of the books that she had read, and the lyric legion of these adulterous women began to sing in her memory with the voice of sisters that charmed her. She became herself, as it were, an actual part of these imaginings, and realised the love-dream of her youth as she saw herself in this type of amorous women whom she had so envied. [p. 124]

As a result her seduction is represented through a series of images that have little to do with the local here-and-now situation, with Rodolphe Boulanger's animal presence, with his strange smile and fixed pupils. The reader is thus asked to take on board Emma's vision of fluttering humming-birds (this amidst the Normandy countryside!) and the genteelly pornographic sensation of her blood 'coursing through her flesh like a stream of milk' (p. 123). Rodolphe by contrast, in a shift of novelistic perspective that is as brutal as his lovemaking, 'a cigar between his lips [already in the nineteenth century a cliché of male sexual behaviour?], was mending with his penknife one of the two broken bridles.' (p. 123)

Sex will become important to Emma in the context of her renewed relationship with Léon, in the final part of the novel. During their

increasingly frenetic encounters in Rouen, Emma imposes upon the newly qualified lawyer demands, both sexual and financial, that in the end will prove to be beyond him. The reader will accordingly not be surprised to learn, as the novel closes, of the sensible marriage of Léon Dupuis ('notary at Yvetot', p. 263) to a certain Mademoiselle Léocadie Leboeuf (more splendidly bovine onomastics) from Bondeville . . . It is at this stage, in Part Three of the novel, that Flaubert's text becomes sexually much more explicit: the celebrated coachride around Rouen, with its pair of sweating and jolting horses, thus stands as a clear metonymic representation of the activity that is taking place inside the vehicle. The passage had been suppressed from the serialised publication of *Madame Bovary* in the *Revue de Paris*, much to Flaubert's indignation; this did not prevent it being picked upon by the prosecution during the trial of the novel. What, however, especially offended Maître Ernest Pinard (the imperial prosecutor) was not so much the sexual explicitness of *Madame Bovary* but the fact that at no point in the book does Emma express any feeling of shame or any sense of repentance for being unfaithful to her husband. Her story is in this sense very different from those of Anna (Tolstoy) or Effi (Fontane): Flaubert's heroine dies not because she is an adulteress but because she fails to keep up the payments on her credit cards, because the mess she gets into is more financial than matrimonial. Infringing the laws of Mammon appears to have been in July Monarchy France, and still under the Second Empire, a more serious offence than breaching the seventh commandment.

Flaubert ends his novel, just as he had begun it, not with Emma but with Charles. The last three chapters of *Madame Bovary* (Part Three, Chs 9–11) are devoted to an account of the remainder of the country doctor's life, after the death of his wife. They culminate in a series of parallel events: the death of Dr Bovary and the destruction of his family (Emma and Charles die whilst Berthe, their daughter, is forced by her financial circumstances to work in a cotton-mill) are thus counterpointed by the triumph of the chemist Homais and by the ever-increasing prosperity of his clan. Beyond its obvious symmetrical value (short opening and concluding sections bracketing a long middle section: Flaubert talked about his novels having the structure of a pyramid), the reader must again ponder the thematic and moral implications of the epilogue. For the concluding chapters of *Madame Bovary* fundamentally change the way in which the novel is focalised: where previously the bulk of the action had been viewed through Emma's erratic (some would say neurotic) eyes, Charles is now seen no longer from the viewpoint of his wife but from that of

more reliable witnesses, chiefly that of the narrator. Flaubert in this way seeks to offer a corrective to the representation of Charles that has been given in the central section of the novel; as a result, by juxtaposing prologue and epilogue, readers will be able to reach a more balanced view of Charles's character. They will in particular be in a position to evaluate a development to which the predominance of Emma's viewpoint in the middle part of the novel may have previously blinded them.

We are thus left in no doubt that Charles has been devastated by Emma' s death: his behaviour in its immediate aftermath contrasts sharply with his deadpan reaction after the demise of Héloïse Dubuc ('She was dead! What a surprise!', p. 16). It would also seem that Charles, in the course of his marriage to Emma, has grown towards her, towards the Romantic ideal that she has vainly been looking for elsewhere. The unmemorable schoolboy of the opening chapter, the gauche, emotionally stunted and timid adolescent, is now someone who stands out from the crowd, a distraught but resolute widower. As the adult Charles weeps, he demonstrates an unexpected side to his nature, a vulnerability and sensitivity (*sensibilité*) that the reader had not previously associated with him. It is striking by contrast that neither Léon nor Rodolphe sheds any tears when they learn of Emma's death; both sleep comfortably in their beds on the night of her funeral whiles Justin, Emma's secret and youthful admirer, sobs inconsolably on her grave. Counterpointing the absurd and repeated conjugation of *ridiculus sum* of the novel's beginning is another and more meaningful form of writing, the self-assured note ('Let no one say anything to me. I shall have strength', p. 252) in which Charles sets out the arrangements for Emma's funeral; devoid of rhetoric, stripped of clichés and banal metaphors, Charles's letter (an example of what Roland Barthes will later call *le degré zéro de l'écriture* ['writing degree zero']) contrasts sharply with the hypocritical and pose-ridden Dear-Janet letter with which Rodolphe breaks off his relationship with Emma. Charles's letter stands as a clear formal expression of the emotional authenticity of which he is now capable.

After the brutal realism that characterises Flaubert's description of Emma's death with its merciless accumulation of gruesome medical details (the reader is spared none of Emma's feverish shivering, of her sweating and vomiting), Charles buries his wife with precisely the sort of Romantic ceremonial that she would have wished. The funeral is organised around a whole series of most un-Charleslike trappings: Emma is to be buried 'in her wedding-dress, with white shoes, and a wreath', her long hair spread over her shoulders; her