Birds eye view on Madame Bovary by Flaubert

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Abstract **- Flaubert has had the highest reputation enjoyed by a novelist ever since the birth of the novel. The common reader encountering his novels for the first time may feel rather puzzled, just as Madame Emma Bovary does a few days after her marriage. She begins to suspect that she has been deceived, and wonders what exactly in her brief experience is supposed to correspond to those grand words, "bliss", "passion", "ecstasy", which she has heard so often repeated. The common reader develops a similar feeling of disillusion on first reading Flaubert, because he does not see there any of these grand features of art attributed to Flaubert as an artist. He only realizes a gap between what he has been hearing about the novelist and what he actually experiences in his work. This reader is likely to side with the cynic who said that "no one would think of admiring Flaubert if he had not read about him in books." But these books are by those who are, for sure, more knowledgeable than we the common readers about the works of literature. Maybe we miss, like Emma does, many vital points that lie hidden under the surface narratives of Flaubert's various compositions. Art, like any science, involves craft or technique, and only those that are trained in that craft or technique would comprehend the working and functioning of that art, craft, or science.**

Index Terms **- Romanticism, conventional, admiring, freedom, funerals.**

BEYOND ROMANTICISM

Contemplating the question of roads to artistic glory, Flaubert, in a letter of 1846, classifies writers into two categories. One category is of those, the greatest and the true masters who "encompass all humanity; without concentrating on themselves or their own passions they reproduce the universe." The second category is of those who can be harmonious when crying out in pain and remain eternal when writing about themselves. Flaubert considers Byron of the second category. He himself started writing fiction in the romantic mode. He had no patience to create, as the conventional novelist of the Victorian period did, a temporal history which would gradually reveal truths about the universe, because he knew those truths already. Consequently, when he adopted the romantic confessional mode or prophetic mode, which, too, required for success temporal development, he found himself impatient with their demands. He felt then inclined to move too quickly towards explicit thematic statements which devalue the proposed illustrations and expose the narrator to judgement as an object. Flaubert's own self-consciousness, which is linked with a knowledge of earlier literature, led him to shun the romantic modes as a form of self-display. He felt that the romantic mode of self-display made one much too vulnerable now that it lacked originality. He must therefore face what, as Geoffrey Hartman says, was a basic problem of Romantic literature: whether the mind can find an unselfconscious medium for itself. The romantic writer as seer cherishes the individuality of his vision, for it defines his own soul. But he is always aware that its value lies precisely in the extent to which it can be made to transcend the solipsistic and subjective. And yet to make large claims for that vision is to expose himself to the irony of his own and the readers' reflective gaze. What is to be done? For Flaubert, in the later nineteenth century, a return to innocence was not possible, not even in the form in which Blake terms it second or "organized innocence." Moving through knowledge to a recovery of a new kind of innocence and freedom would mean for Flaubert a passage through a sense of the negative determination of everything in the universe to a consciousness which does not define itself by describing it. In his later novels, Flaubert decidedly seems to move towards an overcoming of self-conscious alienation. He achieves this by incorporating the problems of self-consciousness in the writing itself rather than in a persona. Thus, his attempt to go beyond romanticism is, in a way, an aspiration to an earlier condition. He does it by striving to achieve a combination of distance and potential sympathy. And this he achieves by relating details

which in their very emptiness and irrelevance suggest absent depths. An example of this method or technique in Flaubert is Emma Bovary's funeral, which shows the writer's willingness to allow irrelevance, as if the impossibility of having funerals, which are properly summed up in eight words, adds to the tragedy. Note the following piece from the description of Emma's funeral: The black pall, decorated with white tears, rose from time to time uncovering the bier. The tired bearers slowed down, and it moved forwards in continuous jerks, like a launch pitching over the waves. They arrived… while the priest spoke, the red earth, piled up on the sides, ran down at the corners, continually, silently. The funeral passages clearly reject sentimentality. There is an evident refusal on the part of the narrator to do anything more than give an account of the facts. No doubt, there are too many irrelevant details incorporated in these passages. But they are just stated in a manner that they suggest behind them the presence of a silence of emptiness. No one speaks here; it is just written. Sartre has suggested that thisnostalgia for lost innocence is one of the basic determinants of Flaubert's project: the establishment of a diabolical order as revenge for the loss of the divine. Flaubert's method of creating it is that instead of saying, "the world is hell," which is too abstract to have an effect, he must make the proposition haunt each word through his style. Here one may recall Buffon's dictum that style is the subject. What Eliot calls "objective correlative", in fact, can be said to be a principle derived from the technique that Flaubert adopted. Flaubert as novelist is quite like the original Snow Man, who denies misery and, by the rejection of this simple pathetic fallacy, allows a far more comprehensive version of misery to enter his novel. In recording the scrupulous bareness the listener is nothing himself, not the purveyor of Romantic Naturphilosophie, nor even the source of a theme that he casts in symbolic form, but only the space in which is inscribed nothing that is not there and the nothing that is. This nothingness cannot be articulated, not because it is so profound an experience, but because it is defined precisely in those formal and dialectical terms: as the emptiness of any presence. Nothingness, in short, is the absence every presence supposes. To call it Hell would already be a positive determination. It would mean that rather than place a saint on the mountain and have demons torture him, it would be far better to take as his subject, as Flaubert does, a country doctor and his adulterous wife or two autodidacts. In this method of Flaubert, readers are required to recognize the scenes he presents, to find them natural, so that the malice of any destructive project may be concealed behind the fatality of the real. Thus, the novelist can blow through the world like that hail-storm which descended on Rouen on Saturday, destroying crops and breaking windows. Although Flaubert suffered a damage of one hundred francs, it was not without pleasure, that he saw his espaliers destroyed, his flowers cut to pieces, the vegetable garden overturned. In other words, there is a strong temptation to go through the world destroying melon covers, establishing, as the negation of what exists, the true order. "This order, the law of existence," as Jonathan Culler explains, "is not a necessary evil, not the manifestation of a firm diabolical synthesis, but only contingent evil, which is the more demoralizing for its arbitrariness. In displaying this order has one become a vengeful God who plays tricks or is one merely a youthful vandal? It is in any case a criminal role, for which Flaubert was well-suited by temperament and situation."

BEYOND BURGEOIS VALUES

Whatever the narrative technique a writer may choose to adopt, and in whatever style he may choose to write his work, no one can escape implying, explicitly or implicitly, a set of values. These values emerge as a pattern from his entire work. The pattern would be made of sympathies and antipathies, favours and disfavours, likings and dislikings, which no technique or style can conceal or obliterate. Flaubert cannot be any exception to this general trait of the literary work, including the novel. It may sound strange, but in Flaubert's world stupidity is one of the values. Both as a category of his own thought and as a component of his literary practice, it remains at the centre of Flaubert's world. In his Dictionaries des idees recues, which is an obvious guide to stupidity, Flaubert places an epigraph from Chamfort, which offers one explanation of the category he calls stupidity. In the epigraph's view, received ideas are stupid because, in their ignorance most people accept ideas that are untrue. Since most people have intellectual laxity, they tend to distort and simplify whatever ideas come their way. Another form of stupidity that Flaubert includes in the category is the facile generalization. We tend to

generalize to content ourselves with the most rudimentary knowledge without caring to pursue the subject any further. Flaubert gives examples of such stupidities as the following generalizations, or false impressions we carry in our minds: Architects- all fools, always forget the stairways in houses; Estomac- all illnesses come from the stomach; Koran- Book by Mohammed which talks only of women; Serpents- all poisonous; Peru- country where everything is made of gold; Paris where all roads are made of rubber, etc. That such ideas are stupid, there can be very little doubt. Flaubert's Dictionaries is an extensive collection of such generalizations which assume the character first of belief and then of value. Flaubert's arduous exercise in identifying the various stupidities by which a society lives strengthens one's growing conviction that it does not depend on one's ability to formulate the "correct" alternative view. Stupid ideas are not of the middle class or bourgeoise alone, as opposed to other, preferable opinions. Thus, these entries in Flaubert's book neither represent a coherent view of the world, nor are they rendered stupid by being set against another coherent ideology. His enterprise actually is very much that of a mythologist, as Roland Barthes has more recently defined it. In his view, to analyse contemporary myths of bourgeois culture is not to claim that they are necessarily false but only that their historical and conventional character has been obscured by a society which attempts to transform its particular culture into a universal nature. For example, Rolls-Royce as car has great many properties which make it a prize specimen, but it is still a mythical name, a symbol of excellence and status. This habit of mythmaking attacks a kind of fetishism which takes various associations, however sound their factual basis, and makes them "natural" meanings of or responses to an object or concept. Flaubert's choice of the format of Dictionary is important, because that is what we do with objects and concepts, people and places, individuals and groups – reduce them to items of dictionary. Basques (a community in Spain) – are the best runners. This may be true, although there must be many among them not interested in running at all. Even if it is true, to make it, as it were, the meaning of Basques, the socially required response, is to limit freedom and curiosity in ways which obliterate reality. Flaubert makes entries in this Dictionaries mostly of this type. They are stupid, not because the facts on which they are based are false, but because the particular meanings they are made to offer do not exhaust all the possible meanings of the object or concept. They are stupid also because they place the object or concept in a self-enclosed system of social discourse which comes to serve as reality for those who allow themselves to be caught up in it. If stupidity were ignorance, one can take a position on the side of knowledge. Also, if stupidity were bourgeois, one can range oneself with the aristocracy or the people. But if stupidity were cultural language made nature, how does one combat it? How does one fight against clichés, which are grounded in truth but have been made the constituents of a world? Flaubert's first attempt to define a posture in which he could rail against stupidity was his invention of that curious giant, le Garcon. The Garcon is not the archetypal bourgeois. He utters idees recues on the appropriate occasions but with such conceit and bellowing that interlocutor who are not in on the joke become annoyed. And he can take up any other position sufficiently gross and ridiculous for him to make a spectacle of himself. If one were playing the Garcon one could display self-satisfaction and unmask one's relations with others. But the Garcon, we are told, would not simply present a bill. For that would put him into the situation of professional men whose time we buy but with whom we expect to strike human relations during the period we have bought. The Garcon, on the other hand, details his fees, like a doctor charging extra for each reassuring word, adding a supplement for a delicacy. Every moment of his behaviour is an object to be weighted and paid for. He is, thus, making, quite literally, a spectacle of himself, not merely revealing the sordid truth of a human relationship but making it worse. The Garcon's mode of existence is laughter. The man who laughs is strong among the strong, especially if his laughter be outrageous. One must either join in the laughter, which makes one feel self-conscious and foolish, so excessive it is, or one must allow bourgeois indignation to mount and become a spectacle oneself. Either way, the Garcon disconcerts; he pulls the strings. And if one experience this paradoxical duality one might try, as experiment, what Flaubert often did to avoid boredom: look at oneself in the mirror and laugh one's most outrageous laugh. Here, one becomes both subject and object of ridicule and can experience in one of its purest forms the stupidity of the human species. Now, how can one prick stupidity

without claiming supreme intelligence? The Garcon's solution is to display one's stupidity with a blatant and provocative self-confidence. The Garcon has no positive position. In him, materialism can make fun of romanticism, and romanticism can make fun of materialism. Everything is grist to his mill, or at least any position that takes itself seriously. Thus, the stupidity of the Garcon is both a mode of comprehension and a property of all that he comprehends. But the Garcon was an attempt at a lived rather than a written solution. It is significant that he does not appear in any of Flaubert's books. Flaubert's purpose in a book is not to present intelligence to mock at stupidity; rather, it is stupidity both as object and as mode of comprehension. To write the book, according to him, is itself an act of stupidity. Representation of the world in sentences is only a particularly pointless and gratuitous activity. Indeed, it can be said that as an incarnation of stupidity the Garcon leaves out the stupidity of language.

CONCEPT OF LANGUAGE

Flaubert's concept of language, or his attitude to it, is amply exemplified by his Dictionnaire. The book makes the point very clear. He makes entries alphabetically. His order is purely arbitrary or linguistic only. It is different from those medieval and renaissance compendiums which attempted to reproduce in their arrangement the order of the world. In Flaubert, sentences are simply juxtaposed, as isolated bits of linguistic matter. Thus, his basic attitude to language is: one does not speak, one does not construct sentences to express one's relation to the world and to others; one is only spoken. Social discourse is already there, which each individual absorbs and imbibes. He only picks out of the stock the response which the system of discourse provides. The novelist's attitude towards language is well documented from the novels themselves. They offer a sense of "the grotesque stupidity of things said, whatever they may be." In Flaubert's view, anything one says is a linguistic object placed on display. And if one looks at it long enough, its stupidity will come out clearly; just as when one repeats a word until it becomes meaningless. Cutting speech off from its origins in practical life, Flaubert treats it as a set of phrases rather than the accomplishment of human intentions. Here is an example from Madame Bovary: "It's going to rain," says Emma to Leon, who is taking his leave. "I have a raincoat," he replies. "Ah!" Here nothing is said. Sentences stand, empty and detached. Thus, language lifted away from the world becomes a self-contained system of empty phrases which we exchange and transmit but which we neither invent nor investigate. At the same time, Flaubert does not believe that man has a rich inner and outer life prior to language, a treasure so particular that no social discourse can capture it. In his novels, there is, in fact, much evidence to the contrary. In Madame Bovary, for example, Emma's desires are created by a language of romance (so are of Cohn in Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises) in her life to fulfill the promise of those words which had seemed so splendid in books. His attitude to science also reveals Flaubert's commitment to facts rather than to knowledge. Language, too, is living when it relates to facts, dead when it relates to knowledge. He is attracted to Positivism precisely because it seems to have abandoned a search for causes (knowledge) and contented itself with exhaustive scientific descriptions (facts). In his view, explanation lies outside the province of science and any attempt to attain it is a step into the abyss of stupidity. Flaubert's view is: "Note that the sciences began to make progress only when they set aside the notion of cause;" "Try to hold firm to science, to pure science: love facts for themselves." Thus, for Flaubert the only kind of knowledge worthy of respect is that which presents and classifies facts. Scientific knowledge, offering no conclusions and explanations, cannot be translated into action. In his view, therefore, any attempt to relate knowledge and activity is an instance of presumptuous stupidity. As a general denegration of synthesis, Flaubert's view is particularly inimical to the pursuit, in novels, of thematic conclusions. Nor does it promote a desire for organization.

ATTACHMENT TO BINARIES

Critics have come up with the strange fact of Flaubert's ambiguous attachment to what (after Derrida) are known binaries. His predilection for pairs had been noted much earlier. Of course, not all his oppositions are profound; some are quite factitious. Binary opposition, we should know, is a metaphor for all thought in its ability to bring order into any disorder. It presumes to isolate crucial features in

simple antitheses and hence moves towards conclusions with a minimum of intellectual effort. One can recall here a passage from Flaubert's Education Sentimental, in which the newly arrived provincial in Paris, Henry, watches the faces of passengers in the omnibus, "establishing between them similarities and antitheses." That, according to Flaubert, is stupid both as an attempt to grasp and comprehend the world and as an intellectual construction which takes place in a language lifted away from the world which does not submit itself to any organization so easily. Strangely, the same Flaubert is also wedded very much to the binary principle, especially when drawing up plans. For instance, the project of a novel related to Napoleon III's era is rigidly symmetrical. "Madame catches Monsieur deceiving her; then Monsieur catches Madame deceiving him – jealousy. She wishes she had married a true lover who had become a great man; he wishes he had married a tart who had become very rich." And opposed to the couple, "in the background his sister and her husband, a respectable and perfectly egotistical household." Writing such a novel would obviously involve the task of struggling with the stupidity of his symmetrical plan. As we have it in Flaubert, the problem of binarism serves a useful pivot on which we can turn from the stupidity of knowledge to the stupidity of the world. Flaubert had great dislike of facile antitheses. He had a tendency also to make oppositions unproductive. So, he can use binarism in his descriptions as a device of antithesis: doubling objects without allowing this to produce meaning. In Flaubert, the stupidity of the world is always the coefficient of a rudimentary order, whether that of syntax which pretends to compose items into a coherent proposition, or that of the more elaborate objects described at some length. In Madame Bovary, Emma's wedding cake and the elaborate toy which, destined for the Homais children but did not find its way into the final text due to the insistence of Bouilhet, are excellent instances of stupidity as a coefficient of organization. The former, of course, is ridiculous in its mixture of styles and in the contrast between its elements and what they represent. The cake is doubly alienated and fetishistic; first, because its form is so divorced from its practical purposes (it will, after all, be eaten), and secondly, because its ingredients are made to serve functions which are not their own. However, the toy serves as a significant example of stupidity and its attractions. It is a scale model of a town and all the activities taking place within it; it is also nonfunctional and purely representational. The traditional defense of representation is that art takes pleasure in discovering the closeness of representation to the object represented. Such objects, with their high degree of organization, though perfectly useless, are directly and abashedly mimetic, presenting us with a whole and allowing us to explore its parts. In Flaubert, however, the objects only illustrate the stupidity of this kind of intelligibility. Blocking the discourse of the text, they offer a high degree of organization which leads nowhere. They figure the absurdity of representational art itself. Divorced from its human context, it is language free from origins and goals. It only retains a high degree of organization as it accedes to the condition of the practico-inert. We must not have any doubt that for Flaubert the attraction of such objects lie in their stupidity. One stands fascinated before them because they have no function, prove nothing. The mind is released from any commitment to practical life and can simply explore. Stupidity of this kind is a property of a tranquil appearance, like the very objects of nature, like mountains or large animals. The masterpiece does not display intelligence. It also does not reach towards any conclusion. It only offers itself with no ostensible purpose. The betise of novels is even more than a version of negative capability. They command attention, as a mountain does when it rises before us. They are not subsumed by any human project. One may play around them but does not exhaust them. In fact, inexhaustibility is a compelling property of both art and stupidity. Stupidity as a refusal to understand negates ordinary meaning and replace it with an open and exploratory reverie. To see how this was done in the novel, we must consider the style which was to make the world stupid while remaining itself an object of admiration. To comprehend the world without understanding it was the task of Flaubertian irony. FLAUBERTIAN IRONY: Kierkegaard said that the true ironist does not wish to be understood. We can decidedly say that irony always involves the possibility of misunderstanding. As such it offers the critic or analyst the opportunity to display his own perspicacity. The most basic feature of irony is its dual structure. It presupposes two orders which are in contrast with one another and in whose contrast lies whatever value the form can generate. Since our most pervasive dualism is one of appearance and reality, we tend to cast suspected ironies into that

mould. An ironic statement has a literal meaning, but that meaning is only semblance and true proposition is hidden and must be reconstructed. In fact, it is the incongruity of the literal meaning, the perception of it as semblance, which leads us to identify a possible irony and seek the hidden reality. Situational irony, as opposed to verbal irony, relies even more obviously on this particular structure. Situational or dramatic irony is thus a device of cohesion in Flaubert, which knits together incidents and gives them a meaning by relating them to a law of the world. In Madame Bovary, the irony of Charles encouraging Emma's relationships with Rodolphe and Leon gives more shape to the plot than it might otherwise have had. Also, the irony of the Blind Man's appearance at three crucial moments in Emma's life and the implicit commentary provided by his songs and actions gives a metaphorical neatness to her fate. However, generally such gross dramatic ironies play only a minor role in Flaubert's novels. We can understand why it is so in Flaubert's novels. Situational irony is rather neat. It implies a fundamentally predictable and orderly world. It is a mode of existential recuperation and is often used in daily life to overcome disappointment: "that's just what would happen," we say when rain starts just as we begin a picnic, just to suggest that nature is not wholly indifferent but acts in accordance with an order which can be grasped. Verbal irony is more fascinating than the situational. It is so because no sentence is ironic per se. For a sentence to be properly ironic it must be possible to imagine some group of readers taking it quite literally. Otherwise, there would be no contrast between apparent and assumed meaning and no space for ironic play. When Flaubert writes that during her illness Emma had a vision of heavenly bliss and purity to which she resolved to aspire, his language itself does not offer decisive indications of irony. In such a case, our perception of irony depends on a series of cultural norms which we assume we share with the narrator. Her vision dwells not on the piety and self-sacrifice of a convent life but on the embroidered train of the long gown in which she might majestically move along corridors. Such analogues help to confirm our perception of irony. The clearest ironies in the novels or Flaubert are those that deflate the pretentions of characters, either by signal departures from our models of human conduct or else by the description of illusions which contrast with realities announced by the text. Slightly different cultural models make Leon's opinion about the best name for Emma's child an object of irony: "M. Leon… is surprised that you don't choose Madeleine, which is exceedingly fashionable just now." Our notions of human behaviour also enable us to identify irony when Fredric "wished for a serious illness, hoping in that way to interest her." Sentences which juxtapose and pretend to knit together items which our notions of appropriate human responses and behaviour render incongruous are perhaps the most frequent devices of Flaubert's irony. Madame Bovary is exceptional among Flaubert's novels in that an early chapter in the novel sketches for us the main features of the principal code. The chapter is devoted to Emma's convent education and its extracurricular accompaniments. She is attracted to the concrete expressions of vague sentimentality. She accepts religion only insofar as its metaphors are sexual or pathetic and peoples her mind with particularized novelistic images of amorous adventures. Very naturally, these images mingle with historical melodrama, the cult of Mary Queen of Scots and other noble and unfortunate ladies. The experience which this code expresses is either socially exotic – noble ladies reclining on sofas or in carriages, contemplating the moon, a flower, or a plumed rider – or culturally exotic – mountains, waterfalls, ruins, palm trees. When we recognize later passages as instances of this code, we thereby enter the domain of irony. Emma's own exotic ironies of countries with sensuous names, where one travels in a post-chaise over mountain roads to the sounds of cowbells, waterfalls, and songs, stopping at night beside a gulf beneath lemon trees, not only are distant from possible experience but dwell on concrete and surface details which would not satisfy if they were experienced. Our acquaintance with this code confirms our ironic view of Emma's own behaviour. Her affairs with Rodolphe and Leon are presented as attempts to produce in her own life events which might serve as reference for the language of this code. The language that Emma and Leon exchange in their early conversations is precisely a language of sentimental clichés. The way she wants Leon to look like Louis XIII. All these things on the part of Emma enumerate that code and the writer's irony accompanying its presentation. Flaubert uses this type of irony as a polemical device. For the most part, it is directed against particular characters and their views of the world. It suggests that the implied

author of the text holds other views. In Flaubert, the function of the various types of irony is not to convey to the reader a particular view of the world or to make out a definable case. Their function is to set in motion the negative operations of irony so that they may be constantly present as possible modes of processing other sentences in the text. If we are once accustomed to undertaking ironic readings of sentences which refer explicitly to the thoughts and behaviours of characters, on the assumption that alternative positions may always be constructed, then we will at least be attuned to treating in like manner sentences where polemical intent would be difficult to locate but where detachment still seems the safest posture.

THE STORY OF MADAME BOVARY

Being the first type of novel that came out of France, Madame Bovary shocked the contemporary readers. It was condemned for picturing the life of a romantic adulteress. But it was also acclaimed for the honesty and skill with which it handles the subject. Flaubert does not permit Emma to escape the tragedy she brings upon herself. She finds diversion from the monotony of life, but she does so at the cost of her self-respect. The truth of Emma's struggle has had universal appeal. The detailed summary of the novel's narrative can be put as under: Charles Bovary, a student of medicine, marries for his own advancement a woman much older than himself. She makes his life miserable with her nagging and groundless suspicions. One day Charles is called to the bedside of M. Rouault, who has a broken leg, where he meets the farmer's daughter named Emma. She is a beautiful but restless girl whose early education in a French convent gives her an overwhelming thirst for broader experience of life. Charles finds his patient an excellent excuse to see the girl. He is captivated by the charm and grace of Emma. But the doctor is soon suspected by his wife, Heloise, who disbelieves that her husband could be so devoted to the patient as to be very keen to see him every day. She has heard rumours about Emma as to how, despite her peasant background, she conducts herself like a gentlewoman. Angry as well as tearful Charles's wife, Heloise, makes him swear that he would no longer visit the Rouault farm. Meanwhile it comes to be discovered that Heloise's fortune is non-existent, that in reality she is not a woman of means or fortune. This makes the young doctor furious, because he had married this woman, although much senior to him in age, just because she was known to be a woman of means or fortune. The discovery is followed by a violent quarrel between the two. The stormy scene between her and the parents of Charles brings on her an attack of an old illness. She dies quickly and quietly. Charles feels guilty because he had so few regrets at his wife's death. Once he gets an invitation from old Rouault, and in response goes to the farm only to fall under the influence of Emma's charms. As old Rouault finds Charles fall more deeply in love with his daughter, he decides that the young doctor is dependable and quite respectable. This leads him to force his daughter to accept the young widower's hand. Thus, Emma gets married to the widower doctor with blessings from her father. During the early weeks of their marriage Emma occupies herself with changing their new homes. She busies herself with every household task she can think of to keep herself from being utterly disillusioned. She, however, soon realizes that even though she thinks she is in love with Charles, the rapture which should have followed their marriage does not actually arrive. All the romantic books she had read during her early years had led her to expect more from marriage than she actually receives. The dead calm of her feeling only expresses now a bitter disappointment. The intimacy of marriage only disgusts her. Instead of a perfumed, handsome lover in velvet and lace, she finds herself tied to a rather dull-witted husband who reeks of medicines and drugs. As Emma is about to give up all hopes of finding any joy in her married life, a noble patient of Charles invites them to a ball at his chateau. At the ball Emma gets a chance to dance with a dozen partners, tastes champagne, and receives fabulous compliments on her extraordinary beauty. The sharp contrast between the life of Bovarys' and that of this nobleman comes to her consciousness with an anguish. As a result, she becomes more and more discontented with her husband. His futile and clumsy efforts to please her only make things worse; they make her despair at his lack of understanding. She now only sits by her window, dreams of Paris, becomes listless, and falls ill. Hoping that change of place would improve her condition, Charles takes Emma to Yonville, where he sets up a new practice. Here, Emma prepares herself for the birth of a child. When her daughter is born, her interest in the child is confined only to laces and ribbons for her dresses. The child is sent to a wet nurse,

where Emma visits her, and where, accidentally, she meets Leon Dupuis. Leon is a law clerk bored with the town and is out to seek diversion. Charmed with youthful Emma, he walks home with her in the twilight. Emma finds her sympathetic to her romantic ideas about life. Later, Leon visits the Bovarys in company with one Homais, the town chemist. Homais holds little soirees at the local inn, to which he invites the townsfolk. Here Emma's acquaintance with Leon develops and finally ripens. The townspeople start gossiping about the couple, but Charles Bovary is not acute enough to sense the nature of interest his wife shows in Leon. Bored with Yonville and tired of loving in vain, Leon leaves for Paris to complete his studies. This makes Emma broken-hearted. She deplores her weakness in not giving herself to Leon. She frets in her bedroom, and once again makes herself ill. However, before she can have enough time to become as melancholy as she was earlier, there appears a new arrival. A stranger, Rodolphe Boulanger, comes to town. One day he brings his farm tenant to Charles for bloodletting. Rodolphe, an accomplished lover, sees in Emma a promise of future pleasure. When he begins his suit, Emma realizes that if she gives herself to him her surrender would be immoral. But she rationalizes her doubts by convincing herself that nothing as romantic and beautiful as love could be sinful. Therefore, she starts deceiving Charles, her husband, and begins meeting Rodolphe. She rides with him over the countryside to his persuasive appeals. At first, she feels guilty But she soon identifies herself with adulterous heroines of fiction, believing that very much like them she has experienced true romance. Now feeling assured of Emma's love, Rodolphe no longer considers it necessary to continue with his gentle lover's tricks. He no longer bothers to maintain punctuality in his meetings with Emma. Noticing this cooling of passion, Emma begins to suspect him of gradual withdrawal from her. She starts feeling that she is losing him as a lover. Meanwhile, Charles, Emma's husband, gets involved in Homais's attempt to cure a boy of a clubfoot with a machine Charles has designed. Both Homais and Charles are convinced that the success of their operation will raise their future standing in the community. But after weeks of torment, the boy contracts gangrene. As a result, his leg has to be amputated. This damages the reputation of Homais, as he is by profession a chemist. As for Charles, as a doctor, he comes to be viewed with suspicion. His practice begins to fall away. Disgusted with her husband's failure as a practicing doctor, Emma starts scorning her past virtue. She now starts spending lavishly on jewelry and clothes. Consequently, her husband goes under heavy debts. The case of Emma's gradual sliding into the life of vice brings to mind the following lines from Pope: Vice is a master of so frightful mien, As to be hated needs but to be seen; Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face, We first endure, then pity, then embrace. Precisely these very steps form the fall of Emma into the abyss of vice. In her desperate attempt to escape the miserable life of debt and enjoy better life of riches she finally secures from Rodolphe his word that he would take her away. But on the very eve of what was to be her escape she receives from her lover a letter so hypocritically repentant of their sin of adultery, that she reads it with sneers. Now, realizing the horror of having lost her dream of living with a lover like Rodolphe, she almost throws herself from the window. But she is saved when Charles calls to her. However, as usual with her, she become gravely ill with brain fever. She remains in bed for several months, expecting death to release her from the pain of living. Emma's convalescence is slow, but she finally gets well enough to go to Rouen to the theatre. The tender love scenes behind the footlights make Emma breathless with envy. Once again, she starts dreaming of life of romance. In Rouen she meets Leon Dupuis again. This time Leon is very much determined to possess Emma. He listens to her complaints with sympathy, soothes her, and takes her driving. Still consumed by her thirst for romance, she soon yields herself to Leon with regret that she had not done it before. Charles Bovary grows concerned about his debts. In addition to his own financial worries,his father dies, leaving his mother in ignorance about the family estate. Emma uses the excuse of procuring a lawyer for her mother-in-law to visit Leon in Rouen, where he has set up a practice. At Leon's suggestion Emma procures a power of attorney from Charles. This document leaves her free to spend Charles's money without his knowledge of her purchases. Finally, in great despair over his debts, the extent of which Emma only partly reveals, Charles takes his mother into confidence and promises to destroy Emma's power of attorney. Thus, deprived of her hold over her husband's finances and unable to repay her debts, Emma throws herself upon Leon's mercy with

all disregard for caution. By now her corruption becomes so complete that she has to seek release and pleasure or go out of her mind. In her growing degradation, Emma begins to realize that she has brought her lover down with her. She no longer respects him. She even scorns her faithfulness when he is unable to give her money which she needs to pay her bills. When her name is posted publicly for a debt of several thousand francs, the bailiff prepares to sell Charles's property to settle her creditors' claims. Charles is out of town when the debt is posted. Emma, in one final act of self-abasement, appeals to Rodolphe for help. But he, too, refuses to oblige her. He does not even lend her money. Fully aware now that the framework of lies with which she has deceived Charles is about to collapse, she resolves to die a heroine's death. She swallows the poison of arsenic bought from Homais's shop. Charles, returning from his trip, arrives too late to save her from a slow and painful death. Pitiful in his grief, he can barely endure the sounds of the hammer as her coffin is being nailed shut. Later, when his pain over his wife's death grows less, he opens her desk only to find the carefully collected love letters of Leon and Rodolphe. Heart broken with the knowledge of Emma's infidelity, scourged with debt, and helpless in his disillusionment, Charles, too, dies soon after his wife. He leaves behind only a legacy of twelve francs for the support of his orphaned daughter. Thus the Bovary tragedy is completed.

THE SOURCES OF MADAME BOVARY

We are told that nothing demonstrates the continuity of Flaubert's effort better than the writing of Madame Bovary. Maxime DuCamp's account has been accepted as true, which runs thus: when Flaubert read his first version of The Vision of Saint Anthony to Bouilhert and DuCamp, Madame Bovary came into being from Bouilhert's suggestion. He said, "Why don't you write the Delaunay story?" Flaubert is supposed to have thrown back his head and exclaimed: "What an idea!" Delaunay was actually called Delamare, but that makes little difference. Bouilhert and DuCamp in their verdict are reported to have said, "It is our opinion that the manuscript of Saint Anthony must be thrown into the fire and the subject never brought up again." There is now available whole archive of works on the actual personages on whom are cast the characters of Madame Bovary. Most of this archive relates to the character of Emma Bovary. The very day Flaubert's novel came out, people started demanding to know the identity of Madame Bovary. However, when Flaubert, feeling persecuted by the demand, answered, "I am Madame Bovary!," everyone assumed he was only joking. All the very many articles and books that have been written on Emma Rouault, Charles Bovary, and Yonville–l' Abbey, in real life supposedly Delphine Courturier, the wife of an officer de Sante named Dalamare who practiced medicine at a place called Ry – offer little but anecdotal interest. Besides, they have been much disputed and are often dubious. Also, they are of little importance to the real critic seeking to penetrate the psychological motivations of the writer. Flaubert himself found the subject so banal that, using it as a point of departure, he felt he could write a book with no subject at all. The only authentic "source" of the novel, if we must look for one, comes from the novelist himself. As a schoolboy of only seventeen Flaubert had written a "Philosophical Tale: Passion and Virtue," which is dated December 10, 1837. This tale is the story of a young woman named Mazza. She already embodies everything that Emma Bovary would later have. From the very opening lines we find Mazza dreaming of a man she has only seen two times: "the first time was at a dance given at the ministry, the second time at the Comedie Francaise, and although he was neither a man of extraordinary talents nor very handsome, she had often thought of him. In the evening, after the lamp had been blown out, she would remain a few instants dreaming, her heavy hair covering her bare breasts, her head turned toward the window where the night threw forth a pale light, her arms hanging over the edge of the couch, and her soul floating between emotions at once vague and repellent, like those confused sounds which rise from the fields on autumn evenings." Here, we can see that in the space of just ten lines there is, in sum, the story of Emma Bovary. Mazza's portrait is very much similar to that of Emma's. They both have the same dreamy character combined with the same thirst to possess the absolute. There are also further similarities between Passion and Virtue and Madame Bovary. Just as Charles is by nature the exact opposite of Emma, M. Willer, a financer totally absorbed in the fluctuations of the stock market, knows nothing of Mazza's reveries. Evil fortune brings it that she

encounters her Rodolphe, a certain Ernest: "Far from being one of those men of exceptional feeling whom one meets in books and plays, he was a man with a dry heart, a precise mind, and on top of all that, a chemical engineer. But he was an expert seducer: he knew by heart the devices, the tricks, the chic (to use a vulgar word) by which an adroit man arrives at his ends." We can see that page by page, the parallels and analogies between the novel of the sixteen-year-old and the masterpiece of the mature man become more numerous and apparent. As Rene' Dumesnil puts it, "the one is already the other, only in an embryonic state; it will take gestation period of fifteen years for this subject, reluctantly reconsidered and laboriously executed, like a schoolboy's exercise, to grow into the masterpiece we know." In Passion and Virtue, Ernest is adroit. He enters into Mazza's household in this fashion: "he lends her novels, takes her to the theatre, making sure always to do something startling and different; and then, day by day, he is freer in his visits to her house and manages to become a friend of the family, of her husband, of the servants…." As we see later in Madame Bovary, Rodolphe behaves in the same manner, who diabolically manages to have Emma's own husband suggest that for reasons of health she should go out riding in the forest with this rascal who has been waiting all along for such an opportunity. So Mazza gives herself to Ernest, just as Emma gives herself to Rodolphe. Both surrender themselves to these subtle men body and soul. Also like Rodolphe, Ernest, we are told, "begins to love her a little more than a little shop-girl or a bitpart actress." He becomes frightened of this love, "like children who run away from the sea saying it is too large." Again like Rodolphe, Ernest invents excuses to withdraw from the affair when it no longer remains interesting to him. Even the letter he writes to Mazza is very much similar to the one Rodolphe writes to Emma: "Farewell, Mazza! I will never see you again. I have been sent by the Minister of the Interior on an important mission to analyze the products and the soil of Mexico. Farewell! I embark at Le Havre. If you wish to be happy, cease to love me. Love Virtue and Duty instead. This is my final word to you. Farewell again! I embrace you. Ernest." Mazza runs all the way to Le Havre, arriving only in time to see "a white sail sinking beneath the horizon." She has no choice but to return home, which she does stunned and wounded. "She sees life as one long cry of pain." She "writhes in agony in the embrace of her husband, weeping at the memory." She becomes a widow. After a long wait, she finally receives a cold and indifferent letter in which Ernest announces his marriage to the only daughter of his superior. Mazza drinks poison and dies. Of course, there are so many elements of the 1857 work (Madame Bovary) which are not there in the 1837 sketch (Passion and Virtue). Emma's gradual degeneration, her slow and fatal progress which leads her implacably from fall to fall till she finally takes the poison, etc., are the details missing in the former sketch of the "tale". But the relevance of the earlier piece remains for an understanding of the latter. Besides, Flaubert did draw, for sure, several details of his masterpiece from reality or real life. Decidedly, they are not of much importance in themselves. Nevertheless, they do constitute the material of a work of art. The very logic of their being there in the book proves their relevance. No doubt, every detail in the novel is true, and has been observed and measured by the novelist. But it is all these details from real life, taken from various times and different places and meticulously manipulated by the artist, which made the novel whose life came only from him. A long process of maturation always takes place in the writer's mind. In 21 this case, it took twenty years. It was carried out in silence. And in this process, the subconscious mind of the artist plays as important a part as does the conscious. Memory registers may impressions which precipitate only when they amalgamate and form a new compound. It is in this process of alchemy that life gets transformed into a work of art. Conscious and careful craftsman as Flaubert was, he worked hard on his project and perfected the narration into a piece of art.

FLAUBERT AND MADAME BOVARY

In the histories of literature, Flaubert used to be presented as the "father of realism." He had also been alleged of having "feminine" temperament; his physicians dubbed him a nervous old woman. Responding to these statements, Jean-Paul Sartre calls Madame Bovary a "dry and objective" work. At the same time he believes that the work is "the objectification of the person." In his view, the work is, "in fact, more complete, more total than the life. It has its roots in the life, to be sure; it illuminates the life, but it does not find its total explanation in the life

alone. Thus the work – when one has examined it – becomes a hypothesis and a research tool to clarify the biography." Satre, therefore, recommends that the reader "can and must catch sight of the movement of landowners and capitalists, the evolution of the rising classes, the slow maturation of the Proletariat: everything is there" across Madame Bovary. The work also reflects existing contradictions in contemporary petit bourgeoisie, the evolution of the family, of property, as well as Flaubert's "femininity," his childhood in a hospital building, etc. Each of these significations clarifies the other, with each serving as an encompassing framework for the preceding. However, the included signification in the work is richer or greater than the including signification. In a word, what we have is only the outline for the dialectical movement, and not the movement itself. In Sartre's view, our "project" as readers should be the one "by which Flaubert, in order to escape from the petit bourgeoisie, will launch himself across the various fields of possible towards the alienated objectification of himself and will constitute himself inevitably and indissolubly as the author of Madame Bovary and as that petit bourgeois which he refused to be." Sartre considers such a project as meaningful. It is not any way the simple negativity of flight. By so doing a man aims at the production of himself in the world as a "certain objective totality." In Sartre's view, it is not the simple abstraction to write which makes up the peculiar quality of Flaubert; rather, it is the decision to write in a certain manner in order to manifest himself in the world in a particular way. In a way, it is the particular signification – within the framework of the contemporary ideology – which gives to literature as the negation of his original condition and as the objective solution to his contradictions. 22 Making an application of his theory about the relationship of the author with his work, Sartre concludes that Saint Anthony "expresses the whole Flaubert in his purity and in all the contradictions of his original project, but Saint Anthony is a failure." In comparison to this work, Sartre considers Madame Bovary a success. But he sees a relevance of Saint Anthony to the creation of Madame Bovary. In his view, "the monstrous, splendid work which results from it, that in which he is objectified and alienated, is Madame Bovary." Thus, our return to the biography shows us the hiatuses, the fissures, the accidents. At the same time, it confirms the hypothesis of the work's original project by revealing the direction and continuity of the life. Sartre being a philosopher of existentialism, thus makes an application of the philosophy to the interpretation of literary works. As he defines, the existentialist critical approach adopts "a regressive-progressive and analytic synthetic method." In this approach there is an enrichment of cross-reference between the work and the period. As he himself concludes, "In short, the simple inert juxtaposition of the epoch and the object gives way abruptly to a living conflict." Sartre leads us through this approach to question and then reject the conventional notion of Flaubert as a realist or an author of feminine sensibility or temperament. In his view, "If one has lazily defined Flaubert as a realist and if one has decided that realism suited the public in the second Empire (which will permit us to develop a brilliant, completely false theory about the evolution of realism between 1857 and 1957), one will never succeed in comprehending either that strange monster which is Madame Bovary or the author or the public. Once more one will be playing with shadows. But if one has taken the trouble, in a study which is going to be long and difficult, to demonstrate within this novel the objectification of the subjective and its alienation – in short, if one grasps it in the concrete sense which it still holds at the moment when it escapes from its author and at the same time from the outside as an object which is allowed to develop freely then the book abruptly comes to oppose the objective reality which it will hold for public opinion, for the magistrates, for contemporary writers." In Sartre's view, Flaubert despised realism and said so many times in his life. He loved only the absolute purity of art. It is interesting to note that Flaubert saw his book stolen away from him the moment it was declared a success. The period viewed it as a supreme work of realism, a sharp critique of romantic attitudes which Emma represents. Flaubert reacted against this attitude to his book, and no longer recognized it. It was foreign to him. Suddenly he lost his own objective existence. The opposite way of looking at Madame Bovary, which critics like Sartre adopt, is to see it as a comment as much on the so-called realism or naturalism of our attitudes and beliefs, precepts and practices, as on the romantic attitudes and beliefs, precepts and practices. Viewed from this angle, the novel throws a new light upon the period itself to which it belongs, or of which it is a

product. It enables us, as Sartre says, to pose a new question to History: just what must that period have been in order that it should demand this book and mendaciously find there its own image? Sartre issues the statement that "It is enough to say by way of conclusion that the man and his time will be integrated into the dialectical totalization when we have shown how History surpasses this contradiction". Hence the relationship between the writer and his work is as intimate as is the relationship between the work. Further, the relationship between the work and its times is also as intimate as the one between the work and its author. Hence, for a proper understanding of any literary work it is necessary to go into these relationships and work out the equations that connect one with another. Of course, the equations may not answer to the principles of realism adopted by every work, just as Flaubert's Madame Bovary does not. These equations and the principles underlying them are always determined by the individual writer and his purpose behind the project which is his work. As the later twentieth-century or postmodern critics have pointed out, Flaubert's novel is more a critique of realism than a realistic work. It attempts the creation of a completely objective or pure art which draws attention not so much to the subject it is about but to the manner in which that subject has been treated. Here, it is the style and technique that gain priority with the author rather than the subject and plot or incidents and characters.

NATURE OF REALISM IN MADAME BOVARY

Realism as a critical term has been highly elastic. It has often been used in ambivalent and equivocal terms. In fact, over the years, through long and varied use, it has gathered far too many qualifying adjectives, which have not been of much use in clarifying the term as such. A stage has reached that many critics now feel that we could as well do without such a term. Quite a few, the present writer included, still feel that the term realism, like several others, such as classicism, romanticism, modernism, expressionism, etc., does serve a useful purpose in defining and understanding many a work of narrative fiction. Any style of writing, when in use for a long time, would gain richness and complexity. It is, for sure, a function of criticism to follow the growth of literary styles and find ways of drawing as many distinctions as the growth of any particular style has necessitated. Let us therefore not get scared of the complexity or variety that the style of realism has acquired in narrative fiction and engage ourselves instead in gaining a clear understanding of the various nuances it has come out with! In literature, realism fundamentally is the depiction of life with fidelity and objectivity. Thus, it is not concerned with exaggeration or idealization. It does not attempt to render things, incidents and characters, more beautiful than they actually are. The attempt is to keep the bare bones without adding any padding or ornament. It also confines itself to the everyday world, avoiding the twilight world of the supernatural, and the higher world of heroes and heroines, of exceptional incidents and characters. In the last hundred years or so a large number of theories about realism have developed. What is to be regarded realistic has been a problem provoking different answers from different schools of criticism. Of course, the term has not lost currency. We cannot avoid its use when it comes to talking about literature of verisimilitude or possessing authenticity of lived experience. The issue has been made technical after the French novel of the nineteenth century which was based on a conscious and deliberate theory of realism and naturalism. The movement began in the 1830's and gathered momentum by the 1850's. Madame Bovary is a product of the same period, if not a deliberate specimen of that movement. This movement started in reaction against romanticism, but it also rejected classicism. The reasons for these rejections were different. Romanticism was rejected for its search for the uncommon, unusual, fantastic, other-worldly, magical, supernatural, etc. Classicism was rejected because it depicted, in the name of realism, books rather than nature. Also, its imitation of nature was methodized, standardized, classified, categorized, typified, etc. Realism recommended an imitation directly of nature, of the life of common man in all its minute mundane details. In the view of a realist, literature has to concern itself with the here and now, with everyday events, with the writer's own environment and with the movements (political, social, etc.) of his time. Balzac gave the lead in France. Zola came out with his theory of naturalism, which was a more scientific version of realism. It focused, like the science, on the case studies of individuals in terms of heredity and environment. The density of detail, of documentation, of observation, of analysis – all these became a necessary apparatus of realism and

naturalism as practiced by the later nineteenth century French novelists. Theory combined with practice in the nineteenth century to produce a large body of literature which presented an altogether a different view of the condition humaine. The movement was decidedly influenced by contemporary philosophical thought, especially by Comte's Cours de philosophic positive (1830). Comte's positivism insisted on making sociology a prime science. Later, Darwin's Origin of Species (1857) and the writings of other evolutionists induced many writers to re-appraise assumptions about their origin and to take a very different view of the environment. An equally powerful influence seems to have been the invention of photography in 1839, which made people look at literature as a mirror image of nature. The photographic precision demanded much greater care for accuracy in depiction and delineation than ever before. Courbet emerged as one of the great champions of realism. He expressed opposition to all kinds of idealization of life in art. Rejecting both romanticism and classicism, he maintained that realism alone was democratic. He also insisted that the hero of the novel should be a common man. Thus, in realism can be said to have begun the shaping of the anti-hero in fiction. Flaubert's Madame Bovary, too, was greeted in 1857 as a great work of realism. Later it was greeted as a great work of naturalism. Flaubert did not like the label. Balzac alone, before Flaubert, was the proper realist. He regarded man, and analysed character, as a zoologist might. He also expressed his intention to follow Buffon's work on zoology in order to write a natural history of man. Flaubert did not aspire to use any such scientific method in his novels. Only as an artist he wanted to treat his subject. And in so doing, he made realism impartial, impersonal, and objective. That realism in Flaubert is different from the realism Balzac and Stendhal practiced can be illustrated by any paragraph of crucial importance in Madame Bovary. Note, for instance, the following: But it was above all at mealtimes that she could bear it no longer, in that little room on the ground floor, with the smoking stove, the creaking door, the oozing walls, the damp floor-tiles: all the bitterness of life seemed to be served to her on her plate, and, with the steam from the boiled beef, there rose from the depths of her soul other exhalations as it were of disgust. Charles was a slow eater; she would nibble a few hazel-nuts or else, leaning on her elbow, would amuse herself making marks on the oilcloth with the point of her table knife. This paragraph forms the climax of a presentation whose subject is Emma Bovary's dissatisfaction with her life in Tostes. The occasion is that she has been waiting for a long time for some sudden event which would give a new turn to her bored life. She feels that her life here is without elegance, adventure, and love, in the depths of the provinces, beside a mediocre and boring husband. But that moment has not yet come, nor seems to be coming. Hence the present scene when she is seized with disgust and despair. Flaubert does not present the situation simply as a picture. He first gives Emma and then the situation through her. It is not a matter of a simple representation of the content of Emma's consciousness, of what she feels as she feels it. Although the light which illuminates the picture flows from her, she herself also remains a part of that picture. She remains situated within it. If we compare this paragraph with one from Balzac or Stendhal, we shall observe that, in the first place, all the three share the two distinguishing characteristics of modern or French realism. One of these is that real everyday occurrences in a low social stratum, the provincial petty bourgeoisie, are taken very seriously. Another is that the everyday occurrences are accurately and profoundly set in a definite period of contemporary history. In these two basic characteristics all the three French writers are at one, in contradistinction to all earlier realism. However, beyond these two features, there is noting common between Flaubert and the other two. In the other two we constantly hear what the writer thinks of his characters and events. In the case of Flaubert, no such running commentary is found in the narrative. We also hear in the other two what the characters think and feel. In the case of Flaubert, this, too, is altogether absent in the narrative. Flaubert's opinion of his characters and events remains unspoken. Also, whenever the characters express themselves, it is never in the manner of Balzac and Stendhal where the writer identifies himself with their opinion or seeks to make the reader identify himself with it. It Flaubert we do hear, at times, the author speak, but he neither expresses any opinion nor makes any comment. Flaubert as narrator limits his role to selecting the events and translating them into language. His conviction is, and he proves it practically, that every event, if the writer is able to express it purely and completely, interprets itself and the persons involved

in it better and more completely than any commentary appended to it could do. Flaubert's artistic practice, and its excellence, solely rests on this. Returning to the paragraph in particular we cited above, we see a scene in which a man and his wife are at dining table, which is the most everyday situation imaginable. It is a picture of discomfort, and not a momentary or passing one, but a chronic discomfort, which completely rules an entire life, Emma Bovary's. The beauty of the passage is that an interpretation of the situation is contained within the description itself. The two are sitting together at a table. The husband senses nothing of his wife's inner state. They have so little communication between them that things do not even come to a quarrel. There is not even an argument between them. Conflict seems an altogether a distant possibility. Each of the two is so absorbed in their respective worlds that they are both entirely alone. She is lost in her despair and daydreaming. He is lost in his philistine self-complacency. They have nothing in common. And yet they have nothing of their own, for the sake of which it could be worthwhile to be lonely. Privately, each of the two has a silly world of his/her own, which cannot be reconciled with the realities of the situation. Hence both of them miss the possibilities life offers them. As Erich Auerbach has so well said, "What is true of these two, applies to almost all the other characters in the novel; each of the many mediocre people who act in it has his own world of mediocre and silly stupidity, a world of illusions, habits, instincts, and slogans; each is alone, none can understand another, or help another to insight; there is no common world of men, because it could only come into existence if many should find their way to their own proper reality, the reality which is given to the individual – which then would be also the true common reality. Though men come together for business and pleasure, their coming together has no note of united activity; it becomes one-sided, ridiculous, painful, and it is charged with misunderstanding, vanity, futility, falsehood, and stupid hatred. But what the world would really be, the world of the 'intelligent,' Flaubert never tells us; in his book the world consists of pure stupidity, which completely misses true reality, so that the latter should properly not be discoverable in it at all; yet it is there; it is in the writer's language, which unmasks the stupidity by pure statement; language, then, has criteria for stupidity and thus also has a part in that reality of the 'intelligent' which otherwise never appears in the book."

STRUCTURE OF SYMBOLISM

Perfectionist as Flaubert was, he sought to effect unity of structure in his novels, not through incident alone, nor through imagery alone, but through each and every element of the novel. Symbolism is also one of the devices of structure in his work. Derived from the Greek word symbolon, meaning mark or emblem, token or sign, symbol is an object, animate or inanimate, which represents or stands for something else. As Coleridge has said, "a symbol is characterized by a translucence of the special in the individual." Scales, for example, symbolize justice; the orb and scepter, monarchy and rule; a dove, peace; goat, lust; the lion, strength and courage; the rose, beauty; the lily, purity; the cross, Christianity; etc. Actions and gestures can also be symbolic. The clenched fist symbolizes aggression; beating of the breasts, remorse; raised arms, surrender; etc. A literary symbol combines an image with a concept, words themselves being symbols. It may be public or private, universal or local. Journey, for instance, is symbolic of life. The blood image comes to symbolize guilt in Shakespeare's Macbeth; storm symbolizes mental disturbance in King Lear; weeds symbolize corruption in Hamlet. Symbols can also be abstract words, such a facts standing for utilitarianism in Hard Times; immobility standing for paralysis of will in End of the Road. Among the novelists Hawthorne and Melville in America, Jyoce and Woolf in England, Proust and Kafka in Europe are well-known symbolists. Although Flaubert has not been known as a regular symbolist, committed to this particular mode of expression, he made use of every possible literary device he found useful in effecting perfect unity in his work. Madame Bovary shows how profoundly Flaubert could use symbol as a device of structure in his fictional narratives. As in other novels of his, in this novel also, he has used, for instance, symbols of water and fluidity for the expression of love. He sets up a structure of such symbols to effect the unity of his novel. There are similar structures through imagery, not necessarily symbolic, raised to support the same unity. Let us study here the structure of symbolism. The symbol of water or fluidity for love seems to express the essential truth, that in its nature as well as structure, love is a

dissolution of the human personality. The truth of love here is, of course, the one that Flaubert seems to hold. Elsewhere, say in Shelley, love may mean the source of all good that comes out of human personality, something ennobling. In Shakespeare's comedies, love is a cementing force, effecting harmony, refining individual self, almost a symbol of purity. In Flaubert's novels, including Madame Bovary, there is an almost obsessive concern with water, which appears as a dissolving and diluting force. An allied symbol is that of boat. If water dissolves, embraces and fuses, boat defies and conquers the water, even while being carried by it. The boat rides, for instance near the end of Madame Bovary, suit the moment when love checks itself rather than overflows. Lost in the happy emptiness of their sensations, the two lovers allow themselves to be carried together by the languid movement of the moment. They do not lose themselves into each other. The flow of the river gives direction to the amorous effusion and orients its slow languor. Water makes them live with each other. It makes them realize that, carried by the universal flux, they nevertheless exist and travel together. A famous passage in Madame Bovary describes the refraction of a ray of moonlight in the river as follows: "and the silvery light seemed to spiral to the very bottom, like a headless serpent covered with scales." The serpent is like a river in the river. In Flaubert, running waters seem to occupy only a minor part of his dreams. They tear apart before they absorb. He seems to respond more spontaneously to the slow oozing of one element into another. The contivuity that wraps all things into one single entity fascinates him. The most fascinating is, of course, the movement of water as it originates, its apparition at the surface of a solid object. Certain solids perspire in his work. It is not by chance that Madame Bovary takes place in an atmosphere of saturated humidity in which all things, sensations, feelings, houses, and landscapes make up a world of oozing waters. Since it was to be the novel of "lascivious dampness," of "poor hidden souls, damp with melancholy, closed in like the courtyards in the provinces whose walls are covered with moss." As Flaubert himself said, he set out to produce "the musty colour that surrounds the lives of lower insects. Charles Bovary, for example, literally oozes with boredom and greyness: "the long thin hairs that covered his cheeks like a blond moisture… covered his expressionless face with a pale fuzz." It is an effective image, showing stupidity grown visible, like a mushroom. Quite often, this mildew does not coagulate enough to become moss or fungus. Instead, the surfaces of things are shown slowly swelling and growing heavy, until a liquid drop comes into being and falls to the ground. This obscure operation of the drop arouses all kinds of dark thoughts in Flaubert's soul. He never ceases to meditate upon it. The drop, therefore, becomes as recurring a symbol as that of river, or pool, or bathtub. The drop is indeed the most mysterious entity. It seems to pose a difficulty in accounting for the apparition of a drop on the flat surface of a wall or a rock. Everything on this flat plane seems to prohibit its formation. And yet, there it is, alive, born elsewhere. It seems to become a sign or symbol of the fact that one has to penetrate either beyond the wall or into the drop itself to capture the obscure power that brought it into existence. When Charles falls in love with Emma, he is shown watching the drops of a springlike rain fall on the young woman's umbrella: One day, during a thaw, the bark of the trees in the yard was oozing, the snow melted on the roofs of the buildings…. She stood on the threshold; went to fetch her sunshade…. Beneath it, she smiled at the gentle warmth; drops of water fell one by one on the taut silk. Another time, in a scene of satisfied sensuality, Emma looks at the moonlight which is like "a monstrous candlestick, from which fell drops of melting diamond…." These are the overflowing of a satisfied ripeness, echoing the manifestations of her tenderness. Also, there is the fall, in the night, "of a ripe peach that fell all by itself from the espalier." The same movement of saturation followed by falling is present in the ripening fruit and the melting snow. During the horseback ride with Rodolphe, for example, immediately prior to her undoing, Emma's and Rodolphe's horses "kicked with their hooves fallen pinecones." Also, at the end of the novel, when Emma runs to Rodolphe's house to borrow money, "a warm wind blew in her face; melting snow fell drop by drop from the brave buds onto the grass." Then, the first draft added: "a weakening odor emanated from the damp tree-trunks, and she was about to faint with desire and apprehension." One can go a step further still: ripeness turns into its own excess, the person bursts open like a rotten fruit, losing himself among all things. Emma, when dead, does not quite disappear forever: it seemed to Charles that "she slowly expanded beyond her own

limits and diffused into all surrounding things, into the silence, into the night… and into the liquid drops that oozed from the walls….” Death and life come together in the same oozing drop. The symbolism of water in Flaubert’s novel does not stop here. It goes even further. Instead of merely imitating the movement of desire, it can represent its very consciousness. Rather than concentrate on the beginning and end of desire, imagination will focus on its renewal, its repetition. It is so because any individual drop is only a part of a series of drops. It necessarily lives within the continuity of this successive movement. It does cause, when it drops, a moment of discontinuity, a momentary disruption that suspends the persistent flow of desire. It awakens us from a state of torpor into a semiconsciousness. Letting oneself live, as it were, drop by drop, one feels satisfied. For consciousness gains brief moments of relief while waiting for the next drop of desire to come into being. Thus it does not altogether lose touch with the feeling of satisfaction. This process allows it to recover its strength and self-awareness. When Emma and Leon, for example, are frozen into mutual contemplation, they are shown listening to the running water of a fountain: The water running in the courtyard, dripping from the pump into the watering can, kept time and created a palpitation. Here, the regularity of the successive drops gives a semblance of life to feelings numbed by the monotony of desire. The drops at least awaken the consciousness of an inward palpitation and create an obscure feeling of duration. Thus, the pattern of desire, which is rhythmical in its movement of rise and fall, gives shape to the continuously expanding movement of their love. Little shocks of self-awareness, too, keep shaking them, like the movements of the oars that shake a boat on a river: The heavy boat advanced slowly, shaken by regular movements…. The square oars tinkled against the irons, and, with the breathing of the oarsman, this created an even, regular rhythm into the silence. Thus, desire at last finds its deeper rhythm, its proper beat. Also, water is not merely the element that absorbs and slides; it can also symbolize an inner balance within the human personality. For examples, after having given in to Rodolphe, Emma felt “her heart beginning to beat again, and her blood circulating within her like a river of milk.” At such a moment as this the happy rhythm of the body coincides with the powerful flow of free and life-giving rivers. The water symbolism in Madame Bovary also includes the metaphor of the sea. When Emma finds herself betrayed by Rodolphe and wants to throw herself out of the window of her attic, she feels terribly attracted by the void. She feels possessed as by a liquid form of dizziness: “the ground of the village square seemed to tilt over and climb up the walls….” She was “right at the edge, almost hanging, surrounded by vast space…. She had but to yield, to let herself be taken.” Death for her appears as a passive giving in to this liquid tide which has never ceased to be there, sustaining and absorbing life all along. What satisfaction she felt, when she leaned at last on something solid, something sturdier than love…. Emma, at this occasion, desperately looks for the rescuing pavement underneath that will stop her from drowning. “She tried naively to find support in something, in the love of her little girl, the cares of her household.” But these efforts are futile. She knows it, too. If one is unable to find support within oneself, how to find it outside? All that Emma finds within herself are floating masses of feeling, like the ceaseless motion of dark waters, nothing solid or pure. She has no feelings which she can take hold of. Flaubert, required to explain how feeling can originate, live and die, would say something like the following from Madame Bovary: Literary reminiscences, mystical impulses, carnal ecstasies and ephemeral caresses, all were confused in the immensity of this passion. A heap of experiences, great and small, some ordinary some exotic, some insipid some succulent, reappeared there, giving the passion variety, like those Spanish salads where one finds fruits and vegetables, chunks of goat meat and slices of citron floating about in pale-blond oil. Here, the flow of inner duration draws together elements of the most diverse origin. It gathers them into a heterogeneous mass. In this case feeling has no synthetic power. It is only the result of a group of impulses which continue living side by side; although they do not assimilate, they continue as long as the feeling lasts. And when the flow of feeling subsides, they get back into their independent existence. At other moments, when the driving force of passion is lacking, psychological changes take place by a kind of fermentation, the reason being the excessively stagnant state of each separate feeling as it remains locked up within itself: “All was mixed together, all these frustrations, all these fermentations turned into bitterness….” “Love burned into melancholy.” At

such moments, one lives passively as if carried by the current: "I am driven from thought to thought, like a piece of dry grass on a river, carried down the stream wave by wave…." Emma's imagination wanders from page to page of the keepsake albums. No strong tie links together the different images. The present is nowhere enriched by the imagination of the future. At other moments, however, especially when it is directed towards the past, this same coagulating power of dreams can lead to valid and stable combinations. The stream of memory brings together experience of different times and places. This leads to a drowsy state of mind in which time and space are blurred. At times, this may happen before falling asleep. For example, just before dropping off, Emma dreams that she falls asleep in some other place, in a luxurious house that quickly grows into a reality: For, in a double and simultaneous perception, her thoughts mixed with the things that surrounded her, the cotton curtains becam silk, the candlesticks on the chimney became silver, etc. In this confusion of places and settings, the illusion is successful for an instant. More often, it is some exterior motion that causes the necessary drowsiness. For 38 instance, the rocking motion of a carriage in which a character is traveling. Charles Bovary, seated in the cart that takes him, in the early hours of the morning, to the farm of old Rouault. Or, when Emma, in the carriage taking her home, after the dance at Vaulyessard. Or when Emma in the Yonville coach after her days of lovemaking with Leon. In the case of Charles Bovary, the sensations that are tightly fused together are more specific than in other cases: He would fall again into a tepid drowsiness, in which his most recent sensation came back to him. He saw himself at the same time, both husband and student, lying on his own bed beside his wife as he had just left it, and walking busily about in an operating room. He felt under his elbow the sensation of a desk in an amphitheatre which was also his pillow at home…. He smelled the odor of cataplasms and of his wife's hair…. And it all mingled into one whole seeking for something with an uneasy longing, unable to lift its lead-weighted wings, while the confused memory turned round and round in place below. What is actually being conveyed here is that Charles no longer feels any desire towards his first wife, who is constantly complaining of being ill. Elsewhere, in a more awake state of consciousness, subterranean relationships of the same type will be expressed by metaphors. But, in the present instance, we are in an area preceding that of metaphor, on the level where all substance is experienced as identical. Thus, most characters in Madame Bovary seem to exist in a state of drugged semi-awareness. They "stagger around like people suffering from ex-haustain," overcome by some "irresistible torper like that of someone who has drunk a deadly beverage." They are bewitched "with a kind of mist in their head," which "neither the priest not the doctor are able to dispel." All these dazed characters end by devouring themselves out of sheer sloth. They collapse for good when they achieve their own deaths. For example, Emma is not a victim of the mechanical power of money. She is defeated by weakness, by passivity, and most of all by lies, lies that are "like quicksand: one single step taken in that direction, and the heart-itself is conquered." Her death is like a pathological drowning in quicksand: "it seemed to her that the stairs [of Rodolphe's house] gave way under her feet;" the furrows of the field look "like gigantic waves that broke all around her. The earth under her feet was weaker than water, and she was surprised not to be sinking away in it…." "She felt her soul escape." Death is the final dissolution, prefigured in sleep, sensation, and love. One says farewell, relinquishes all possessions. The characters in Madame Bovary have been engaged in dying: their lives have been like a succession of fainting spells. As for death, it is called "a continuous fainting." Thus, the entire narrative moves through a series of metaphors, symbolizing the inner world of the novel's characters. All descriptions of events, places, movements, scenes, get converted into symbolic settings, states, and perceptions of things. We see being raised in the narrative a massive structure of symbols which provides us insight into the mental states, moral condition, spiritual states of the characters reflected through the concrete depiction of everyday reality. Hence, nothing in the novel can be read in the manner of realistic fiction. Flaubert takes us always beyond concrete surfaces into the plasmatic world of the mind.

BOOKS FOR FURTHER READING

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