Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880)

The enduring literary fame of Gustave Flaubert was established all at one go, in the course of a famous trial that simultaneously brought him success and scandal. In 1857, when *Madame Bovary* (translated 1881) was appearing in serial form, the imperial prosecutor accused Flaubert of publishing a novel offensive to public morality and religion. *Madame Bovary* was nothing less than the glorification of the "poésie de l'adultère" (poetry of adultery), and in the course of his indictment, the prosecutor repeatedly accused the author of painting "tableaux" of lascivity. Such charges may seem absurdly overblown to the modern reader, who will find little to object to in Flaubert's measured and sympathetic portrait of Emma Bovary's discontents and dalliances.

The France of the Second Empire (1852-1870), however, was the result of a coup d'état against the short-lived Second Republic, and the republican form of government in the 1850s was still associated in bourgeois minds with dangerous left-wing revolutionary causes. The government of Emperor Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte (whom the exiled Victor Hugo ridiculed as "Napoléon le petit," which could be construed either as "the petty Napoleon" or "the small Napoleon") intended to set a moral tone. Thus it sought to assert its legitimacy as the regime of Moral Order and treated perceived affronts to tradition and social stability as challenges to be pursued and repressed. Art, still intended to serve a moral function in the conservative mind, should condemn adulterous conduct such as Emma Bovary's, yet nowhere did this novel condemn it--"pas une larme, pas un soupir de Madeleine sur son crime d'incrédulité, sur son suicide, sur ses adultères" (not a tear, not one sigh of a repentant Magdalene for her crime of incredulity, for her suicide, for her adulteries).

Poor Emma was no better than a whorish "Messalina." And all was Flaubert's fault, for having indulged in *realism*. Here was the artistic shibboleth of the age! Even though Flaubert was eventually acquitted of all charges--more fortunate he than the great poet of *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857; translated as *Flowers of Evil*, 1909), Charles Baudelaire, who was found guilty of similar charges later in the same year--the judge felt it his duty not to discharge Flaubert without a stern lecture on the excesses of *realism*, a realism that he deplored as both "vulgaire et souvent choquant" (vulgar and often shocking).

Flaubert's name has indeed been long associated with realism, and *Madame Bovary* figures often as its canonical, liturgical text. It is heroic in a sense, especially because of its long and arduous composition, which lasted from 1851 to 1855. (The composition of the novel through its manuscript stages has been magisterially presented by Claudine Gothot-Mersch in *La Genése de "Madame Bovary"* [The Genesis of *Madame Bovary*, 1966].) Flaubert constantly wrote and rewrote his masterpiece, spending hours and often entire days on the redaction of a single page, the polishing of a single phrase. The well-documented history of its writing has turned it into a legendary book--and its author into an apostle of objective art, of single-minded devotion, of the chill and impartial hypostatized artist who was summed up in a contemporary caricature of Flaubert as a surgeon: "Flaubert dissecting Emma Bovary." In the left background of the caricature is a dissection table bearing a female form (wearing boots and fully clothed!). Flaubert stands before the table in surgeon's garb. His handlebar mustache is long and waxed. His eyelids seem to veil his outlook, which may be imagined to be pensive or pitiless. From his apron, cutting instruments protrude: a saw, a pair of scissors. In his uplifted left hand, at the end of a scalpel, he displays the heart of Emma Bovary, whose blood, drop by drop, is gathered in an inkwell at his feet. And in his right hand he holds a mirror, the time-honored emblem of verisimilitude or mimesis (the exact representation of reality). Virtually all of Flaubert's contemporaries concurred that his treatment of his characters was detached and often cold: in a word, clinical. He himself

acknowledged that he had a *coup d'oil médical* (a medical outlook).

Lemot's caricature is a manifestation of the positivistic spirit of the age, for positivism was an epistemology relying heavily on relations of cause and effect. This concept of causality resulted in theories of literature that one would today term "genetic." Books were biographical extensions of their authors. (And thus a "bad" book connoted a bad person, one who could be brought to bar.) Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, the leading literary critic of the day, summed up the biographical approach to literature, in his work on François-René de Chateaubriand, with the proverbial expression "tel arbre, tel fruit" (the fruit does not fall far from the tree). So Flaubert, as the son of a doctor, could be presumed to have absorbed his *coup d'oil médical* in childhood.

There was much to justify these beliefs. Achille-Cléophas, Flaubert's father, was the son of a veterinarian, and was to become chief surgeon and head of the Hôpital Dieu in Rouen. Flaubert's elder brother, Achille, would succeed him in this post. The family lived in a wing of the hospital, and so Flaubert could be said to have grown up in pathological surroundings. "L'amphithéâtre de l'Hôtel-Dieu donnait sur notre jardin; que de fois avec ma sour n'avonsnous pas grimpé au treillage et, suspendus entre la vigne, regardé curieusement les cadavres étalés; le soleil donnait dessus, les mêmes mouches qui voltigeaient sur nous et sur les fleurs allaient s'abattre là, revenaient, bourdonnaient" (The lecture hall of the hospital had windows on our garden; how many times did my sister and I not climb the trellis and, hanging amid the vines, look with curiosity upon the laid-out cadavers; the sun beat down upon them, the same flies that flitted around us and the flowers alit upon them, returned, buzzed). There is more than a lingering romantic taste for the macabre in such memories, for a child who is raised in a hospital will be exposed to real suffering and pain, and may be expected to acquire a gloomy perspective on life and death.

The Flaubert family, with the father's flourishing medical career, led a life of considerable ease and even wealth. Three children survived: Achille, born in 1813; Gustave; and his beloved sister Caroline, "le bon rat" (the good rat), born in 1824. Flaubert adored his mother, née Anne-Justine-Caroline Fleuriot. A close boyhood friend somewhat older than he, Ernest Chevalier, lived nearby and is said to have taught Gustave to read in an illustrated edition of *Don Quixote*.

The Flauberts formed an affectionate family, and despite Flaubert's obvious "pathologies," there is little hard evidence to support the Oedipal drama creatively constructed by Jean-Paul Sartre in his lengthy three-volume study of Flaubert, *L'Idiot de la famille* (1971-1972; translated as *The Family Idiot*, 1981-1991). Pace family anecdote and the existentialist philosopher, Flaubert learned to read at a normal age (thus he was hardly the "idiot" of Sartre's title), and his earliest extant letters (from 1829 to 1830) even show him in command of a certain style (if not spelling). By 1832 he had become an author, as a family friend reproduced two very different texts of his: an *Eloge de Corneille* (Tribute to Corneille; the great seventeenth-century playwright was a Rouen native) and a bit of schoolboy naughtiness, *La Belle Explication de la fameuse constipation* (The Fine Explanation of the Famous Constipation).

This was the year he entered secondary school, the Collège Royal de Rouen. Following the custom of the day, young Gustave was a boarder. He was not particularly happy there, but he did well in his studies, carrying off several end-of-year prizes, including one for best all-around in his class. During this time he read voraciously in the classics and began mounting home theatrical productions (works by Hugo, Alexandre Dumas *père*, and Molière) with his sister and friends. These included Ernest Chevalier and the Le Poittevin children: Alfred, whom Flaubert admired perhaps to excess; and his sister Laure, who was to be the mother of Guy de Maupassant.

At school he was assigned "narrations to compose." These resulted in historical narratives and dramas, such as *La Mort du duc de Guise* (Death of the Duke de Guise) and *Loys XI*; "philosophical" tales in the manner of Honoré de Balzac, such as *Passion et vertu* (Passion and Virtue); and muddled "mysteries," such as *Smarh*. The juvenilia, about two dozen texts written between 1835 and 1840, foreshadow many a scene of the mature novels and establish important psychological oppositions (such as that of the insider and the outsider) that Flaubert would incorporate into his later fictional portraits. The dualistic opposition between Homais on the one hand and Emma and the Blind Man on the other is an example of the Flaubertian paradigm of inclusion and exclusion.

Soon came the early novels *Mémoires d'un fou* (Memoirs of a Madman, 1901) and *Novembre* (1885; translated as *November*, 1934). *Mémoires* is the record of the strong adolescent love Flaubert conceived for a married woman whom he met, with her young daughter and companion, in 1836 at the seaside in Trouville. (Dr. Flaubert was an early proponent of sea bathing and had extensive property holdings in the Deauville-Trouville area.) Flaubert was fourteen, and Elisa Foucault Schlesinger was twenty-six. She had dark eyes, dark hair worn in bandeaux, brownish skin, and the full figure of a mature woman. She seemed beautiful and inaccessible. "Elle me regarda. Je baissai les yeux et rougis. Quel regard, en effet! comme elle était belle, cette femme!" (She looked at me. I lowered my eyes and blushed. What a look indeed! how beautiful that woman was!).

A psychological imprinting took place that was to mark Flaubert's fiction permanently: Elisa Schlesinger, the great love of his life, is the sensual model for Maria of *Mémoires*, Madame Renaud of *La Première Education sentimentale* (The First Sentimental Education, composed 1845, published 1910), and particularly Madame Arnoux, the heroine of the Fra Angelico-like "apparition" in the definitive version of *L'Education sentimentale* (1869; translated as *Sentimental Education*, 1898). She became the incarnation and projection of male passion in all its complexities and contradictions: virginal, maternal, erotic. At summer's end, Flaubert returned to school.

Flaubert's readings continued apace, often to be discussed with Alfred Le Poittevin. They included William Shakespeare; Johann Wolfgang von Goethe; George Gordon, Lord Byron; François Rabelais; Michel de Montaigne; and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Flaubert's works during this period deal with grand metaphysical questions of death and God, of evil and freedom. An incident at school led to the rebellious adolescent's expulsion in 1839, but he nevertheless passed his baccalaureate exams the next year and was rewarded with a trip to southern France. Led by Dr. Cloquet, a disciple of his father, Flaubert and a small group visited Bordeaux, Bayonne, and the Pyrenees. Next they traveled eastward to Provence, to Marseilles, and finally to Corsica. Returning through Marseilles, Flaubert had an unexpected physical encounter with the proprietress of the hotel in which they stayed. Thus to the romantic component of love furnished by Elisa Schlesinger was added the "flambée des sens" (the conflagration of the senses).

This trip was a revelation of the exotic and the "Oriental" for Flaubert. It was an introduction to the sun-drenched lands of the Mediterranean with which he would so strongly identify. It was a prelude of sorts to his conviction that he, with his native gloom and pessimism, had led a mystical series of what Baudelaire would soon term "anterior existences." Flaubert expresses this very well in a letter (13 August 1846) to his mistress Louise Colet: "J'ai au fond de l'âme le brouillard du Nord que j'ai respiré à ma naissance. Je porte en moi la mélancolie des races barbares, avec ses instincts de migrations et ses dégoûts innés de la vie, qui leur faisait quitter leur pays comme pour se quitter eux-mêmes. ils ont aimé le soleil tous les barbares qui sont venus mourir en Italie, ils avaient une aspiration frénétique vers la lumière, vers le ciel bleu, vers quelque existence chaude et sonore, ils rêvaient des jours heureux pleins

d'amour, juteux pour leurs cours comme la treille mûre que l'on presse avec les mains. J'ai toujours eu pour eux une sympathie tendre comme pour des ancêtres" (Deep in my soul I have the fog of the North that I breathed at my birth. Within me I bear the melancholy of the barbarian races, with their instincts for migration and their innate disgust for life, which made them leave their lands as if to flee themselves. They loved the sun, all those barbarians who came to Italy to die, they had a frenzied yearning toward light, toward the blue sky, toward some warm and resonant existence, they dreamt of days filled with love, as succulent for their hearts as the ripe grape that one presses with one's hands. I have always had a tender sympathy for them, as for ancestors).

The year 1841 was mostly one of study for Flaubert, but in November, yielding to his father's wishes, he enrolled in law school in Paris. Before moving there in July 1842, he met an English family in Trouville, the Colliers. Flaubert kept up sporadic contact for many years with the two Collier daughters, Gertrude and Harriet. During this time he was at work on *Novembre* , an autobiographical rumination in the Romantic vein. The work owes much to Rousseau, to Alfred de Musset, and to Chateaubriand; it evokes the narrator's childhood, school days, and discovery of sexual love in the arms of a warmhearted prostitute named Marie.

Marie, inspired by Elisa Schlesinger but also by the less ethereal Eulalie Foucauld de Langlade of Marseilles, adumbrates Emma Bovary in her mixing of sensual and spiritual love: "A l'église, je regardais l'Homme nu étalé sur la croix ... je le détachais de la croix et je le faisais descendre vers moi, sur l'autel; l'encens l'entourait, il s'avançait dans la fumée, et de sensuels frémissements me couraient sur la peau" (At church, I used to gaze at the naked Man spread on the cross ... I used to detach him from the cross and bring him down toward me, on the altar; incense surrounded him, he would advance in the smoke, and sensual shudderings would run over my skin). Flaubert later dismissed this text as an "amorous and sentimental ratatouille," noting that the action was "nil."

A similarly sensual liaison takes place between a schoolboy and his headmaster's wife in the first *Education sentimentale*. The title is unfortunate, for this early work, though fascinating, bears scant resemblance to the 1869 masterpiece of the same name. A better title would have simply been "The Story of Two Young Men," since the work contrasts the adolescences of two friends who evolve in very different ways. Henry becomes the lover of Emilie, who is older than he, and comes to lead a successful worldly existence. Meanwhile his friend Jules, an aspiring playwright, is unhappy in love and withdraws progressively from life to embrace an austere artistic creed. Jules's cult of style and impersonal expression presage the aesthetic principles that Flaubert would enunciate in his letters to Louise Colet during the "Bovary" years. The two characters represent twin aspirations of Flaubert's temperament: the socially successful lion and (as he would later be termed) the "hermit of Croisset," living in his ivory tower. As Jean Bruneau has noted, this is the work that marks the end of Flaubert's youth and the beginning of his artistic maturity. Yet before this long novella was finished, one important event produced a break in Flaubert's life and career.

Flaubert was unhappily enrolled in law school. At the end of 1842 he passed his first-year exams. During the next year he began writing the first *Education sentimentale*, visited the Schlesingers, frequented the studio of the sculptor James Pradier (where he met Hugo), and made friends with Maxime Du Camp, whom he would accompany a few years later to Egypt and who left important if suspect impressions of Flaubert in his *Souvenirs littéraires* (Literary Memories, 1882-1883). But in August he failed his second-year exams and returned to his family. While riding in a carriage with his brother in January 1844, he suddenly fell over, stricken by an epileptic seizure in which he felt "carried away in a sea of flame." His brother thought he was dead.

Flaubert eventually recovered, despite secondary attacks (he was probably suffering from venereal disease as well), but his law career was at an end; henceforth, his father would accept his son's destiny as a writer. He was at last free to become the "Homme-plume" (Pen-Man) he had always wished to be. The seizure, which may have been psychosomatic if not actually self-induced, was a turning point in his life. Soon he was installed at the new family property at Croisset (just downstream from Rouen), and here all his masterpieces were to be written. Today, all that remains of the house is its pavilion, which houses a small Flaubert museum.

In March 1845 Caroline married Emile Hamard, a young lawyer. Astonishingly, the bride's mother, father, and brother decided to accompany them on their honeymoon trip to Italy. When they reached Marseilles, Flaubert tried to look up Eulalie, but there was no trace of her. In Genoa, Pieter Brueghel's painting *Temptation of Saint Anthony* made a strong impression on him. His decision to adapt the subject of the hermitic saint's temptations for the theater was to become a lifelong obsession. Modern editions of Flaubert recognize at least three versions of the text.

At home in Croisset, Flaubert's research on Saint Anthony was interrupted by his father's illness. Then, in a terrible series of events, Dr. Flaubert died from an abscessed thigh (operated on by Achille), and Caroline, after giving birth to a little girl also named Caroline, died of puerperal fever two months later. The mother and brothers were devastated. Hamard entrusted the upbringing of little Caroline to Mme Flaubert, who was then fifty-three years old. (Mme Flaubert's own mother had died in childbirth. Many years later, Flaubert's niece would become the owner and executor of his papers.) Achille would follow in his father's footsteps and live at the hospital in Rouen, and so at Croisset a new little household was formed: Flaubert, his mother, baby Caroline, and the faithful servant Julie.

About this time Flaubert became close friends with a former classmate, Louis Bouilhet. A minor poet and playwright, Bouilhet shared Flaubert's ideal of artistic rigor and became something like his literary conscience. And on a visit to Paris, Flaubert met Louise Colet in Pradier's studio.

Louise Colet was a beautiful poet of meager talent who was living apart from her husband but enjoying the protection of the philosopher Victor Cousin. Her affair with Flaubert would be long and stormy, lasting from 1846 to 1848 (when there was a break) and then from 1851 to 1855 (the final break). Its literary significance is enormous, for Colet preserved the letters Flaubert wrote her during the crucial Bovary years. Although there are some love letters (yet he told her that love could never be the main course in his life, only the "relish"), most of the correspondence deals with fascinating aesthetic reflections by Flaubert, which allow the reader to follow the composition of *Madame Bovary*. There are a lot of letters, for Flaubert refused to live with Louise in Paris and did not want her to visit Croisset. (She was roundly humiliated on the one occasion when she arrived unannounced, hoping to force her way into the household to meet his mother.) As a result, he would write to her two and sometimes three times a week.

Of course Flaubert had numerous other correspondents, and today the *Correspondance* is considered a great literary monument in itself. The tone of the letters may vary according to their audience, but many are written in a vigorous, often vehement style that makes them most appealing. To express his contempt for his own age (a sentiment soon to inform his writing on the Saint Anthony theme), he wrote to Bouilhet (30 September 1855): "Je sens contre la bêtise de mon époque des flots de haine qui m'étouffent. Il me monte de la merde à la bouche.... Mais je veux la garder, la figer, la durcir. J'en veux faire une pâte dont je barbouillerais le XIXe siècle, comme on dore de bougée de vache les pagodes indiennes; et qui sait? cela durera peut-être?" (Against the stupidity of my age I feel waves of hatred that

suffocate me. The taste of shit comes to my mouth.... But I want to keep it there, congeal it, harden it, make it into a paste to daub all over the nineteenth century, as Indian pagodas are gilded with cow dung; and who knows, maybe it will endure?).

Despite his nervous crises, Flaubert decided to undertake a walking tour of Brittany with Du Camp. The two friends left Paris with their backpacks on 1 May 1847, going through Anjou and Touraine and returning to Normandy in August. They resolved to write up their trip, with Flaubert doing the odd-numbered chapters and Du Camp the even ones. This travel narrative is entitled *Par les champs et par les grèves* (1885; translated as *Over Strand and Field*, 1904).

Shortly after this, in February 1848, he and Bouilhet traveled to Paris to observe the uprising that marked the fall of the July Monarchy. In the company of Du Camp, the friends "attended" the revolution of 1848 as if it were a spectacle or a theatrical performance. They witnessed street fighting near the Palais Royal and later the pillaging of the palace. (A fictional transposition of these events is found in part 3 of the 1869 *Education sentimentale*.) Hardly had he returned to Croisset than his great friend Alfred Le Poittevin ("lost" to him already through marriage) died. Flaubert wrote Du Camp a moving account of his friend's death (7 April 1848).

Then he began writing his account of Saint Anthony, for which he had long been preparing. Earlier (21-22 August 1846) he had explained to Colet that the subject appealed to the charm that the "grotesque triste" (sad grotesque) held for his comically bitter nature. *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* (1874; translated as *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, 1895), which he called his "vieille toquade" (old infatuation), is a difficult work to describe. It could be called a philosophical prose poem or a dramatic narration and dialogue. It opens with Anthony, a fourth-century Christian hermit, alone on his mountain in Egypt (North Africa as the crossroads of religions), overlooking the desert and the Nile. He recalls his childhood and his decision to become a hermit. The ascetic reflects on other lives he might have led and feels discouragement. His Bible is little consolation to him, and, weak from fasting, he becomes prey to hallucinations. Dreams and visions of temptation ensue.

He is attracted by rich food, participates in an orgy, and is visited and tempted by the Queen of Sheba. But it is the temptation of knowledge that proves most dangerous to Anthony. His former pupil Hilarion assumes the role of Science and summons before Anthony's eyes a long succession of sages and heresiarchs, magicians and prophets. The world's religions appear to present their claims as Hilarion notes how similar they are: they flow in and out of one another in an endless metamorphosis. The Devil-Hilarion takes Anthony through space and shows him countless other worlds. Upon his return to Earth he is tempted by two women, one young, one old, who turn out to be incarnations of Lust and Death. Taking each other by the waist, they sing:

--Je hâte la dissolution de la matière!

--Je facilite l'éparpillement des germes!

--Tu détruis, pour mes renouvellements!

--Tu engendres, pour mes destructions!

--Active ma puissance!

--Féconde ma pourriture!

(--I hasten the dissolution of matter!

--I expedite the scattering of germs!

--You destroy, for my renewals!

--You beget, for my destructions!

--Activate my power!

--Fecundate my decay!)

This typically Flaubertian obsession with the reciprocity of destruction and creation is followed by the impossible attempt at coupling of the Chimaera and the Sphinx, emblematic of the irreconcilability of fantasy and matter. A proliferation of life in all its forms confronts him, and the saint would like to be absorbed in the amalgam of animal, vegetable, and mineral--he aspires to "être la matière!" (be matter!). Daybreak finally comes; the face of Jesus Christ appears in the disk of the sun; and Anthony returns to his prayers.

Flaubert's identification with Anthony is at the heart of this strange work. There can be little doubt that this is a portrait of the artist himself, of an obstinate artist who resisted all self-doubt and every temptation in order to remain faithful to his self-imposed mission, to his text. As Victor Brombert has shown, it also reflects the fear of decadence that haunted the nineteenth century. This was the legacy of the historical relativism of the Enlightenment married to the comparative study of religions in Flaubert's day. The Wagnerian "Twilight of the Gods" and Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1918-1922) are adumbrated in Flaubert's treatment of Saint Anthony.

Meanwhile, Du Camp had been pushing Flaubert to undertake together another, more ambitious trip, this time to Egypt and the Levant. Flaubert would not leave before finishing *Saint Antoine*. When at last the work was finished, Bouilhet and Du Camp, who knew only the book's title, were summoned to Croisset for a reading of the text. Over four days Flaubert read for thirty-two hours, at the end of which the hitherto silent friends were called upon to give their opinions. "Nous pensons qu'il faut jeter cela au feu et n'en jamais reparler" (We think you should throw it in the fire and never mention it again). Flaubert was horrified and disappointed, but in the end he bowed to their arguments. Yet he was to return to his dear *Saint Antoine* after finishing *Madame Bovary*, and yet again five years before his death, when a "definitive" version was published. Thus there are three versions, progressively shorter, of 1849, 1856, and 1874.

Then it was off for a trip of almost two years to the Orient. Du Camp was charged with a semiscientific mission by the French government that provided the travelers with some official introductions. He took along cumbersome camera equipment and produced the first photographically illustrated book on the Near East. Flaubert's mission was ostensibly to assess commercial potential, but he was chiefly intent upon satisfying an ancient thirst for the land of Saint Anthony, for that East where he had long thought he was born to live.

The travelers sailed from Marseilles on 4 November 1849, and after stops in Malta and Alexandria, they reached Cairo on the twenty-sixth. They visited the Pyramids and the Sphinx, and eventually sailed up the Nile on a two-masted *cangia*, past Karnak and the Valley of the Kings to Luxor. At Esna they stopped to visit the *almehs*, or singing dancers (that is to say, prostitutes), who had been exiled from Cairo to Upper Egypt. Flaubert left a famous account of his night with Kuchuk-Hanem, who performed the Dance of the Bee for him.

It is certain that Flaubert's self-confidence had been shaken and that he was still brooding over the reception of *Saint Antoine*. In his memoirs, Du Camp claims that his friend was passive and even bored throughout their trip. One day, though, on the second cataract of the Nile, he came to life. Shouting "Eureka! Eureka!," Flaubert proclaimed, "Je l'appellerai Emma Bovary" (I'll call her Emma Bovary). But there is no reference to the character or the novel in Flaubert's own letters or travel notes from this time, and such anecdotes cause one to treat Du Camp's recollections with caution.

Returning to Cairo and Alexandria, they took a ship to Beirut and made their way overland to Jerusalem. From Damascus, Flaubert wrote Bouilhet about a "Dictionnaire des ideées reçues" (Dictionary of Received Ideas), a compendium of popular beliefs and clichés that would be arranged in such a way that the reader would not know whether or not he was being mocked. He would work on this project all his life, intending to place it in the second volume of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881; translated, 1896). In the same letter (4 September 1850) is found one of his bestknown aphorisms: "L'ineptie consiste à vouloir conclure" (Stupidity consists of seeking to conclude).

From Syria the companions made their way through Turkey, Greece, and Italy, where Mme Flaubert came to meet her son. Together they visited Rome, Florence, and Venice, returning to Croisset in June 1851. Flaubert had ingested "plein le ventre de couleurs" (a bellyful of colors); he had seen the Pyramids, the Holy Sepulcher, and the Parthenon. He had also spent most of his inheritance on the trip. In July, Du Camp wrote to ask what Flaubert was writing--was it the story of "Mme Delamarre," which he thought very beautiful?

This is an allusion to Flaubert's source material for *Madame Bovary*. Eugène Delamare was an obscure medical officer, a former student of Dr. Flaubert, whose second wife, Delphine, had two affairs and died, leaving her husband with a daughter and enormous debts. Louise Pradier, the sculptor's wife, could also have served as a model. What is of more importance than Flaubert's source is the fact that he had taken up with Louise Colet once more, and that his frequent letters to her serve as a kind of log of the novel's composition. The writing of *Madame Bovary* was wholly to absorb Flaubert from its beginning on 19 September 1851 until he sent off the manuscript to Du Camp on 30 April 1856.

The story begins with the slow-witted Charles Bovary, a country health officer, who takes as his second wife Emma Bovary, the dissatisfied and pretty daughter of a well-to-do farmer. Unsatisfied in her marriage and yearning for a love and an existence that she can find only in the romantic books she devours, Emma is completely bored and frustrated. (In a witty piece entitled "The Kugelmass Episode" [1977] that takes off on the *Madame Bovary* story line, Woody Allen describes the couple as a "paramedic married to a jitterbug.") They move to Yonville-l'Abbaye, where their neighbor is the grotesque and pompous pharmacist Homais, whose "enlightened" attitudes are invariably expressed in platitudes. The local priest cannot fathom Emma's dilemma, and her mother-in-law is hostile. Disappointed that she gives birth to a daughter rather than a son, she finds no joy in motherhood. She flirts gingerly with a lawyer's clerk, Léon Dupuis. She attends an agricultural fair in the company of a rakish country squire, Rodolphe Boulanger, and is seduced by him during a horseback ride in the woods.

Emma is further disillusioned and humiliated when Charles botches a clubfoot operation. Rodolphe tires of Emma's demanding nature and abruptly abandons her on the eve of a planned flight to Italy. Emma falls into a deep depression but eventually recovers. On a trip to the Rouen opera she reencounters Léon, who entices her into an affair that begins with a ribald carriage ride around town. Emma travels frequently to Rouen for clandestine rendezvous with Léon, spends and borrows profligately, and becomes mired in despair and debt. As the bailiffs arrive to seize the family goods, Emma takes arsenic and dies a painful death. Afterward, Charles discovers her love letters to Rodolphe. He blames his misfortune on no one, or rather on fate, and soon dies. The orphaned little Berthe will be condemned to the grim world of nineteenth-century child labor. Homais receives the Legion of Honor.

All the characters of *Madame Bovary* are strongly drawn, and the novel alternates between moments of savage satire and deeply moving, lyrical passages. In fact, the novel can be viewed

as being structured around a series of dramatic episodes: Emma's wedding feast, where the guests spend sixteen gluttonous hours at the table; the ball at La Vaubyessard, the episode which, the narrator tells the reader, made a "hole" in her life; the agricultural fair, with its double discourses of seduction; Emma's encounters with the emblematic Blind Man; her meeting in the Rouen cathedral with Léon and ensuing lovemaking in the carriage; her last appeal to Rodolphe and her suicide. Linking all the episodes is Emma's incessant yearning for a nameless fulfillment and a capacity for wishing herself other than she is, a characteristic that an early critic, Jules Gaultier, dubbed *le bovarysme*.

Virtually all of the characters' names say something about them. The "bovine" metaphor of oxlike, cud-chewing existence is encoded in the Bovary name; Rouault, Emma's maiden name, contains the French word for wheel, and thus gestures to the patterns of repetition and enclosure in her constricted life; Léon, unlike his namesake Leo, is scarcely leonine--rather, he is timorous and indecisive. And, in a subtle comeuppance visited upon him at the novel's end, Léon will marry a Mlle Léocadie Lebouf (Léocadie The Ox).

Flaubert's name has long been linked to realism, and *Madame Bovary* has long figured as a sacred text of literary "mimesis" (the representation of reality). The earliest recorded use of the term *realism* came in a Parisian periodical of 1826. Having defined it as a "literary doctrine ... that would lead to the imitation not of artistic masterpieces but of the originals that nature offers us," the journalist added that realism "might well emerge ... as the literature of the nineteenth century, the literature of truth." Realism was not to achieve wide currency until the 1850s, however, and then it would be used in conjunction with a certain style in painting, in particular the paintings of Gustave Courbet. *Realism* was rarely used without the epithet *sordid* or *vulgar*

As F. W. J. Hemmings observes in *The Age of Realism* (1974), historians have linked the rise of realism to the abandonment, by influential thinkers and philosophers in the nineteenth century, of the solid belief in transcendental values that had hitherto framed the European worldview. Thus the Marxist critic György Luká;cs once called the novel "the epic of a world forsaken by God,"and indeed realism depends on a willing suspension of belief, on the part of reader and writer, in an intervening deity, whose mediations in this world might shape human fates. In order to be convincing, the characters in a novel must be shown to be working out their own destinies independently of God's will: "To the marriage of realism and positivism (or determinism) there is no obstacle, but realism and fatalism make uneasy bedfellows."

Now Flaubert refused to think of himself as a realist. The author of *Saint Antoine* had undertaken his new subject as an antidote to his own lyrical flights, and had done so upon the strong urging of his friends. In one of his most frequently quoted letters to Colet (16 January 1852), he wrote, "Il y a en moi, litté'rairement parlant, deux bonshommes distincts: un qui est épris de *gueulades*, de lyrisme, de grands vols d'aigle, de toutes les sonorité's de la phrase et des sommets de l'idée; un autre qui fouille et qui creuse le vrai tant qu'il peut, qui aime à accuser le petit fait aussi puissamment que le grand, qui voudrait vous faire sentir presque *maté'riellement* les choses qu'il reproduit" (There are inside me, literarily speaking, two distinct fellows: one who is smitten by *shouts*, by lyricism, by great eagle flights, by all the sonorities of the sentence and the loftiness of ideas; another who probes and digs into the true as best he can, who loves to underscore the little fact as powerfully as the big one, who would wish to make you feel almost *physically* the things he is reproducing). He had failed to fuse the two sides of his nature in *Saint Antoine* and the first *Education sentimentale*; now it was time to succeed or "jump out of the window."

But the heavy realistic component of the new work made him protest that the whole Bovary business was inimical to his temperament. He complained in 1856 that people thought him drawn to reality, whereas "je l'exècre" (I loathe it). And later, in an 1876 letter to George Sand, he wrote, "J'exècre" ce qu'on est convenu d'appeler le *réalisme*, bien qu'on m'en fasse un des pontifes" (I loathe what people call realism, although I'm supposedly one of its pontiffs). To Colet he grumbled constantly about the vulgarity of his subject matter, the platitude of his characters, and the difficulty of finding *le mot juste*--or precise word and phrasing.

He wrote Colet on 17 October 1853 that he was tortured by the book, that it gave him stomach pains and made him want to vomit: "Je crois qu'aujourd'hui je me serais pendu avec délices, si l'orgueil ne m'en empêchait. Il est certain que je suis tenté parfois de foutre tout là et la *Bovary* d'abord. Quelle sacrée maudite idée j'ai eue de prendre un sujet pareil! Ah! Je les aurai connues, les *affres* de l'Art!" (I think that today I would have hanged myself with delight if pride hadn't stopped me. What's certain is that I'm sometimes tempted to say to hell with it all, beginning with the *Bovary* woman. What a damn cursed idea of mine it was to pick such a subject! Ah! I'll have learned all about the *torments* of Art!). Why did he persist? It was out of sheer artistic devotion (24 April 1852): "J'aime mon travail d'un amour frénétique et perverti, comme un ascète le cilice qui lui gratte le ventre" (I love my work with a frantic and perverted love, as the ascetic the hair shirt that scratches his belly).

Yet the torments of art yielded a masterpiece that confounded the critics of 1857, puzzled as they were by the author's successful combination of artistic, nuanced phrasing with an "immoral," though banal, subject--adultery. And yet for Flaubert there were no intrinsically beautiful or ugly subjects, for all was in the style, style being, as he put it, "in itself an absolute way of seeing things." Flaubert's cult of form, which brought him aesthetically close to the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art* (art for art's sake) and the school of poets known as *le Parnasse*, led him to conceive his celebrated ambition of writing "un livre sur rien" (a book about nothing) in which style alone would be the sustaining element (letter to Colet, 16 January 1852).

Alison Fairlie has written that realism, as practiced by Flaubert, can be understood as a manner of reacting against the traditional Romantic novel with its flights of fancy and its emphasis on the fantastic, the ideal, and the exceptional. It sought to create the illusion of observing impartially the events of an average life. Balzac and Stendhal had already exploited the possibilities offered by the triviality of daily life; but their characters were exceptional beings whose lives were filled with exciting events. They succeeded or failed in spectacular ways. Such was not to be the case with Emma Bovary.

Emma would have been better matched with a character such as Chateaubriand's René or a Lamartinian lover, or in a suicidal role as beautiful as that of Chateaubriand's Atala. But failure in love alone does not determine Emma's downfall; she has money problems, is pursued by creditors and bailiffs, and dies amid emetics and vomiting. The very possibility of the dramatic seems constantly to be denied her. When she thinks that her husband Charles may surprise her with her lover Rodolphe, she breathlessly asks him if he has his pistols. Rodolphe uncomprehendingly asks her why. "Mais ... pour te défendre, reprit Emma.--Est-ce de ton mari? Ah! le pauvre garçon!" (But ... to defend yourself, replied Emma.--You mean against your husband? Oh, the poor fellow!).

Her desire for luxury, for a life of excitement and social sophistication, is satisfied only by a single night spent at a ball in an elegant country château. In his plans Flaubert had thought of having her visit Paris, but the book restricts her to the provinces, where she can only buy maps of the capital and trace imaginary itineraries with her finger. Flaubert thus subjects his characters to

what Baudelaire called a "dureté systématique" (systematic harshness).

Moreover, Flaubert wrote that the hardest thing in art is not to make people laugh or weep, but to make them dream (26 August 1853). An object long contemplated acquires an interest of its own (16 September 1845). It is unnecessary to inflate the objects of the material world with artificial dignity and grandeur; the artist's task is to extract from the humblest object its suggestive value. Thus in Charles's fantastic schoolboy cap one can see the symbol of his stupidity: "une de ces pauvres choses dont la laideur muette a des profondeurs d'expression comme le visage d'un imbécile" (one of those poor things whose silent ugliness has depths of expression like the face of an imbecile).

One of Flaubert's strongest aesthetic beliefs concerned narration. He was adamant that the novelist should maintain neutrality and that the author's personality should remain absent from the novel (this is one of his chief differences with his predecessors in the development of French realism, Balzac and Stendhal). Of course Flaubert put much of his own temperament into his works--the most famous assertion concerning the identity of his protagonist remains "Madame Bovary, c'est moi" (*I* am Madame Bovary)--but Flaubert does so in an impersonal manner. His most memorable formulation of this tenet comes in a letter to Colet (9 December 1852): "L'auteur, dans son ouvre, doit être comme Dieu dans l'univers, présent partout, et visible nulle part" (The author in his work must be like God in the universe: everywhere present and nowhere visible). "It is above all else," writes Hemmings, "this finely balanced mixture, where Emma is concerned of empathy and critical objectivity that has earned the novel its celebrity as the first masterpiece of the realist esthetic."

The absence of the author does not mean that he has no opinions; on the contrary, as Flaubert wrote, he is, like the deity, omnipresent. But how is one to detect authorial presence or judgment? Sometimes this poses no problem, since the platitudes of Homais and the schemes of Lheureux are obvious or transparent. Patterns of recurrence give objects significance: a statuette of a priest reading his breviary that stands in Emma's yard deteriorates progressively in harsh weather and then falls off the moving van and is smashed; it symbolizes the breakup of her marriage to Charles. A representation of Cupid appears in each of the three parts of the novel, but in the last one it is "smirking."

In other scenes the author's meaning may be less accessible. Flaubert worried that a "poetic" conversation between Léon and Emma (when they first meet at the beginning of part 2) might be taken seriously, whereas he intended it to be grotesque. In such instances Flaubert sets up rather visible ironic counterpoints, making sure in this particular scene, for example, that the "poetic" is offset by a "practical" conversation simultaneously taking place between Charles and Homais. Homais's pompous claims to scientific expertise are deflated by his inability to convert temperature scales. His comments about the financial ease of the local farmers are belied by their manifest poverty. Léon's lyrical description of the natural beauty of Swiss waterfalls is undercut by his own remark that his experience is second-hand, derived from a cousin's account. This example of direct speech (dialogue) suggests a general rule for reading *Madame Bovary*: all dialogue should be read as satire. The proof comes in the grand agricultural fair scene--a truly bravura piece--where the elevated and the vulgar are ostensibly set at odds, only to be conflated in the awarding of a prize for the best manure.

Here another problem arises, one that Flaubert was also highly conscious of: how to reproduce the mediocrity of everyday speech and yet still capture its evocative tones, its lingering charm, even its underlying poetry. Easy enough, one might say, to depict the surface of human speech and to stigmatize its inadequacies; more daunting by far to convey its subtextual and virtually immaterial allure. As Gothot-Mersch writes in her

1971 edition of *Madame Bovary*, "Les coeurs pleins vibrent sous les mots vides" (Full hearts are throbbing under the empty words).

An uncharacteristic authorial intervention in *Madame Bovary* reveals just how strongly Flaubert felt on this point. As Emma affirms her love in embarrassingly overwrought terms, Rodolphe discounts her protestations, hearing in them only the hackneyed endearments of his previous mistresses, "comme si la plénitude de l'âme ne débordait pas quelquefois par les métaphores les plus vides, puisque personne, jamais, ne peut donner l'exacte measure de ses besoins, ni de ses conceptions, ni de ses douleurs, et que la parole humaine est comme un chaudron fêlé où nous battons des mélodies à faire danser les ours, quand on voudrait attendrir les étoiles" (as if the fullness of the soul does not sometimes overflow in the emptiest metaphors, since no one, ever, can give the exact measure of his needs, nor of his conceptions, nor of his sorrows, and since human speech is like a cracked drum on which we beat out melodies fit to make bears dance, when one would wish to move the stars).

The main problem, then, is the lack of "fit" between sentiment and expression. In an attempt to remedy this problematic relationship, Flaubert had recourse to the syntactic resources of the language itself, and perfected what was later to be called the "free indirect style" (FIS; the "free" indicates that once launched, it requires no verbs of thinking or saying). This is an intermediate style that is situated somewhere between direct and indirect style. It allows Flaubert, as Brombert writes, "to formulate clearly that which, in the character's mind, remains unformulated or only half-formulated." Thus the author glides imperceptibly between the confused, half-articulated concepts of the characters and his own artistic and polished expression of the same concepts. Its effect on readers is to place them simultaneously on the inside and on the outside of the character.

After the catastrophic clubfoot operation, the text focalizes on Emma's disgust with her husband's potential: "Comment donc avait-elle fait (elle qui était si intelligente!) pour se méprendre encore une fois? (Just how had she managed [she who was so intelligent] to be mistaken once again?). The reader must here reflect: who exactly states that Emma is intelligent? It is a third-person statement, but would the narrator make such an assertion? FIS offers the potential for irony and lyricism, and it is Flaubert's most admired stylistic achievement. Harry Levin praises this internalization of the narrative for achieving a paradoxical "eloquent banality," the sensation that speech is both caricature and poetry.

Alison Fairlie makes the important point about FIS that its characteristic French tense is the imperfect (or the conditional), a tense reserved in French for describing the real background conditions of events or scenes. Since the imperfect also serves to describe Emma's inner thoughts, the effect is one of shuttling without distinction between reality and illusion. And that interweaving of the real and the dream is what gives *Madame Bovary* its strongest appeal.

When the novel was finished, Du Camp and Laurent Pichat, then editors of the *Revue de Paris*, asked to publish it in serial form, intending to cut the risqué scenes (such as the carriage ride) to avoid the wrath of the imperial censor. But expurgation brought them the wrath of Flaubert, and the censor did not fail to prosecute them on charges of immorality. Flaubert suspected political persecution and was personally outraged (16 January 1857): "Je dois aller m'asseoir (pour crime d'avoir écrit en français) sur le banc des filous et des pédérastes" (I must take my seat [for the crime of having written in French] on the bench of pickpockets and pederasts). He feared that he would be found guilty by the court, but his lawyer (Sénard, to whom *Madame Bovary* is dedicated) presented a brilliant defense, and the defendants were acquitted. The novel, then assured of a succès de scandale, was published in two volumes in April 1857.

Before this, at the time he completed *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert returned to his *Saint Antoine*, eventually publishing some excerpts of the finished second version in Théophile Gautier's *L'Artiste* (December 1857). But now he feared more censorship and prosecution, and so he turned away from modern life to antiquity, to Carthage. As always, Flaubert undertook serious documentation for the new work, in libraries in Rouen and Paris. The first chapter of *Salammbô* (1862; translated, 1886) was started in October 1857. He needed to see the sites of his novel for himself, and so he undertook his second and last trip to North Africa, shipping out from Marseilles in April 1858 on a two-month voyage that took him to eastern Algeria and Tunisia. By June he was back in Croisset, studying his travel notes and hard at work. It was to take him until February 1862 to finish it.

During the *Salammbô* years, Flaubert was an established literary personality who frequented figures such as Sainte-Beuve, Baudelaire, Edmond and Jules Goncourt, George Sand, Ernest Renan, and many others; after the publication of *Salammbô* he was also well received in imperial society, particularly in the circle of Princess Mathilde, the emperor's cousin.

Almost nothing was known about Carthage, but this would leave room for Flaubert's historical imagination to work. His principal source would be Polybius's *General History*, and the plot would tell of the revolt of mercenary armies after the defeat of Carthage in the first Punic War (third century B.C.) and the bloody repression that ensued. The passion of a mercenary leader, Mâtho, for a Carthaginian princess, Salammbô, would provide the matrix of the novel's binary structure.

The novel opens with a banquet in the gardens of Hamilcar in Megara, a suburb of Carthage. The mercenaries, or "Barbarians," are suspicious of the Carthaginians, who are unable to pay them off and who in turn are wary of the soldiers, a motley group of Africans of all sorts, of Greeks and Gauls, and other races. They do not understand one another's languages, and this increases the confusion. Drunken mercenaries avenge themselves by killing the sacred fish, a sacrilege that brings Salammbô out of her apartments to berate the mob. The soldiers cannot understand her ancient Chadian dialect, but they watch her descent from the palace in fascination. Narr'Havas, the Numidian, and Mâtho, the Libyan, are particularly struck by her appearance and become rivals. Mâtho is counseled by a freed slave, the crafty Greek named Spendius.

Eventually, the soldiers are convinced to leave Carthage, but they meander about and set up camp not far away. Hostilities break out when the pay issue cannot be settled, and the Barbarians return to bivouac beneath the city walls. Salammbô emerges onto her terrace at night to worship the moon goddess Tanit, "Reine des choses humides" (Queen of all things humid). She is consumed by a vague yearning; she would like to leave her body, be only a breeze or a moon-beam. She wants to visit the sanctuary and see a veil, the zaïmph, sacred to Carthage and its fate. It is said that the touch of the veil kills the profane, but Mâtho and Spendius penetrate the town through the viaduct and steal it from the temple. The alarm is raised; guarded by the zaïmph, Mâtho braves the howling crowds and leaves the city. He is now the undisputed mercenary leader. The Carthaginian army with its elephants routs the Barbarians, but the general, Hanno, does not follow up his victory and is in turn put to flight by a counterattack of flaming swine.

At this point the suffete, Hamilcar Barca (father of Salammbô), returns to take charge of Carthage. A man of enormous wealth, Hamilcar worships the terrible god Moloch, "the devourer." He plots revenge against the Barbarians--"Périssent dix mille Barbares plutôt qu'un seul d'entre nous" (Let ten thousand Barbarians perish rather than one of us)--and his Punic armies defeat Spendius at the battle of Macar. But Carthage turns against him when he is surrounded by four Barbarian armies, and threatens to immolate his daughter. The high

priest of Tanit, Schahabarim, urges Salammbô to recover the zaïmph from Mâtho. After performing an erotic and mystical dance with the sacred python, she sets out for the mercenaries' camp. There she gives herself to the Barbarian: "Moloch, tu me brûles!" (Moloch, you are burning me!). And yet, upon retrieving the veil, "elle restait mélancolique devant son rêve accompli" (she remained melancholy before the fulfillment of her dream). Narr'Havas betrays the Barbarians to serve Carthage, and Salammbô is promised to him.

The Barbarians lay siege to Carthage; Spendius cuts the aqueduct, and the Carthaginians suffer from hunger and terrible thirst in the heat. In order to appease Moloch, the Carthaginians sacrifice the infant sons of the nobility. (Hamilcar manages to substitute a slave's child for his own son Hannibal.) The frenzied noise of the slaughter attracts the Barbarians, who look on in horror. Rain falls and thunder rumbles: "C'était la voix de Moloch; il avait vaincu Tanit; et, maintenant fécondée, elle ouvrait du haut du ciel son vaste sein" (It was the voice of Moloch, who had conquered Tanit; and now made fertile, she opened her vast womb from the heights of the sky).

With renewed courage, the Carthaginians manage to escape by sea and to trap the Barbarians in the Pass of the Axe. Carnage, cannibalism, starvation, and death are their fates, and lions eat the survivors. Mâtho is captured by Hamilcar and forced to run the gauntlet of the massed, frenzied Carthaginians. "Le principle femelle, ce jourlà, dominait, confondait tout: une lascivité mystique circulait dans l'air pesant" (This day the female principle dominated and confounded all: a mystical lascivity circulated in the heavy air). By the time Mâtho reaches Salammbô, he is scarcely recognizable as a human being, yet she feels attracted to him. Torn to pieces by the mob, he falls dead; a priest of Moloch rushes forward to cut out his heart and offers it to the sun.

The populace roars in exultation: "Carthage était comme convulsée dans le spasme d'une joie titanique et d'un espoir sans bornes" (Carthage was as if convulsed in the spasm of a titanic joy and limitless hope). Narr'Havas encircles Salammbô's waist and raises his cup to the genius of Carthage. Salammbô rises to drink also, but she falls backward dead, "blême, raidie, les lèvres ouvertes, et ses cheveux dénoués pendaient jusqu'à terre. Ainsi mourut la fille d'Hamilcar pour avoir touché au manteau de Tanit" (pale, stiff, her lips parted, and her unbound hair hanging down to the ground. So died the daughter of Hamilcar for having touched the mantle of Tanit).

Even with its appalling bloodthirstiness, *Salammbô* was an immediate success. Despite its setting in a remote and little-known historical period, it managed to address many contemporary concerns, as Anne Green has shown. Flaubert's publisher Michel Lévy had paid him eight hundred francs for the rights to *Madame Bovary* ; for *Salammbô*, Lévy offered ten thousand. *Salammbô* costumes became popular and were worn to court balls. Flaubert's photograph was taken by Nadar, and he began to attend the Magny literary dinners (where he met Ivan Turgenev). He began work with Bouilhet on a fairy play, *Le Château des coeurs* (House of Hearts), which was to be refused by several theater directors and neverperformed. He was invited to the Tuileries and eventually (in 1864) to Compiègne, the preferred residence of Napoleon III. Empress Eugénie wrote that he was admired for his talent and erudition.

Flaubert's clinical interest in pathology comes to the fore in *Salammbô*, displayed in scenes of sadism and orgies of killing and bloodlust. The violence is unending. Lust, betrayal, mystical sensuality, and the unsteady antithesis of Civilized and Barbarian are themes of the work. (The indifferentiation of Civilized and Barbarian was moreover a favorite theme of literary decadence.) Flaubert's old preoccupations with the Orient and its ferocious gods, and with the

themes of inaccessibility, sacrilege, and mystical yearning, reappear here.

Emma and Salammbô are really sisters under the skin. Salammbô experiences only disillusionment when she at last possesses the zaïmph; it is the same with Emma's disenchantment in marriage: "Et Emma cherchait à savoir ce que l'on entendait au juste dans la vie par les mots de félicité, de passion et d'ivresse, qui lui avaient paru si beaux dans les livres" (And Emma tried to understand what precisely was meant in life by the words bliss, passion, and ecstasy, which had seemed so beautiful to her in books).

Flaubert's style in *Salammbô* is chiseled, lapidary, and Parnassian. It focuses on hard surfaces, jewelry, and sculpted, exotic perfections of a neurotic allure, on shimmer and plastic forms. Its gaze alternates between the petrified and the putrified. And a terrible sameness underwrites this world, a lassitude that the Ancients knew as taedium vitae. "Ah! vous comprenez l'embêtement de l'existence, vous!" (Ah! you understand the boredom of existence!), he wrote Baudelaire, the poet of spleen (ennui). Flaubert early wrote of his own "melancholy of the barbarian races."

In 1864 Flaubert's niece Caroline married Ernest Commanville. Her departure left only Flaubert and the aging Mme Flaubert in Croisset. She continued to support him financially. Another work had been decided on, and Flaubert settled into his study to begin ("ce cabinet du travail obstiné et sans trêve ... témoin de tant et de si grands labeurs" [this cabinet of obstinate and relentless work ... witness to so many great labors], as the Goncourts described it after a visit the year before). Soon he was putting in fourteen-hour days. This modern novel, the composition of which was to keep him "in harness" from 1864 to 1869, would be *L'Education sentimentale*--another masterpiece. Flaubert described it in this way (6 October 1864): "Je veux faire l'histoire morale des hommes de ma génération; 'sentimentale' serait plus vrai. C'est un livre d'amour, de passion; mais de passion telle qu'elle peut exister maintenant, c'est-à-dire, inactive" (I want to write the moral history of the men of my generation; "sentimental" would be truer. It's a book about love and passion, but about passion such as it can exist today, that is, inactive). Documentation and research led to long studies of the revolution of 1848 (it has been remarked that he had personally "attended" only its February days), feminist movements, means of transportation under the July Monarchy, neo-Catholic thought, stock-market operations, and diphtheria; he traveled to Fontainebleau, to a porcelain factory, to Melun and Montereau.

His research did not prevent him from leading an active social life. He traveled to London in 1865 and 1866 to visit, respectively, Juliet Herbert and his childhood friends Gertrude and Harriet Collier. In 1866 he was decorated with the Legion of Honor, and George Sand came for a visit to Croisset. In 1865 he had visited the Schlesingers in Baden-Baden, and in 1867 he may have seen Mme Schlesinger again in France. He attended a ball given in Czar Alexander II's honor at the Tuileries. Work continued apace, and on 16 May 1869 *L'Education sentimentale* was finished. He gave readings of his new work in Princess Mathilde's salon. To his great distress, both Bouilhet and Sainte-Beuve died before its publication in November. (Lévy paid him sixteen thousand francs for the work.)

As Flaubert had indicated, *L'Education sentimentale*, was to be the story of the failure of Flaubert's generation as seen through its protagonist, Frédéric Moreau. The story begins in 1840, as the eighteen-year-old Frédéric's boat is leaving Paris. Frédéric has been sent to visit his uncle in Le Havre and is on his way home to Nogent-sur-Seine. He has just finished school and will spend the summer in the provinces. The trip is uneventful, even languid, as the boat slowly makes its way upstream past the modest houses that dot the banks of the Seine. Frédéric is in a pensive and somewhat melancholy mood: "Il trouvait que le bonheur mérité par l'excellence de

son âme tardait à venir" (He found that the happiness deserved by the excellence of his soul was long in coming).

His travel companions are of a common appearance, and the decks are strewn with scraps of food and trash, yet in the midst of this bourgeois mediocrity he is suddenly visited by an "apparition," a Beatrician vision of a comely, dark woman so striking that his fate is sealed in a single moment. "Quels étaient son nom, sa demeure, sa vie, son passé? Il souhaitait connaître les meubles de sa chambre, toutes les robes qu'elle avait portées, les gens qu'elle fréquentait; et le désir de la possession physique même disparaissait sous une envie plus profonde, dans une curiosité douloureuse qui n'avait pas de limites" (What was her name, her home, her life, her past? He longed to know the furniture in her room, all the dresses that she had worn, the people whom she frequented; and even the desire of physical possession disappeared in a deeper yearning, in a painful curiosity that had no limits).

This is Mme Arnoux, the archetypal maternal-erotic figure whose image had long ago imprinted itself on Flaubert's psyche in the encounter with Mme Schlesinger. (Her Christian name, like the character's, was Marie.) Mme Arnoux is a vision of loveliness in her straw hat with ribbons fluttering in the wind. Her oval face is framed by black hair, and her straight nose and chin are sharply outlined against the blue sky. Her fingers are so fine that light seems to traverse them. "Elle ressemblait aux femmes des livres romantiques" (She looked like the women in Romantic books). A black nanny brings her daughter to her, and this leads Frédéric to surmise that his exotic vision must be of Creole, or Andalusian, origin. In fact she is the wife of Jacques Arnoux, the vulgar and philandering proprietor of a shop and journal oxymoronically entitled *L'Art industriel* (Industrial Art).

Frédéric returns to Paris for law school, which bores him. He shares a room with his improverished Nogent friend, Deslauriers, and dabbles in literature with the idea of writing a novel. The two friends (who stick together throughout the novel despite many fallings-out) imagine that they will conquer Parisian society like heroes out of a Balzac novel. They make an assortment of acquaintances: Sénécal, the dogmatic socialist; Hussonnet, the bohemian journalist; Pellerin, the second-rate painter; and Dussardier, the good-hearted worker who embodies the generous and naive qualities of the 1848 revolutionaries.

Frédéric fails his law exams. He has become an intimate of the Arnoux household and timidly worships his idol without declaring himself. His hopes fail, and one night he thinks of throwing himself from a bridge into the Seine; but the parapet is broad, and out of "lassitude" he renounces the attempt. Frédéric is invited to dine with an influential banker, M. Dambreuse, who has political interests in Nogent, but he prefers to attend Mme Arnoux's birthday party at her country house in Saint Cloud. An incident reveals Arnoux's infidelity, and Frédéric returns to Paris with Mme Arnoux, alone in a carriage with her sleeping daughter.

Back in Nogent, Frédéric's mother reveals that family finances are grim. He can no longer live in Paris and must take a position at home as a law clerk. A little neighbor girl, Louise Roque, develops a crush on him. Finally he is saved from provincial existence by the death of his wealthy uncle; he can return to Paris after all. When his mother inquires what he will do there, he answers "Rien!" (Nothing!).

In part 2 Frédéric leads a leisurely existence. He buys an apartment, a carriage, and a horse and enjoys the life of a fashionable man-about-Paris. He frequents the Arnoux household once again; their financial position is perilous, and M. Arnoux has become a faience merchant. M. Arnoux takes him to a masked ball and introduces him to a courtesan, Rosanette Bron. He attends soirees at the house of M. and Mme Dambreuse. He is now

paying court to Mme Arnoux and Rosanette but cannot seduce either.

Political unrest is in the air; Frédéric largely ignores it except to the extent that he is obliged to listen to Sénécal. He meets a young nobleman, M. de Cisy, whose great concern is "avoir du cachet" (having tone), and promises Deslauriers money to feed his political ambitions by starting a newspaper. But on learning that M. Arnoux is in debt and may have to leave Paris, he gives money to keep his ideal love from departing. A misunderstanding leads to a comic duel with M. de Cisy. Frédéric's investments in coal mining with M. Dambreuse turn sour, and his reduced fortune forces him to consider marriage with Louise Roque.

Learning of his engagement, Mme Arnoux becomes jealous and at last recognizes that she loves Frédéric. An idyllic interlude ensues, during which she receives him at her house at Auteuil, but these tender meetings remain platonic. Demands for political reform now fill prerevolutionary Paris. Frédéric is determined to possess Mme Arnoux and rents an apartment for the purpose. Her son's croup keeps her from the rendezvous, and out of bitter frustration Frédéric seeks out Rosanette, who is astonished at his new forcefulness ("Je suis à la mode, je me réforme" [I'm in fashion; I've reformed]); he takes her to the apartment. During the night his weeping awakes Rosanette; he explains that his tears come from being too happy: "Il y avait trop longtemps que je te désirais!" (I wanted you for so long!).

Part 3 begins with the early days of the revolution of 1848. Frédéric and Hussonnet are more or less spectators (as Flaubert and Du Camp had been in reality) and follow the rampaging mobs into the Tuileries palace. "Les héros ne sentent pas bon!" (Heroes don't smell good!), remarks Hussonnet. But Frédéric finds the people "sublime," and, characterized by the narrator as an "homme de toutes les faiblesses" (a man of every weakness), he is drawn into political agitation. He presents himself as a candidate to a revolutionary organization, the "Club de l'Intelligence," but his appearance is preempted by a "patriote de Barcelone" who cuts him off with a speech delivered entirely in Spanish.

Disgusted with politics, Frédéric enjoys an unplatonic idyll with Rosanette in Fontainebleau. After their return to Paris, he makes up with Mme Arnoux but is interrupted at a crucial moment by the sudden appearance of a possessive Rosanette. Next Frédéric becomes the lover of Mme Dambreuse. M. Dambreuse dies. Since political reaction is in the air, marriage with Mme Dambreuse would mean a great fortune for Frédéric. But M. Dambreuse has cut his wife out of his will. About this time Arnoux's business affairs go completely awry, and despite Frédéric's attempts to save them, the Arnoux's are obliged to leave Paris. Out of loyalty Frédéric breaks with both Rosanette (their illegitimate child dies in infancy) and Mme Dambreuse.

It is 2 December 1851, the day of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte's coup détat. Frédéric thinks of Louise Roque and returns to Nogent, but he arrives just in time to see her and Dussardier emerge from their marriage in the village church. He returns to Paris. The police are breaking up political protests against the coup. Dussardier refuses to budge and cries "Vive la République!" He is run through by a policeman's sword, and Frédéric recognizes the killer: Sénécal, whose evolution from revolutionary to reactionary is now complete.

All of this action takes place before the next-to-last chapter of the novel. Now comes what Marcel Proust referred to admiringly as its "blanc" (blank space). As this example of temporal acceleration demonstrates, Flaubert had discovered the compressibility of time and could consequently orchestrate the rhythms of his novel to great aesthetic effect:

Il voyagea.
Il connut la mélancolie des paquebots, les froids réveils sous la tente, l'étourdissement des

paysages et des ruines, l'amertume des sympathies interrompues.
Il revint.
Il fréquenta le monde, et il eut d'autres amours encore. Mais le souvenir continuel du premier les lui rendait insipides; et puis la véhémence du désir, la fleur même de la sensation était perdue. Ses ambitions d'esprit avaient également diminué. Des années passèrent; et il supportait le désouvrement de son intelligence et l'inertie de son cour.
(He traveled.
He experienced the melancholy of steamers, cold awakenings under the tent, the tedium of landscapes and ruins, the bitterness of interrupted friendships.
He returned.
He went into society, and he had still other loves. But the constant memory of the first one made them insipid; and besides, the vehemence of desire, the very flower of feeling was lost. His intellectual ambitions had also declined. Years passed; and he endured the idleness of his mind and the inertia of his heart).

In March 1867 Frédéric is suddenly visited by Mme Arnoux. They take a walk through the streets of Paris. Back in the apartment Mme Arnoux removes her hat; her hair has turned entirely white. "Ce fut comme un coup en pleine poitrine" (It was like a blow straight to his chest). Yet Frédéric falls to his knees to affirm his eternal love. Suspecting that she is about to yield at last, he feels revulsion and something like fear of incest. He does not want to "dégrader son idéal" (degrade his ideal); he turns away from her and begins rolling a cigarette. So Mme Arnoux places a maternal kiss on his forehead, cuts off a lock of her hair for him, and leaves. "Et ce fut tout" (And that was all).

In the last chapter, Frédéric and Deslauriers have reconciled again and are chatting by the fireside. They sum up their lives and their friends'. Pellerin, the "future Veronese," has become a photographer. Rosanette has been widowed and gone fat. The two friends, "celui qui avait rêvé l'amour, celui qui avait rêvé le pouvoir" (the one who had dreamt of love, the one who had dreamt of power), wonder how they could have failed. ("Les Fruits secs" [The Desiccated Fruits] was the novel's original title.) They go back over their youth to an incident in Nogent in the summer of 1837. An escapade that took them timidly to the bordello of "the Turkish woman" ended in flight and embarrassment for the pair of adolescents they then were. They reconstruct all the details of the adventure, and then Frédéric exclaims--and he is echoed by Deslauriers: "C'est là ce que nous avons eu de meilleur!" (That was the best thing in our lives!).

As stated, Flaubert carried out extensive historical research on the bourgeois regime of the July Monarchy. (He once famously signed a letter "Gustavus Flaubertus Bourgeoisophobus.") His fictional account is often taken as a historical record or document in itself, and indeed one of his fears was that the characters might be engulfed by the historical background. Yet *L'Education sentimentale* says nothing about Bonapartism or the dynamic liberal Catholic movements of the time, and relatively little about its numerous socialist doctrines. Sénécal is a sinister caricature of the doctrinaire socialist.

The book is certainly deeply autobiographical, but in no way could it be considered a roman à clef. It is the record of the education of his generation, one that Flaubert felt could never carry to completion its generous ambitions and hopes, either in the sentimental or the political realm. The word *quarantehuitard* (Forty-eighter), coined to designate a revolutionary of 1848, has a pejorative suffix suggesting ineffectiveness. The novel is structured to march in counterpoint with history so that, for example, Frédéric's multiple sentimental failures (with Mme Arnoux, Rosanette, Louise, and Mme Dambreuse) coincide with (and appear to culminate in) the failure of the Second Republic and its overthrow by Bonaparte.

Politics and political speechifying always put Flaubert into a satirical mode, and this novel is no exception. The Club de l'Intelligence episode shows speech in the arena of revolutionary egalitarianism degenerating into babble and logorrhea, and the hypocrisy of conservative political concerns in M. Dambreuse's salon is equally mocked. The prostitution of ideas, or the profanation of dreams, is what most strikes the reader of *L'Education sentimentale*, and the imagery of prostitution and that of circularity (as in *Madame Bovary*) run side by side throughout the book.

The coincidence of these concepts may be seen in "historical" incidents such as the sacking of the Tuileries, where whores adorn themselves in Legion of Honor ribbons, and where escaped prisoners roll in the royal princesses' beds as a consolation for not being able to rape them. In the purely fictional realm, Frédéric takes Rosanette into a chamber lovingly prepared for Mme Arnoux. The salon of the wealthy Mme Dambreuse (which resembles Rosanette's) is depicted in terms of a bordello, and M. Dambreuse is described as having bowed and scraped before every government, for he had acclaimed Napoleon, the Cossacks, Louis XVIII, 1830, the workers, and every other regime, cherishing power with such love that "il aurait payé pour se vendre" (he would have paid to be able to sell himself). The bordello scene of the end is the long-deferred explanation of an allusion to a "low house" in the beginning of the novel, and this circular return is the opposite of forward movement or thrust. It brings the reader back to adolescence and underscores the lack of moral growth in the characters, the lack of sentimental progress, and thus gives an ironic twist to the title.

Indeed, neither lubricity nor ambition seems to lead anywhere. It has been noted that Frédéric's voyage in the opening scene is virtually the antithesis of the itinerary of a true adventure. The boat is not heading downstream for the open sea, but upstream, inland, in a reversal that points to a kind of psychological inertia or solipsism. Frédéric's only itinerary is in fact aimlessness, reflected in his immense random walks across Paris and in the evolution of his plans. A reader of romantic texts, like Emma (indeed, Emile Faguet called him the spiritual son of Charles and Emma Bovary), Frédéric early abandons the writing of a novel called "Sylvio, le fils du pêcheur" (Sylvio, the Fisherman's Son) because its plot is more reminiscent of Musset than the arriviste heroes of Balzac and Stendhal that Deslauriers cites as models of Parisian success. He ponders whether he should become a great poet or a great painter and decides on painting (it will take him closer to Mme Arnoux).

In an example of the potential that FIS offers for irony, one finds the following: "Il avait donc trouvé sa vocation! Le but de son existence était clair maintenant, et l'avenir infaillible" (Thus he had found his vocation! The purpose of his existence was now clear, and his future infallible). Finally, when Frédéric unexpectedly inherits his uncle's fortune (and he does so not because his own efforts have succeeded, but because the uncle has died intestate), his announced ambition is reduced to a single word: "Rien!" (Nothing!). Thus Frédéric is widely referred to as a *velléitaire* (one who has only weak intentions and cannot resolve to act).

If indeterminacy, fragmentation, and discontinuity are the hallmarks of the postmodern, then *L'Education sentimentale* offers much to sustain the views of scholars, such as Jonathan Culler, who maintain that Flaubert set out deliberately to block recuperation, that is, the reflex that assigns meaning to all fictional events. "Action," such as it exists in *L'Education sentimentale*, is summarized in the ironic portrait of a curious minor character, the actor Auguste Delmar, whose most imposing stance is a pose: hand on heart, left foot forward, eyes lifted skyward, he wears a laurel crown and attempts to project a look of fascination into his gaze. He stands as a model of the circular imagery of the novel, for his great stage success comes with a role that has him lecturing Louis XIV and

predicting 1789. Thereafter, the same role is fabricated for him: an English brewer who rails against Charles I; a student from Salamanca who curses Philip II; and his best role, that of heartbroken father denouncing "la Pompadour."

His success is so complete that popular biographies are written of him. He is seen as a latterday Saint Vincent de Paul mixed with Brutus and Count de Mirabeau. "On disait: 'Notre Delmar.' Il avait une mission, il devenait Christ" (People would say 'Our Delmar.' He was a man with a mission, he was turning into Christ). His electoral platform, expounded at the Club de l'Intelligence, is to pacify the mobs by showing them his profile. His greatest admirer, the procuress Mlle Vatnaz, claims that he represents the very genius of France, the people. She claims that he has a humanitarian soul and understands the sacred role of art. The last glimpse of Delmar portrays him declaiming a humanitarian poem about prostitution. Spelling variations in his name (Delamare, Dellamarre, Delmas, Belmar) seem to point to the most famous of French political proverbs: "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose." It is hard not to conclude that the staginess and essential hollowness of this fraudulent character stand for all the self-delusions besetting the generation of 1848.

Though *L'Education sentimentale* is rich in satire, and though its protagonist is a "failure," his love for Mme Arnoux is redemptive in the sense that it alone allows the ideal to persist in the face of disillusion. Frédéric's passion waxes and wanes, but even in the last scene, where motive and emotion are most ambiguously portrayed, Mme Arnoux retains, white hair and all, her hold over his dreams and senses. The tenacity with which Flaubertian characters hold to their illusions is legendary. They seem to do so with considerable justification, for fulfillment brings weariness and disenchantment. In *Madame Bovary* , the narrator warned about this: "Il ne faut pas toucher aux idoles: la dorure en reste aux mains" (One must not lay hands on idols: the gilt rubs off on one's hands). Thus adultery brings to Emma only "toutes les platitudes du mariage" (all the platitudes of marriage), and Salammbô's finally touching the zaïmph brings only disappointment. The dream accomplished is its end. What an irony to consider that Frédéric Moreau alone would seem wise in his refusal to "degrade his ideal!"

In Flaubert's ironic vision, abstention is the closest one may come to satisfaction. Jean-Pierre Richard has noted that after the "apparition" of the opening scene, Mme Arnoux is mainly experienced as an absence, or at best, as an evanescent presence. "We hear her move behind a partition, we glimpse her profile behind a drapery: only her echo or her shadow can be possessed. Her house is full of intervening objects: screens, fans, lampshades." This very space of deferral constitutes Flaubert's opportunity to inscribe scenes of great tenderness, particularly the idyllic days that Frédéric and Mme Arnoux spend in their clandestine trysts in Auteuil, trysts of perfect intimacy and innocence. The sense of what might have been is the strongest impression this novel leaves its readers, and if, for the survival of the dream, *nothing* is always better than *something*, then its mode of deferral bestows upon *L'Education sentimentale* its enduring poetic qualities. *L'Education sentimentale* is the reliquary of romanticism. The storehouse of fine sentiments has been petrified, shriveled like so many *fruits secs*, or transformed into clichés. In this sense the moderns are no longer "believers" in the Romantic religion of perfect love; thus it is only through irony's oblique approach that Flaubert can pay nostalgic homage to the ideal.

The public reception awaiting his new novel was not brilliant, and Flaubert had to be satisfied with a succès d'estime. Only in recent years has *L'Education sentimentale* come into its own as the true masterpiece of the realist canon. Flaubert soon returned to work on *Saint Antoine* and spent Christmas of 1869 with George Sand in Nohant. The years from 1869 to 1872 were to be difficult ones for him, and for France; first, more deaths: Bouilhet in 1869, and in 1870 a close friend, Jules Duplan, then Jules de Goncourt as well. The

Franco-Prussian War, a catastrophe for France, broke out in July. Flaubert was appointed a lieutenant in the National Guard, but the Prussians had reached Rouen by December, and Croisset was eventually occupied. Flaubert was profoundly depressed and became more misanthropic than ever.

After the signing of the armistice in January 1871 he refused to wear his Legion of Honor. After a visit to Princess Mathilde in exile in Brussels, Flaubert returned to Croisset to work on *Saint Antoine* and to busy himself with Bouilhet's unpublished works. Elisa Schlesinger, now a widow, had come to Trouville for a visit and was invited to Croisset, but their farewell scene had already been written in the penultimate chapter of *L'Education sentimentale* (Flaubert's last extant letter to her is dated 8 October 1872.) Mme Flaubert's health was declining, and family finances were becoming more and more alarming. Mme Flaubert died in April 1872, and Flaubert was deeply grieved. George Sand was to write him a most moving letter on this occasion. In September he switched publishers, as Georges Charpentier bought the rights to his works from Lévy and was promised the definitive *Saint Antoine* and the new work now under way, *Bouvard et Pécuchet* . Théophile Gautier died in October.

The year 1873 was largely devoted to theatrical activities. Flaubert attempted to ready an unfinished play by Bouilhet and undertook a political comedy of his own, *Le Candidat* (1874; translated as *The Candidate*, 1904); neither was successful. While Charpentier brought out *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* in March 1874 (surprisingly, sales were good), the "bear" of Croisset was throwing himself into documentation for *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. One of Flaubert's sources for information on the routines of copy clerks was the son of his old playmate from youth, Laure Le Poittevin. This was Guy de Maupassant, then employed as a clerk in the Ministry of the Navy in Paris. Flaubert became quite fond of young Guy, who served a kind of literary apprenticeship under the master.

Inevitably, it was rumored that Maupassant the "disciple" was in reality Flaubert's son, and it is a fact that illegitimacy is a recurrent theme in Maupassant's works. He has left a record of a Sunday reception in Flaubert's apartment in the rue Murillo: the visitors were Turgenev, Hippolyte Taine, Alphonse Daudet, Emile Zola, and Edmond de Goncourt; and Flaubert stupefied them with his "prodigious erudition." Henry James attended one of these Sundays in 1875 (by then Flaubert had moved to the same apartment house as the Commanvilles, in the rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré). That was the year of his nephew's near bankruptcy, which Flaubert heroically helped to stave off by selling his single large asset, a farm at Deauville. It was feared that Croisset might have to be sold as well, but happily this was not necessary. After this debacle Flaubert would live the remainder of his life in straitened circumstances.

In March 1876 Louise Colet died. By then Flaubert had finished a short work that he entitled "La Légende de Saint Julien l'hospitalier" ("The Legend of Saint Julian the Hospitaler") and had begun work on a second tale, "Un Coeur simple" ("A Simple Heart"), intended for George Sand. But his great friend died in June before she could read the work. Flaubert also planned a third short work, "Hérodias"; the first two were published separately in periodicals in 1877 (Flaubert needed money), and in April of that year Charpentier brought them out together under the title *Trois contes* (translated as *Three Tales*, 1923).

The tales are placed in three different chronological settings and locations. "Un Coeur simple" is set in contemporary France, *"Saint Julien"* in a generalized Middle Ages, and "Hérodias" in the Near East in the time of John the Baptist. They all present the old Flaubertian yearning for escapefrom self as the characters thrust toward mystical transcendence.

The most accessible of the tales is "Un Cour simple," probably the most anthologized of all Flaubert's writings. (It is also the most poignant of the *Trois contes*, although poignancy is not the essence of Flaubert.) It tells the story of a peasant girl, Félicité, who loyally serves the same mistress for more than fifty years. "Pendant un demi-siècle, les bourgeoises de Pont-l'Evêque envièrent à Mme Aubain sa servante Félicité" (For a half-century, the women of Pont-l'Evêque envied Mme Aubain her servant Félicité). This much-admired opening sentence affords quick insight into the richness of Flaubert's style. Its syntactical end point identifies the focus of the tale, the maidservant Félicité, and "Felicity" is a name remarkable enough to encourage the reader to see if *happiness* will be her lot. It also imparts information regarding geographical setting (Pont-l'Evêque sounds like a Norman place-name) and social class (*bourgeoises*) that will figure in the tale. The choice of the term *half-century* over the equally possible *fifty years*. shows Flaubert's sense of duration and temporality at its acutest, for "half-century" is psychologically much longer; it is *le mot juste*.

As a young orphan girl from the country, Félité is taken in by a widow, Mme Aubain, who finds in her the perfect servant for one hundred francs a year. She is loyal and hardworking, and frustrated in a series of loves. Jilted by her fiancé, the farmhand Théodore, she lavishes her inarticulate affection on Paul and Virginie, the children of Mme Aubain. But Virginie dies young, and Paul goes off to boarding school. Her beloved nephew Victor, a sailor boy, is lost to yellow fever on a voyage to Havana. She cares for Polish refugees and devotes herself to alleviating the final suffering of an outcast, old Father Colmiche.

One day Mme Aubain is given a parrot, Loulou. He becomes Félicité's constant companion. In time Félicité turns deaf, and the only voice that reaches her is the parrot's. In her isolation, he has become almost a son, a lover. When he dies, she has him mounted. Struck by his resemblance to the dove in a stained glass window (symbol of the Holy Ghost), she begins to pray to him. Mme Aubain dies and leaves her a small income. Félicité is allowed to stay in her room, stuffed with remembrances of her loves, as the empty house slowly decays around her. Loulou is now moldy and worm-eaten. Her end approaches, and the priest allows Loulou to be placed on the altar of repose set up in the courtyard for the Corpus Christi procession. She bids him a tender farewell, and as she expires in wafts of incense from the ceremony below, "elle crut voir, dans les cieux entrouverts, un perroquet gigantesque, planant au-dessus de sa tête" (she believed she saw, in the opened heavens, a gigantic parrot, hovering over her head).

Many readers have felt that Flaubert's incarnation of the Holy Ghost in the body of a parrot constitutes a satire of religious thought. He was, after all, a relentless mocker of all parrotry, the mindless repetition of clichés, and conceived as one of his earliest projects a "Dictionnaire des idées reçues." Emma's consultation with the priest in *Madame Bovary* ends in an empty repetition of the catechism ("baptized, baptized, baptized"), and it has been said that many of the characters in his world are infected with psittacosis--parrot fever. And Sartre remarked in *L'Idiot de la famille* that "Flaubert ne croit pas qu' *on parle: on est parlé*" (Flaubert does not believe that *one speaks: one is spoken*). Language infects one with thought in reverse, thought being not the origin but rather the product of words. Loulou's very name is made of repetition, and one scene in particular, where Mme Aubain's visitors admire him while wondering why he is not called "Jacquot" (French for "Polly"), has been termed a "closed circuit of inanity" by Victor Brombert.

Irony seems to pervade the tale at every pass, and nowhere more obviously than in Flaubert's onomastic practices: Félicité finds felicity in extremis perhaps, but not on this earth; her fiancé, Théodore, is hardly a "gift of God" nor is Mme Aubain an *aubaine* (a godsend). And yet Flaubert himself, an unbeliever, maintained that he respected religion and that his tale was not at all ironical, but on the contrary, "very serious and

very sad." "Je veux apitoyer, faire pleurer les âmes sensibles, en étant une moi-même" (I want to move people to pity, to make sensitive souls weep, being one of them myself). Moreover the tale was written for George Sand in specific response to her regret that Flaubert's fictional practice masked his true feelings in impassivity.

Thus the story is finely balanced between tenderness and irony. Félicité suffers in silent abnegation and gives every appearance of leading a saintly existence in her capacity for love and charity. She bestows her gifts on the children, on her ungrateful mistress, on the sick, and on strangers, and she performs authentic deeds of self-sacrifice, as when she heroically saves the entire Aubain family from an attack by a bull. She might well become the matter of a saint's life herself--"Saint Felicity Slaying the Bull." Pious and modest, she seems to recall a youthful project of Flaubert, to tell the story of a Flemish virgin who lives her whole existence in mystical devotion. If Félicité's belief is illusion, it does not fail to comfort her to the end of her life, including the ultimate visionary appearance of the gigantic parrot. She certainly dies in odor of sanctity. Félicitéshares this with Frédéric Moreau, that neither suffers the loss that inevitably ensues upon the possession of an ideal--no matter how decrepit that ideal has become.

The second of the tales, "Saint Julien," opens with a depiction of the stability of Julien's world. His father is a great lord, and the paternal manor is a safe and prosperous place. Soon after Julien's birth, a mysterious hermit appears to the mother and tells her to rejoice, for her son will be a saint. The next day a Gypsy beggar stammers prophetic words to the father: "Ah, ah! ton fils! ... beaucoup de sang! ... beaucoup de gloire! ... toujours heureux! la famille d'un empereur" (Ah, ah! Your son! ... Much blood! ... Much glory! ... Always happy! The family of an emperor). Neither parent tells the other, but each respects the child as if he were marked by God. They take great care for him, and he receives a thorough education.

One day Julien kills a little white mouse in the church and furtively throws its body away. Next he strangles a wounded bird: its dying convulsions fill him with ecstasy. He takes up venery and becomes an expert hunter. One morning he indulges in an orgy of killing: deer, badgers, peacocks, birds, foxes, hedgehogs, and lynx--Julien mercilessly slays them all. He comes to an amphitheater filled with stags, where he wreaks carnage until at last he spies a buck, a doe, and their fawn. He sends arrows into them all, but the dying buck springs forward and, to the tone of a tolling bell, confronts Julien: "Maudit! maudit! maudit! Un jour, cour féroce, tu assassineras ton père et ta mère!" (Accursed, accursed, accursed! One day, cruel heart, you will kill your mother and father!). Julien rejects the stag's prophecy, "Non! non! non!" And then he pauses: "Si je le voulais, pourtant?" (But what if I wanted to?). He abandons hunting, but in two separate accidents he narrowly misses killing his mother and father, and he flees the castle in dread of the prediction.

Julien becomes a great soldier, and eventually, to reward his services, the Emperor of Occitania offers him his daughter in marriage. Julien languishes; he would like to hunt again, but he may not, believing that the fate of his parents is bound to the killing of animals. But at his wife's urging, he does set off to hunt. During his absence his mother and father come to seek him out, and their daughter-in-law offers them her own bed. In a nightmarish scene, Julien is unable to kill any animals, who surround him and accompany him in sinister silence back to the palace. There Julien mistakes his father for a lover and his mother for his wife. In a burst of uncontrollable rage, he slays them both.

A repentant Julien wanders, a beggar, through many lands. He seeks ever greater acts of mortification, but his suffering cannot be eased. Finally he becomes a boatman beside a perilous river. In all weather Julien carries travelers across it, asking nothing for his dangerous service. He lives in abject poverty. One stormy night, from across the river, a voice cries out his name three

times. It is a leper, whom Julien ferries back to his hut. The leper demands food and drink, and Julien gives him what he has. He is cold and demands that Julien lie naked by him for warmth. Julien does his will: he stretches himself out on top of him, mouth to mouth, breast to breast. The leper clasps him tight, the roof flies off, the heavens unfold, and Julien rises face to face with Jesus Christ, who bears him off to heaven. "Et voilà l'histoire de saint Julien l'Hospitalier, telle à peu près qu'on la trouve, sur un vitrail d'église, dans mon pays" (And that is the story of Saint Julien the Hospitaler, more or less as it can be found in a stained glass window of a church in my land).

Several familiar themes are to be found in the tale. The first is the linking of sexuality and religion or death, particularly in the killing of the white mouse in church and later the pigeon. Julien hastily mops up the drop of blood the mouse leaves behind and almost guiltily disposes of the little carcass, saying nothing to anyone. But he immediately starts to kill birds with his blowpipe, and he is happy as they rain down upon his shoulders. The death of the pigeon is recounted in overtly sexual terms: "Les convulsions de l'oiseau faisaient battre son cour, l'emplissaient d'une volupté sauvage et tumultueuse. Au dernier roidissement, il se sentit défaillir" (The convulsions of the bird made his heart beat and filled it with a wild and tumultuous ecstasy. At its last stiffening, he felt himself fainting).

The apparent reciprocity between destruction and creation is a plausible variant reading of these same events, and the history of nineteenth-century literary decadence constantly views the "Barbarian" as a longed-for injection of vigor that will regenerate a stagnant society. Violence then becomes a remedy for the impasse of positivism and the exhaustion of an overcivilized society: decadent works are filled with episodes of gratuitous cruelty. This was one of the preoccupations of *Salammbô*, whose prose style, with its emphasis on heavy, overloaded descriptions, is often termed lapidary. This accentuation of the artificial at the expense of the natural, or the manmade at the expense of the human, would become the hallmark of the masterpiece of decadence, Joris-Karl Huysmans's *A rebours* (1884; translated as *Against the Grain*, 1922).

Julien's inward contradictions are made literal in the incompatible double prophecy of his infancy. It is the symbol of Julien's paradoxically double nature, his capacity for savagery and sainthood, for good and evil, for creation and destruction. In more specifically psychoanalytic terms, William J. Berg has shown that the Freudian concepts of displacement and reversal are at work in the tale. As Julien has himself admitted his patricidal leanings ("But what if I wanted to?"), the latent Oedipal conflict cannot be denied. It would unfold as follows: while it would be unthinkable for Julien to kill his father, the stag (synecdoche for all animals) provides a socially acceptable substitute. Moreover, the stag is described as a "patriarch." When Julien kills the animals, he escapes from his position of inferiority with regard to the Father (reversal).

During Caroline's wedding trip in 1845, Flaubert had written down a nightmare about animals (in his *Notes de voyage* [Travel Notes, 1910]): he was walking in a great forest with his mother when they noticed monkeys in the trees and in their path. They were all looking at him; soon he was surrounded by monkeys, and one of them took him by the hand. Flaubert shot the monkey, which screamed and bled. Then his mother asked him, "Pourquoi les blesses-tu, ton ami? qu'estce qu'il t'a fait? ne vois-tu pas qu'il t'aime? comme il te ressemble!" (Why do you wound your friend? What has he done to you? Don't you see that he loves you? How similar he is to you!). And Flaubert awoke feeling that he was of the same nature as the animals and fraternizing with them in a tender and pantheistic communion. Thirty years later the guilt of 1845 was shifted to Julien.

The narrative tone of this tale comes closest to what one might properly expect in a legend; it is

that of a dreamworld where supernatural events are common and time has been suspended. Although the narrator says that he has taken his tale from a stained glass window, it is known from the research of Benjamin F. Bart and Robert F. Cook that Flaubert's source was a printed description. The setting of "Saint Julien" is an idealized Middle Ages, picturesque and mysterious despite all its killing. The reader feels distanced from this world because of the obscure psychology of the characters and the stylistic features of the narrative, such as the exotic or archaic vocabulary of venery and falconry. Its very tone of historical affirmation is distancing ("C'est lui, et pas un autre, qui assomma la guivre de Milan et le dragon d'Oberbirbach" [It was he, and no other, who slew the serpent of Milan and the dragon of Oberbirbach]). In Julien's legend, the naive and the erudite are interwoven, the real and the surreal overlap with ease, and Julien's final flight heavenward in the arms of his Saviour is narrated with a matter-of-fact sense of wonder.

Even though "Hérodias" closely follows documentary sources (and thus is the most "historical" of the *Trois contes*), it is marked by condensation, ellipsis, and obscurity. Significantly, it is the tale most admired by the historian Taine, who said it was the real Judea in A.D. 30. And although Edmond de Goncourt called it a "gaudy mosaic," he and his brother had earlier written this in their journal (24 October 1864): "Le roman, depuis Balzac, n'a plus rien de commun avec ce que nos pères entendaient par roman. Le roman actuel se fait avec des *documents*, racontés ou relevés d'après nature, comme l'histoire se fait avec des documents écrits. Les historiens sont des raconteurs du passé; les romanciers, des raconteurs du présent" (The novel, since Balzac, has had nothing more in common with what our fathers understood by novel. The novel today is made with *documents*, narrated or gathered from nature, just as history is made with written documents. Historians are tellers of the past; novelists, tellers of the present).

In a letter of 19 June 1876, Flaubert joked that he was becoming one of the pillars of the temple: "Après Saint Antoine, Saint Julien; et ensuite saint Jean-Baptiste; je ne sors pas des saints. Pour celui-là, je m'arrangerai de façon à ne pas 'édifier.' L'histoire d'Hérodias, telle que je la comprends, n'a aucun rapport avec la religion. Ce qui me séduit là-dedans, c'est la mine officielle d'Hérode (qui était un vrai préfet) et la figure farouche d'Hérodias, une sorte de Cléopâtre et de Maintenon. La question des races dominait tout" (After Saint Anthony, Saint Julien, and then Saint John the Baptist; I can't get out of the saints. For this one, I'll manage so as not to 'edify.' The story of Herodias, the way I understand it, has no connection with religion. What fascinates me in this is the official appearance of Herod [who was a real prefect] and the fierce appearance of Herodias, a sort of Cleopatra and Maintenon. The racial question dominated everything). Sources in art for "Hérodias" included the Saint John sculpture on the Rouen cathedral and Perugino's *Beheading of Saint John* , which he had seen in Perugia in 1851.

The characters of "Hérodias" are taken from Roman and biblical history: the scheming and ambitious Herodias (a Jezebel, the saint calls her), who has divorced one uncle to marry another; Antipas, her husband (a son of the great Herod), the Tetrarch of Galilee; Vitellius, the Roman Proconsul; his decadent son and favorite of the Emperor Tiberius, the gluttonous Aulus; the fulminating prophet John the Baptist (here called Iaokanann); Salome, the daughter of Herodias and her first husband; and many others. The Gospel story of Salome's dance and John's decapitation are the center of the tale, but the atmosphere of tension, of religious and political suspicion and intolerance, is reminiscent of *Salammbô*. Flaubert no doubt drew on his memory of Kuchuk Hanem and her lustful Dance of the Bee for Salome, and the old theme of profanation arises in John's beheading. As the head is passed around the banquet table, torches are extinguished, tears roll down the Tetrarch's cheeks, and the guests hurriedly make their exit.

The head is placed before Aulus, who is awakened: "Par l'ouverture de leurs cils, les prunelles mortes et les prunelles éteintes semblaient se dire quelque chose" (Through the opening of their lashes, the dead pupils and the dulled pupils seemed to speak to one another).

Herodias was also a subject treated by Stéphane Mallarmé in the 1860s, but after Flaubert's tale and Gustave Moreau's paintings, interest shifted more to Salome. Oscar Wilde wrote a one-act play (in French) that served as the libretto (in German translation) for Richard Strauss's opera *Salome* (1905), and Sergey Diaghilev mounted a ballet on the theme in 1913. Gratuitous cruelty, decadence, profanation, and the cycle of destruction and regeneration compose the familiar yet exotic preoccupations of "Hérodias."

The unity of *Trois contes* is a much-debated question; it is certainly a problematic unity, to be found (if it exists) in a presentation of varieties of religious experiences, a triptych of saints' lives. Or perhaps it should be located in the yearning to escape from self, in the quest for transcendence that haunts the protagonists of the Flaubertian universe.

Flaubert now returned to *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. The *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* had been mentioned while he was on his trip to the Orient, and the subject of the two copyists dates from 1862. *Bouvard et Pécuchet* would remain unfinished, but it was published in 1881, only one year after Flaubert's death. His early title for the novel was "Les Deux Cloportes" (The Two Woodlice). It offers a cautionary tale of intellectual frustration.

The two woodlice, the copy clerks Bouvard and Pécuchet, meet one sultry summer evening on the boulevard Bourdon in Paris. They immediately take a liking to one another, so that when Bouvard comes into an inheritance and Pécuchet retires, they decide to leave Paris to live in the countryside. At their place in Chavignolles, they begin to study and experiment with agriculture; soon they pass to arboriculture, then to ornamental gardening, chemistry, anatomy, medicine, astronomy, natural sciences, geology, archaeology, and history. Their ambition is encyclopedic. In each domain they are frustrated, for in each they discover contradictions and flaws.

The two friends are immersed in politics with the revolution of 1848, and in affairs of the heart. They take up gymnastics and study animal magnetism, spiritism, and philosophy. "Alors une faculté pitoyable se développa dans leur esprit, celle de voir la bêtise et de ne plus la tolérer" (Then a pitiable faculty developed in their minds, that of seeing stupidity and no longer tolerating it). They go on to religion and the adoption of a pair of miscreant children; but everything leads to failure. In the plans for the unfinished last chapter, they return to copying. They have a double desk made, purchase copybooks and writing instruments, and then "Ils s'y mettent" (They go to it). A second volume of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, a *sottisier*, or compendium of stupidities, was to have consisted almost entirely of quotations. It would have exposed the contradictions and bêtises of their readings.

Harry Levin has called *Bouvard et Pécuchet* a "*Bildungsroman* in reverse." Bouvard's name recalls the bovine, and Pécuchet's name (from *pecus* [cattle]) yokes him to the same destiny. The research that the partners carry out, it has often been remarked, is effected with a Flaubertian pertinacity, and their enthusiastic inquiries could be taken as a caricature of the Hermit of Croisset's own multifarious investigations.

Nothing could be more like their creator than their interest in bêtises. The *Dictionnaire*, Sartre wrote, was a strange work of more than a thousand entries, but in the end, who was the butt of it all? "Personne. Ou plutôt si: un homme. Le plus curieux, c'est qu'il *est* visé et ne semble pas s'en rendre compte. C'est l'auteur lui-même" (No one. Or rather yes: one man. The most curious thing is that he is the butt and does not seem to realize it. It is the author himself). For Lionel Trilling, Bouvard and Pécuchet "are the *reductio ad*

absurdum of our lives in culture ..." (*The Opposing Self*, 1955). But are they finally comic or tragic in their willingness to persist? The pessimism of the book, and Flaubert's characteristic infusion of irony, make debate fruitless. They are simply exemplars of modernity.

Bouvard et Pécuchet is certainly a self-reflexive book, one whose reading retraces its own composition. For Brombert, it marks the impasse of fiction, that is, the limits of traditional realistic narrative. The work calls into question, and destroys, all pretense of narrative authority, for it makes it impossible to pinpoint with certainty the narrative instance, or the source of the narrating voice. The use of FIS here breaks down demarcations, and often the numerous summaries in the book cannot be confidently attributed to a character, a treatise, or a narrator. Utterances become free-floating and produce the *simulation* of an imitation.

By upsetting the foundations of classical mimesis, in which copy and model, imitator and imitated are clearly situated with respect to one another, *Bouvard et Pécuchet* displaces the very concept of origin and truth. Signs darken and become opaque; meaning is obscured, and one is left with the unending circulation of words. Roland Barthes--in a passage so often quoted that Anne Herschberg-Pierrot wonders if it has become a cliché itself--wrote in *S/Z* (1970) that one never knows if Flaubert is responsible for what he writes (if there is a subject *behind* his language); the essence of Flaubert's writing is to "empêcher de jamais répondre à cette question: *Qui parle?*" (prevent one from ever answering this question: *Who is speaking?*).

Flaubert's last years were a mixture of worries over money and health, and devotion to friends and work. The great events of 1879, for example, were a fractured leg (he was cared for by a new, devoted friend, his neighbor Edmond Laporte), receipt of a rather meager official pension of three thousand francs, and the reading of *War and Peace* (1865-1869), which Turgenev "the Muscovite" had sent him. In early 1880 he was on chapter 10 of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, and serial publication of his fairy play, *Le Château des cours* , had commenced. He read the manuscript of Maupassant's short story inspired by the Franco-Prussian War, "Boule de suif" (Butter Ball, 1879). Although Maupassant had published little before age thirty, this story brought him instant fame, and Flaubert duly hailed it as a masterpiece of composition, of comedy, and of observation. He read Zola's *Nana* (1879) and found it "Babylonian." Earlier, of *L'Assommoir* (1877; translated as *Gervaise (L'Assommoir)*, 1879), he had wryly observed that Zola was becoming "une *précieuse* à l'inverse" (a *précieuse* in reverse).

No admirer of naturalism, he wrote Maupassant that it was an empty word, an "ineptitude" exactly like "realism." He smiled upon learning that Du Camp had been elected to the French Academy. For Easter weekend, Flaubert had as houseguests in Croisset his publisher Charpentier, Daudet, Goncourt, Maupassant, and Zola. The last Saint Polycarp's dinner was held in April. This was an annual dinner honoring Flaubert, who professed an ironic identification with this early bishop of Smyrna, famous for his lament, "My God, my God, what a century you have placed me in!" On 8 May, Flaubert suffered a stroke and died.

Elisa Schlesinger lived until 1888. Flaubert's niece Caroline had custody of his papers; she had remarried, and as Mme Franklin-Grout lived in Antibes until her death in 1931.

The Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin wrote in a long essay on "Discourse in the Novel" that the nineteenth century created "an important novel-type in which the hero is a man who *only* talks, who is unable to act and is condemned to naked words." The passage could apply to Frédéric Moreau, to Emma Bovary, to Bouvard and Pécuchet. But it is not only the pessimism of failure or the inadequacy of words that is figured in Flaubert's writings. One is most alert to a particular admixture of emotion and irony. Thus during the *Bovary* years he had written to Colet

(20 March 1852): "Toute la valeur de mon livre, s'il en a une, sera d'avoir su marcher droit sur un cheveu, suspendu entre le double abîme du lyrisme et du vulgaire (que je veux fondre dans une analyse narrative)" (All the worth of my book, if it has any, will be in having learned to walk straight along a hair, suspended between the double abyss of lyricism and vulgarity [which I wish to fuse in a narrative analysis]). That fusion is what constitutes the pleasure of his text, from *Madame Bovary* to *L'Education sentimentale* and "Un Coeur simple."

In addition to his advances in technique, Flaubert's legacy to the modern writer is one of tenacity, of devotion to task. He established the familiar image of the artist-as-priest. Proust thought him a "génie grammatical" (grammatical genius) and paid him homage by including a pastiche of his style in the "Lemoine Affair" section of his *Pastiches et mélanges* (1919). Franz Kafka admired him excessively. Sartre was totally obsessed, writing thousands of pages about Flaubert. (His only novel of distinction, *La Nausée* [1938; translated as *Nausea*, 1949], owes much to *Bouvard et Pécuchet*.) A generation of Latin American novelists found inspiration in him; Mario Vargas Llosa devoted an entire work to him (*The Perpetual Orgy*, 1975). He is the writer's writer in his meticulous planning and his refusal to settle for less than *le mot juste*. He left works that have continued to attract the attention of critics and literary theorists of stature. His practice enacts in advance the dilemmas of the modern writer: the crisis of representation, the inadequacy of language, the stoic awareness of humanity's entanglement in words.

Papers: Flaubert's papers are at the Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris), the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris, the Bibliothèque Municipale de Rouen, and the Musée Flaubert (Canteleu-Croisset).

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