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BOVARYSME BEYOND BOVARY: FROM THE PSYCHE TO THE TEXT

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AND LINGUISTICS

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Table of Contents

Abstract

"*Bovarysme* Beyond Bovary: From the Psyche to the Text," centers on examining the notion of *bovarysme* as a particular stance on literature, as well as a specific literary technique, and seeks to establish the emergence of a textualized *bovarysme* in selected works by Gustave Flaubert. Jules de Gaultier's 1902 definition of *bovarysme* as "le pouvoir départi à l'homme de se concevoir autre qu'il n'est," while useful as a point of departure, focuses largely on the psychology of the fictional character and does not extend the notion's implications further, such as into the realm of literary art. I therefore investigate if Gaultier's definition of *bovarysme* could apply to writing. Can language also conceive of itself other than what it is?

Working from this key question, I organize my study into four chapters that address the textualization of *bovarysme*. In Chapter One, "*Madame Bovary* and 'La Maladie de la lecture'," I trace the development of *bovarysme* in relation to the desire to transpose reading onto reality, a transposition that exhibits contaminating effects that posit *bovarysme* as a "textually transmitted disease" (in the words of Daniel Pennac), as a condition that originates from the fictional realm, but extends also into the real, and influences not just Emma Bovary's comportment, but equally that of future generations of readers.

Chapter 2, "*Bouvard et Pécuchet*: The Caging of the Parrot," examines the mimetic properties of *bovarysme* as a textualized stance against the infectious power of clichés and *idées reçues*. Here, I argue that Flaubert's

skillful use of italics and quotation marks seem to "quarantine" the linguistic properties of clichés, and yet simultaneously participate in their usage. Through the (mis)reading of linguistic signs, imbued with received ideas or linguistic platitudes, I argue that not only do Bouvard and Pécuchet read—and, especially, *misread* clichés—but also, readers of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* often perform a similar function by perceiving clichés and *idées reçues* merely as cultural references instead of representing as well an aesthetic stance against the forces of *bêtise*.

Chapter 3, entitled "*Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues*: Writing the Paradox," elaborates the ways in which the *Dictionnaire* problemetizes the power of words through the suggestiveness of rhetorical figures. I also analyze Flaubert's transformation of the genre of the dictionary into a ludic space in which to examine the self-reflexive properties of language. Additionally, I also aim to demonstrate that the text represents Flaubert's most notable attack against the pervasive idea of *bêtise*, as he seeks ultimately to expose the fallacy of the notion through its reification in dictionary form. Adding to this argument, I show that Flaubert's attempt to sequester *bêtise* reveals the author's own struggles with the inability of language to depict reality, producing a linguistic tension between literary and social discourse that may be seen to create a certain impossibility of writing anything original. I conclude the chapter by proposing that this impossibility culminates in the *Dictionnaire*. One can thus add the form of the dictionary to the list of techniques of quotation marks and italics, as a

form that presents the cliché in its most isolated form, almost entirely devoid of contextual references.

Chapter 4, "The Posterity of *Bovarysme* or the Edifice Complex," I investigate the embodiment of *bovarysme* far beyond the nineteenth century, as it continues to emerge in a series of recent fictional texts that deliberately engage Flaubert as a precursor to honor or to challenge. I argue that contemporary authors such as Christophe Claro, Alain Ferry, Raymond Jean, and Philippe Doumenc contribute to the posterity of *bovarysme* in that, reversing the gesture of the fictional Emma choosing models from other authors, it is now the real-life authors choosing Emma as model, creating their own texts, variations on the theme of Flaubert's novel. In my view, this more contemporary *bovarysme* is not specifically on or about Flaubert, but rather "after him," which, both stylistically and chronologically, raises the question: "What is it to write or read after Flaubert?"

Introduction: the Dynamics of *Bovarysme* as a Theoretical Term

Born in Rouen in 1821, Gustave Flaubert remains the subject of numerous analyses, constantly shaping critical interpretation and influencing writers from the nineteenth century to the present day. In fact, Henry James's oft-cited remark that Flaubert was a "novelist's novelist" (329) alludes both to Flaubert's importance to canonical literature as well as to his impact on aspiring new writers. Labeled the "Hermit of Croisset" by Timothy Unwin (1), the writer's self-imposed seclusion by no means reduced his powers of observation and his professed aim to remain objective in his works, qualities enhanced by his supremacy as a prose stylist and his nearly maniacal devotion to the preliminary research phases of his writing process, known as he was for multiple rewrites of his texts. In the 130 years after his death in 1880, Flaubert, and subsequently what has become "Flaubert Studies," have continued to enrich and be enriched by new critical discoveries and developments.

Indeed, while an exhaustive treatment of what constitutes exactly the nature of "Flaubert Studies" is beyond the scope of the present study, it is worth noting that D.J. Colwell's impressive 1988 two-volume *Bibliographie des Études sur Gustave Flaubert* lists some 7000 titles of works devoted to Flaubert and his texts. Additionally, Tony Williams' and Mary Orr's 1999 study, *New Approaches in Flaubert Studies*, provides an impressive addendum of works that appeared from 1989 to 1997 and demonstrates the continued presence of

Flaubert's methods. The noteworthiness of these studies is enhanced by Alain

Raitt's comment in his preface to Williams' and Orr's text:

> It is of course a measure of Flaubert's inexhaustible greatness that he has
> to be invented anew for each successive generation and his reputation
> has never suffered from those temporary or permanent eclipses
> which have affected the standing of so many other nineteenth-
> century authors, and this despite the fact that the size of his production is
> no more than a fragment of that of novelists such as Balzac, Zola, and
> Dickens. (x)

The image of Flaubert "invented anew" is of particular importance in that it

highlights the applicability and relevance of the author's aesthetics in current

critical trends, especially when one compares his literary production to that of

more prolific nineteenth-century authors such as Honoré de Balzac or Émile

Zola. [1] This "inexhaustible greatness" may place Flaubert scholars at a

disadvantage, due to the overwhelming amount of material available both on

Flaubert and his work. As Yvan Leclerc notes in his article "Flaubert

contemporain: bilan et perspectives": "Flaubert fait partie de ces auteurs qui

connaissent une actualité permanente et pour lesquels la bibliographie courante

s'accumule à un rythme tel qu'une vie de chercheur spécialisé ne suffit pas à

tout lire" (75). Within the protean nature of the status of Flaubert Studies, it is

not simply an issue of the inability to read everything, as Leclerc suggests, but

also reconsiderations of longstanding motifs and discursive figures in light of

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[1] Aside from his early works and vast *Correspondance*, in his lifetime Flaubert published only
four major novels: *Madame Bovary* (1857), *Salammbô* (1862), *L'Education Sentimentale*
(1869), and *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* (1874). His fifth novel, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, was
published posthumously in 1881. Flaubert also wrote a collection of short stories, entitled *Trois
Contes* (1877), which includes "Un Cœur Simple," "La Légende de Saint Julien l'hospitalier,"
and "Hérodias."

new realms of critical inquiry such as Genetics, Gender Studies, Psychoanalysis, and Postmodernism, among other theoretical stances. The research and scholarship of these approaches reflect the plurality and complexity of Flaubert's work, the effects of which are especially evident in the notion of *bovarysme*, a phenomenon that clearly continues to shape the critical reception of Flaubert's writing, especially when understood as a means to explore the self-reflective properties of language.

French philosopher Jules de Gaultier developed his conception of *bovarysme* in two primary texts: *Le Bovarysme: la psychologie dans l'œuvre de Flaubert* in 1892, and *Le Bovarysme*, a text published in 1902 which expands the earlier version to include a more in-depth examination of the notion.[2] In both versions, which were inspired directly by Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Gaultier defines *bovarysme* as "le pouvoir départi à l'homme de se concevoir autre qu'il n'est" (*Le Bovarysme,* 10), depicting the term first as a pathological and then as a philosophical phenomenon. For Gaultier, the pathological implications stem from an individual's views of and reactions to reality—in fact, potentially present in *all* individuals—resulting in "ce singulier pouvoir de métamorphose" (10), a behavior that compels an individual to conceive of him- or herself other than what he or she in fact actually is. According to Gaultier, those who display this pathological behavior imitate a model of their choosing: "Pourvus d'un

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[2] Gaultier would later return again to his consideration of *bovarysme* in his 1913 text *Le Génie de Flaubert*, in which he reaffirms his initial views of the notion alongside other philosophical and sociological interpretations, such as artistic creation, metaphysical reality, and aesthetic considerations.

caractère déterminé, ils assument un caractère différent, sous l'empire d'un enthousiasme, d'une admiration, d'un intérêt, d'une nécessité vitale" (10). For Gaultier, the notion of *bovarysme* represents an inescapable and integral part of the human condition from which all people inherently suffer.

The intrinsic nature of *bovarysme* depends largely on the individual's differentiation between the fictive and the real, a subjective form of perception that Gaultier defines as "l'indice bovaryque," a parameter which "mesure l'écart qui existe en chaque individu entre l'imaginaire et le réel, entre ce qu'il est et ce qu'il croit être" (16). The resulting discord creates a tug-of-war between these two states in which both sides vie for control. As Gaultier writes: "Tout être qui prend conscience de lui-même se conçoit par le même autre qu'il n'est. Ainsi peut-on se formuler, selon son caractère universel, cet antagonisme essentiel entre deux états, qui pourtant se conditionnent l'un l'autre…" (97). The antagonism to which Gaultier refers results from tensions that arise when an individual essentially confuses reality with fiction and attempts to fuse one with the other from an idealized, unrealistic point of view. The dual nature of the self—simultaneously of the world and distinct from it—creates a further difficulty in establishing individualization and acceptance of social norms since recognizing what truly constitutes the self is diluted within a collective social system. Therefore, the specifics of *bovarysme* are not in fact as clear as Gaultier's preliminary definition might suggest.

The dynamics of *bovarysme* have undergone subtle and substantial changes since the notion first emerged. These changes are present first within the term itself, distinguishable by two additional derivations: *bovaryste* and *bovaryque*. One of the first instances of the use of the adjective *bovaryste* was by Flaubert himself in his *Correspondance* of 1857. In two letters, Flaubert uses the term to describe those who defended *Madame Bovary* at the time it was literally put on trial. First, in a letter to his brother Achille, Flaubert writes: "Les *dames* se sont fortement mêlées de ton serviteur et frère plutôt de son livre, surtout la princesse de Beauvau, qui est une 'Bovaryste' enragée et qui a été deux fois chez l'Impératrice pour faire arrêter les poursuites (II, 667). In the second letter, addressed to Théophile Gautier, Flaubert states: "M. Abbatucci fils, qui *t'aime beaucoup*, est extrêmement prévenu en ma faveur. Un mot de toi, ce soir, aura le plus grand poids. Je suis chargé de te le dire. Tu trouveras là beaucoup de Bovarystes. Joins-toi à eux et sauve-moi, homme puissant!" (II, 676). Therefore, at its origin, the term *bovaryste* clearly has positive connotations, describing the avid supporters of Flaubert's novel. However, as critical interpretations evolved, the meanings of *bovarysme*, as well as of *bovaryste*, are later inscribed within the term *bovaryque*, an additional derivation that strongly emphasizes the psychological make-up of fictional characters, going as far as to represent a veritable disease.

In "*Bovarysme*, histoire d'une notion," Leclerc explains the advent of the term *bovaryque* as a notion possessing psychiatric implications: "le *bovaryque*

rejoint la grande famille des malades mentaux qu'il s'agit de soigner" (10). This classification, however, began to gain popularity early in the nineteenth century, as critics began to analyze human beings' perception of reality. As Jan Goldstein points out:

> Around 1800, investigators claiming scientific status and authority began to fasten their attention on the ordinary activities and the internal processes of human beings. Among the many 'human sciences' thrown up by this far-reaching development was psychiatry, the medical study and treatment of the disorders of the mind. (1)

Linking the medical connotations of the psychiatry to Gaultier's perspective, Leclerc outlines how meanings associated with *bovarysme* have changed over time, implying more than simply psychological attributes. In his definition of *bovaryque*, Leclerc invokes the relationship between the adjectival and nominative forms. He writes:

> Après les *bovarystes* qui plaident la cause du roman au moment du procès, après le *bovarysme* comme faculté commune de l'humaine condition, le XXe siècle développe toute une réflection autour d'un troisième dérivé, le *bovaryque*. Ce n'est plus une catégorie judiciaire comme en 1857, ni morale ou philosophique comme chez Gaultier. Le *bovaryque* relève de la nosologie, de la psychopathologie. Emma devient un cas clinique; elle donne son nom à des patients analysés par les psychiatres, qui caractérisent la "maladie de l'âme" étendue par Jules de Gaultier à l'homme tout entier. (9)

While current critical observations demonstrate an implied interchangeability of meaning between the three terms, Leclerc's description of *bovaryque* advances the applications of the specific term *bovarysme* into the twentieth century, while continuing to underscore its continued medical connotations. Here, the character of Emma is classified as having a disease, as evidenced by Leclerc's use of the

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term "nosologie," a term he employs based on studies such as J. Grasset's *Les demi-fous, les demis-responsables* (1907), and Genil-Perrin's *Les Paranoïaques* (1926), in which doctors conceive of Emma as an example from which to find cures for others with similar symptoms. Within this classification, Emma becomes in fact the prototype for all who indulge excessively in the power of the imagination. She represents a fictionalized portrayal of maladaptive behavior that generates a destabilization of the real. As a result, through considerations of its two primary derivations, a more complete view of the scope of *bovarysme* is discernible, particularly with regard to Gaultier, who explores the term in many of Flaubert's texts, often from a psychological viewpoint that focuses on a fictional character's relationship to the real.

In Gaultier's and Leclerc's observations and those of other critics germane to the present discussion, such as Michel Brix, Larry Riggs, and Delphine Jayot, it is often the case that *bovarysme* is explored specifically through the act of reading, a situation in which the interaction between the text and its effects in the reader's mind produces a dysfunctionality, discernable in the relation of the fictive to the real. Within this framework, the reader attempts to make of fiction a reality, a hopelessly *bovaryste* undertaking that results in the semblance of the non-real overtaking and contaminating the veracity of the real. To this end, in his article "Mal du siècle et *Bovarysme*," Brix offers a particularly useful perspective on the contaminating nature of *bovarysme* and how it can affect the act of reading:

> Le bovarysme représente un mauvais usage, voire une perversion de la lecture: au lieu de considérer les livres pour ce qu'ils sont, c'est-à-dire comme l'expression d'un point de vue particulier sur le monde, le lecteur croit à la vérité de ce qui est rapporté, même dans les romans, ou à tout le moins imagine que ce racontent les livres est valable, ou "exportable", dans sa propre existence. (97)

Here, "perversion" can be read as synonymous with "contamination", in that fictive information is altered unnaturally to conform to non-fictive expectations. Further, Brix seems to suggest that, through dissociation, the reader basically locates certain meanings in the text founded on individual desires, effectively "perverting" it and conceiving of it something other than what it might actually be, resulting in a new manner in which to approach Gaultier's meaning of "other." The text becomes the "other," that which the reader desires, promoting the belief that the mimetic illusion contained in novels can correspond to his or her corporeal reality.

While this description certainly conforms to the case of Emma Bovary, who constantly seeks real gratification from the Romantic illusions contained in the novels she reads, it is by and large not restricted to her case alone. While Emma's blindness toward her mistakes may be perceived as instinctual, or as a product of her environment, I believe that she deforms deliberately her reality according to what she reads. It is important to note that this behavior materializes in other fictional (and real) individuals who are apt to misconstrue, like Emma, the relationship between words and the mind and who pursue literature with utilitarian purposes, molding it deliberately into a means to a desired end. In this case, the effects of *bovarysme* may be viewed in relation to

the cultural climate in which the notion flourishes. In other words, an individual's particular social context may directly influence his or her mental outlook on reality. For Riggs, this particular mindset is analogous to the true definition of *bovarysme*:

> *Bovarysme* … is the attitude that fosters and is fostered by a culture of consumption. It is not to be equated precisely with the general human ability to imagine progress, or transcendence. It is the naive, historically conditioned belief that transcendence can be achieved through the consumption of literary or political communications, combined with the inability to see that such communication is produced and delivered, increasingly, by a commercially organized, all-pervasive social system. (234)

When he wrote *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert was dealing directly with this type of attitude, with the highly-charged issue of discursive propaganda. The novel was published during the Industrial Revolution, a period in which mass-printing furnished the public with ready-made materials as well as ready-made ideas (as Flaubert will portray ironically in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*), marketing its publications to the desires of the public in order to become more profitable. As Riggs points out, the illusions that lead Emma astray are still active, but they operate under different circumstances, while they continue to produce an inability to differentiate between fiction and reality.

Riggs' analysis underscores the fact that giving precedence to fictive, imaginary environments over natural ones is not limited to the fictional character of Emma. Further, the protagonist's belief that the fulfillment of her personal needs depends on the consumption of socially-produced objects is not

an isolated incident. Rather, it is a behavior that expands beyond Bovary and into modern consumerist practices. As the critic notes:

> Flaubert here puts his finger squarely on what appears still to be, today, a fundamental trait of popular culture: the purposefulness, the belief in a causal relationship between reading and a tangibly better life, with which many people read, and which is encouraged and exploited by the way in which books are marketed. Flaubert is describing, in its early stages, the process that has produced our popular literature of how-to manuals for personal growth and "creating your own reality." (232)

For the present discussion, the importance of Riggs' statement derives primarily from the belief that what one reads, or how one reads, can change one's reality. This is not to suggest that the practice of reading novels has no effect on the real world. On the contrary, fiction continues to serve as a great source of inspiration, for individuals and society. However, when no distinction is drawn between what one reads and what one experiences, this is *bovarysme* at its core, the illusion that art could actually become reality if certain criteria, no matter how difficult, can be met. This supposition invites a deeper analysis of the effects of *bovarysme*, applied as a methodological tool to reexamine the acts of reading and writing.

Jayot offers a compelling view of this application in *Madame Bovary*, as she explores how the notion influences readers of Flaubert's novel. She writes:

> Il existe indéniablement un usage "littéraire" du bovarysme. On peut très bien le rencontrer dans un contexte scolaire, harnaché à Emma Bovary et à l'étude du roman, comme dans des ouvrages de critique littéraire. Il est, en effet, devenu un topos de l'histoire de la littérature, de son enseignement, et jouit également d'une certaine autorité au sein de la critique. (18)

From this perspective, *bovarysme* can be seen as a critical lens through which readers may explore both Emma's behavior and their own reactions to the novel, as well as a reconsideration of the act of reading. Again, according to Jayot: "Quelles que soient les orientations théoriques qui l'accompagnent, on peut dire que le bovarysme sert l'interprétation de *Madame Bovary* et de son personnage éponyme" (18). Here, Flaubert's novel may be interpreted ultimately through the reader's own *bovarysme*, resulting in the recurrence in other, more contemporary readers of the same pitfalls inherent in Emma's reading habits, thereby "contaminating" a reading passed on to future generations. Leclerc posits this particular relationship between the reader and the text as a synthesis of Emma's reading habits that all readers necessarily imitate, often without clear awareness of the implications of their interpretation. Referencing Daniel Pennac's 1992 text, *Comme un roman*, Leclerc states: "Madame Bovary, c'est nous. Le *bovarysme* est une MTT, une maladie textuellement transmissible" ("Bovarysme," 11). This notion, while incorporating both medical and literary inferences, brings considerable expansion to the trope of reading, due to the intertextual echoes discernible in virtually all texts. In this case, *bovarysme* and literature intertwine, the association of Emma's reading fuses with that of the modern individual, and Flaubert's writing sets an example against which future writers measure themselves. As Leclerc points out:

> L'"autre" de Gaultier, c'est en nous la part de la fiction. Le *bovarysme* autant que le *donquichottisme*, se confond avec la littérature, puisqu'on pourrait présenter l'intertexte comme le pouvoir départi au texte de se

concevoir autre qu'il n'est…. En ce sens, la figure d'Emma incarne la littérature toute entière. ("Bovarysme," 11)

Indeed, it is true that the lineage from Cervantes to Flaubert is well documented, positing a perspective in which the fictional Emma is interpreted as an image of a feminized Quixote whose search for passion and luxury leads to a conflation of fact and fiction.[3] As Victor Brombert explains: "As for Emma's reactions to the books she reads, the image of a female Quixote comes to mind. She too transmutes reality into fiction. Here, as in Cervantes' novel, literature itself becomes one of the strongest determinants" (54). However, Leclerc takes the consideration of *bovarysme* in a different direction. Not only does the notion affect individuals, but it can also exist on a purely textual level, in the writing itself. What is at stake in fact is a consideration of the reactions between readers and the text, as well as the reaction of the text to itself, highlighting the self-reflexivity of the writing in proportion to "other" linguistic phenomena such as intertextuality, parody, and pastiche.

As the variety of these studies indicates, *bovarysme* is not just psychological, nor is it simply medical, or even literary, but rather it incorporates the characteristics of all three realms of inquiry. Consequently, while useful as a point of departure, in large part Gaultier's definition focuses finally only on the psychology of the fictional character and does not extend the notion's implications further, such as into the realm of literary art. I propose to

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[3] For a detailed analysis of the relationships between *Don Quixote* and *Madame Bovary*, see Soledad Fox, *Flaubert and Don Quixote: The Influence of Cervantes on Madame Bovary* (Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2008).

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determine, then, if his definition of *bovarysme* might apply to writing. Can language conceive of itself as other than what it is? Within this framework, I explore the possibility of a textualized *bovarysme* that reaches beyond *Bovary*, colors the tone of other Flaubert texts, and delves into a more general sphere of language. The present study examines a variety of aspects inherent in the possibility of this application, as I expand the notion of *bovarysme* beyond the female protagonist of Emma Bovary into a linguistic and semantic realm. By moving from the description of a fictional creation to the examination of a more global concept, conceived as a methodological tool, I investigate *bovarysme* as an ideological stance towards the art of literature as well as a theoretical literary technique, applicable far beyond Flaubert's own corpus. I argue that it can serve effectively as a critical lens through which literary texts can be productively analyzed. Further, I suggest that Flaubert takes a particular stance on the acts of reading and writing through the image of "la lecture *bovaryque*" as well as through his ironic use of clichés, *idées reçues*, and the idea of *bêtise*.

Chapter One: *Madame Bovary* and "La Maladie de la lecture"

Published first in serial form in the *Revue de Paris* in 1856, *Madame Bovary* remains an extraordinarily popular novel and continues to yield fresh insights into Flaubert's general aesthetic principles. Interpretations of the work are extensive and demonstrate the enduring presence of *Madame Bovary*, as well as the degree to which Flaubert's text has influenced critical thought both in France and elsewhere.[1] Among the numerous methodological perspectives surrounding the dynamics of the novel, much analysis has been given to contextualizing *Madame Bovary* within the larger scope of the antithesis posited at times between the literary movements of Realism and Romanticism. Approaches to Flaubert are discernible from both perspectives and, in fact, given that from a historical viewpoint, it is evident that French literature of the 1850s witnessed a decline of Romanticism and the beginnings of Realism, this aesthetic shift may well have influenced Flaubert's writing generally, as well as the specific depiction of his eponymous heroine—Emma Bovary—in fiction.

Whether Flaubert can ultimately be said to embody a Realist or Romantic author might remain forever an elusive, and probably unnecessary, question. Yet the desire to associate him with one or both of these literary movements continues to impact studies on his art. As Bernard Doering points

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[1] In addition to the critical approaches to which I refer in the present study, other works to consult are, for example: Claire Addison, *Where Flaubert Lies: Chronology, Mythology and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Mary Orr, *Flaubert: Writing the Masculine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Matthew MacNamara, *La Textualisation de Madame Bovary* (New York: Rodopi, 2003), Jonathan Culler, *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty* (Aurora: The Davies Group, 2006), and Eric Le Calvez, *Genèses flaubertiennes* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009).

out, "almost every book written about Gustave Flaubert has in some way or another commented on his vacillation between Romanticism and Realism" (1). Doering's focus on the trope of "vacillation" is key because, while *Madame Bovary* may be persuasively interpreted as an exemplar of Realist or Romantic fiction, to state that Flaubert is fully a practitioner of either stance necessarily overlooks a large part of the author's richly complex writing, while it oversimplifies the multiplicity of his aesthetics. As Murray Sachs observes: "The commonest means by which critics have tried to resolve this diversity and incoherence in Flaubert's work has been to reduce it to a duality in his nature" (65). In my view, this incoherence signals a welcome polyvalence and calls attention to the futility of classifying Flaubert or his works in any single theoretical school. Moreover, as Marc Redfield notes, the issue of Flaubert's adherence to any given artistic perspective is uniquely complex:

> Même en nous limitant à *Madame Bovary*, roman "réaliste" exemplaire, nous serons inévitablement amenés à adopter d'autres vocabulaires. Certes, les personnages du roman sont décrits avec une finesse que la critique flaubertienne a toujours su apprécier. Mais le thème, le *sens* du livre s'impose avec une force d'abstraction qui nous pousse habituellement vers de grandes phrases totalisantes, nous encourageant à méditer sur "l'écart entre l'imagination et le réel", à transformer "Bovary" en "isme" et à trouver incarnée en Emma, comme le fait Jules de Gaultier, une "exagération pathologique" de la "faculté essentielle" de l'homme: "le pouvoir … de se concevoir autre qu'il n'est." (333)

The dynamics of Flaubert's Romantic and Realist tendencies can be understood to converge in the character of Emma, specifically through her Romantic longings that clash with the harshly banal realities of her station in life. She possesses at once dreamily romanticized views of reality, passion, and love,

while remaining hopelessly ensconced in the petit bourgeois mediocrity of her time. Further, Redfield's allusion to *bovarysme* highlights Emma's position as a literary character torn between two distinct spheres—the imaginary and the real—as she partakes consistently of both.

In *Madame Bovary*, the relationship of these spheres creates a state of fluctuation in Flaubert's writing, reflecting simultaneously characteristics of Romantic and Realist discourse. With regard to Flaubert's Romanticism, perhaps the most widely-celebrated statement interpreted as proof of his allegiance is his own phrase: "Madame Bovary, c'est moi!" Indeed, Flaubert's early writings, particularly *Novembre*, express a profound lyricism and a fatigue with society that continues to color his mature works, characteristics that unveil one aspect of the author's sensibility, a deep-seated Romantic urge. In an 1857 letter to Sainte-Beuve, Flaubert admits: "Je suis un vieux romantique enragé, ou encroûté, comme vous voudrez" (II, 710). Flaubert's comment may well suggest a possible conflict between his personality and the writer he aspires to become, in the sense suggested by Enid Starkie: "[H]e was a Romantic by nature, but a Realist or Classicist by discipline" (338).

Flaubert might also have agreed with Starkie's observation because he himself was aware of this internal clash between the two movements. For example, in an often-cited 1852 letter to Louise Colet, he writes:

> Il y a en moi, littérairement parlant, deux bonshommes distincts: un qui est épris de *gueulades*, de lyrisme, de grands vols d'aigle, de toutes les sonorités de la phrase et des sommets de l'idée; un autre qui fouille et creuse le vrai tant qu'il peut, qui aime à accuser le petit fait

aussi puisamment que le grand, qui voudrait vous faire sentir presque *matériellement* les choses qu'il reproduit; celui-là aime à rire et se plaît dans les animalités de l'homme. (II, 30)

This self-analysis occurs four years before the publication of Flaubert's first novel, and his description reflects both a personal conflict and an outline of his aesthetic doctrine. In fact, from one point of view, the ambivalent presence of both Romantic and Realist elements in his authorly sensibility contributes directly to the creative force of *Madame Bovary*, as well as to subsequent texts. As Sachs affirms: "This fusion is already in evidence in *Madame Bovary*, and after *Madame Bovary* each of Flaubert's works tends to be a seamless synthesis of the two tendencies" (66). To realize this synthesis, Flaubert appears to have understood clearly the essential balance between these two facets of his artistry: "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)" (II, 57). His statement implies that he recognizes the ambivalence ultimately necessary to reconcile himself to his writing. Further, his words represent a subtle acknowledgement of a deliberate attempt to join Romantic sentimentality and Realist ideology into a single, unified narrative.

To the malaise that Flaubert may well have felt toward his own nature as a human being, one might also add the Romantic leitmotif of *Ubi Sunt*, writing as he was with nostalgic Romantic impulses in a Realist era, a predicament Starkie formulates as conventionally unbecoming of an author of Flaubert's day:

"It must also be remembered that, after 1850, it was impossible for a serious writer to remain a Romantic writer, for the products of the movement had become perfectly discredited and worn-out and were only imitated by the poorest writers" (337). Certainly, Flaubert's friends Louis Bouilhet and Maxime DuCamp understood the declining status of French Romantic literature at this time, as well as the dangers of their friend's apparent adhererence to the tenets of the movement. As a result, they recommended that he choose a down-to-earth subject more akin to the topoi of Balzac's novels. In *Souvenirs Littéraires*, DuCamp recounts the encounter that eventually results in the creation of *Madame Bovary*. After Flaubert reads aloud *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* to Bouilhet and DuCamp, the latter describes the ensuing discussion:

> Bouilhet était timide, mais nul ne se montrait plus ferme que lui dans l'expression de sa pensée, lorsqu'il a décidé à la faire connaître; il répondait: "Nous pensons qu'il faut jeter cela au feu et n'en jamais reparler." Flaubert fit un bond et poussa un cri d'horreur. (109)

Flaubert's "cri d'horreur," while open to diverse analyses, may represent a reaction to what the author intuited as a reconsideration of his aesthetic position. As a point of departure, Bouilhet and DuCamp offered Flaubert the specific example of Balzac: "Prends un sujet terre à terre, quelque chose come *La Cousine Bette*, comme *Le Cousin Pons*, de Balzac…" (111). This recommendation represents an arduous task that Flaubert, according to DuCamp, viewed as a kind of catharsis: "[I]l m'a parlé de cette causerie et m'a dit: 'J'étais envahi par le cancer du lyrisme, vous m'avez opéré; il n'était que temps, mais j'en ai crié de douleur'" (111). He eventually chooses a scenario

based on a *fait divers* about the wife of Eugène Delamare, and yet we know that Flaubert remained in the end opposed to a Realist label.[2] In an 1876 letter to George Sand, he declares: "Et notez que j'exècre ce qu'on est convenu d'appeler le *réalisme*, bien qu'on m'en fasse un des pontifes" (V, 12). However, Flaubert's antipathy toward Realism does not necessarily suggest that the movement is totally absent from his work.

Stephen Heath remarks that *Madame Bovary* was composed during the "emergence of 'realism' as an important literary and artistic term" (28), as he defines the aesthetic as a movement that draws on social inferences with the aim of revealing an objective truth. Yet it is important to note that Flaubert's well-known disdain for his milieu also influenced the composition of *Madame Bovary* and the author suggests that the novel was written in fact in reaction to Realist theory: "On me croit épris du réel, tandis que je l'exècre. Car c'est en effet en haine du réalisme que j'ai entrepris ce roman" (II, 643). Flaubert does not direct his scorn only at Realism per se, but also at the culture that engenders it. As Heath observes:

> The hatred of realism is a hatred of the reality it represents…. [T]he paradoxal force of Flaubert's writing is then that realism, development and critique of romanticism, is itself equally subject to critique; the movement of disillusionment from romanticism to realism is also for him just as much a refusal of any of the illusions *of the latter*, of any of realism's social, progressive purpose: realism is as execrable as the reality it knows and depicts, is caught in the surrounding stupidity, the general fetidness. (30)

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[2] According to DuCamp, it was Bouilhet who gave Flaubert the recommendation to write about Delamare, but DuCamp discreetly changed the name from Delmare to Delaunay. For further reference to the concern for veracity in DuCamp's choice, see Claudine Gothot-Mersch, *La Genèse de Madame Bovary* (Paris: José Corti, 1966).

Out of disdain for a outmoded Romanticism and a distaste for Realism's equivalency of art and the quotidian real emerges *Madame Bovary*, a novel situated on the threshold of both movements, invoking a dual position described by Heath as "the very situation of his writing" (31).

Despite a disparaging attitude toward Realism, clearly Flaubert's aesthetic practices highlight nonetheless certain characteristic aspects of the movement, particularly with regard to his attention to detail and his quest for objectivity. Indeed, the specificity of Flaubert's prose and the well-documented research that the author conducted in the creation of his novels demonstrates a Realist-influenced immersion in his subject matter. For instance, in an 1853 letter to Colet, Flaubert alludes to the adulterous scene between Emma and Rodolphe when he writes:

> Aujourd'hui par exemple, homme et femme tout ensemble, amant et maîtresse à la fois, je me suis promené à cheval dans une forêt, par un après-midi d'automne, sous des feuilles jaunes, et j'étais les chevaux, les feuilles, le vent, les paroles qu'ils se disaient et le soleil rouge qui faisait s'entre-fermer leurs paupières noyées d'amour. (II, 483-84)

While this passage exudes Romantic discourse and topoi, it demonstrates equally Flaubert's empirical approach, as well as his interest in the Realist techniques of detail and documentation. Much like a scientific researcher taking notes in the field before positing a hypothesis and drawing a conclusion, Flaubert bases his premises on real-life experiences, communicating them through a style in which, as he writes, "l'auteur, dans son œuvre, doit être comme Dieu dans l'univers, présent partout, et visible nulle part" (II, 204).

Flaubert aims explicitly to keep an objective stance in his work and to avoid intervening in the development of his characters. As B.F. Bart points out:

> Flaubert strove for an impartiality which would allow the facts, presented in a style in harmony with them, to determine the reader's reaction and his final judgement. One critical element in that reaction and judgment is the aesthetic distance for the reader, which is in turn a reflection of Flaubert's own attitude toward the material…. The various aspects of the problem are typified in a recurrent theme of the novel, the effect upon Emma of her reading in the convent in her youth and the parade of romantic visions which she created from them. (1112)

Bart's passage is key on two levels. First, Flaubert's emphasis on style and objectivity draws attention to the importance of the writing, as well as to the intrinsic value of the act of reading. Second, this relationship alters the readers' perception of Emma in that her readings provide the principal guidepost for her life while orienting as well the readers' direction in the novel itself. The irony present in the depiction of Emma's dreams in the convent informs the novel and purposefully directs our attention toward the effects of her reading habits.

In order for Flaubert to remain aloof from intervening directly into the story, he equips the reader with a fixed point of reference—Emma Bovary—for whom an essential activity throughout the novel is the reading of Romantic fiction. Interestingly, as we read *Madame Bovary*, we realize that we are reading Emma reading, a process in which she becomes both subject of the novel and object of critical inquiry. In other words, readers ultimately base their opinions of Emma as a fictional character largely on her desire to transpose what she reads onto the reality she lives. Within this framework, the present discussion investigates specifically Emma's reading strategies that underscore Gaultier's

formulation of *bovarysme* as "le pouvoir départi à l'homme de se concevoir autre qu'il n'est" (10), while illustrating Flaubert's general conception of the acts of reading and writing. The relationship between how Emma reads and why she does so will show that Flaubert constructs his heroine as an example of misreading, as he underscores its subsequent effects on literary art.

The image of Emma reading is so important to the integrity of the project that Flaubert devotes an entire chapter to its unfolding. Chapter Six of the novel describes the convent in which Emma's sentimentality will surface dramatically, establishing patterns that will influence her fate throughout the text. At first, Emma conforms happily to her new surroundings:

> Loin de s'ennuyer au couvent les premiers temps, elle se plut dans la société des bonnes sœurs, qui, pour l'amuser, la conduisaient dans la chapelle, où l'on pénétrait du réfectoire par un long corridor. Elle jouait fort peu durant les récréations, comprenait bien le catéchisme, et c'est elle qui répondait toujours à M. le vicaire, dans les questions difficiles. (59)

Flaubert's use of the imperfect tense reinforces the habitual, nostalgic nature of daily events that Emma initially accepts without incident. From this description, the teenage Emma seems the epitome of good behavior and appears to be genuinely happy. But, ironically, the convent also embodies the context in which Emma develops the character traits that chiefly define her later in life: manipulation, deceit, greed and, as I will demonstrate, very poor reading habits.

The beginning of the chapter also emphasizes Emma's development as a character, as well as her voracious reading of the most celebrated Romantic novels: "Elle avait lu *Paul et Virginie* et elle avait rêvé la maisonnette de

bambous, le nègre Domingo, le chien Fidèle, mais surtout l'amitié douce de quelque bon petit frère…" (59). The twin statements of "elle avait lu" and "elle avait rêvé" situate Emma's penchant for associating reading with dreaming, an inclination that slowly permeates her entire reality. During mass, for example, Emma's attention wanes and, "au lieu de suivre la messe, elle regardait dans son livre les vignettes pieuses bordées d'azur" (60); later, when she goes to confession, again she allows her mind to wander: "Les comparaisons de fiancé, d'amant céleste et de mariage éternel qui reviennent dans les sermons lui soulevaient au fond de l'âme des douceurs inattendues" (60). Her reactions conceptualize the book as a sensual object as she reads physically what she yearns for into "les vignettes pieuses," transposing psychologically her desires onto what she hears. Instead of listening to a religious sermon to gain moral instruction, she relates it to her own secret, sensual aspirations, a misinterpretation of a textual meaning that will mark her character throughout the novel. As Emma's reading of religious doctrine demonstrates, it is not divine inspiration she feels, but the sparking of her own desires. Susanna Lee notes: "It is not God who is within, just Emma. So is it that Emma … is closed to religion and faith—a closure that will stand as the foundation for subsequent spiritual failures" (205). God remains outside as Emma places her faith only in her own desires, underscoring her intensely personal appropriation of the sacred into that of the profane, a habit that will pervade her troubled life in many ways. Further, as Brombert suggests:

> Her private symbolism of love, mysticism and death is determined by this experience. The "mystic languor" provoked by the incense, the whisperings of the priest, the very metaphors comparing Christ to a celestial love, predispose her to confuse sensuous delights with spiritual longings. (54)

The literary models that project idealistic images into Emma's consciousness begin with religious references, and will condition her behavior in key parts of the novel, such as the ball at Vaubyessard and the *comices agricoles*. As Brombert's comments suggest, Emma misreads religious discourse, interpreting the spiritual through the lens of the sensual. Emma's reading here is inherently *bovaryste* in that she conceives of religion as something other, as a potentially malleable recourse in opposition to the ordinariness of the convent.

Indeed, the mediocrity and boredom of Emma's reality is brought into focus through her own spiritual emptiness. Her failure to find solace in religion leads her to shift her gaze elsewhere—choosing the illusions in the Romantic novels she reads, or rather misreads—to fill the interior void she feels in relation to the outside world. Emma succumbs to the temptation to seek emotional gratification over spiritual fulfillment, supplementing fantasy for the solace of God. In fact, as Charles Baudelaire affirms in his 1857 article, "*Madame Bovary par Gustave Flaubert*," "…elle substituait dans son âme au Dieu véritable le Dieu de sa fantaisie, le Dieu de l'avenir et du hasard, un Dieu de vignette..." (481). Here, Baudelaire's comments on Emma's penchant for substitution point to the force of her desires usurping the place of Holy Scripture. Therefore, the passion Emma derives from reading is not one of piety but of perniciousness.

Yet how does reading contribute to this flaw? To state simply that Emma reads Romantic literature does not take into account the indirect associations possible between how and what she comprehends. For instance, in the convent, Emma fabricates an education of escapism into novels, becoming a devout student of the word, but not the Word. Aside from *Paul et Virginie*, Emma also has obligatory religious readings:

> Le soir, avant la prière, on faisait dans l'étude une lecture religieuse. C'était, pendant la semaine, quelque résumé d'Histoire sainte ou les *Conférences* de l'abbé Frayssinous, et, le dimanche, des passages du *Génie du Christianisme*, par récréation. (60)

Both texts in this passage participate in Romantic sentimentality, glorifying new sources of inspiration and celebrating the divine beauty of nature. However, these features equally suggest an ironic reading by Flaubert of the Romantic obsession with idealized nature, a tone that also enhances the narrator's conclusions about Emma's reactions to these texts: "Mais elle connaissait trop la campagne; elle savait le bêlement des troupeaux, les laitages, les charrues. Habituée aux aspects calmes, elle se tournait au contraire vers les accidentés" (60). While both Chateaubriand and Frayssinous depict in their works a combination of Romantic sentimentality and religious zeal, Emma already recognizes the religious component from the convent and understands the often harsh realities of nature from her rural upbringing. She thus casts aside these texts in favor of "accidentés," a term synonymous with mobility, a notion which, instead of inciting religious feeling, appeals to her yearnings to break out of her

mundane existence.[3] As Flaubert writes: "Il fallait qu'elle pût retirer des choses une sorte de profit personnel; et elle rejetait comme inutile tout ce qui ne contribuait pas à la consommation immédiate de son cœur" (60). Thus, through a reference to "les accidentés," Flaubert establishes an engaging dichotomy between stagnation and movement.

Clearly, Emma desires the opposite of her prosaic country lifestyle and chooses an alternate, *bovaryste* conception of herself from the novels she reads. For Brombert, the contradictions between these two spheres "emphasize the basic theme of incompatibility. Their implicit tensions stress a fundamental state of *divorce* at all levels of existence" (53). The greatest degree of separation in Emma's character lies in the rupture between the imaginary and the real, perceived as a parallel analogous to the notion of limitation. Throughout the novel, Emma is caught between the claustration of her social position and the freedom of her imagination. She desires movement, both emotional and physical, as opposed to the stagnant complacency of the convent. As she declares: "…mais le dérangement m'amuse, j'aime à changer de place" (111). Certainly, then, the convent represents a significant force in Emma's struggle between the conflicting spheres of imposed seclusion and her wish for escapism.

Aside from the aforementioned examples, the forbidden texts read in secret by the older girls in the convent divulge Emma's idealized view of

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[3] The *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française* explains that the term "accidentés," "apparaît au milieu du XIXe siècle en littérature pour 'rendre accidenté' et au figuré 'rendre mouvementé'."

passion, as they represent a double move away from religion, further undermining the religious influence in favor of the secular:

> Ce n'était qu'amours, amants, amantes, dames persécutées s'évanouissant dans des pavillons solitaires, postillons qu'on tue à tous les relais, chevaux qu'on crève à toutes les pages, forêts sombres, troubles du cœur, serments, sanglots, larmes et baisers, nacelles au clair de lune, rossignols dans les bosquets.... Elle aurait voulu vivre dans quelque vieux manoir, comme ces châtelaines au long corsage qui, sous le trèfle des ogives, passaient leurs jours, le coude sur la pierre et le menton dans la main, à regarder venir du fond de la campagne un cavalier à plume blanche qui galope sur un cheval noir. (60-61)

Even from within the boundaries of the convent's walls, Emma replaces the image of devotion with those that correspond to her inner desires. These texts read in private convey a passion essential in understanding Emma's *bovaryste* inclinations. She identifies wholly with the heroines contained in these novels, a connection that renders her character doubly fictional and creates a sort of *mise en abyme* that prefigures her cyclical repetitions later in the novel. Also, the "ne...que" limitation contained in "Ce n'était qu'amours..." further emphasizes the hyperbolic list of images—similar to dictionary entries[4]—intextricably linked to the different, fragmentary models that populate Emma's mind and from which she will attempt to fashion her reality, a mimetic gesture through which she will become ultimately an imitator of imitation.[5] Further, as Heath confirms, the descriptive detail of this passage provides an unobstructed view of how and what Emma reads: "Thus is Emma plunged into romance, her head

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[4] More analysis is given to the concept of cyclical repetition later in the chapter, particularly in relation to René Girard's notion of triangular desire.

[5] A more in-depth analysis of the discursive figure of the encyclopedic entry will be addressed in Chapter Two: "*Bouvard et Pécuchet*: The Caging of the Parrot."

filled with tears, kisses, boats in the moonlight, young men in short cloaks, turtledoves in Gothic cages…. [T]his is *her* reading, her perception of these novels and their world" (73). Emma is indeed "plunged into romance," but what also emerges is the distinctly subjective relationship between words and the mind that results in her continuous inability to differentiate between fiction and reality. From a psychological perspective, the conflict between what Emma reads and how she lives results in a sentiment of insubordination.

While in the convent, Emma stimulates her imagination with Romantic fiction, a choice that, for Ana-Isabel Aliaga-Buchenau, represents a revolt bound up in the act of reading:

> Emma's rebellion against the rules of the convent reflects itself in the forbidden activity of reading, which proves pivotal in her character's development. The reading habit that she acquires in the convent as an act of rebellion against her education there serves her throughout her short life. (98)

It is not just the rules of the cloister against which Emma rebels, but especially the seclusion and detachment that it represents to her. The freedom expressed in the Romantic textual images she consumes engrains in her the idea that true happiness lies surely in another place, "comme une plante particulière au sol et qui pousse mal tout autre part" (65). Obviously, her readings have engendered a conception of the world to which the conventional religious community cannot correspond. As Heath notes: "Books suggest a reality to her that must thus exist somewhere else; which is where she wants to be, seeking to fuse reading and existence and so, in fact, losing herself in reverie and illusion" (75).

Consequently, Emma soon tires of the confining environment of the cloister and she rebels against the community:

> Cet esprit positif au milieu de ses enthousiasmes, qui avait aimé l'église pour ses fleurs, la musique pour les paroles des romances, et la littérature pour ses excitations passionnelles, s'insurgeait devant les mystères de la foi, de même qu'elle s'irritait davantage contre la discipline, qui était quelque chose d'antipathique à sa constitution. (64)

Emma's strong attraction to the temptation of external stimuli is bound up in her desire to escape a lifestyle that is contrary to her most basic disposition. It is not surpising, then, that when her father takes her from the convent, the community's reaction is one of relief: "Quand son père la retira de la pension, on ne fut point fâché de la voir partir. La supérieure trouvait même qu'elle était devenue, dans les derniers temps, peu révérencieuse envers la communauté" (64).

At this moment, Emma's stay in the cloister has come full circle. The expression "dans les derniers temps," when juxtaposed to "les premiers temps" (59), provides closure for Emma's religious education, announcing both her return to society, as well as her arrival into adulthood. For Emma, the "pension" had become a prison in which she passed the time by reading. However, her reading habits both in and outside of the convent's walls belie symptoms of a profound naiveté through which Emma opts for emotional content over artistic quality, espousing the illusion that the opposing spheres of fiction and reality should, or even can, coincide. Christopher Prendergast observes that the Flaubertian naive reader:

will (mis-)recognise, and possibly identify with a literary stereotype; his attitude to the hero will parallel the hero's attitude to his own literary models, and will thus be caught in the same trap of taking a purely literal textual construction for reality. (189)

Although Prendergast does not explicitly mention *bovarysme* in this passage, his description recalls its characteristics, and his observations reveal an untrained and potentially dangerous way of viewing literature, an attitude that affects all of Emma's readings and that pervades virtually every facet of her life. As Riggs has noted: "Emma's early reading habits and their general effect on her character are evident. It is important to notice, however, that her degeneration is accompanied and accelerated, as well as started, by reading" (231). The "degeneration" to which Riggs alludes establishes a basic pattern of failure for Emma throughout the novel, a form of repetition that Ross Chambers addresses when he writes of Emma: "She seems not to realize that in trying to escape banality and in searching for something 'new' she is only condemning herself to an existence of repetitions" (176).[6] Emma's repeated failures to find true happiness create a feeling of circularity because after each failure, she begins the quest anew. The systematics of this process may further be approached fruitfully through René Girard's notion of "le désir triangulaire," which suggests that the desire of the subject, real or imaginary, is reflected in the mediator.

For Girard, desire is not straightforward, but is represented as a triangle formed by the trio of the subject, the mediator, and the object of the desire. In order to attain the object, the subject must first pass through the mediator.

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[6] I address more fully the notion of repetition as a key figure in Flaubert's aesthetic practices in Chapter Two, "*Bouvard et Pécuchet*: The Caging of the Parrot."

According to Girard: "Emma Bovary désire à travers les héroïnes romantiques dont elle a l'imagination remplie. Les œuvres médiocres qu'elle a dévorées pendant son adolescence ont détruit en elle toute spontanéité" (14). As Girard demonstrates, Emma's reading habits provide an interesting example of triangular desire. Emma (the subject) desires an idealized reality (the object), which is filtered and gauged through the Romantic novels she reads (the mediator). The fictional heroines in these texts constitute a locus for Emma's desires, producing an inherent conflict between the idealized object and the fictionalized mediator that results in recurrent patterns of failure throughout the novel.

The inaccessible nature of Emma's desires is governed by Girard's mediator, which remains present and keeps the triangle intact. As Girard aptly remarks: "L'objet change avec chaque aventure, mais le triangle demeure" (12). Indeed, regardless of Emma's choice of object—Tostes, Yonville, Léon, or Rodolphe—she cannot breach the insurmountable distance between herself and the mediator, thus failure always looms on the horizon. At Vaubyessard, she comes the closest to the reality she has coveted for years. Girard explains:

> Emma se rapproche encore du médiateur lors du bal chez les Vaubyessard; elle pénètre dans le saint des saints et contemple l'idole face à face. Mais ce rapprochement restera fugitif. Jamais Emma ne pourra désirer ce que désirent les incarnations de son "idéal"; jamais elle ne pourra rivaliser avec celles-ci; jamais elle ne partira pour Paris. (17)

This scene of false plenitude represents the moment when Emma embodies perhaps most fully the notion of *bovarysme*. At Vaubyessard she witnesses the

realization of the visions she has gleaned from her readings, only to have them dissipate afterward with the return to her hackneyed lifestyle. During all the excitement, she indulges completely in her fantasy: "Emma fit sa toilette avec la conscience méticuleuse d'une actrice à son début" (75), we read. In many ways, the most invasive obstacle tethering her to the banality of the real is Charles, a foolish gadfly to whom Emma openly displays her annoyance: "Charles vint l'embrasser sur l'épaule.—Laisse-moi! dit-elle, tu me chiffonnes" (75). The swirling, dizzying movements of the dancing hypnotize Emma to such a point that even when the servant breaks the plate glass window and she comes face to face with the harsh platitude of her own rural world, this former life "s'évanouissait tout entière, et elle doutait presque de l'avoir vécue" (78).

Additionally, the cyclical attributes of Girard's triangular desire may be enhanced through George Poulet's analysis of the motif of the circle in *Madame Bovary*; he refers explicitly to Emma's reactions during the ball:

> Elle a dansé dans les bras d'un vicomte dont les airs parisiens l'ont troublée…. [R]etenons ces girations physiques qui sont comme une préfiguration des girations mentales que vont décrire ensuite les pensées d'Emma … cependant, à partir du point de chute, une infinité de cercles vont se former dans l'imagination d'Emma. (394)

For Poulet, the swirling movement of the dancing creates powerful concentric circles that pervade the novel and serve as a rich metaphor. Whereas Girard formulates the mediator through the image of the triangle, Poulet employs circles and contends that, much like a stone thrown into a pool, the interconnectedness of each circle affects future episodes, seen as variations that

emphasize at once the continuity and discontinuity of Emma's reality. For example, her continual pursuit of Romantic ideals creates a feeling of disconnect, because reality always intervenes and the circle begins again. Poulet's theory indicates how, even when the stimuli of Emma's outside world, such as the ball, are absent, she continuously replays the images in her imagination, producing a cyclical repetition represented by the metaphor of the circle (which adds yet another dimension to the cycle of failure she experiences throughout). To her chagrin, the ball ends and Emma must return to everyday life: "Mais elle grelottait de froid. Elle se déshabilla et se blottit entre les draps, contre Charles qui dormait" (80). Briefly, in her husband's corporeal warmth, Emma locates an actual site that corresponds perfectly to her desires. However, she soon recalls the immense distance between her world and the world she fancies, and tries vainly to sustain the illusion: "elle faisait des efforts pour se tenir éveillée, afin de prolonger l'illusion de cette vie luxueuse qu'il lui faudra tout à l'heure abandonner" (80). The ball and what happens afterward with Charles characterize Poulet's notion of "le point de chute," in that Emma's real view of reality fails to correspond to her exceptional inner experience, a perspective Girard addresses in his discussion as two distinct types of mediation: internal and external. He writes:

> Les œuvres romanesques se groupent donc en deux catégories fondamentales—à l'intérieur desquelles on peut multiplier à l'infini les distinctions secondaires. Nous parlerons de *médiation externe* lorsque la distance est suffisante pour que les deux spheres de *possibles* dont le médiateur et le sujet occupent chacun le centre ne soient pas en contact. Nous parlerons de *médiation interne* lorsque cette même distance est

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assez réduite pour que les deux sphères pénètrent plus ou moins profondément l'une dans l'autre. (18)

At risk of oversimplifying, one might usefully recast Girard's description this way: in external mediation, the distance between the desiring subject and the object of the desire is so great that the attainment of the object remains forever impossible. This is the case for Emma, whose objects of desire are imaginary Romantic illusions that exist only in a virtual sphere. In internal mediation, the possibility does exist for the two spheres to interact, raising the probability of attaining the object of the desire. This is the case of other literary characters, such as Stendhal's Julien Sorel, who, while he is never able to attain the public image of Napolean, does gain access to the upper class, a realization achieved through the internal mediator of Mathilde. Yet unlike Julien who possesses both an internal and external mediator, Emma's focus remains uniquely exterior, in Girard's sense, dissolving any possible unification of the subject and object.

Purely illusory, Emma's triangular desire produces a simulated reality with no real referent, shaped primarily through the mediator. For Girard, this type of communication alters the object's status: "Le prestige du médiateur se communique à l'objet désiré et confère à ce dernier une valeur illusoire. Le désir triangulaire est le désir qui transfigure son objet" (25). The example of Emma at the ball reinforces Girard's statement because the event momentarily transforms her conventional lifestyle into comforting illusion. The distasteful scene of the old man eating exemplifies this transfiguration. The narrator describes him as "courbé sur son assiette remplie et la serviette nouée dans le dos comme un

enfant … laissant tomber de sa bouche des gouttes de sauce" (76). However, through Emma's eyes and Flaubert's characteristic irony, the description of a decrepit old man metamorphoses into a manifestation of Romantic imagery. With naïve enthusiasm, Emma exclaims: "Il avait vécu à la Cour et couché dans le lit des reines!" (75). Instead of viewing the old man as he really is, Emma mentally projects a prefabricated illusion onto his image based on her hyperbolic desires, engendering a *bovaryste* substitution in which Emma adjusts the view of herself to compensate for the variance of objects. In other words, the reality of the objects around Emma does not change, but through external mediation, she alters dramatically her self-perception in relation to these objects.

Emma's transformations of herself and her surroundings represent an integral part of Gaultier's discussion of *bovarysme*, in that her behavior varies according to the specific appearance she wishes to emulate. An illustration of this conduct occurs later in the novel, when she attempts to convince Léon that she has traveled to the sea: "Je ne trouve rien d'admirable comme les soleils couchants, reprit-elle, mais au bord de la mer, surtout" (112). Here, Emma reaffirms her *bovaryste* inclinations by projecting a false image of herself to Léon. The text informs the reader only of Emma's rural upbringing and it remains thus quite unlikely that she has ever visited the seaside. In an additional occurrence of the central notion of mimesis, her words repeat images fabricated from her mind, grounded in illusions from her readings that she then reproduces to Léon.

In Gaultier's view, this hyper-sensitive reaction toward reality produces "ce singulier pouvoir de métamorphose" (17), a behavior in which Emma conceives of herself as other, as she takes on "un caractère différent" (13). Further, Gaultier calculates the distance between the models Emma emulates and her actual social position through "l'indice bovaryque," a parameter that measures "l'écart qui existe en chaque individu entre l'imaginaire et le réel, entre ce qu'il est et ce qu'il croit être" (16). Emma's specific degree of *bovarysme* is thus measured in the distance between who she really is (the wife of a country doctor), and the person she aspires to be (a great lady). To this end, Emma's reading determines her misreading of life. Instead of using literature to ameliorate her reality in a constructive way, she proceeds unwaveringly to base her real actions on fictional representations, a type of reading Christophe Ippolito describes as "identification reading":

> Whether we are dealing with a Romantic hero or not, identification reading is based on the recognition of stereotypes…. [S]uch a reading is undoubtedly a poor reading, and in fact, most Flaubertian characters are represented as poor readers, their misreadings consequently have an effect on the narrative's development, its unfolding, and its overall reading. (*Narrative Memory,* 46)

In Emma's case, she misconstrues with unfortunate ease the fictive images she reads as real possibilities: "elle le savourait sans remords, sans inquiétude, sans trouble" (204). Her poor reading denotes strong, *bovaryste* connotations since she essentially (mis)identifies herself as something other than what she is by hoping to escape reality through fiction and by compromising, among other aspects, her social role as wife.

When Emma begins to neglect her household duties, Charles' mother quips: "Ah! elle s'occupe! À quoi donc? À lire des romans, de mauvais livres, des ouvrages qui sont contre la religion et dans lesquels on se moque des prêtres par des discours tirés de Voltaire" (164). Worried about the effects of Emma's behavior on Charles' reputation, she decides to forbid Emma from reading altogether. She even goes so far as to tell the bookseller in Rouen that Emma would no longer be a customer and, afterward, she remarks: "N'aurait-on pas le droit d'avertir la police, si le libraire persistait quand même dans son métier d'empoisonneur?" (164). Certainly, the elder Madame Bovary's comments correspond to a much larger anti-intellectual critique of reading, but her remarks also may suggest that she sees specifically through Emma's particular deceit. To her, Emma's reading and transposing of Romantic idealism onto reality make of Emma a dangerous force. Charles' mother conceives of Emma's dreaming as a threat to the conventional status of women, in that it spreads the illusion that women have a place other than that of the home. In essence, Emma steps out of line with her social role and must be rehabilitated back into convention. For Charles' mother, the quickest route to accomplishing this retraining is to ban reading altogether.

Thus Emma's *bovarysme* affects not only her integrity as an individual, but also her social role as woman, wife, and mother. This image is constantly scrutinized by those around her and these opinions not only affect Emma's reputation, but also Charles', an affront his mother could not tolerate. Despite

the efforts of the elder Madame Bovary, Emma's behavior escalates into adultery, an action endangering the status of all who are involved. As Ana-Isabel Aliaga-Buchenau observes:

> Adultery in itself poses a threat to society because it leads to a destabilization of the family, one of society's most stable institutions. Emma abandons her role as wife and mother, even willing to run away and leave both husband and child. (109)

Accordingly, Emma's dubious behavior does not go unnoticed in her social milieu; it intensifies to the point that another local character, Madame Tuvache, exclaims: "On devait fouetter ces femmes-là!" (363). Recalling the aftermath of the ball scene in which Emma repeats in her mind what she had previously read, even without a specific book having inspired her, she inundates her imagination with Romantic fantasy to such a point that, when she realizes what she has done, it is already too late. Instead of reading actively, that is, instead of reflecting on what the readings express independently of her own bias, Emma forgoes the process of critical thinking and passes straight to imprudent action. Gaultier writes: "Pour se persuader qu'elle est ce qu'elle veut être, elle ne s'en tient pas aux gestes décoratifs … mais elle ose accomplir des actes véritables" (14). Nowhere in the novel is this absence of critical thought more evident perhaps than in Emma's dealings with Léon and Rodolphe.

Emma's adulterous relationships are based largely on models taken directly from her youthful readings, and Flaubert's description of what Emma desires from literature speaks directly to her passion: "Il fallait qu'elle pût retirer des choses une sorte de profit personnel; et elle rejetait comme inutile tout ce qui

ne contribuait pas à la consommation immédiate de son cœur" (60). Bound up in this sentence are two essential character traits that dominate Emma's life: personal profit and the vagaries of her heart. Risking everything, Emma's actions revolve around emotional and material gratification. For instance, listening to Léon, she discovers with pleasure that their literary tastes are similar:

> Quelle meilleure chose, en effet, que d'être le soir au coin du feu avec un livre, pendant que le vent bat les carreaux, que la lampe brûle? … On se promène immobile dans des pays que l'on croit voir, et votre pensée, s'enlaçant à la fiction, se joue dans les détails ou poursuit le contour des aventures. Elle se mêle aux personnages; il semble que c'est vous qui palpitez sous leurs costumes. (114)

Léon's reading preferences provide in fact a very accurate account of Emma's reactions to what she reads. Again, her adolescent readings prove particularly useful in revealing the striking resemblance between Léon's statement quoted above and her own perceptions:

> Et l'abat-jour du quinquet, accroché dans la muraille au-dessus de la tête d'Emma, éclairait tous ces tableaux du monde, qui passaient devant elle les uns après les autres, dans le silence du dortoir et au bruit de quelque fiacre attardé qui roulait encore sur les boulevards. (63)

This sentence gives the reader the rare opportunity of a portrait of Emma actually reading, instead of trying to reenact what she has read. Like Léon, Emma also loses herself in the tantalizing images that pass before her. It is unsurprising then that Emma's response to Léon's appreciation of the pleasures of reading is "C'est vrai! C'est vrai! (114). In true Romantic fashion, after the disillusionment that accompanied her marriage and the moment of promising

plenitude embodied in the ball at Vaubyessard, Emma longs to find someone with whom she shares similar interests. As a result, she misreads Léon's discourse, interpreting it as the declaration of a genuine soul mate instead of casual conversation or, more aptly, as an ingenuous attempt to take advantage of her Romantic sentimentality.

These similarities establish an important correlation between Emma and Léon in which the latter appears as a kind of double for Emma. In this vein, Léon may represent an ironically-charged representation of Emma's *âme sœur*, the fictional "other" that seems to most resemble Emma, and a potential partner with whom she can lose herself in Romantic reverie. Further, the couple's mutual love of Romantic literature illustrates the Flaubertian *leitmotif* of misreading in pairs (other examples of which occur in *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and *L'Education sentimentale*).[7] Through an ironic lens, their "lecture en duo" personifies complimentary aspects of Romanticism, such as similar reading interests and disdain for the monotonous, as both characters consider themselves as uniquely individual and marginalized, and they both aspire to transcend the physical and social constraints of their time. Further, as Ippolito has noted, their shaky union is based on mere chimeras: "It is as if, within the trivial background of the inn, they were trying to build an imaginary setting for their nascent love" (48). To this end, Léon resembles the male equivalent of Emma. Like her, he is young, attractive, and a Romantic at heart. He detests the boredom of Yonville

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[7] For a more detailed discussion of misreading in pairs in *Madame Bovary*, see Ippolito, 47-51. He addresses the antithetical, as well as the complimentary, effects of misreading couples in several key Flaubertian texts.

and yearns for the day that he will escape to Paris. When Léon does finally leave, Emma's excitement at having possibly found the happiness that has always eluded her does not wane. In Léon's absence she seeks out the same sensation through an affair with Rodolphe, a relationship that Emma also misreads.

In her secret readings in the convent, Emma imagines herself "le coude sur la pierre et le menton dans la main, à regarder venir du fond de la campagne un cavalier à plume blanche qui galope sur un cheval noir," (61) in an ironic echo of the image she remembers from her readings. During her affair with Rodolphe (in which Emma commits her first act of adultery) she sees this dream come to fruition:

> Le lendemain, à midi, Rodolphe arriva devant la porte de Charles avec deux chevaux de maître. L'un portait des pompons roses aux oreilles et une selle de femme en peau de daim. Rodolphe avait mis de longues bottes molles, se disant que sans doute elle n'en avait jamais vu de pareilles; en effet, Emma fut charmée de sa tournure, lorsqu'il apparut sur le palier avec son grand habit de velours et sa culotte de tricot blanc. Elle était prête, elle l'attendait. (199)

On a stylistic level, Flaubert stresses the last sentence of the paragraph through its striking brevity and also by leaving both verbs in the imperfect tense. It is true that Emma "était prête" and that "elle l'attendait" because she has lived the life of a lady in waiting ever since the ball at Vaubyessard—in fact, all her life. Indeed, after the ball, as she and Charles are leaving, Emma thinks she has sighted the vicomte: "Ils étaient sur les hauteurs de Thibourville, lorsque devant eux, tout à coup, des cavaliers passèrent en riant, avec des cigares à la bouche"

(81). Further in their journey, Charles finds a "porte-cigares" dropped by one of the riders, in which he finds two cigars. In the next chapter of the novel, the object becomes a fetish in Emma's mind as she muses: "À qui appartenait-il? … Au vicomte. C'était peut-être un cadeau de sa maîtresse" (83). Indeed, the cigar case is charged with implied meaning, unleashing waves of speculation in Emma's imagination. Fixated on the object, Emma's mind immediately weaves a web of enticing possibilities surrounding the object. In much the same way that she viewed the old man during the ball, here too she refuses to see the cigar case simply as what it is; sometimes a cigar case is simply a cigar case. Instead, she transfigures the image into her desire to be in Paris, a gesture that engenders readings beyond those of the convent.

After speculating on the history of the cigar case and of its owner, the viscount, Emma marvels: "Elle était à Tostes. Lui, il était à Paris, maintenant; là-bas! Comment était ce Paris? Quel nom démesuré!" (83). The cigar case becomes an object of desire and illusion, a totem for a promised land, leading Emma on another illusory quest, one focused on the name itself of the place she desires: "Elle s'acheta un plan de Paris, et, au bout de son doigt, sur la carte, elle faisait des courses dans la capitale. Elle remontait les boulevards, s'arrêtant à chaque angle, entre les lignes des rues, devant les carrés blanc qui figurent les maisons" (84). In order to indulge her imagination, Emma resorts to creating her own vision of Paris, a distorted perception resulting from how she understands what she reads. These associations are particularly important in that Emma does

not stop with merely a map of Paris; she also turns to other novels and magazines. For fashion, she subscribes to *"Corbeille"* and *"Sylphe des Salons"* (84), magazines that provide updates on Parisian trends. She also studies Eugène Sue "pour des descriptions d'ameublements" (84) and seeks in Balzac and Sand "des assouvissements imaginaires pour ses convoitises personnelles" (84). It is important to note that this type of utilitarian reading centered on the material world is launched by Emma's fixation with the cigar case, which serves as a catalyst for her future endeavors. Eventually, Emma will purchase (at Charles' expense) the latest in Parisian fashion and furniture, but she begins her exploration first with the cigar case and it is not by coincidence that the next owner of the case will be Rodolphe. Nor is his acquisition limited only to the object, but also, much more importantly, Rodolphe takes on the semiotic associations that it represents for Emma.

Accordingly, Rodolphe becomes Emma's new cavalier, her long-awaited knight with whom she will go into the "forêt sombre" (60), an imaginary space cherished from her adolescent readings. There, she will commit adultery. For Emma, the nature of this extramarital encounter is much more than physical; it is transformative, seeming to meld the Romantic illusions of her mind with the dynamics of the outside world: "Mais, en s'apercevant dans la glace, elle s'étonna de son visage. Jamais elle n'avait eu les yeux si grands, si noirs, ni d'une telle profondeur. Quelque chose de subtil épandu sur sa personnne la transfigurait" (204). After discovering her physical transformation in the mirror,

Emma states: "J'ai un amant! un amant!" (204). Her feelings recall those she felt

during her first encounter with Léon, when she exclaims "C'est vrai! C'est vrai!"

(114) and, as with Léon, with Rodolphe too she misinterprets the man's

intentions. For the reader, informed through Flaubert's ironic stance, Rodolphe's

objectives are made clear from his initial meeting with Emma:

> Ça baille après l'amour, comme une carpe après l'eau sur une table de cuisine. Avec trois mots de galanterie, cela vous adorerait, j'en suis sûr! ce serait tendre! charmant! … Oui, mais comment s'en débarasser ensuite? … Oh! je l'aurai! s'écria-t-il en écrasant, d'un coup de bâton, une motte de terre devant lui. (169)

For Rodolphe, Emma is nothing more than another conquest to add to his

debauched collection of misled women. What is more, Rodolphe too employs

characteristics of *bovarysme* by projecting a view of himself as other than he is

in order to seduce Emma, manipulating her own *bovarysme* for his benefit. To

be sure, Rodolphe is *bovaryste* but for him, *bovarysme* is a means to an end, an

illusion necessary to obtain Emma's favors. His awareness of the facade is

evidenced by his plotting of how to free himself of Emma after their sexual

encounter has lost its luster, but he is not exempt from its influence. Conversely,

Emma's *bovarysme* is accompanied by no such awareness with Rodolphe. For

her, he actually does embody a true-to-life representation of her readings:

> Elle entrait dans quelque chose de merveilleux où tout serait passion, extase, délire…. Alors elle se rappela les héroïnes des livres qu'elle avait lus, et la légion lyrique de ces femmes adultères se mit à chanter dans sa mémoire avec des voix de sœurs qui la charmaient. (204)

In Emma's mind, Rodolphe is not merely a lover, but a long-awaited physical

manifestation of her desires. Almost immediately she compares the experience

to her readings, envisioning herself as a part of a different class of women able to transcend the boundaries of their social status. Her imagination transports her back to her youth and provides a basis on which she feels she can justify her actions: "Elle devenait elle-même comme une partie véritable de ces imaginations et réalisait la longue rêverie de jeunesse, en se considérant dans ce type d'amoureuse qu'elle avait tant envié" (204). In her reverie, Emma feels that she becomes something other than what she is, losing a sense of self-worth that she thought to have gained in being Rodolphe's lover. She is now part of a "type d'amoureuse" aligning herself psychologically with "la légion lyrique de ces femmes adultères" (204), a classification she formulates in her mind through reading and by which she will attempt to fashion her reality.

In the case of Emma's *bovarysme*, it becomes evident that the notion's implications are directly associated with the literature she reads. However, what does this suggest about the image Flaubert portrays of Emma as reader? Heath poses the question with regard to Emma this way:

> *Madame Bovary* or "The bad use of literature"? … Think of her reading *Madame Bovary*: she reads it as she reads other novels, she is the heroine marked by beauty and distinction for higher things but beaten down, pathetically, by the mean uncomprehending world in which she finds herself…. [M]ost of what Emma reads is trite and her mode of reading disastrously silly, but from where exactly in the novel can we say that? Should we not, on the contrary, assent to her revolt against the mediocre world around her and recognize the value of her reading as the refusal of her oppressive life as Madame Bovary? (77)

Heath's comments in this passage depict a different and more positive approach to Emma's reading, conceived as a reflection of resorting to literature as a means

to transcend social boundaries. And, inherently, one could argue that there is nothing wrong in the act of viewing the positivity of some literature as an alternative to the negativity of some kinds of life. In this aspect, literature can, and perhaps should, effect changes in the social climate in which it is published. Yet Heath's remarks also underscore the ability to differentiate between fiction and reality, a talent Emma fails to demonstrate in the novel. In fact, Emma seems to assess the value of her reading in direct proportion with the value of her life, approaching literature as something other than an aesthetic, didactic, intellectual, or otherwise non-artificial object. In this case, Flaubert constructs his character in such a way that Emma is presented not primarily as a reader, but as an anti-reader whose habits are to be avoided because they endanger the status of art.

Emma's alternate identity through fictive models provides a *bovaryste* example of how not to read, in which the power of the fictive embodies for her something more real than reality itself. And Emma's readings influence her real-life decisions, leading ultimately to her suicide, an outcome that Jacques Rancière analyzes in *Politique de la littérature*. To begin, Rancière asks: "…[P]ourquoi *fallait-il* tuer Emma Bovary? La réponse passe nécessairement par un réexamen de ce qui est censé être l'erreur première responsable des malheurs de la jeune femme: elle aurait confondu la littérature et la vie" (60-61). For the critic, Emma's fatal flaw is that she confuses literature and life, engendering a skewed approximation that he views ultimately as democratic.

To this end, Rancière argues that, after the fall of the aristocratic hierarchy and the advent of the Industrial Revolution, instead of representing a conventional system of power relations, democracy began to depict the limitless potential of the human condition. This newfound, seemingly endless horizon influences not only Emma, but also the rest of society. As Rancière explains:

> Les traits fictionnels d'Emma répondent ainsi à la grande obsession intellectuelle de son temps que résume le mot d'*excitation*…. Cette société de l'excitation, ils [les individus libres et égaux] lui donnaient un autre nom: ils l'appellaient démocratie. (62)

Certainly, social liberty is an integral part of this democracy, but so are individual aspirations and idealistic dreams and desires, a mix that produces the "excitation" to which Rancière refers. After the Revolution, the aristocracy gives way to a government said to embody "les droits de l'homme," as do the rules governing the distribution of roles and capacities within the social body. As a result, the concept of self-indulgence becomes especially prominent. Yet at issue is not the pursuit of idealistic pleasures, but rather the desire to make the possibility of these pleasures a reality to all, urges that characterize fully the character of Emma.

Commenting on the dynamics of the fictive and the real, Rancière underscores the potentially subversive interpretation of the character of Emma:

> Mais ils voulaient faire de ces plaisirs idéaux des plaisirs concrets, des plaisirs matériels positifs. Pour les lecteurs de Flaubert, Emma Bovary est l'incarnation effrayante de cet appétit "démocratique". C'est bien ainsi que l'auteur l'a caractérisée: Emma veut à la fois la romance idéale et le plaisir physique. Et elle passe son temps à négocier entre les excitations des sens et celles de l'esprit. (63)

Rancière argues primarily that Emma's attitude is democratic because her desire for ideal romance and physical pleasure corresponds to the premise of an equal exchange, a system in which she substitutes one desire for another, making no distinction between the potential in life and the possibilities in literature. In Rancière's view, this indistinction provides an interesting platform from which he reconsiders the potential link between Emma's death and the literary realm. This relationship centers first on Emma's disposition, described by Flaubert as: "de tempérament plus sentimentale qu'artiste, cherchant des émotions et non des paysages" (60). Focusing on Emma's sentimental nature, Rancière affirms why he believes Flaubert chooses effectively to "kill" his protagonist. Above all, sentimentality encompasses more than lofty ideals or a heightened sensibility. For Rancière: "[l]e caractère sentimental demande aux plaisirs idéaux de la littérature et de l'art d'être des plaisirs concrets. Il ou elle veut y trouver plus qu'un objet de contemplation intellectuelle: une source d'excitation pratique" (62). Since Emma is "plus sentimentale qu'artiste," literature does not symbolize for her an object of intellectual stimulation, but rather one that should interact perfectly with her idealized view of real life. In this case, Emma interchanges freely what she reads in fiction for what she possesses in reality, a result of what Rancière calls her "appétit démocratique" (63). This type of equivocation leads to Emma's extravagant purchases, financial ruin, and eventual suicide.

For example, in Chapter Five of *Madame Bovary*, Emma's "appétit" for social status and emotional fulfillment slowly become one: "Alors, les appétits de la chair, les convoitises d'argent et les mélancolies de la passion, tout se confondit dans une même souffrance" (143-44). Accordingly, after her first failed attempt at love with Léon, Emma exchanges emotional loss for material gain through numerous purchases from Lheureux, filling an emotional void with physical objects:

> Une femme qui s'était imposé de si grands sacrifices pouvait bien se passer des fantaisies. Elle s'acheta un prie-Dieu gothique, elle dépensa en un mois pour quatorze francs de citrons à se nettoyer les ongles; elle écrivit à Rouen, afin d'avoir une robe en cachemire bleu; elle choisit, chez Lheureux, la plus belle de ses écharpes…. (163)

For Emma, these commercial items replace what she lost in Léon: the idealized view of happiness that that she gleaned from Romantic novels. According to Rancière, this substitution represents precisely the most substantial wrongdoing that Emma commits; she assumes that the social equality inherent in the notion of democracy applies also to the realm of literature. In other words, Emma believes that the rights she has as an individual should equal those she has as a reader, an erroneous judgment for which Flaubert is the first to hold her accountable.

Indeed, Rancière suggests that before the 1857 trial of *Madame Bovary*, there was the trial of Madame Bovary, the character, presided over by Flaubert himself:

> Avant le procès que les honnêtes gens font à l'écrivain, il y a celui que l'écrivain fait à son personnage. À côté du mal qui les effraie, il y a le

> mal fait par Emma à la littérature, c'est-à-dire le mal que l'écrivain lui
> fait faire, celui qu'il incarne dans son personnage. (64)

Thus, even before the detractors of the novel began to question Flaubert's motives, the author mounted his own case against Emma, against the crime, the one she commits against literature, that is, the ambivalent gesture of confusing art and life. She seeks to attain the best of both worlds—the fictional and the real—a *bovaryste* perspective in that she believes herself entitled to self-fulfillment in both fiction and reality, producing a unique interpretation of the democratization of literature. This parallel is further problematic because if, for Emma, literature and life are equal, then of what value is literature? Rancière poses the question in this way: "si le futur de l'art tient à une forme nouvelle d'indistinction entre l'art et la vie non artistique, et si cette indistinction est disponible pour n'importe qui, que reste-t-il à l'art pour fonder sa spécificité?" (67). His question is especially complex because it implicates the creator of the work of art as much as the creation. In addition to Emma's democratization of literature, Flaubert also seems to participate in a form of democracy in which everything is equal, particularly subject matter.

In fact, Flaubert alludes to this kind of equalization in his *Correspondance*: "C'est pour cela qu'il n'y a ni beaux ni vilains sujets et qu'on pourrait presque établir comme axiome, en se posant au point de vue de l'Art pur, qu'il n'y en a aucun, le style étant à lui seul une manière absolue de voir les choses" (II, 31). Here, Flaubert's view of style suggests in fact an authorial, Realist stance on art as democratic, in which all subjects are equal. As Leo

Bersani affirms, pure art "could take anything as its subject or—even better—dispense entirely with inferior occasions, with stories, with characters, with words…. Flaubert's dream, however fanstastic we may find it, is, after all, the democratization of literature" (188). Bersani's comments confirm both Flaubert's view of art and Rancière's claim that Flaubert's prose "…était même l'incarnation de la démocratie" (17). Flaubert's absolute way of viewing art emphasizes the style, the medium through which the work is produced. For Flaubert, all subjects are treated on an equal basis and their specificity matters less than the techniques employed to communicate them. The fact that *Madame Bovary* is based on a *fait divers* (and not on a heroic saga, for instance) is strong evidence of the diminishing importance of the subject and the rising emphasis on style. For Flaubert, literature is a form of art, akin to a visual art that captures the essence of the common individual, through direct depiction, instead of seeking inspiration from the aristocratic or mythological realm. This change is precisely what Bersani references when he speaks of art as democratic, as a vehicle capable of taking up any subject. Therefore, the suggestion that it is permissible to have a non-hierarchical, literary democracy such as that performed by Flaubert, one that stays within the confines of the text, is compelling. What is not permissible, Rancière argues, is exactly that which Emma attempts, a fusion of artistic and social democracy, that is, the assumption that autonomy in fiction is congruous with that of society. For this reason, the blurring of the lines between life and literature destroys the unifying properties

of style and creates a discord in which societal democracy effectively usurps literary democracy.

According to Rancière, for art to maintain its specificity, the author must undo the confusion between both art and life and demonstrate that the relationship between the writer and the character rests in a dichotomy of ways to approach literature:

> Il faut disjoindre les deux égalités, séparer deux manières différentes de traiter l'indistinction de l'art et du non-art. Il doit y avoir une bonne et une mauvaise manière de traiter l'indistinction. C'est alors cette mauvaise manière que l'auteur doit incarner dans son personnage. Il doit construire le personnage comme son opposé, comme l'anti-artiste. La bonne manière, la manière artistique de traiter l'indistinction consiste à mettre dans le livre seul, dans le livre en tant que livre. La mauvaise manière, la manière du personnage, consiste à la mettre dans la vie réelle. (67)

In this passage, the critic outlines how the fictional character's artistic perspective differs from the writer's, a process that unravels the equalization of fiction and reality and reestablishes the autonomy of literature. To this end, Flaubert's sovereign view of art ("la bonne manière") is juxtaposed to Emma's reading habits ("la mauvaise manière,") which constitute a simulacrum of fact and fiction that becomes a basis for denouncing her actions.

The aftermath of the ball again proves helpful in providing an understanding of the dynamics of Emma's "mauvaise manière," as well as additional reconsiderations of a key passage quoted earlier in the chapter:

> Elle s'abonna à la *Corbeille*, journal des femmes, et au *Sylphe des Salons*…. Elle étudia, dans Eugène Sue, des descriptions d'ameublements; elle lut Balzac et George Sand, y cherchant des assouvissements imaginaires pour ses convoitises personnelles. (84)

Her readings after the ball imply that Emma continues to seek actively a correspondence between her emotional yearnings and personal desires. To this end, Flaubert's use of the term "ameublement" denotes not only household property, but also, and more importantly, a synergism in which Emma attempts to "furnish" her "convoitises personnelles" with her "assouvissements imaginaires." Yet literature cannot truly substitute for life and Flaubert constructs his anxious protagonist to reflect this truth. As Rancière aptly asserts: "Mais Flaubert a besoin d'assimiler l''esthétisme' de son personnage à la simple confusion entre littérature et ameublement…. [L]e crime d'Emma est un crime contre la littérature. Il est d'avoir mesuré de l'équivalence entre l'art et la vie" (69). In the end, Emma confuses "littérature et ameublement," literally furnishing her mind with images that, in her view, should be applicable to her reality. Her *bovaryste* misreading of reality stems clearly from her dreaming about how what she lives should resemble what she reads.

In this type of reading, there is no filter in the reader's mind that allows for differentiation between the fictive and the real. As Howard Jacobson notes, Emma is "destroyed by the brain rot which is unchecked reading" (1). Indeed, even until her suicide, Emma never wanes in her pursuit of personal fulfillment based on fictional representations. Her "brain rot" connotes a disease, a decaying of the mind from which she suffers and which leads her to confuse art with life, attempting to equate the two. As Rancière argues: "Telle est l'erreur d'Emma, sa faute contre l'art. Nous pouvons lui donner un nom: esthétisation de

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la vie quotidienne…. La littérature doit la mettre à mort pour préserver l'art de son double maléfique…" (68-69). Emma's death may be interpreted thus as an attempt by Flaubert to rid his writing of the disease that seeks to contaminate it and reduce it to something other than art. While this claim may be true, Emma's fictional death removes only one part of the disease while the other, the language that imbues her mind with illusions, still remains. The question for Flaubert seems to be then how to remove Emma's contagiously *bovaryste* "ameublement" of literature and reality at its source—on the level of the discourse itself. This question fuels my analysis in the next chapter, in which I explore how Flaubert's writing tries to elude the influence of *bovarysme* through his ironic use of clichés and *idées reçues* in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*.

Chapter Two: *Bouvard et Pécuchet*: The Caging of the Parrot

Published posthumously in 1881, Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* can be interpreted as a rich textual adventure in which the author recounts ironically his own literary efforts and reaffirms his conception of writerly and readerly principles while denouncing what he sees as the foolishness of much of the writing of his time. After a chance encounter in the park, copyists François Denys Bartholomée Bouvard and Juste Romain Cyrille Pécuchet (names that Flaubert obviously ironizes even through their very complexity) begin an impassioned search for intellectual stimulation that leads them on a labyrinthine path through virtually every branch of human knowledge. The couple's hapless attempts and unsurprising failures at understanding the world through their readings mirror the thwarted, idealistic efforts of Emma Bovary, in that their inability to separate fiction from reality ultimately results in their downfall, humiliation, and eventual return to the infinitely banal task of copying. Despite its cyclical nature, the plot is in fact rather straightforward and relatively easy to grasp, reflecting a deliberate move by Flaubert that places strong emphasis on the manner in which the plot is communicated—on *la forme* as well as *le fond*—highlighting the dynamics of the writing itself.

Throughout their compendium of pathetic failures, Bouvard and Pécuchet often refer to other documents and texts that govern their respective actions and reactions to the outside world. In a veritable illustration of "life as citation," the couple rely heavily on one of the most common, yet oblique modes

of textual reference—that of clichés and *idées reçues*—regularly producing sentiments of conflict between each protagonist's interpretation of the written word. One may wonder, then, if this discord could extend beyond the fictional lives of the characters and into the actual act of writing. In this case, language would cease to express merely the author's intentions and would perform instead a semantic self-analysis of parts of itself as inherently "other." Given this premise, I explore the possibility of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* as the *mise en scène* of a textualized *bovarysme* that reaches beyond *Bovary* into the sphere of the language animating this other key Flaubertian text.

Through a quasi-encyclopedic, deeply ironic use of a variety of figures of speech, Flaubert deliberately foregrounds his text with what normally backgrounds it, that is, clichés and *idées reçues*, transforming it into an object of rich cultural scrutiny. He highlights the ease with which clichés move intertextually in literature as an artistically-contagious affliction rampant in his time. Additionally, this emphasis isolates clichés, stresses their duplicity, and may in fact point to a parroting of language that transposes the mimetic properties of speech onto the text, the effects of which produce an irreducibility that necessarily conceptualizes language as something other than what it is. We might ask if Flaubert is actually questioning the validity of his own art, as he posits an ambivalent self-image hidden in the eternally futile figures of Bouvard and Pécuchet. The result is the textualization of *bovarysme*, a linguistic "bad

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faith" whose ambiguity exposes the vagaries of language mired in cultural influence while functioning within a system that bears witness to its dominance.

The term "cliché" gained enormous popularity in nineteenth-century France, originating first, interestingly, in relation to typography. At its core lies the mass reproduction of a fixed model, a mold from which numerous copies are generated and whose multiplicity clearly problematizes any notion of a unified sense of singularity in a text. In literature, these repetitive qualities engender linguistic platitudes and worn-out formulae for literary production that may be seen as a devaluation of the act of writing. As Anne Herschberg-Pierrot observes, novelists of the 1800s were quite conscious of the ubiquitous influence of the cliché:

> [L]e cliché accompagne le développement au XIXe siècle d'un discours de masse, et de l'opinion publique. Parallèlement, la conscience d'une usure des mots hante les écrivains face à la rhétorique et à la littérature industrielle, face au discours politique et journalistique, au langage ordinaire. (227)

Herschberg-Pierrot's comments bring an additional consideration to Flaubert's constant quest for "le mot juste."[1] In the midst of the context the critic describes, French writers had to confront the onslaught of the ever-present cliché in the formulation of their words. Beyond embodying a trait of perfectionism, the pursuit of "le mot juste" may be viewed as a clarion call to preserve the originality of literature when confronted with "le langage ordinaire." In this

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[1] Flaubert was notoriously meticulous in his choice of words. For instance, in an 1852 letter to Louise Colet, he writes: "…car comme je suis souvent plusieurs heures à chercher un mot et que j'en ai plusieurs à chercher, il se pourrait que tu passasses encore toute la semaine prochaine si j'attendais la fin" (I, 88).

case, the cliché in nineteenth-century prose can be seen as indicative of a crisis of utility, raising the question of determining the value of literature and of the function of a writer in a society in which works are produced on a mass scale. As a result, many writers, including Flaubert, cast a look of disdain upon the cliché. As Ruth Amossy and Herschberg-Pierrot describe: "C'est au XIXe siècle que toute une série d'expressions comme *lieux communs*, ou *idées reçues* deviennent franchement péjoratives" (11). The absence of the term "cliché" in Amossy's and Herschberg-Pierrot's comment is particularly relevant because Flaubert himself preferred other terms. For the entry on "clichés," the *Gustave Flaubert Encyclopedia* adds:

> Flaubert did not use the term…. Rather, he used *lieu commun* (commonplace) or *idée reçue* (received idea, platitude); and he collected examples of these throughout his writing career with a view to publishing his *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*. (59)[2]

Although clichés and *lieux communs* possess similar meanings in Flaubert's aesthetic practices, the entry invests *lieu commun* as carrying the same significance as the *idée reçue*. Within the generally negative conscription assigned to clichés, however, these comments necessitate that a specific distinction be made between clichés and *idées reçues*.

The concept of *idées reçues* resembles that of the typographical and linguistic cliché, reflecting an uncritical reliance on conventional ideas,

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[2] A more detailed analysis of *Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues* is presented in Chapter Three: "*Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues*: Writing the Paradox." Here, I make reference specifically to the entry on clichés in order to inform the reader of the essential distinctions to be made among clichés, *lieux communs*, and *idées reçues*, and to explain the ways in which I employ these terms throughout the remainder of the discussion.

judgments, and prejudices imbued in language through mass production. However, Herschberg-Pierrot situates the concept of prejudice as the differentiating factor between clichés and *idées reçues*. She writes: "Entre le cliché et le stéréotype, intervient la notion d'idée reçue, qui désigne pour Flaubert les préjugés, et toute relation aux conventions sociales, à l'ordre moral, à l'immobilisme de la pensée et à la bêtise" (228). Therefore *idées reçues* do not imply specifically the usage of commonplace expressions, as is the case with the cliché, but may also suggest conceptualizations of society and the more broadly-based theoretical conception of ideas themselves. In this vein, the *idée reçue* is different from Flaubert's treatment of bourgeois language and may be construed further as a deliberate means to critique the cliché. Again Amossy and Herschberg-Pierrot note:

> Les idées reçues ne sont pas l'apanage des bourgeois, mais l'expression dans son usage dénigrant est plutôt un terme d'"artiste". Il inclut, bien sûr, avec les idées, une critique du langage et des clichés, comme les formes exacerbées d'un langage d'emprunt, incapable d'exprimer la subjectivité individuelle. Il semble bien que le syntagme "idées reçues" corresponde alors à une notion qui se stabilise, sur laquelle se fait un accord: ce sont les préjugés courants, liés aux convenances, à la morale sociale. (22-23)

Thus while *idées reçues* contain the germ of clichés, they also expand beyond them, creating a much larger discursive space in which one can examine their use and influence, as well as their impact on the act of writing. Amossy and Herschberg-Pierrot further affirm that it is in Flaubert's work that one gleans one of the most significant textualized stances against *idées reçues*: "L'expression '*idées reçues*' n'apparaît dans les dictionnaires qu'à l'époque

contemporaine, dans l'acception péjorative de 'préjugés', 'idées toutes faites', et ce en référence au *Dictionnaire des Idées Reçues* de Flaubert" (20). Even though Flaubert mocks the presence of accepted ideas in society and literature, his work also seems to suggest the possibility of conceiving of *idées reçues* as a critical lens through which commonplace language can be juxtaposed to literary discourse. Flaubert's critique of language bound up within clichés and *idées reçues* surpasses, for instance, a simple critique of clichés as an exaggerated linguistic form, as it reflects as well a heightened sensitivity to the presence and function of commonplace language in the sphere of aesthetics.

References to clichés and *idées reçues* can be found, of course, throughout Flaubert's literary corpus. As culturally-based forms of rhetoric, clichés express a socially-charged and repetitive linguistic form, easily reproduced and devoid of deep cognitive reflection. Further, the mass production of texts during the Industrial Revolution only serves to exacerbate the influence of clichés in literature. Anton Zijderveld relates this rise in production directly to attempts to produce literature accessible to the masses in the form of the aesthetic cliché. He notes:

> Because of the originally expressive and symbolic nature of clichés, they are liable to occur rather massively in art, literature, and music…. Generally, it is the function of these aesthetic clichés to enable people to consume and digest artistic products in a leisurely fashion and without much reflection. (12)

Reminiscent of Emma's reading strategies in *Madame Bovary*, the aesthetic cliché (in Emma's case, the characteristically Romantic cliché) imposes

superficial meanings that, in turn, jeopardize the deeper significance of the text. The "ready-made" properties of the cliché result in the creation of a particular attitude in readers, which can engender a discernible lack of critical thought. Zijderveld explains:

> Clichés thus bring people unobtrusively into a certain mood. They mould their mentality and attitude, and thus gradually prepare them to speak, to think, to feel and act in a specific direction…. Clichés resemble food that is easy to swallow and easy to digest, as it were, without much chewing. (13)

The ability of the cliché to influence imperceptibly reader behavior exists in virtually all literature. Yet it is with Flaubert that this ability is questioned, scrutinized, and criticized on a textual level as an example of the cliché's effects on the acts of reading and writing. To this end, an exploration of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* will illustrate Flaubert's attempts to expose the fallacies of following blindly the commonplace, as well as the repercussions of confusing the universality of the cliché with the contingencies of reality.

In *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, when the character of Bouvard acquires a sizeable inheritance, the naive couple's sudden financial gain is sufficient to purchase property in the countryside and, more importantly, to advance their ongoing project to fund a series of varied quests for knowledge. Flaubert structures the text meticulously within ten chapters, coolly cataloguing the subsequent failures of his hapless protagonists, an approach that the author considered as integral to the "ensemble" of the work as a whole. In an 1877 letter to Émile Zola, Flaubert declares: "Ce sacré bouquin me fait vivre dans le

tremblement. Il n'aura de signification que par son ensemble" (V, 306).[3] Therefore, it is not with individual failures or specific details that Flaubert is concerned; rather, he addresses the overall effect produced in the conception of his text as kind of a satirical *Bildungsroman* of failed human aspiration. Throughout their numerous, often comical, adventures, Bouvard and Pécuchet take refuge without fail in the written word—a choice that directly precipitates the series of failures that awaits them.

The thick-skulled copyists' attempts to translate what they read into how they live may be interpreted as a *bovaryste* misreading of signs as figures having fixed meanings, obscured and tangled in the web of clichés and received ideas. This misappropriation of meaning is notably evident in Chapter Two of the novel, when the couple undertakes landscape gardening. Consulting Boitard's *Architecte des Jardins*, the two decide on rock as their material of choice. After the first day of labor, Pécuchet awakes at dawn to work on the rock garden:

> Il avait taillé les deux arbres à la mesure des appendices expédiés par Dumouchel. Depuis six mois, les autres derrière ceux-là imitaient plus ou moins des pyramides, des cubes, des cylindres, des cerfs ou des fauteuils, mais rien n'égalait les paons. Bouvard le reconnut avec de grands éloges. (752)

According to Flaubert's narrative, neither of the two has any experience in gardening, but both proceed to interpret the written manual as the sole prerequisite for them to become experts in the field. On a discursive level, the

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[3] According to Herschberg-Pierrot, *Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues* was originally conceived by Flaubert as the second part of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. Thus, here, "ensemble" may also be viewed as a reference to the correlation between both works. I address this relationship in more detail further in this study.

language points to the creation of the garden as an adaptation of another form, a case of derivative art based on others' experience. Pécuchet's sculptures recall the characteristics of an aesthetic simulacrum in which he seeks to reproduce the qualities of an original form. This type of naive misreading can be seen as ultimately *bovaryste* in that Pécuchet tries to transpose fiction onto reality, imposing theoretical form onto three-dimensional space, viewing himself, as well as the world, as other than what he should. Instead of gaining experience through his own authentic efforts, he resorts lazily to the linguistic constructs provided in the "appendices" of the guidebook, which produce ultimately a *bovaryste* distortion of reality made manifest during a dinner party the couple give in order to show off their creation.

Despite the pride they express in their work, during the meal the narrator describes the garden as "quelque chose d'effrayant" (II, 754). Indeed, when their masterpiece is finally unveiled, the results are disastrous to the point of being comical:

> Le rocher, comme une montagne, occupait le gazon, le tombeau faisait un cube au milieu des épinards, le pont vénitien un accent circonflexe par-dessus les haraicots, et la cabane, au delà, une grande tache noire, car ils avaient incendié son toit de paille pour la rendre plus poétique. (II, 754)

Whereas Bouvard and Pécuchet, still conceiving of themselves as gifted specialists, "ressentirent une véritable jouissance" (755) at the blossoming of their creative skills, the guests' reactions are, in striking contrast, hardly appreciative:

> Mme Bordin éclata de rire. Tous firent comme elle. M. le curé poussait une sorte de gloussement. Hurel toussait, le docteur en pleurait, sa femme fut prise d'un spasme nerveux, et Foureau, homme sans gêne, cassa un Abd-el-Kader qu'il mit dans sa poche, comme souvenir. (755)

The humorous *décalage* between the Flaubertian narrator's portrayal of the guests and Bouvard and Pécuchet's delusions points to the ironic undertones present in the passage, creating a distance that allows the reader to identify with both the guests and the copyists. In this case, the protagonists' proud desire to stage the dinner in order to showcase their skill as gardeners, as well as the guests' disappointing reactions, indicate simultaneously the copyists' *bovaryste* belief in themselves as accomplished landscape architects and the comically disastrous reality of the contrary. Both Bouvard and Pécuchet forgoe the essential critical thought to distance the spheres of fiction and reality one from the other, as they opt to believe that what they read provides a guarantee to their success in the world at large.

An additional occurrence of this uncritical confidence in the written word takes place just prior to the pair's adventure in Geology. Once again, by consulting Boné's *Guide du voyageur géologue*, they refer to a "how-to" manual, this time on the topic of Archeology, an increasingly popular area of inquiry in the nineteenth century. Yet it is not for information on excavation techniques or specimens of rock that they turn to this authority in print; it is rather for amateurish suggestions on apparel, conduct, and *savoir-faire*:

> "Savoir la langue du pays que l'on visitera"; ils la savaient. "Garder une tenue modeste"; c'était leur usage. "Ne pas avoir trop d'argent sur soi"; rien de plus simple. Enfin, pour s'épargner toutes sortes d'embarras, il

est bon de prendre "la qualité d'ingénieur"!—Eh bien! nous la prendrons! (787)

The couple's hilarious failure to learn from the garden fiasco or the episode of archeological dilettantism does not derail them from pursuing additional cultural undertakings. In these cases, the guide emerges as a universal checklist from which Bouvard and Pécuchet make preparations for their next course of action. More specifically, however, it is important to observe that the advice taken from the guide bears a striking resemblance to the genre of the maxim, a form that may be seen to present clichés of traditional attitudes or nineteenth-century French cultural ideologies, conceived as general truths that Flaubert transforms into aesthetic farce. Further, the author's use of quotation marks conveys a deeper significance than mere reference markers. This form of punctuation also serves to distance the rest of the narration from clichés and *idées reçues*, which often are accompanied by no specific typographical sign, presenting an implicit technique to isolate their occurrences, thus also emphasizing Flaubert's ambivalent acknowledgment of and reaction to such figures.

Heath observes that, for Flaubert, italics "nail the commonplace, setting it off from the language of the narration. They identify the *on dit* of language, its 'what-is-said'" (121). More specifically, Heath's reference to the *on dit* alludes to more than dialog; it also calls attention to the relationship between a method of citation and social discourse. It becomes necessary then to distinguish between two potential uses of italics—a conventional usage and one specifically reserved for isolation. In conventional usage, italics are employed generally for

innocuous purposes: to highlight the presence of foreign words or to underline titles of certain texts, for example. More significant, however, is the use of italics as a means to set apart ambivalent social discourse from the rest of the text. Within italics, then, Flaubert often includes clichés and *idées reçues*, two categories that mark the presence of social discourse in the text itself. According to Claude Duchet:

> *Discours social* n'est pas propre au roman mais se manifeste dans le roman d'une manière spécifique dans la mesure où celui-ci, fonctionnant comme une société, reproduit dans son texte un ensemble de voix brouillées, anonymes … où se mèlent les clichés, les fameuses idées reçues, les stéréotypes socio-culturels, les traces d'un savoir institutionnalisé ou ritualisé, des noyaux ou fragments d'idéologies plus ou moins structurés, plus ou moins subsumés par une idéologie dominante, plus ou moins actualisés par des références, inscrits dans des lieux comme dans des personnages, voire montés en scène ou éléments de scène. (145)

Through this reproduction of voices, the dynamics of italics establish a dual linguistic plane. On the one hand, we witness the presence of what Heath refers to as the *on dit* of language, stressed by italics, and including clichés and *idées reçues*. On the other hand, there remains the writing outside this typeface, present in a separate discursive space. Duchet's reference to these fragments as being "montés en scène" underscores the privileged status that emerges when italics render social discourse textually and typographically different, an "other" discourse distinct from the rest of the writing. In his comments on *Madame Bovary*, which also apply in an important way to Flaubert's entire literary corpus, Duchet attributes this separation to Flaubert's writerly originality. He states: "L'originalité de Flaubert serait, selon moi, de situer son écriture dans

Madame Bovary au niveau du discours social, parole de la socialité du roman, d'en faire sa référence et son texte même, de s'installer en quelque sorte du côté de *l'autre…*" (146, italics Duchet). In this vein, Flaubert does not limit his use of italics to a specifically Realist technique of documentation or only for the advancement of the plot of his texts. Rather, he transforms the conventional use of italics by inscribing it as a sign of fundamental difference at the core of language itself.

Through italics, a deliberate separation occurs between the discursive commonplace and the surrounding narrative. As a result, instead of viewing italics as a form of seamless transition between dialogue and narration, we see instead a rift that emphasizes clichés and *idées reçues* by means of visual linguistic markers. An additional occurrence of this type of marked difference is notable in Flaubert's use of parentheses, a form similar to italics in that, in structuralist terms, it produces a distinction between the *énoncé* (what is said) and the *énonciation* (the process of saying it). Similar to Flaubert's ironic distance as discussed in the previous chapter, here too, the use of parentheses sets apart graphically what can appear as authorial presence from the rest of the narrative. Robert Morrissey describes Flaubert's use of parentheses as one primarily of dissociation, stating: "Freed from the syntax, these isolated closings and openings of doors remain as perceptions dissociated from understanding. Unattached, comically unassimilated, they almost cry out for some further elaboration" (59). There are many instances of the insertion of parentheses in

Bouvard et Pécuchet to express contrasting levels of discourse. In some cases, they provide supplementary information regarding the narrative to which, without them, the reader does not have access. For instance, during their first encounter at the park, they begin to lament life in Paris, when the narrator interjects: "Décidément (et Pécuchet en était surpris) on avait encore plus chaud dans la rue que chez soi!" (714). In this instance, parentheses provide access to Pécuchet's feelings and perceptions, sentiments that would otherwise remain beyond the reader's comprehension. It is also the case that parentheses explain the preferences of Bouvard or Pécuchet, such as the latter's admiration for Dumouchel, whom the narrator describes as: "Cet auteur (car il avait publié une petite mnémotechnie) donnait des leçons de littérature dans un pensionnat de jeunes personnes, avait des opinions orthodoxes et la tenue sérieuse" (720). In both these instances, parentheses do not divide the narration; they provide instead essential additional details about the characters useful in their development and to the overall advancement of the plot.[4]

Yet this is not the sole aesthetic or ideological importance of this form of punctuation. In fact, parentheses also often serve to encapsulate *idées reçues* and thus represent unverified statements as socially accepted truths, possibly without rational bases. The above citation on Dumouchel is an example of this acceptance. Pécuchet recognizes him as an author: "(…il avait publié une petite mnémotechnie)," a charged statement in that Flaubert seems to mock the fact

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[4] Obviously, these few examples do not represent an exhaustive compilation of the number of occurrences of parentheses in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. In my research I have noticed more than 45 instances of the figure in the narration.

that the publication of a text on mnemonics is the only criterion needed to establish Dumouchel's status as author in society. Set off in parentheses, the statement necessitates the attention of the reader and makes him or her pause to reflect on this sudden irruption of the technique within the narrative flow. In other words, the textual presence of parentheses stops passive reading and engenders a more critical approach to the relationship between the mind and the words on the page.

This particular use of parentheses is prevalent elsewhere in the novel, an example of which may be found when, on the eve of the horticultural undertaking, we read: "Ils s'achetèrent des instruments horticoles, puis un tas de choses 'qui pourraient peut-être servir', telles qu'une boîte à outils (il en faut toujours dans une maison), ensuite des balances, une chaîne d'arpenteur, une baignoire…" (725). This citation demonstrates how, in a single example, Flaubert separates the cliché and the *idée reçue* through quotation marks and parentheses. In each format, these techniques serve the traditional purpose of enclosing spoken or inferred speech. Yet what is particularly interesting here is the intrusion these forms make into the narrative, breaking the linguistic harmony and interfering with the flow of the discourse. What is normally interpreted as the disadvantage of diverting the reader's attention from the advancing of the general narrative may be viewed as a tactical position Flaubert utilizes to interfere deliberately with the prominence of the cliché and/or *idée reçue*. To this end, these techniques are not simply add-ons or objects of

supplementarity in the language; they provide instead an additional dimension of analysis to the text, drawing attention to that which—graphically, semantically, and ideologically—does not belong. In a moment not of cohesive weakness, but of authorial power, Flaubert's *énociation* takes control of the social *énoncé* and posits a textual dissociation between what is said verbally and its written form. The end result is a syntactical fragmentation of the text that harnesses the power of social discourse while fostering an analytical distance maintained through the estrangement of commonplace language.

Through this process of discursive divorce, Flaubert establishes in the end a dichotomy between superficial and critical reading. This relationship derives its power from the reader in that these techniques of detaching commonplace language from the narration necessarily presuppose participation on the part of the recipient of the text. As Morrissey explains:

> Calling attention to narration, putting the narrative fiction on display in its different manifestations is a means of exploring, one could almost say of demonstrating, its implications and consequences…. Narrative mobility put on display orients the reader, invites and instructs self-conscious reading. (60)

By securing clichés and *idées reçues* within easily identifiable typographic structures, Flaubert employs the figures in the narration along with many others, but draws attention to them specifically, inviting deeper, more creative analysis from the reader. From this viewpoint, Morrissey's self-conscious reading calls for a rethinking of the relationship among the elements of author, reader, and text. In fact, this process is suggestive of a "textually-active" reader, à la

Barthes, promiscuous in his or her involvement with literature and willing to delve into more than one interpretation, not only of the text but also of the forms of expression that produce it. In fact, much like Emma Bovary's extra-marital comportment in *Madame Bovary*, an individual reader's willingness to engage in extra-diegetic activities is not without consequence. As Emma's (and Bouvard and Pécuchet's) exploits and failures demonstrate, this type of reaction to the written word may prove disastrous. To this end, the same can be stated of Flaubert's approach to writing, in that clichés and *idées reçues*, while prominent in social discourse, may also result in the misidentification of the act of writing with the ambivalent modes of expression he seeks to refute. Hence, Flaubert's placement of the commonplace in quotation marks, italics, or parentheses may be effectively viewed as quarantining an otherwise infectious form of language, keeping it from penetrating into his own writing, a gesture seen as an immunization against contracting stylistically what might otherwise become a "textually-transmitted disease." What is more, these very techniques signal a heightened awareness to the presence of clichés and *idées reçues*, pointing to the interrogation of what constitutes a text *per se*. This assessment is particularly evident in the narration of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, as Herschberg-Pierrot succinctly notes:

> La spécificité de *Bouvard et Pécuchet* est encore ailleurs: elle réside, me semble-t-il, dans la réflexivité du texte, dans cette possibilité qu'a le texte de réfléchir son langage et, en l'occurrence, de représenter le processus même de production des clichés, le clichage. (*Le Cliché*, 32)

Further, "le clichage" surpasses the mechanical process of producing clichés. It denotes a substantial mutability of language, a fluidity in the circulation of signs, through the ease of transference of blocks of text from the printing press to the manuscript. In what one may call an intra-textual transference, that is, the reproduction of language in a nineteenth-century version of our contemporary copy and paste functionality, a commutability of language ensues, resulting in a loss of originality on a discursive level. The writing ceases to be an act of creation and becomes instead one of reproduction, an issue addressed creatively by Walter Benjamin.

In his celebrated essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin rethinks the link between artistic authenticity and reproducibility, reconfigured as an antithesis that he analyzes through the image of the "aura." Writing on the loss of authenticity, he states:

> One might subsume the eliminated element in the term "aura" and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique purpose. (223)

Benjamin's perspective on the notion of the copy is significant for *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, a text in which the two copy clerks' very working existence is grounded in the notion of re-production. The critic's analysis also invites a serious exploration of a potential discursive tension between content and form that occurs within a semantic layer underneath that of the plot or structure. The

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reproduced object to which Benjamin refers may be viewed as a cliché or an *idée reçue* detached from the writing through the process of *le clichage*. In addition, the last sentence of the passage summarizes the rupture that occurs between linguistic banalities and auratic creation, in which case the author becomes the vehicle of transference, replicating commonplace language in the writing itself. Despite being produced by human hands (and not by a machine, as with a printing press), a "withering away" of the aura occurs in that the mass inclusion of linguistic platitudes effectively socializes the text, eroding the authority and originality of the act of writing. From this perspective, the utility of writing is juxtaposed to the replication of clichés and *idées reçues*, leading to a possible effacement of uniqueness in favor of imitation. Yet by referencing clichés within his own writing, it is also true that Flaubert duplicates them, engendering a mimetic stance that necessarily repeats the *doxa*, a process similar to that embodied in the celebrated and ambivalent image of the parrot.

Flaubert's most extensive treatment of this image occurs in "Un Cœur simple". In this short story, the reader learns that the parrot's name is Loulou and that the humble servant Félicité is charged with his care: "Elle entreprit de l'instruire; bientôt il répéta: "Charmant garçon! Serviteur, Monsieur! Je vous salue, Marie!" (613). These are the first words the parrot learns and which, true to his nature, he passively repeats. Further, in a series of three clichés, Flaubert ridicules the endless cycle of social discourse—Félicité first teaches the parrot what she was taught, a discourse he then mimics with no end in sight. The first

cliché might suggest a passionate love inherent in Félicité's character. The second cliché draws attention to her inferior social status and, finally, in the third cliché, one may wonder why Félicité teaches a parrot what may be considered as one of the most well-known phrases in Catholicism. In this instance, Flaubert seems to mock the profound lack of spirituality embodied in the gesture of teaching a parrot religious dogma which, as with the cliché, is so commonly heard as to have lost much meaning, amounting to nothing more than empty sounds and automated responses, similar to what Emma hears in the convent. Further, in typically Flaubertian comical irony, even the doubling of the phoneme "Lou" in the parrot's name indicates the repetition or copy of a term. In Julian Barnes' novel *Flaubert's Parrot*, the image of the parrot as copy is developed farther as the narrator, Geoffrey Braithwaite, discovers that there may have been in fact two parrots featured in Flaubert's context. Reflecting on the first, the one supposedly used by Flaubert, he states:

> I imagined Loulou sitting on the other side of Flaubert's desk and staring back at him like some taunting reflection from a funfair mirror. No wonder three weeks of its parodic presence caused irritation. Is the writer much more than a sophisticated parrot? (18)

Barnes' comments touch upon the consideration of the parrot as object and one might wonder, with Braithwaite, if Flaubert considered the discursive habits of the parrot as a danger to avoid and if he perhaps looked upon it with disdain, as a reminder of the very repetition of common phrases that he wished to avoid. Bruce Thomas Boehrer alludes to this aversion when he writes of Flaubert's situation during the composition of "Un Cœur simple." He notes: Called upon to

write a story that runs counter to his personal instincts—a story about consolation rather than desolation—Flaubert draws instinctively upon the subject matter he despises" (103). For Flaubert, the figure of the parrot serves as a locus in which he confronts the presence of clichés and *idées reçues*, both in others' speech as well as in his own writing, a stance supported by the image of two parrots, an existence Braithwaite decides to investigate further.

In his exploration of the two parrots, Braithwaite decides to visit a summer pavilion used by Flaubert himself, a choice that allows him to affront the potential double of the original parrot claimed by the Hôtel-Dieu. Of the two parrots, he observes:

> Then I saw it. Crouched on top of a high cupboard was another parrot. Also bright green. Also, according to both the *gardienne* and the label on its perch, the very parrot which Flaubert had borrowed from the Museum of Rouen for the writing of *Un cœur simple*. I asked permission to take the second Loulou down, set him carefully on the corner of a display cabinet, and removed his glass dome. How do you compare two parrots, one already idealised by memory and metaphor, the other a squawking intruder? (21)

Flaubert's acquisition of the parrot from the museum brings to mind the Realist style of hands-on research and documentation, implying that the author may have actually needed the parrot to be brought literally before him. In an 1876 letter to Caroline, Flaubert affirms his visit to the museum, but offers no proof that he borrowed one. However, he does reveal the eerie presence of a parrot on his desk during his writing of "Un Cœur simple." He writes: "… actuellement, j'écris devant un *"amazone"* qui se tient sur ma table, le bec un peu de côté et me regardant avec ses yeux de verre" (V, 78). Furthermore, information

generally viewed as historical detail about Flaubert's writing habits and sources of inspiration also reveals, importantly, a deeper ideological and aesthetic significance. Braithwaite's description of the second parrot, as well as its comparison with the first, problematizes the concept of the parrot as authentic object, which suggests an additional doubling of the linguistic sign. This doubt may also be applied to what the parrot symbolizes—the empty repetition of discourse devoid of any integral authenticity. Braithwaite's question at the end of this passage offers a possible explanation of Flaubert's well-documented difficulty with language and his quest to avoid becoming merely "a sophisticated parrot." In much the same way, the inclusion of clichés and *idées reçues*, considered as parrot-like repetitions of conventional social discourse, represent the "squawking intruder" in a linguistic struggle against the "idealised" view of language present in the first parrot, conceived by Flaubert as possibly immune to the influence of the cliché.

Flaubert's *Correspondance* affirms that he, too, struggled with the validity of writing anything ultimately original without risking a parroting of language. In an 1867 letter to George Sand, he writes: "Quelle forme faut-il prendre pour exprimer parfois son opinion sur les choses de ce monde, sans risquer de passer, plus tard, pour un imbécile? (V, 347). Similar authorial concerns were present even in Flaubert's youth. For instance, in *Novembre*, written when he was only fifteen, the author already demonstrates a keen

perception of the arduous nature of the quest for linguistic authenticity. He

writes:

> Oui, il m'a semblé autrefois que j'avais du génie, je marchais le front rempli de pensées magnifiques, le style coulait sous ma plume comme le sang dans mes veines; … J'en étais ébranlé, ébloui; mais quand je trouvais chez d'autres les pensées et jusqu'aux formes mêmes que j'avais conçues, je tombais, sans transition, dans un découragement profond; *je m'étais cru leur égal et je n'étais plus que leur copiste!* Je passais alors de l'enivrement du génie au sentiment désolant de la médiocrité, avec toute la rage des rois détrônés et tous les supplices de la honte. Dans de certains jours, j'aurais juré être né pour la Muse, d'autres fois je me trouvais presque idiot; et toujours passant ainsi de tant de grandeur à tant de bassesse, j'ai fini, comme les gens souvent riches et souvent pauvres dans leur vie, par être et par rester misérable. (491, italics mine)

Flaubert's candid remarks on the difficulties of writing posit the search for

originality against what has already been said by one's predecessors. To admit

to feeling as if one was another writer's copyist reflects an author's perhaps

unrealistic goal of writing something truly original, free from as few

metadiscursive influences as possible. In the passage from *Novembre* quoted

above, Flaubert affirms the drive to create, all the while describing the dangers

of repetition inherent in all writing. Further, the author's dreams of success and

early experience with failure prefigure Bouvard and Pécuchet themselves, as

they flounder from one area of knowledge to another, basing their learning

solely on the written word, on the time-worn findings of predecessors, and

reproducing nothing more than insufficient copies of the original.

In *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, this ever-present linguistic danger of imitation

instead of production resembles an ideological *mise en abyme* that Flaubert

posits in the image of his two copy clerks, a gesture suggestive of his own

challenges as author. Subsequently, Flaubert feels perhaps that what he writes has already been written and that language may always be second-hand, mired in the commonplace and demoted to mimicry. In such a way, *Bouvard et Pécuchet* may be ultimately understood as an expression of the inescapable uncertainty of the very nature of the act of writing and, by extension, of any encounter with pure language itself, trapped between parody and parrotry. Hence, the question becomes one not of eliminating social discourse, but rather of finding a way to contain and manipulate it in the service of writing. I propose that Flaubert's solution, especially in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, is a textual isolation of clichés in order to craft a language that can resist their appropriating qualities without subsequently falling victim to them.

In her text *Folie et la chose littéraire*, Shoshana Felman devotes an entire chapter to Flaubert's aesthetics, entitled "Gustave Flaubert: Folie et Cliché," in which she explores clichés as discursive figures that emerge as mechanical repetitions inherent in the process of general language acquisition, as well as the potential repercussions on writing. She writes:

> L'exercice sociolinguistique de la répétition devient de la sorte un apprentissage, un conditionnement, un automatisme. Toute pratique linguistique répétitive véhicule une puissance hypnose, qui induit l'individu à des comportements sociaux ou mentaux stéréotypés dans lesquels il abdique sa subjectivité. (164)

Felman's classification of repetition as a force at once social and linguistic—as well as hypnotic—recalls Zijderveld's assertion that "clichés thus bring people unobtrusively into a certain mood. They mould their mentality and attitude, and

thus gradually prepare them to speak, to think, to feel and act in a specific direction" (13). On the one hand, Flaubert's isolation of these linguistic forms essentially reactivates their presence in the text, lending them a renewed force. On the other, this action also places his discourse in direct and reciprocal contact with them. Elaborating further on this juxtaposition, Felman suggests that the pairing of seemingly out-of-place linguistic modes is an essential goal of the literary genre of the novel. She observes: "La tâche du roman est de faire coexister toutes les répétitions … dans un espace linguistique où la différence se distribue comme un pouvoir *critique* de dissentiment et de renversement" (166). Appropriately, this reactivation of prowess that Flaubert affords to clichés and *idées reçues* enables a linguistic reversal through which banal language embodies a space of interrogation on the potentiality of language.

Consequently, when linked to the image of the parrot and the figure of repetition, clichés and *idées reçues* question the validity of a universal, absolute sense of the logos. Within this framework, the novel takes on an even more subversive nature and may be seen as a medium through which the fallacies of empty discourse are exposed, isolated deliberately from the rest of the narrative. As Felman notes: "A son tour, le roman lui-même utilise des clichés, mais pour les renverser, pour subvertir nos attentes 'perroquetières', et pour les interroger" (166). The transplanting of clichés into another linguistic sphere reduces their referential value, investigates their ideological function, and creates a modernist

view of the fragmentary effects they produce within language as cultural expression.

When Flaubert assigns a confined, visually-quarantined space to clichés, he effectively robs them of their invasive power and silences their parrot-like "chatter," creating what Felman calls "la modernité du lieu commun." She writes that with a cliché: "Flaubert a désigné celui-ci comme le lieu privilégié d'où se pose une question décisive: celle des rapports de l'écriture et du silence" (192), a question upon which rests the formidable decision "de savoir dans quelle mesure et à quel prix un tel silence [du cliché] était possible" (192). At this point, commonplace language surpasses the boundaries of oral speech and enters the realm of literary writing. To silence clichés indicates a removal of their authority, through a methodological move to reclaim language and renew its status as artistic medium. Further, a "silent" cliché does not suggest its elimination from writing, but rather the subversion of its repetitive qualities into a space of linguistic interrogation. To this end, the author's critical stance against the commonplace effectively targets clichés and *idées reçues* as linguistic modes to refute, by a paradoxical transcription of their suggestive power into his own writing, transforming them into objects of aesthetic scrutiny.

The complications arising from employing and resisting clichés simultaneously problematize Flaubert's position as author in that the decision to write may constitute an acceptance to become entangled in the web of what he

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seeks to expose. As Felman adds, no one is exempt from the impact of discursive duplicity:

> Nous sommes tous des perroquets. Nous sommes pris dans la toile d'araignée du langage, dans le piège permanent du discours social, discours où s'exercent, constamment, à nos dépens et à notre insu, des instances diffuses, anonymes, du pouvoir, qui sans arrêt nous présentent, nous séduisent à la superstition d'une lecture littérale. (168)

In Flaubert's case, the result is a paradox of language that positions his writing against common social discourse void of true meaning. Indeed, the confinement of the commonplace within linguistic barriers suggests that Flaubert does not attempt to force language to express *himself*, but rather to reveal *itself*. This paradox is especially notable in Flaubert's quarantining of cultural figures, establishing first a displacement of social discourse, then destabilizing it and, in a final attempt, seeking to disengage it altogether from the narration. In Chapter Five, for example, the copyists decide to play out a scene from Molière's *Tartuffe* for the only audience present, Madame Bordin, a widow who joins the group after the banquet and who confuses their actual speech with dialogue from the play:

> Et il [Bouvard] dardait ses prunelles, tendait la bouche, reniflait, avec un air extrêmement lubrique, finit même par s'adresser à Mme Bordin. Les regards de cet homme la gênaient, et quand il s'arrêta, humble et palpitant, elle cherchait presque une réponse. Pécuchet eut recours au livre:
> —*La déclaration est tout à fait galante*.
> —Ah! oui! s'écria-t-elle, c'est un fier enjôleur! (833)

At the end of the passage, even though the narrator states explicitly that Pécuchet is making reference to the drama, the meaning of the ensuing clichéd

declaration is displaced from the text and made to resemble actual speech, perceived by Madame Bordin as a real-time declaration. Consequently, this position upsets the stability of the narration and the reader is left unsure of the origin of what is written, and by whom, as well as of the voice responsible for initiating the discourse. Flaubert emphasizes this ambivalence by italicizing and estranging the cliché from the rest of the dialogue, thus undermining its influence while also stressing its prominence. This stylistic "exile" of the cliché is potentially *bovaryste* in that it encompasses a deliberate alteration of its linguistic and mimetic properties. In essence, Flaubert is forcing language to express its own discursive function and to define its own position in the narration, thus extending the general psychological boundaries of the definition of the term into a matter of linguistic authenticity. From this perspective, clichés involve something other than marks of poor elocution; they affect the very production of the text itself, progressing outside the limits of simple repetition and into the broader spectrum of textual mimesis.[5]

In his study on mimesis, Prendergast aligns the term with *doxa*, suggesting that "mimesis is basically a matter of repetition; its discourse 'parrots' the *doxa*" (181, italics Prendergast), an assertion that, when considered within the scope of Bouvard's and Pécuchet's repetitive re-enactments of

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[5] There are many definitions of mimesis, but for the present discussion, I view the term as a duplicitous form of writing that repeats social discourse, based primarily on Prendergast's text: *The Order of Mimesis: Balzac, Stendhal, Nerval, Flaubert*. Of particular importance is Chapter Six, entitled: "Flaubert: the stupidity of mimesis."

socially-accepted norms, stresses Flaubert's rethinking of how to avoid

repetition in his writing. As Prendergast observes:

> The question posed by Flaubert's work is whether there is any way out
> of the impasse of repetition. One answer which, with increasing
> regularity, modern criticism has seen Flaubert's work as giving to the
> question takes a somewhat paradoxical form: Flaubert outwits the *doxa*
> by "miming" it, by adopting a form of "parroting" as provocative in its
> implications as the last incarnation of Loulou in *Un Cœur simple*. (181)

Prendergast's comments confirm Flaubert's attentiveness to the problems

associated with repeating social discourse. His view also supports the idea that

Flaubert's awareness may constitute a strategy employed against the *doxa*

through techniques that invert systematically its power in a process of

disengagement with the narrative structure.

At play in Prendergast's consideration of the notions of mimesis and

doxa are the ramifications of the cliché and the *idée reçue*. To undermine the

polyvalent qualities social language represents a substantial facet of Flaubert's

aesthetics. He writes:

> [T]he ceaseless miming of the *idée reçue* marks the point at which
> Flaubert's novels engage critically with the nineteenth-century *doxa*. Or
> in Flaubert's own terms, the strategy of quotation represents a way of
> insinuating a criticism of the forms and effects of *bêtise*. (185)[6]

Thus one may conclude that Flaubert's incorporation of the *doxa* represents a

creative means to an aesthetic end, a way of circumventing the ubiquitous nature

of what is perceived as the universally-unquestioned claims of clichés and *idées*

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[6] As with mimesis, *bêtise* is ubiquitous in Flaubert's work and a finite definition of the term is
almost impossible due to its varied forms. However, here, I view the term as synonymous with
the gesture of accepting invalidated truths as being self-evident and universal. As Flaubert
affirms in an 1850 letter to Bouilhet: "Oui, la bêtise consiste à vouloir conclure. Nous sommes
un fil et nous voulons savoir la trame" (I, 680).

reçues. Further, Prendergast's reference to Flaubert's "engagement" with the *doxa* through his writing, especially through the techniques available to him through punctuation, signifies the author's own repetition of the *doxa* as a linguistic model to reproduce and critique.

Certainly, this position creates an additional semantic interrogation of what exactly constitutes the narration, versus the meta-narration, of a text such as *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. Specifically with regard to the notion of *bêtise*, the validity of the text is placed in opposition to the dangers of facile cultural commonplaces. This problematization of meaning points of course to Flaubert's desire to shield his writing from the contaminating effect of the *doxa*. Yet the separation between *doxa* and the surrounding discourse suggests in fact that, as an author, Flaubert was also reflecting on what necessarily constitutes the text itself.

According to Roland Barthes, the text can be conceived as "un tissu de citations, issues de mille foyers de la culture" (494). The multiple attributes of the text signal a plurivocity of meanings, a concept Barthes perceives as an inherent constituent of the *doxa*. As Herschberg-Pierrot notes: "Above all, Barthes associates doxa with the invasive power of mass discourse in modernity—with opinion in the statistical meaning of the term" ("Barthes and Doxa," 428). Thus *doxa* is linked not only to that which is discussed, but also, more importantly perhaps, to how it is discussed through the medium of language, creating echoes between texts, cultures, and social fabrics. These

relationships produce a form of intertextuality that Julia Kristeva calls "a text 'put on trial' or 'in process.'" She continues: "The moving unity inside a text that realizes itself as a repetitive structure (the triad: matrix, model, variants) confronting the reader with a repressed outside (the intertext) is called 'signifiance' or 'semiotic process'" (11). Faced with the adversity of overcoming the oppressive nature of the *doxa*, authentic human communication is further complicated. Herschberg-Pierrot formulates the issue this way: "[I]f doxa speaks in us, the question is, how should we speak afresh?" ("Barthes and Doxa," 432). One answer to this question may lie in the possible idea that when clichés exert a mimetic function in the text, as is the case in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, the distance an author can create between his text and the cliché underscores the recognition of these figures, as well as their textual (re)production.

To formulate finally the question more directly, when placed within a formal system of difference (i.e. within italics, quotation marks, or parentheses), clichés and *idées reçues* become the "other" of the text, a *bovaryste* irreducibility of language. As Prendergast affirms in his treatment of *bêtise* and mimesis, with *bovarysme* "there is literally nothing one can say that is not already caught up in the trammels of *bêtise*…. *Bêtise* is everywhere and inescapable. One is inside it as if inside a prison from which there is no possible escape" (194). Perhaps the only recourse Flaubert perceived to counter such an interminable and oppressive presence was to attempt its sequestration. As a

result, whether they are employed as embellishments or as references to social discourse or to other texts, clichés and *idées reçues* no longer possess the same position or the same value as the parts of language that are not confined within techniques of isolation. For Flaubert, this process consists in identifying clichés and *idées reçues* and then effectively isolating them as separate parts of the same system. Nevertheless, the usage of italics, quotation marks, and parentheses to nullify their influence creates an inner tension between what constitutes authentic language and what does not, resulting in a textualization of *bovarysme* that occurs within the language itself. By emphasizing certain parts of language to demonstrate how they differ from others, Flaubert posits language directly against itself, creating a *bovaryste* analysis that brings to light the self-reflexivity of his text, as well as the paradoxical nature of the act of all writing. Further, his desire to exhibit certain parts of language as alien to the whole suggests not the elimination of these parts, but rather a somehow more inclusive gesture, based on an ironic foundation, involving a negation of their gratuitous and commonly-accepted power through a sublimation of their contextual references. To this end, while italics, quotation marks, and parentheses serve to restrain social discourse, it is quite possibly in the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* that one finds the notions of clichés and *idées reçues* best explored, almost entirely devoid of contextual references, resulting in an ultimate exposure of *bêtise*.

Chapter Three: *Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues*: Writing the (Para)dox

It is interesting to note that, despite its literary brilliance, *Le Dictionnaire des idées recues* has not been the subject of as much critical insight within the scope of Flaubert's literary corpus as his celebrated novels, most notably *Madame Bovary* and *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. It is important to consider the influence of the *Dictionnaire* in the author's aesthetics, in part because of its unique generic status, but also because there is something quintessentially Flaubertian about the book. As Herschberg-Pierrot points out in fact: "Le *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* est le livre flaubertien par excellence" (9). Originally written to comprise the second volume of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* but published in fact much later in 1911 under the full title of *Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues: le catalogue des opinions chic*, Flaubert's *Correspondance* indicates that the *Dictionnaire* took roughly 29 years to compose, a duration that surpasses the publication of the majority of the author's novels. The first mention of work occurs in an 1850 letter to Bouilhet when Flaubert writes: "Tu fais bien de songer au *Dictionnaire des Idées Reçues*…" (I, 678) and the last mention of it appears in an 1879 letter to Madame Roger des Genettes in which Flaubert states: "…le *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* [est] entièrement fait et qui doit être placé dans le second volume" (V, 599). The "second volume" Flaubert describes refers to *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, suggesting a direct correlation between the two texts, as well as the author's intent to present both pieces in a single work. Readers of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* will recall the couple's uncritical reliance

on the authority of the printed word and, at the end of the text, their eventual return to copying. This obsession with transcribing language is significant in that it also illustrates Flaubert's own fixation on recording the commonplace speech of others, an obsession that may be traced as far back as 1831 when he writes to Chevalier:

> Si tu veux nous associers pour écrire moi, j'écrirait des comédie et toi tu écriras tes rèves, et comme il y a une dame qui vient chez papa et qui nous contes toujours des bêtises je les écrirait. je n'écris pas bien parceque j'ai une casse à recevoir de nogent. (I, 4)

Despite the obvious grammar mistakes (Flaubert was ten years old when he wrote this letter), this passage contains the conceptual germ of the *Dictionnaire*. With Chevalier, Flaubert was committing himself to writing and, more specifically, to the writing of comedies for which he found his first inspiration in the words of a woman who spoke always in what could be described as the cultural language of "bêtise." This enthusiasm does not wane, as the author devotes much of the rest of his life to cataloguing the *bêtise* of his contemporaries. While the meanings attributed to the notion of *bêtise* are numerous, in the present discussion I employ the term as it relates specifically to language, to the discursive stupidity Flaubert observed in others' uncritical reliance on—and mechanical repetition of—opinions ubiquitous in society yet dubiously descriptive of reality. Throughout Flaubert's life, these observations become an integral component of the structure of the *Dictionnaire*. For example, in an 1852 letter to Colet, he writes: "On y trouverait donc (dans le *Dictionnaire*), par ordre alphabétique, sur tous les sujets possibles, *tout ce qu'il*

faut dire en société pour être un homme convenable et aimable" (II, 208). The italicized passage suggests that Flaubert adopts a clearly satirical perspective toward the subject of his work, and it becomes evident that the *Dictionnaire* was to serve as an essential tool in the author's battle against the pervasive forces of *bêtise*.

As can be argued with all dictionaries, on a fundamental level, these works reflect the desire to enumerate, alphabetize, and classify. Indeed, according to Littré's *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, "dictionnaire" is defined as: "Recueil des mots d'une langue, des termes d'une science, d'un art, rangés par ordre alphabétique ou autre, avec leur signification" (III, 37). It is worth noting that this definition illustrates well the influence of the notion of Positivism, an ideological and philosophical movement with close ties to Realist aesthetics, with specific concentration on the need to explore meaning imposed on the mind by experience and to express relationships between observable phenomena. In other words, the meanings contained in a dictionary are derived directly from the empirical realm and denote a reliance on sensory or exterior validation. As a school of thought associated with the field of Sociology, Positivism remains nonetheless particularly difficult to define, due in large part to the movement's engagement with numerous fields of inquiry. As Michael Singer notes for example, the term is "so widely pervasive as to pass generally unremarked" (viii). During the nineteenth century, one of the notion's most important proponents was August Comte who, in his *Discours sur l'esprit*

positif, attributes five primary meanings to the word. For the present study, it is particularly informative to explore the first and the last of these five, as they suggest the ways in which interpretations of the idea pertain directly to the genre of dictionaries. For the first meaning, Comte writes that Positivism:

> … convient pleinement au nouvel esprit philosophique, ainsi caractérisé d'après sa constante consécration aux recherches vraiment accessibles à notre intelligence, à l'exclusion permanente des impénétrables mystères dont s'occupait surtout son enfance. (41)

Comte's reference to a committed devotion to research suggests a scientific, orderly classification of information within a particular branch of knowledge, embodying a remark that applies obviously quite well to dictionaries. As texts, dictionaries represent the human desire to delineate facts in well-organized sequences, based on verified data or scientific observation. Further, from a traditional standpoint, these works do not aim to disprove, but rather to establish meanings associated with certain terms. This facet is linked to what Comte describes in the fifth meaning he ascribes to the idea of *positif*. He writes:

> Il faut enfin remarquer spécialement une cinquième application, moins utlisée que les autres, quoique d'ailleurs pareillement universelle, quand on emploie le mot *positif* comme le contraire de *négatif*. Sous cet aspect, il indique l'une des plus éminentes propriétés de la vraie philosophie moderne, en la montrant, par sa nature, non à détruire, mais à organiser. (42)

In Comte's view, Positivism exemplifies a universal human need to understand individual behavior in response to external forces. In this vein, it proves interesting to examine Comte's fifth meaning with regard to Flaubert's aesthetics in the *Dictionnaire*. By way of a linguistic twist that shifts the

emphasis from behavior to linguistic interaction, Flaubert demonstrates that, rather than viewing the negative connotations of *bêtise*, he embraces the polyvalence that emerges from the interplay among the entries. In much the same way that Positivists examine human relationships on a social level, Flaubert explores the effects of these interconnections on a discursive level, specifically how various parts of language interact on a linguistic plane.

Additionally, Flaubert's choice to populate his dictionary with received ideas, i.e. notions grounded in social convention, highlights the fact that the notoriety of commonplace language increased dramatically during the nineteenth century. As Herschberg-Pierrot outlines in her article, "Bibliothèque d'idées reçues au XIXe siècle," the rise in popularity of dictionaries of clichés and *idées reçues* in the 1800s brings to light curious examples of additional *dictionnaires*, already in print in Flaubert's lifetime, more specifically during the developmental stages of his own *Dictionnaire*. Among those listed in her study are Quatrelles' *Parfait causeur: Petit manuel en langue parisienne*, Eugène Vivier's *Très peu de ce que l'on entend tous les jours*, and Lucien Rigaud's *Dictionnaire des lieux communs de la conversation, du style épistolaire, du théâtre, du livre, du journal, de la tribune, du barreau, de l'oraison funèbre, etc.* The pedantic nuances of the titles of these works may attest not only to a conventional, even stodgy approach to language, but also to the fact that these authors utilize commonplace language as the subject matter of dictionaries, acknowledging its presence in writing and transforming it into an object of

interest. Additionally, as the full title of Flaubert's work, *Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues: le catalogue des opinions chic* affirms, this stance toward these forms of language fuses both the concept of a "dictionnaire" and a "catalogue," a parallel that highlights the use of terms such as "dictionnaire," "manuel," or "catalogue," as indicative of an authoritative voice that aims to facilitate belief in their authenticity, suggesting both serious and comical perspectives which, according to Herschberg-Pierrot, result in a "littérature de divertissement, [qui] prétend aussi énoncer un savoir, mais de façon ambiguë" ("Bibliothèque," 38). Because of the ambiguity to which the critic refers, the ability to present both humorous and straightforward approaches to clichés and *idées recues* posits these works in an additional type of text, that of the *sottisier*.

The *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française* defines *sottisier* as: "une personne qui dit beaucoup de sottises…. Le nom s'emploie comme *bêtisier*, pour un recueil d'anecdotes, de chansons libres, puis au XIXe s., de platitudes, de sottises relevées chez des auteurs connus." Also, the *sottisier* draws from both ethnographical and linguistic sources and employs as subject matter clichés and *idées reçues* whose meanings are based on cultural norms of nineteenth-century French society. Interestingly, in a *sottisier*, these forms of language become entries that represent as objects the very subjects that most dictionaries ordinarily scorn, that is, fixed expressions and commonplace language. In his own dictionary, Flaubert also employs these expressions, draws attention to their presence, and implicates strongly as well the role of the reader.

On a first level, Flaubert's *Dictionnaire* seems to present a framework similar to any other—an alphabetized list of words and expressions devoted to explaining their culturally- and socially-based meanings and applications. However, at its core lies a stringent irony directed at the consumers of clichés and *idées reçues*, that is, at the daily practitioners of *bêtise*. To this end, the *Dictionnaire* seeks to expose the fallacy of certain occurrences of public opinion in a single, highly-ironical generic structure. The reader of Flaubert's dictionary, reading only the words and their definitions, is left to draw his or her own conclusions about the meanings suggested therein, often being caught in a never-ending web of clichés and *idées reçues*. For instance, when readers consult the entry "Blondes" in the *Dictionnaire*, they find the following definition: "Plus chaudes que les brunes (voy. Brunes)" (1001). The reader then proceeds to the entry for "Brunes," which states: "Sont plus chaudes que les Blondes (voy. Blondes)" (1002). The tautology contained in these definitions differs from normal dictionary structure by limiting the meaning of one term to only one other, which in turn has only one meaning, that of the original word in question. This strategy catches the attention of the reader who may wonder, as Flaubert stated: "si on se fout de lui, oui ou non…" (I, 679). Furthermore, the circularity of the "Blondes/Brunes" dichotomy continues, as the terms reemerge under entries related to ethnicity such as "Négresses," a word defined as: "Plus chaudes que les blanches (voy. Brunes et Blondes)" (1018). The circuit is never closed and the definition provides an overtly subjective statement that

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contributes little to the actual linguistic meaning of the entry. Indeed, traditionally, a dictionary furnishes terms that accompany or add to the primary entry, terms that readers may examine as part of the broader meaning of the first word. However, in the *Dictionnaire*, while "Blondes" refers readers to "Brunes," instead of providing additional terms for consideration, the text forces the reader to return instead to the main entry, a process that restricts meaning only to the term itself. What is more, particularly with regard to the "Blondes/Brunes" dichotomy, Flaubert highlights the humor of this circularity, thus making readers aware of the limitations of language and stressing the self-reflexivity of language. And, if he or she decides to look up the word "dictionnaire," the entry reads: "En dire: N'est fait que pour les ignorants" (1006), which adds an important metatextual twist to the entire process, hinting at the possibility that Flaubert had already anticipated the reader's next move, one that he ironizes heavily. Additionally, the meaning attributed to "dictionnaire" underscores the dangers of deferring naïvely to *bêtise* (or to the dictionary itself) as a linguistic authority, an uncritical reliance the nature of the dictionary seems to sustain.

Through its focus on the classification of entries, a dictionary becomes the locus for inscribing words and phrases with fixed meanings, with readers seeking standardized advice on how to employ the terms correctly. In fact, the trustworthy and reassuring nature that a dictionary conventionally expresses can be viewed as part of what Flaubert seeks to overturn. Instead of representing a space of finitude, under Flaubert's direction, the dictionary becomes a space of

linguistic recreation. Indeed, through the creation of cyclical patterns, references, and juxtapositions, Flaubert transforms the confining structure of the dictionary into a ludic space, effectively destabilizing the structure of the text by working in and through *bêtise* itself. However, this process also points to a particular anxiety facing all readers who consult a dictionary, that is, the fact that dictionaries, in the sheer amount of entries they contain, bear witness to how much one does not know. To this end, dictionaries are unsettling in that they highlight the infinity of language readers confront when they are opened, a veritable ocean of words in which they float aimlessly among entries and meanings. In this case, the definition above in which Flaubert states that dictionaries are constructed for "des ignorants," also implies that we are all "ignorant" to the extent that we all, eventually, must turn to dictionaries for linguistic guidance. Further, by choosing the genre of the dictionary and then disengaging its structure, that is, by recreating similar cyclical repetitions on a discursive level, Flaubert's text highlights his creativity as author, as well as the erroneous judgments these texts tend to engender and the social mechanics of the *idée reçue*. As Jacquet observes of the *Dictionnaire*:

> Dans ce texte, de fait, Flaubert semble se montrer intéressé pas tant au collectage, à la reproduction plus ou moins brute de ce que le rite social exige du parler des gens qu'à une mise en évidence, une exposition, une mise à nu des mécanismes que le répercuteur d'idées reçues met en acte sur le langage…. (12)

As Jacquet's apt usage of the term "collectage" demonstrates, Flaubert does not intend to write the *Dictionnaire* as a haven in which to store *bêtise* as if it were a

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treasured possession, an action that might seem contrary to the widespread nineteenth-century obsession with aesthetic collecting, a particular site for which Sharon Marcus describes as the "museum plot." In her text, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London*, Marcus states: "The museum plot transfers objects from public spaces into a private one and then details the efforts required to protect that space from invasion…" (62). Flaubert, for his part, reverses this gesture because, while he does place commonplace language on display, he does not depict it as an object to be revered and protected, but rather sequestered and ridiculed. Through the author's focus on the impact of *idées reçues* on language itself, the attentive reader of the *Dictionnaire* confronts a work in a context set apart from other, exterior influences, be they sociological, religious, or beyond.

The act of transposing terms and their meanings from a social context into the realm of writing may be an effective way of approaching writing as an echo of *idées reçues*, as a way of evading the corrosive properties of stupidity, while incorporating their presence into the discourse as both subject and object. In this case, the *Dictionnaire* surpasses the level of a mere compendium of *bêtise* and becomes a textual bridge between social discourse and literary production, the stage on which Flaubert displays his artistry with language in a veritable play on words. An example of this type of interaction occurs in the entry for Diogenes: "Diogène: Je cherche un homme…Retire-toi de mon soleil" (1006). Diogenes is considered as one of the principal founders of the Cynic

movement of philosophy and the entry alludes to an encounter between the philosopher and Alexander the Great, a chance meeting that Joan Price describes in her text: *Understanding Philosophy: Ancient and Hellenistic Thought*. She writes:

> There is a story that tells of Diogenes sitting next to his barrel enjoying the warmth of the shining Sun. Alexander the Great rode up to Diogenes on his magnificent white horse. Impressed with Diogenes's reputation as a philosopher, Alexander asked if there was anything he could do for him. 'Yes,' said Diogenes. 'Stand to one side, you are blocking the sun.' (87)

It is important to note that Flaubert's entry does not provide any further information on the meeting to the reader, be it citational, biographical, or other. This absence is due largely to the fact that the details in the entry itself are derived from lore, passed down verbally because none of the cynic texts have survived. Therefore, by utilizing what is perhaps the most famous part of the story as an isolated entry, that is, with no additional referential markers, Flaubert emphasizes the entry conceived as an *idée reçue* in his time, and invests the term with a degree of ambiguity that allows him to play with its meaning.

To this end, the term appears in the *Dictionnaire* almost like a character in a play, with the definition representing his lines, replete with quotation marks. This linguistic 'play'—in the sense of Flaubert's creativity with language, as well as 'play' in the theatrical sense—provides another interesting dimension to the invasive presence of the *idée reçue*, placing it in a lead role, all the while mocking its very presence through the language itself. As Jacquet notes, Flaubert's text is a "pièce pour les mots, pièce pour le Mot, en tout cas, pour le

Mot se dressant, véritable Allégorie sur la souillure océanique du reçu" (25). In his dictionary, Flaubert effectively strips language to its basic operations, those that operate on a syntactical level, thereby reducing the influence of *idées reçues*, which rely on cultural inferences for meaning, a strategy Jacquet formulates in this way:

> En retenant la forme du dictionnaire, Flaubert non seulement effaçait le producteur d'idées reçues, mais aussi le retranscripteur, le sélectionneur, le scripteur de l'idée reçue, et adoptait la forme d'écriture la plus propice à la théâtralisation des mots, la présentation par entrées. (21)

Relegating *bêtise* to a purely linguistic level does not eliminate it entirely, but alters its presentation and its effects by confining it to written form. This reduction allows Flaubert to explore the interaction among entries in the *Dictionnaire* as a discursive performance, as a *mise en scène* of stupidity. Further, while the instances of *bêtise* remain, they are incorporated into a linguistic system that scrutinizes their presence and highlights their fallacy. In this case, rather than trying to extinguish *bêtise*, Flaubert seems to utilize the *Dictionnaire* as a separate linguistic space in which to confine it. Thus, the form of the dictionary can be seen as a potential terminal resting place of *bêtise*, where the often tortuous act of writing becomes the cathartic challenge of abating the power of commonplace language in writing. As Jacquet aptly states:

> En effet lui, Flaubert, qui n'existe que par elle [the writing], lui, le prêtre de l'Écriture va s'immoler sur l'autel d'une écriture qui ne lui appartient pas, d'une écriture qui va utiliser des mots qu'il ne peut pas reconnaître, d'une écriture qui nomme ce qui ne devrait pas exister, celle du lieu commun. (28)

The *Dictionnaire* becomes thus more than a *catalogue des opinions chic*. In Flaubert's aesthetics, it attains the additional status of a 'banlieue' where *idées reçues* are forever exiled (in the etymological sense of the term as a "lieu de ban" or "place of banishment"). The challenge, then, is not only to confine *bêtise*, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to find authenticity in its midst. The *Dictionnaire* circumvents this problem by providing Flaubert with a mechanism for expunging public discourse from his writing, an outlet in which to purge his mind of his own use of clichés and *idées reçues* and, more specifically, to produce a text in which readers must rely only on the words in order to create meaning, a situation that the *Correspondance* suggests was well-suited to Flaubert's aspirations for his dictionary.

In an 1850 letter to Bouilhet, Flaubert describes the reaction he hopes to achieve from readers of *Le Dictionnaire*. He states:

> Tu fais bien de songer au *Dictionnaire des Idées Reçues*. Ce livre *complètement* fait et précédé d'une bonne préface où l'on indiquerait comme quoi l'ouvrage a été fait dans le but de rattacher le public à la tradition, à l'ordre, à la convention générale, et arrangée de telle manière que le lecteur ne sache pas si on se fout de lui, oui ou non, ce serait peut-être une œuvre étrange, et capable de réussir, car elle serait toute d'actualité. (I, 679)

The last part of the citation merits careful attention, due especially to the ambivalent status projected for the reader. Readers of the *Dictionnaire* in Flaubert's time undoubtedly recognized instances of *bêtise* similar to their own spoken discourse and linguistic habits, an identification that creates a feeling of insecurity *vis-à-vis* the information presented, akin to a literary *déjà-vu* in which

the reader senses that he or she has heard, read, or spoken these words before. The process of readers reading fragments of their own speech denotes a form of self-interrogation and, as Herschberg-Pierrot observes: "…c'est finalement notre faculté de juger qui est sollicitée et devient le centre de l'œuvre" (*Le Dictionnaire*, 10). Therefore, Flaubert intends not only to catalog the *bêtise* of his time, but also to mock satirically the judgment of readers who accept it as a dogmatic, unwavering truth. The author's critique of this kind of uncritical acceptance is discernible throughout his writing, most notably in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. It is also prevalent in *Madame Bovary*, particularly during Charles' experience in school when his classmates ridicule him over his dunce-like cap. As the narrator observes:

> Le soir, à l'étude, il tira ses bouts de manches de son pupitre, mit en ordre ses petites affaires, régla soigneusement son papier. Nous le vîmes qui travaillait en conscience, cherchant tous les mots dans le dictionnaire et se donnant beaucoup de mal. (24)

The hapless Charles typifies the type of reader Flaubert aims to deride in his *Dictionnaire*, one who turns to ready-made definitions to explain the outside world, and whose actions are not unlike those of Bouvard and Pécuchet who, at the end of the narrative, begin to copy "comme autrefois" (987), returning full circle to begin anew their patterns of failure. In Charles' case, he is required to copy twenty times the statement *ridiculus sum*, an act of ironic repetition that engrains his character with features of the Latin sentence throughout the remainder of the novel. Indeed, Charles' reliance on the dictionary can be read as prefiguring that of readers of the *Dictionnaire*, in which case one may wonder

if the same *ridiculus* description might apply. In fact, in Bouvard and Pécuchet's blundering misreadings and Charles' lamentable inability to understand the world around him, we can discern the repetition and *bêtise* that Flaubert holds up to ridicule, ironized in the *Dictionnaire*, not only through the material chosen, but also in his choice of the dictionary itself as literary medium.

As author, Flaubert adopts an ambivalent stance toward clichés and *idées reçues*. On the one hand, the author's creative instincts with language allow him to play with the discursive presentation of *bêtise*, suggesting a certain fascination with its presence. On the other hand, to confine *idées reçues* to a fixed medium also indicates the author's disdain of these spoken forms of language in the sphere of writing. In his article, "Une Idée de Flaubert: la lettre de Platon," Jacques Derrida alludes to this kind of vacillation when he writes:

> Je me trouve donc dans le lieu commun et dans l'idée reçue. Vous savez comme l'évaluation profonde du lieu commun et de l'idée reçue reste contradictoire chez Flaubert, indécise plutôt, ambivalente, fascine, le même affect y étant traversé à la fois d'attraction et de répulsion. (659)

The contradictory sensibility between attraction and repulsion is reminiscent of the sublime, a notion that applies well to Flaubert's complex attitude toward writing. In his text *Cigarettes are Sublime*, Richard Klein provides an interesting account of Emmanuel Kant's philosophy that proves helpful in analyzing Flaubert's use of clichés and *idées reçues*. In addressing what he views as the negative pleasure of the sublime, he writes:

> For Kant, the sublime, as distinct from the merely beautiful, affords a negative pleasure because it is accompanied, as its defining condition, by a moment of pain. By pain he strictly means the normal feelings of shock

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or fear aroused by the presence of whatever impresses us by virtue of its sheer magnitude, giving rise to awe or respect…. The first moment of the encounter with what   we call the sublimely beautiful, the feeling of awe or respect involving fear, is an experience of blockage: We discover in that fearful moment the limits of our capacity to imagine an infinite abyss—the harsh experience of recognizing the limitation of our faculty to represent in finite images the encounter with a magnitude that seems to be infinite. (62-63)

Here, Klein's interpretation of the sublime parallels Derrida's comment, particularly the feeling of fear or blockage *vis-à-vis* the omnipresence of the linguistic cliché. When Flaubert's attitude toward commonplace language is considered with regard to Klein's remarks, it becomes conceivable that Flaubert's aesthetics point to a recognition of the limits of language, boundaries the author attempts to broaden in the *Dictionnaire*. Further, even though Flaubert adopts an ironic approach toward the inclusion of *idées reçues* in the *Dictionnaire*, their very insertion into the writing suggests, at the very least, a semantic parroting of the *doxa* that leaves readers in a void in which they do not know exactly who is speaking or why. This process occurs because, in spoken form, *idées reçues* are employed so mechanically and habitually that they may pass unnoticed. Yet through the written form of entries, readers encounter direct instances of their own linguistic habits that create feelings of doubt, hesitation, and even resistance. As Derrida notes:

Quand on formule une idée reçue comme idée reçue, on ne laisse pas savoir si on y souscrit ou si on se moque de ceux qui y souscrivent, si on *la* parle ou si on *en* parle comme ceux qui en parlent ou comme ce dont parlent les autres, si bien qu'à la fin on n'ose plus parler. (661)

The predicament Derrida describes typifies the feeling of disorientation evoked by the *Dictionnaire*. However, Flaubert deliberately fragments *bêtise* to the point that the very act of reading at all becomes dubious. In the *Dictionnaire*, there are numerous examples of entries with which one is left unsure who is speaking, and it is interesting to note that some of those entries relate directly to writing. For instance, in the term "Grammaire," which carries the definition: "L'apprendre aux enfants dès le plus bas âge, comme étant une chose claire et facile" (1012), one is unsure of the origin of the subjectivity of the definition. What is more, in the term "grammaire," we might ask ourselves if this definition reflects Flaubert's own attitude toward writing, whether it is another of his ironisized commentaries, or whether the information comes directly from public discourse, copied by Flaubert's hand. The answer to these questions remains open, as is the case throughout the *Dictionnaire* because Flaubert utilizes language as something other than what it is to such a degree that, ultimately, one is unsure what it actually means. In the *Dictionnaire*, Flaubert incorporates commonplace language into his text not in order to participate in it, but rather to change it into something other, a catalyst for creation instead of stagnation. It becomes possible, then, that this dichotomy of attraction and repulsion expresses characteristics of *bovarysme*, particularly notable in the domain of consummation.

In Chapter One, I outlined how Emma Bovary construes a misguided reality that fails to correspond to her actual social station, through her reading of

forbidden texts in the convent, as well as later in her life. I argued that this distortion of reality through fiction is *bovaryste* in that Emma tries vainly to juxtapose fiction and reality and conceives of literature as something other than what it is, a process that results in catastrophic consequences that plague her throughout the novel. Now, one could also argue that Emma's *bovaryste* actions resemble those Flaubert carries out in the *Dictionnaire*. If, as we are led to believe through the *Correspondance*, the entries contained in the *Dictionnaire* represent the *bêtise* of Flaubert's time, it is also true that they indicate that the author consumes and uses them for his own purposes. Even though the way Flaubert uses *bêtise* transcends its banal nature, the author's creation of a text constructed entirely out of commonplace language may represent nonetheless a *bovaryste* gesture, particularly since, in the structure of the *Dictionnaire*, *bêtise* becomes something other than what it is. At this point, the status of Flaubert's dictionary becomes especially nebulous. Standing as an ambivalent testament to the omnipresence of human stupidity, the *Dictionnaire* evokes the image of a discursive vanguard, aiming to protect literature from the evils of *bêtise*, even as it incorporates and transforms it. By contrast, the power of *idées reçues* stems from their consumption and subsequent transmission among interlocutors, as they are consumed from one source and copied to another. This process, when applied to the *Dictionnaire*, casts Flaubert in the position of copying the *doxa* that surrounds him and then satirically transcribing it into dictionary form. Further, one might argue that this method problematizes the notion of creativity

or, at the very least, diminishes it, highlighting, as Brix notes, "…un dernier trait caractéristique des bovarystes: leur impuissance à devenir des créateurs" (106). Indeed, what in fact can be creative in the act of recording stupidity in written form? Brix's comment is important in answering this question in that it reveals Flaubert's predicament *vis-à-vis* commonplace language. How in fact is it possible to create from *bêtise* instead of merely consuming it, repeating it, and allowing it to spread?

One answer to this enigmatic question involves considering an additional aspect of the cyclical nature of *bêtise* in the *Dictionnaire*. The repetitions among the entries demonstrate not only their prevalence, but also Flaubert's reluctance to proffer any final judgment on their value. After all, it was he who wrote that "la *bêtise* consiste à vouloir conclure" (III, 34), in which case the *Dictionnaire* takes on the potential of an act of anti-*bêtise* through which Flaubert attenuates its circular and infectious nature by relegating it to the writing itself. Therefore, instead of falling victim to writing in *bêtise*, Flaubert creates in and through it. In other words, instead of writing the *doxa*, he writes against it, producing a paradox in the truest sense of the term. According to Hill, the nature of this tactic encompasses not only the *Dictionnaire*, but pervades virtually all of Flaubert's writing:

> It is in this process that Flaubert's writing constitutes itself, irremediably, as a journey and an adventure through and against the *doxa*, through and against what he will call the "bêtise" of received ideas…. The theme of "bêtise," of course, is one that preoccupied Flaubert throughout his whole career, reaching its final formulation in the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* and the unfinished *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. (335)

Hence Flaubert's predicament as author resurfaces: if *bêtise* is inescapable, at which point can creativity intervene? Here, the ambiguous nature of the *Dictionnaire* aids in the understanding of Flaubert's methodology because the author places *bêtise* in a central position in the text, thereby emphasizing not only its presence, but also its effects on the language itself. As Culler points out, in the *Dictionnaire*:

> [s]entences are simply juxtaposed, as isolated bits of linguistic matter. We can glimpse here Flaubert's basic attitude towards language: one does not speak, one does not construct sentences to express one's relation to the world and to others; one is spoken. (*Uncertainty*, 164)

Culler's remark furnishes a provocative description of the process at work in the text. Each entry seems to represent a mass of words that offers readers little information or meaning. According to Culler, this effect occurs because commonplace language draws its power from a cultural sphere, a source Flaubert removes from his work. He writes: "Cutting speech off from its origins in practical life, Flaubert treats it as a set of phrases rather than the accomplishment of human intentions" (*Uncertainty*, 164). Culler's remarks also reveal that Flaubert's intent is not simply to create an account of *bêtise*, but to scrutinize it through writing since, when no one can identify who is speaking, the *Dictionnaire* becomes its own object, exhibiting characteristics analogous to those associated with the notion of the text, a development addressed in depth by Barthes.

In his celebrated 1971 essay "De l'œuvre au texte," Barthes delineates his perspective on what constitutes the text through a meticulous analysis that

establishes the text as an integral part of the creative aesthetic process. Early in his essay, the critic observes succinctly: "…depuis cent ans, nous sommes dans la répétition" (II, 1211), a remark that elicits the repetitive and cyclical nature of the *Dictionnaire*, published only 60 years prior to his own essay. He also suggests that the literary realm has yet to thwart the contaminating power of the *doxa*, a critical perspective that proves especially useful in interpreting the mechanics of the *Dictionnaire*. Barthes opens his analysis of the text with an assertion that aids in the understanding of the *Dictionnaire* itself as text: "Le Texte ne doit pas s'entendre comme d'un objet computable.… Le Texte, lui, est un champ méthodologique" (II, 1212). Flaubert's ludic and strategic approach to the alphabetical classification of entries, the choice of which entries to include, as well as the relationship among these entries, all characterize a very meticulous approach to clichés and *idées reçues*. In the easily-recognizable form of a dictionary, Flaubert deliberately displays *bêtise* in order to counteract its authority in writing. To put it differently, Flaubert utilizes the form of the dictionary as a frame to impede the corrosive power of *bêtise* and to highlight the text that exists behind these fragments, that is, the underlying creative process of the writing itself. Thus the notion of stupidity, which can elude readers, becomes more easily identifiable in the *Dictionnaire*. Yet it is not just the sequestration of *bêtise* that constitutes the importance Flaubert's text as a *texte* in the Barthesian sense of the term, but also the ulterior associations derived from within it. As Barthes notes: "Le Texte essaie de se placer très

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exactement *derrière* la limite de la *doxa.…* En prenant le mot à la lettre, on pourrait dire que le Texte est toujours *paradoxal*" (II, 1213). By placing *bêtise* in a central position, Flaubert underscores the imaginative possibilities of writing behind what appears as simple fragments of discourse, echoes, and meanings.

Indeed, Flaubert takes the epitome of the banal and transforms it into an example of aesthetic creativity. One of the means by which he achieves this result is through the use of universal pronouns and adverbs. These parts of speech generate an inclusiveness that renders the entries as non-specific as possible, while simultaneously classifying all the meanings of the word in one entry. While numerous entries in the *Dictionnaire* emobody this effect, the listing for architects is particularly noteworthy: "Architectes. Tous imbéciles. Oublient toujours l'escalier des maisons" (1000). For the reader, this entry is problematic in multiple ways. First, contrary to a traditional dictionary, there is no preliminary definition of what an architect is or does. Second, through the plurality of the term, the reader gleans little factual information, but rather a subjective, moral opinion, an outcome contrary to the primary function of the dictionary. The effects of this classification are compounded by the pronoun "tous" and the adverb "toujours." The pronoun "tous" modifies the subject "architectes," suggesting that all architects are grouped within a singular entry. However, the next part conflicts with the first because, while "toujours" modifies the verb "oublier" and "l'escalier des maisons," not all architects

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always forget and not all architects design houses calling for stairways. Thus when readers search for information on the meaning of "architect," they obtain merely a debasement of all architects. Therefore, from a seemingly anodyne fragment of commonplace language, the removal of what typically defines an architect most aptly, such as references to designing or planning, destabilizes the entry and creates a need in the reader to reconstitute its meaning. This process highlights both the stupidity of the remark, as well as Flaubert's ability to create from within the ideology of *bêtise*, rendering the entry humorous to the point of becoming nonsensical. This absence of unified meaning gives way to a multitude of possibilities that vary according to individual reader interpretations.

Multiplicity lies at the heart of the *Dictionnaire*, and one can certainly state that in addition to the aforementioned cyclical patterns of entries, as well as Flaubert's usage of terms to convey a universal meaning, a polyvalent force is at work. Yet it is important not to overlook an additional plurality present in Flaubert's text—the entries themselves—the sheer amount of which creates a labyrinth of chaotic meaning, evoking feelings of bewilderment and amusement. According to Barthes, these sentiments occur precisely because of the plurality of the *texte*:

> Le Texte est pluriel. Cela ne veut pas dire seulement qu'il a plusieurs sens, mais qu'il accomplit le pluriel même du sens: un pluriel *irréductible* (et non pas seulement acceptable) … Le lecteur du Texte pourrait être comparé à un sujet désœuvré… ce qu'il perçoit est multiple, irréductible, provenant de substances et de plan hétérogènes, décrochés: lumières, couleurs, végétations, chaleur, air, explosions ténues de bruits, minces cris d'oiseaux, voix d'enfants de l'autre côté de la vallée, passages, gestes, vêtements d'habitants tous près ou très loin; tous

incidents sont à demi identifiables: ils proviennent de codes connus, mais leur combinatoire est unique, fonde la promenade en différence qui ne pourra se répéter que comme différence. (II, 1213-14)

While he does not explicitly treat Flaubert's text, in this passage Barthes' encyclopedic list of nouns is reminiscent of the extensive lists of words and entries one finds in a dictionary, and the reader reads them in their plurality (virtually all of Barthes' examples are presented in the plural form). When applied to the *Dictionnaire*, the "lecteur désœuvré" discovers much the same experience, that is, a feeling of wandering aimlessly around in what he or she has already experienced. For example, in the definition: "Fourrure. Signe de richesse" (1010), the reader does not learn what a "fourrure" actually might be and, given that Flaubert disembeds the language from its social context, the particular type of wealth implied also becomes ambiguous. Further, the multiplicity of this signification will change according to the reader's reception of it, but will also remain unique to the conditions under which it is originally conceived. Or, as Barthes formulates it: "ils proviennent de codes connus, mais leur combinatoire est unique." Nineteenth-century readers of Flaubert's text surely understood the cultural climate from which the definitions emerged, as well as the socially-based inferences made from them. Yet despite this knowledge, the combinations and meanings derived from these entries remain unique to each reader's experiences, citations that create, as Barthes suggests, a feeling that they have been "*déjà lues…*" (II, 1214). From a critical perspective, this suggestive power of meaning lends extraordinary depth to the *Dictionnaire*.

In his isolation of *bêtise* within a system of echoes and juxtapositions, Flaubert imbues doubt to a language that is normally supposed to remain authoritative, especially the ability to conclude decisively. The result is an polysemic display of the power of the act of writing—not just any type of writing, more specifically—writing about *nothing*.

The dialectics of writing about nothing may be approached productively through a now-famous letter to Colet in which Flaubert describes perhaps his ultimate goal of writing:

> Ce qui me semble beau, ce que je voudrais faire, c'est un livre sur rien, un livre sans attache extérieure, qui se tiendrait de lui-même par la force interne de son style, comme la terre sans être soutenue se tient en l'air, un livre qui n'aurait presque pas de sujet ou du moins où le sujet serait presque invisible, si cela se peut. (III, 31)

While it may be unnecessary to determine if Flaubert in fact achieved his goal, it is important to posit the writing of the *Dictionnaire* as a step toward its attainment. In his letter, Flaubert hints at the difficulty of writing a book in which the subject would be almost invisible. Within this framework, one may wonder in fact if the *Dictionnaire* has any explicit subject. On a basic level, the implicit subject at hand could be the entries themselves, or the reader's interpretation of these entries. Further, the achievement of a work "qui se tiendrait de lui-même par la force interne de son style," suggests that the subject of the text may be the writing itself, independent of exterior influences, including those of society and the reader. In the *Dictionnaire*, although the text remains imbued with social implications, Flaubert removes the contexts that

associate it with outside influences, displacing thus the entries and their meanings, and exposing them for what they are: fragments of nothing, that is, empty discourse.

The process of fragmenting the world into pieces set up on display allows Flaubert to expose *bêtise*, while emphasizing the writing itself, an aesthetic strategy that counteracts the *doxa* and points as well to the additional consideration of stupidity as a representation of limitless possibility. In an 1876 letter to George Sand, Flaubert himself alludes to this prospect as a blank wall. He writes:

> Je me souviens d'avoir eu des battements de cœur, d'avoir ressenti un plaisir violent en contemplant un mur de l'Acropole, un mur tout nu (celui qui est à gauche quand on monte aux Propylées). Eh bien! Je me demande si un livre, indépendamment de ce qu'il dit, ne peut pas produire le même effet. Dans la précision des assemblages, la rareté des éléments, le poli de la surface, l'harmonie de l'ensemble, n'y a-t-il pas une vertu intrinsèque, une espèce de force divine, quelque chose d'éternel comme un principe? (V, 31)

In this passage, it is not simply any wall that Flaubert contemplates, but rather the Acropolis wall, which functioned as a fortification protecting the city of Athens for centuries withstanding, as Flaubert hoped for his own writing, the test of time. Through a metonymous gesture, Flaubert's style would serve as his Acropolis, supporting and harboring his text from any outside influence, and allowing it to exist autonomously. Additionally, much like a painter with a blank canvas who often draws inspiration from the outside world, one may argue that Flaubert, through the manipulation of *bêtise* derived from a social context, answers his own question in the *Dictionnaire* by stripping commonplace

language of outside influences, and manipulating it as he chooses, apart from the meanings that the definitions actually convey. Flaubert turns thus the suggestive qualities of stupidity against the language, creating a paradoxical harmony that emanates from within the discursive structure of the text.

As a work of art, on the surface the *Dictionnaire* can seem incomprehensible, as it is wrought with juxtapositions, irony, and deliberately subjective opinions that offer no concrete definitions of the entries. Yet once the surface is broken, readers can embrace the complexities of the work and seek out deeper meaning underneath, an example of which occurs when stupidity is viewed as a sublime notion. Here, both Flaubert and readers of the *Dictionnaire* appear fascinated by the concept of stupidity, since both may exhibit characteristics of curiosity and repugnance, depending on individual interpretations. As Culler notes:

> The operation which reduces it [stupidity] to a surface and makes it a series of signs without meaning leaves the subject free before it. It remains the world and therefore carries the presumption of importance and order, but once that is shown to be, precisely, an empty presumption, the subject is free to fill it in the activity of reverie…. the attempts to create natural signs have been undermined, and the subject can now prize innocent placidity, blankness, tranquility, a simple being-there: versions of stupidity which serve as *signifiants* to empty *signifiés* which he can explore without naming. (*Uncertainty*, 179)

By reducing *bêtise* to a surface of meaningless signs, Flaubert transforms the ubiquitous nature of clichés and *idées reçues* from a parasitic form of speech encroaching upon the authority of writing, into a display of the power of language. As a result, the nothingness bound up in what Culler refers to as

"empty *signifiés"* points to a more positive approach to Flaubert's desire to create a "livre sur rien," a book on nothing, comprised of empty discourse perhaps and supported by its own devices, but which can become a vehicle of inexhaustible meaning. As Barthes observes:

> La littérature (il vaudrait mieux dire désormais l'*écriture*), en refusant d'assigner au texte (et au monde comme texte) un 'secret', c'est-à-dire un sens ultime, libère une activité que l'on pourrait appeler contre-théologique, proprement révolutionnaire, car refuser d'arrêter le sens, c'est finalement refuser Dieu et ses hypostases, la raison, la science, la loi. (II, 494)

In other words, by embracing the absence of meaning in commonplace language, true creativity can emerge. With the *Dictionnaire*, Flaubert utilizes the inherently infectious nature of *bêtise* against itself by breaking it down and isolating it. The product is a possible recourse from the caustic nature of stupidity that reifies the fallacy of linguistic platitudes while simultaneously neutralizing their presence.

Indeed, it would seem that the author creates a literary tower of Babel in order to tear it down and invite his readers to consider the possibility that "un livre sur rien" moves beyond subject matter; it signifies an entire aesthetic practice, a mode of perception that transforms the banal into the extraordinary. As Culler observes: "To see how this was done in the novels one must consider the style, which was to make the world stupid while remaining itself an object of admiration" (*Uncertainty,* 185). Although not a novel, the *Dictionnaire* illustrates a similar process at work. The world that engenders *bêtise* becomes the target of Flaubert's mockery, displacing language and returning it to its

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source, the writing itself, as a reconsideration of the act of creation. Accordingly, instead of furnishing pragmatic definitions, Flaubert stresses *l'écriture*, a concept Barthes defines as the process by which writers encounter and utilize language. In "Qu'est-ce que l'écriture?," Barthes suggests that the relationship between a writer and society figures appropriately in the ideology of freedom (I, 147), a notion integral to understanding Flaubert's view of language in the *Dictionnaire*.

In his analysis, Barthes describes how language operates *vis-à-vis* the writer, as he examines the implications of this operation. At the center of the process lies an inherent conflict between spoken and written discourse, an important dichotomy in the *Dictionnaire*. On a fundamental level, spoken discourse revolves around the transfer of meaning through sound, and written discourse relies on the visual for linguistic signification. Yet when Flaubert transcribes spoken discourse into the written, the mode shifts, particularly since, according to Barthes, the role of these two systems of communication share an inherent interconnectivity. He writes: "l'écriture est une fonction: elle est le rapport entre la création et la société, elle est le langage littéraire transformé par sa destination sociale…" (I, 147). When applied to the *Dictionnaire*, the society in question is undoubtedly the prevailing bourgeoisie, a rapidly-ascending class that provided Flaubert with ample material for his dictionary. Thus, on the one hand, there is social language utilized by the dominant class (the bourgeoisie) and, on the other hand, there is Flaubert who draws inspiration from this source

and seeks to create from it something innovative. For Barthes, the process by which the writer gains insight from the world and from writing coincides with the notion of freedom. While the writer is constrained to the language of his time, he or she remains free to choose the style that conveys the intended message. Barthes maintains that this freedom of choice allows the author to rediscover the vast potential of writing, as well as a renewed interpretation of his or her sources of inspiration. He states:

> Aussi l'écriture est-elle une réalité ambiguë: d'une part elle naît incontestablement d'une confrontation de l'écrivain et de sa société; d'autre part, de cette finalité sociale, elle renvoie l'écrivain, par une sorte de transfert tragique, aux sources instrumentales de sa création. (I, 148)

As Barthes' comments demonstrate, the act of writing emerges from the conflict between linguistic social norms and the author's deep-seated desire to create. This aspiration is apparent perhaps nowhere more strikingly in Flaubert's literary corpus than in the *Dictionnaire*, a work in which the author demonstrates that the mundane, the banal, the "nothing" of society can yield artistic creation, a feat that continued to inspire Flaubert's contemporaries and, as I shall demonstrate, authors who come after him.

For Flaubert, Barthes' description of a return to the "sources instrumentales de sa création" signifies a reconsideration of style as a means to transform *bêtise* into literary art, providing a framework against which other authors would base their own conceptions of writing. Here, Barthes' "source" implies not only a writer's reconsideration of the craft of writing, but also of literary heritage. To this end, not surprisingly, Flaubert becomes an important

inspiration for other authors. For instance, in his text *La Grande Beune*, contemporary French author Pierre Michon examines the impact Flaubert exerts on his writing. At one point in his text, Michon's protagonist descends into a prehistoric cave that he describes as similar to Lascaux before the celebrated paintings: "C'était impressionnant. C'était nu…. C'était Lascaux au moment où les célibataires accroupis épousent leur pensée, conçoivent, brisent les bâtons d'ocre et touillent le charbon de bois dans une flaque…" (61). In a reference to Flaubert's description earlier of the Acropolis wall as being "tout nu," this cave represents the birth of art with the artists preparing their minds, tools, and bodies to create something from the void. As the tour moves on, the guide, Jean-Jean, stops suddenly and makes a very interesting statement: "Comme vous pouvez le voir, dit-il, il n'y a *rien*" (62, italics mine). Jean-Jean's statement suggests a reference to Flaubert's "livre sur rien," and Michon's description of Lascaux parallels Flaubert's awe at the wall of the Acropolis, as well as how Flaubert seeks to achieve his goal, a return to the source of inspiration, to the writing itself and the style that communicates it. Additionally, Michon's recognition of Flaubert is not an isolated occurrence, but belongs to an increasingly long list of contemporary French authors who draw inspiration from Flaubert in their works, an identification that reveals an additional dimension to Flaubert's modernity to explore, one that becomes particularly important when viewed as a component of *bovarysme* beyond *Madame Bovary*. In this vein, in "Chapter Four: The Posterity of *bovarysme* or The Edifice Complex," I explore the dynamics of

bovarysme specifically as it is discernable in contemporary French fiction, focusing on the modes of reading and writing as depicted in a series of recent fictional texts that deliberately engage Flaubert as a precursor to honor or to challenge.

Chapter Four: The Posterity of *Bovarysme* or The Edifice Complex

In this chapter I investigate the posterity of Flaubert's influence, as well as that of the notion of *bovarysme*, specifically in the modes of reading and writing after Flaubert, in several contemporary works of French fiction. In addition to the work of Pierre Michon, addressed in the conclusion of Chapter Three, books by other well-known authors, such as Jean Rouaud (*La Désincarnation*, 2001) and Philippe Bonnefis (*Métro Flaubert*, 2002), offer textual accounts of Flaubert's influence on their writing. However, in this part of my study, I have chosen to turn my focus specifically to a series of four recent fictional texts by contemporary French authors Raymond Jean (*Mademoiselle Bovary*, 1993), Philippe Doumenc (*Contre-enquête sur la mort d'Emma*, 2007), Christophe Claro (*Madman Bovary*, 2008), and Alain Ferry (*Mémoire d'un fou d'Emma*, 2009). I will argue that these authors each contribute in a significant way to the rich posterity of *bovarysme* in that, reversing the gesture of the fictional Emma choosing models from the authors she reads, it is now a case of real-life authors choosing Emma (or Flaubert himself) as model, creating their texts through their interest in the nineteenth-century author's aesthetics. Their writing, however, is not specifically on or about Flaubert, as is the case with critical studies, but is, rather, "after him," inspired in some way by his work, a stance that raises the question: "What is it to write or read after Flaubert?" In order best to explore possible answers to this question, I group these four texts into two categories. First, I aim to demonstrate that Ferry's and Claro's texts

offer new considerations not only of Emma as fictional character, but also of Flaubert as writer. I then examine Doumenc's and Jean's texts, which engage actively with key questions that *Madame Bovary* inspires in readers, as is the case of the mysterious events surrounding Emma's suicide and its eventual effects on the life of her daughter, Berthe, as well as the fate of secondary characters, such as Homais and Rodolphe.

An homage in these works to Flaubert's literary influence is clearly obvious, but what is especially at stake is not the fatal *bovarysme* that results in Emma's suicide, but an additional, perhaps unlikely aspect of *bovarysme* to which Gaultier refers when he suggests: "se concevoir autre, c'est vivre et progresser" (105). The gesture sometimes defined dismissively as a Quixotic escapism through novels is revealed to provide in fact a useful and forward-looking perspective approach to literary characters, as well as to the novel itself, in attempts to strike a harmonious balance between what the text is and what it desires to become. The posterity of *bovarysme* lies thus in contemporary French authors' conceptions of themselves as "other", as they appropriate Flaubert's writing and Emma's reading, textualizing their individual perceptions of what it is to be both reader and writer. These contemporary authors use *bovarysme* ironically as a tool to situate the novel in relation to itself, as a Janus figure through which writers and readers can step outside of themselves and see, in Flaubert and Emma, Gaultier's "other" as a representation of what they are, as well as what they aspire to be.

The titles of these authors' texts illustrate a dual fascination: on the one hand they signal the ongoing popularity of *Madame Bovary* as an engaging novel, and on the other hand, as I will show, the dramatic action of these texts demonstrates a desire to offer readers access to information that Flaubert denied, through a rewriting of Emma's conjugal night, a rethinking of the life of Emma's daughter, and a reconsideration of the celebrated scene of Emma's suicide. Further, the works in question also participate actively in intertextualizing Flaubert's novel, incorporating celebrated passages, such as the opening scene of *Madame Bovary*, which features Charles' entry into the school and the comical events surrounding his eccentric hat. Indeed, these writerly and readerly reactions to Flaubert's text indicate his profound influence on contemporary literature. As Michon states in an interview in the 2006 special edition of the *Magazine Littéraire* focused on *Madame Bovary*: "Quiconque se destine à l'écriture pense et écrit très vite *en Flaubert*" (38). Michon's italicization of "*en Flaubert*", while presenting Flaubert as the author for all other authors to emulate, also suggests that there is a Flaubertian style in which aspiring authors are encouraged to write. Yet when these writers attempt to write *en Flaubert*, one may wonder if they posit themselves as other in relation to Flaubert's legacy.

In *Mémoire d'un fou d'Emma*, Ferry celebrates *Madame Bovary* as a sounding board for the creative potential of literature. In his text, the narrator has just been abandoned by his wife, Éva, who leaves him for a sailor. As a

result, he seeks to purge himself of her memory and to survive his ordeal by turning to literature and, more specifically, to a *bovaryste* substitution of Éva's absent image with that of the fictional Emma Bovary. The narrator's strategy to overcome his heartbreak is outlined through 70 short chapters that resemble journal entries which address different obstacles that he faces on the road to independence, with each chapter devoted in some way to a comparison among the figures of Éva, Emma, and Flaubert. In these chapters, Ferry presents his readers with a contemporary form of *bovarysme*, in that Emma and Flaubert are now the models that his narrator views as other, creating an interesting variation on the theme of reading in Flaubert's novel. Recalling throughout his text Flaubert's famous plural narrator from the beginning of *Madame Bovary*, Ferry's narrator makes the following assertion about reading: "Nous nous sommes dit que nos lectures nous distrairaient de notre peine. Soûlé de livres, beurré de littérature, nous supporterions mieux, peut-être, l'âcre ennui d'avoir perdu notre femme bien-aimée" (11). In his devotion to literature conceived as a strategy to circumvent the misery of his reality, the narrator's attitude resembles that of Emma, as he believes that what he reads should relate to what he lives. In other words, Ferry's narrator may be viewed as a male counterpart to Emma because the only way in which he finds happiness is by escaping into the fictional realm. Here, Ferry's protagonist participates in a contemporary *bovarysme* by turning to the very character from which Gautier originally developed his views on the notion itself.

However, the narrator's original relationship to Éva remains so strong that, in an ironic echo of Flaubert himself, he states: "Éva, c'est nous. C'est encore nous" (15). At this moment in the text, the images of Éva and Emma become confused in the mind of the narrator, blurring the lines between the ironically fictive "reality" of the narrator and the fiction he reads. Further on, he adds: "Bovarysme: évasion dans l'imaginaire de la bibliothèque bleue. Bovaryste nous sommes, et les livres sont nos *merveilleux nuages*" (27). The narrator escapes thus into *Madame Bovary*, viewing the image of himself and his surroundings as other than what they are. This tendency to equate fiction to reality suggests a fundamental property of all reading—to imagine oneself as other, aiming to escape temporarily the challenges of the real through the imaginative possibilities of literature. In this case, the fictional character of Emma Bovary helps to explain the narrator's sentimental confusion between Emma and Éva, in large part due to the fact that Emma embodies the behavior that the narrator himself aspires to emulate. This process brings to mind Yvan Leclerc's statement, cited in Chapter One: "Madame Bovary, c'est nous. Le *bovarysme* est une MTT, une maladie textuellement transmissible" (11). Leclerc's comment reinforces the fact that *bovarysme* is not confined to Flaubert's most famous character, but rather is indicative of a condition that all readers share. What is more, Ferry's text demonstrates that this "textually transmitted disease" is not necessarily something to fear. On the contrary, Ferry uses the transformative powers of *bovarysme* as a technique that incorporates

Flaubert's aesthetics and demonstrates the effectiveness of using the notion to gauge the current status of the novel, as well as to interrogate its future.

In the tenth chapter of his text, Ferry invites his readers to consider the example Flaubert sets forth; Ferry's narrator observes: "Or le style, Flaubert nous a mis ça dans le citron, c'est l'oméga en toute chose. Mais, pour s'en faire un, il faut oser souffrir" (49). Here, Flaubert's writing is seen as setting an example against which future writers can measure their own work and Ferry's text rises to the occasion. In fact, throughout the work, Ferry deliberately incorporates a number of Flaubert's writing strategies, primarily through specific techniques addressed throughout the current study, such as italics, question marks, and Flaubert's well-known and ruthless editing process. At one point, the narrator envisions what he would write from the perspective of the vicomte of Vaubyessard, stating: "…nous stimulons notre fantaisie par les indications biffées du texte final" (60), and then proceeds to copy Flaubert's text word for word, along with his detailed editing suggestions. Through this imitation of Flaubert's style, we can discover an echo of Michon's statement about writing *en Flaubert*, for, whether one recognizes it or not, many of the practices of writing common today evolved in part specifically from Flaubert's contributions, and Ferry's text is no exception. In the phrase "nous stimulons notre fantaisie" the reader glimpses a double meaning through the plurality of "nous," as Emma is the object of the narrator's desires, whereas it is Flaubert's writing that is the object of Ferry's aesthetic gaze. Flaubert's writing and

Emma's reading become objects of otherness incorporated as representations of the novel itself.

On several occasions, Ferry's narrator equates Emma with an object to be opened and examined, especially with regard to the act of writing. For Ferry, the arduous task of writing is analogous to the act of creation, a process descernible through the narrator's relationship to Emma. As Ferry states: "Du même nous comprenons mieux le mystère de l'écriture an allant sur les sentiers de la création, c'est-à-dire, dans les circonstances où nous sommes, en *ouvrant Emma*" (128). In other words, Emma is viewed as an object representative of the writing that engenders her character. Through this comparison, Ferry suggests that in order to understand the complexities and contributions of Flaubert's writing, one must first endeavor to understand the intricacies of Emma. According to Ferry, once Emma is truly opened and understood, rich rewards await. He notes: "Emma Bovary: il faut l'ouvrir comme on ouvre un retable qui, fermé, ne jette rien de brillant, mais diffuse une fois ouvert une cantate de couleurs attirant l'attention et fixant notre écoute" (51). Indeed, the polyphony of the cantata, released by the simple act of opening the altarpiece, can be seen to represent the fragmented nature of the modern self, discernable as well in the spheres of reading and writing because, he continues in an echo of Leclerc's statement: "En Emma, tout est littérature. Emma est la littérature, c'est tout un. Parce que Emma, notre Emma, est tout uniment l'amour de la littérature à sa proie attachée. Emma c'est la LITTÉRATURE" (124). In this vein, the

bovaryste implications of viewing reading and writing as "other" are not altogether hopeless, as it seems to be the case with Emma's specific situation. Again, they are even positive, imbuing literary aesthetics with a new desire to fuse with the past in order to imagine the possibilities of the future. Consequently, at the end of the novel, Ferry's narrator's *bovarysme* is more productive than Emma's could have ever become because, instead of consistently seeking to transpose fiction onto reality, he eventually returns to the real by falling in love with his librarian, ultimately substituting her image for that of Éva's. However, the notion of *bovarysme* remains intact for, in an ironic reversal, Ferry abandons his fictional lover of books for a real life one, suggesting in fact a double substitution. On the one hand, as I mention above, the narrator substitutes the librarian's image for that of Éva's. On the other hand, it is also possible to consider the fact that the narrator may also be substituting Emma's image with the librarian's, a *bovaryste* replacement in which Éva, Emma, and the librarian are considered as other than who or what they actually are. Finally, in allowing his narrator to engage in a genuine relationship with a real person (one, notably, indissociable with the phenomenon of books), Ferry reveals his desire to leave the image of Flaubert's heroine intact, inviting the next reader to explore and to embrace his or her own *bovarysme* and to, as Ferry states, "[o]uvrir Emma", (125) an invitation that seems to be embraced fully by Christophe Claro who, in his text *Madman Bovary*, continues not only in Ferry's

observations, but reveals also his affinity for *Madame Bovary*, as well as for Flaubert.

The plot of Claro's novel echoes that of Ferry's, considering the fact that the narrator learns that his wife, Estée, has left him and, for solace, he chooses a book from a pile on his desk. The text he chooses is of course *Madame Bovary*, a novel through which he hopes to find a cure for his state of abjection. He declares: "Je vais lire le livre d'une traite, train épris de rails, et quand le dernier tunnel me recrachera à l'air libre je serai guéri" (15). Shortly after pronouncing these words, the narrator adopts the moniker of "Madman Bovary" as a potential symbol of his frenzied desire to plunge into Flaubert's text in order to forget his estranged wife. He begins an impassioned search for self-identity through a number of the major characters in Flaubert's text, considering himself as an integral part of the material he is reading, ultimately as other. For instance, when Madman describes Félicité, he projects immediately a mental image of himself into the text. In his description he states: "Elle avait une dent creuse dont les parois intérieures, quand je m'y fus glissé, parurent à ma conscience aussi vastes et crayeuses que des banquises dressées dans la nuit" (82). Reminiscent of the first time Charles sees Emma in *Madame Bovary*, here we see Madman's interpretation of Félicité through his eyes. In other words, the narrative distance Flaubert creates in large part through his impersonal narrator disappears in Claro's text. As a result, in *Madman Bovary*, readers familiar with Flaubert's novel experience an instance of *mise en abyme*, that is, they read another reader

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reading the same text and experiencing similar effects. In essence, they identify with another reader who, in turn, is identifying with the same text, which posits Flaubert's text as both subject and object. In this case, Félicité, becomes other as Claro incorporates her character into his own *bovaryste* perspective, presenting a narrator who misreads in a fashion much like Emma's in *Madame Bovary*.

Madman's distortion of Flaubert's characters does not end with their re-readings, but extends further into the realm of *bovarysme*, as he becomes a consumer of Flaubert's texts, such as the case with Homais; the narrator states: "Je commence avec un kilo d'Homais…. Je consomme tout ce qu'il possédait" (93), an act that conjures up images of Emma's suicide, but as Madman ingests that which constitutes Homais, the effects of his *bovaryste* reading truly begin to emerge and he assumes fully the role of the pharmacist: "…me voilà devenu ce que je suis, me voilà Homais à deux cents pour cent" (103). This identification is certainly ultimately problematic because Madman actually seems to attempt to transpose Homais' life onto his own. He declares: "J'exerce le métier d'apothicaire pendant quelques siècles, servant toujours la même clientèle, des souffreteux n'ayant aucune idée des changements que subit le monde…" (107). Readers of Claro's text are unsure if Madman is relating his own disillusions, brought about through his reading, or if his reaction is one engendered by the timeless character of Homais himself. Yet one may wonder why Madman chooses the figure of Homais to emulate from among all the other characters in

Madame Bovary. In an additional *jeu de mots*, the author provides readers with a possible explanation of his choice when he states:

> L'Homais que je veux prendrait presque deux m si la chose était possible. L'Homais après lequel j'aspire et quasi soupire, l'Homais yonvillais dont je vais me gaver sans rime ni raison est l'Homais secret, l'Homais interdit d'Homais, son anti-Homais, pour ainsi dire. (89-90)

On a preliminary level, in this passage, Claro gives his personal description of how he interprets the figure of Homais. This is his own "secret" Homais to which no other reader of Flaubert's novel has access. Further, in yet another instance of Claro's individual interpretation of the original text, in the name "Homais," he provides a clue as to why he chose the apothecary as a model to emulate. Phonetically, "Homais" sounds similar to "homme mais," which may be seen to exemplify the emotional state of the narrator in the wake of his rupture with his wife. Indeed, he is a man, but he is also something else, a *bovaryste* fragmentation of the self caught between fiction and reality.

Interestingly, the narrator's dilemma may be interpreted as a mirror of Claro as author, as he, too, is fragmented between what he is and what he seeks to become, between his literary aspirations and the enormous shadow that Flaubert and his writing cast on all authors after him, a predicament that for Claro seems very daunting. Although the words in the text are the narrator's speech, they also represent Claro's writing, creating the possibility of viewing the narrator as Claro himself. For instance, when he writes:

> Je sens, soudain, un effrayant nuage passer sur la page. L'ombre de Flaubert, ni plus ni moins…. Mais cette ombre qui s'avance comme une

foule, comme un souvenir d'équarrissage, voilà qui me cloue. Me voit-il? Que voit-il?.... L'ombre de F., elle, secoue. Encore et encore. (41)

In what may represent an epiphanic moment of realizing the distinct task of writing when faced with Flaubert's literary example, Claro seems in an almost panicked state, viewing Flaubert as a dark shadow observing his every move. In addition, this passage may bear witness to the feelings of contemporary French authors who, in search of their own literary voices, must first contend with Flaubert who encroaches slowly upon their work, ubiquitous and unavoidable.

For Claro, the best way to rid himself of Flaubert's shadow is, metaphorically, to turn on the light. In fact, when Claro describes the moment in his writing when he finally comes in contact with Flaubert, he refers to himself as a dimmer switch to raise or lower the creative light necessary to counteract Flaubert's influence. He observes:

> Je suis l'interrupteur. Abaissez-moi. Du bout du doigt, abaissez-moi. Voilà. Vous entendez? Ce qu'il dit? Ce qu'il, lentement, à voix basse puis haute, crépite? Il dit, me dit, m'explique pourquoi il n'est pas ici, pas là, ni ici-là, mais ailleurs, où jamais je ne serai. Il chante, c'est un couteau sur la pierre, un fil très fin dans l'œil, du verre fendu d'avance, Et l'interrupteur que je suis sent sa masse s'abaisser et le courant alternatif de la centrale Flaubert passer et repasser par à-coups de colère. Court-circuité, pré-bouvardé, pécuchifié, je me mets, moi aussi, à copier, peut-être pour m'effacer, peut-être pour m'enfoncer dans sa voix inaudible et proprement stupéfiante…. (133)

By considering himself and his writing as other (in this case, as a dimmer switch), Claro seems to be in a position of authority, of possessing a certain amount of control as to how much of Flaubert's shadow will manifest itself. When Claro states "Je suis l'interrupteur," he takes up effectively the challenge

Flaubert set forth in his writing. Moreover, with the power to control the shadow of Flaubert, Claro suggests that while Flaubert's influence is omnipresent, "pas là, ni ici-là, mais ailleurs," contemporary writers have the capacity to control that influence in their writing, to allow more or less of it to access their discourse. It is also important to point out that Flaubert appears in Claro's text as a literary character (a point I will address again in Jean's and Doumenc's texts, respectively), an insertion that is clearly not incidental. The resurrection of Flaubert as a spectre who haunts the narrative of those who adapt *Madame Bovary* into a more contemporary setting emphasizes the fact that Flaubert continues to dwell within today's cultural and literary consciousnesses. In order to assert the value of his or her own work, the author must move out of the shadows and into the light to demonstrate that creativity remains possible, in spite of the timelessness of Flaubert and his celebrated novel. One possible approach to the inevitable encounter with Flaubert's shadow is through the use of *bovarysme* as a critical lens, and the presence of the notion is felt throughout the passage, especially given the fact that both Claro and Flaubert are considered as other. Aside from perceiving himself as a light switch, Claro also compares himself to Bouvard and Pécuchet, declaring that he will be forced to resort to copying, as if this process were all that remained after Flaubert.

These reinterpretations of Homais, Bouvard, and Pécuchet suggest an intertextual blending of the *fond* of Flaubert's narrative into a contemporary setting that extends also into the *forme* of Claro's text, as he incorporates entire

passages from *Madame Bovary* into his own narrative. A delightful example of this process occurs in the eighth chapter entitled, "La démocratie dans le roman," a title that brings to mind Rancière's perspective on Emma's democratization of literature. Claro's chapter is constructed entirely out of a facsimile of part of the opening sequence to *Madame Bovary*, specifically the segment describing Charles. This passage, beginning *in medias res*, allows Ferry to advance directly to the description of Charles, and to dispense with the previous material that set up this scene. For this reason, the passage merits citation at some length:

> …. [L]'air raisonnable et fort embarrassé. Quoiqu'il ne fût pas large des épaules, son habit-veste de drap vert à boutons noirs devait le gêner aux entournures et laissait voir, par la fente des parements, des poignets rouges habitués à être nus. Ses jambes, en bas bleus, sortaient d'un pantalon jaunâtre très tiré par les bretelles. Il était chaussé de souliers forts, mal cirés, garnis de clous. On commença la récitation des leçons. Il les écouta de toutes ses oreilles, attentif comme au sermon, n'osant même croiser les cuisses, ni s'appuyer sur le coude, et, à deux heures, quand la cloche sonna, le maître d'études fut obligé de l'avertir, pour qu'il se mît avec nous dans les rangs. Nous avions l'habitude, en entrant en classe, de jeter nos casquettes par terre, afin d'avoir ensuite nos mains plus libres; il fallait, dès le seuil de la porte, les lancer sous le banc, de façon à frapper contre la muraille, en faisant beaucoup de poussière; c'était là le *genre*. Mais, soit qu'il n'eût pas remarqué cette manœuvre ou qu'il n'eût osé s'y soumettre, la prière… (21-22, *Madame Bovary*)

This passage from Flaubert's text is part of what Claro terms as "l'entrée en matière de *Madame Bovary* (15), a statement that carries a double meaning. On the one hand, the passage represents the opening segments of *Madame Bovary*, taken from the first time readers encounter in the text Charles' demeanor as a school boy; afterward, the narrator observes that it is "…le seul roman de

Flaubert que j'ai lu relu plus de dix fois, pour diverses raisons, à diverses époques" (15). On the other hand, the passage may also be seen to indicate an additional entrance into Claro's contemporary interpretation of Flaubert's novel. In a visual affirmation of Flaubert's text as a gateway into his own, the description above extends over the course of five pages in Claro's work (165-70) in a series of repetitions of the same passage for which the font size increases on each page until, on the fifth page, all that is visible is a small segment of the last sentence of the passage:

In a gesture similar to a camera filming a close-up or, indeed, reminiscent of the Realist tendency to describe first from a distance, and then to move progressively closer to the object in question, it is interesting to note that by increasing the font size in this manner, Claro's text gives the impression not of

an "entrée" into the narrative, but rather of a "chute," or a feeling of spiraling descent into the realm of the fictive or *bovaryste*. Indeed, the author appears to suggest that, in order to truly appreciate the writing, one must become *bovaryste*, that is, other than what one is, and embrace fully this literary "other" by becoming the text itself. In the case of the passage in question, Claro chooses Charles' introduction into the text, but he reserves perhaps his most innovative formal technique for engaging his writing with that of Flaubert's for a passage taken from the scene of Emma's death.

This scenario occurs in the ninth chapter of Claro's text which, through a skillful play on words by the author, is entitled, "L'art-scénique," an obvious allusion to Emma's fatal ingestion of arsenic at the end of Flaubert's text. Here, Claro deliberately displays the relation between his writing and Flaubert's, choosing a well-known scene from *Madame Bovary* in which Emma has just received communion, a gesture that also serves as her final rite before she dies. But Claro transforms this episode into a form of art through an innovative interpretation that renders the text as a startling image:

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              AlorssrolA
               elle elle
           allongea  egnolla
             le cou  uoc el
           comme  emmoc
       quelqu'un  nu'uqleuq
       qui a soif,   fois a iuq
              et,   te
           collant   tnalloc
         ses lèvres    servèl ses
         sur le corps,    sproc el rus
    de l'Homme-Dieu,      émiA-emmoH'l ed
          elle y déposa    esopéd y elle
       de toute sa force    ecrof as etuot ed
          expirante    etnaripxe
       le plus grand    dnarg sulp el
             baiser   resiab
          d'amour  ruoma'd
          qu'elle  elle'uq
              eût  ait
          jamais siamaj
          donné.énnod  (193)
```

In his reinterpretation of this scene, Claro presents Flaubert's text both on the left and right sides in a mirror image, backwards and in the shape that recalls the form of a vagina. In this gesture, it is difficult not to be reminded of the image of Gustave Courbet, the celebrated nineteenth-century painter, who is widely considered as the father of Realist painting (*L'Origine du monde*, 1866). It is equally instructive to recall that Flaubert was also often labeled as the creator of Realist fiction and, as a result, it may prove interesting to view Claro's image as an attempt to embrace fully Flaubert's text as a work of Realist art. Moreover, what appears to be primarily a ludic calligraphic image reveals much more, through small but distinct changes made by Claro. Attentive readers will note that, in the third word down the passage, Claro changes Flaubert's use of the

passé simple in "allongea," to the present tense "allonge" and, three words from the bottom, he also changes Flaubert's use of the pluperfect subjunctive in "eût," to the more common "ait donné," the past subjunctive. Further, in line thirteen, the author changes Flaubert's use of the simple past in "déposa," to the present tense form of "dépose". These modifications are important because they draw the reader's attention to the fact that Claro is reincorporating Flaubert's influence, but in a manner unique enough to avoid mere imitation. They also demonstrate Claro's attention to detail because, in Flaubert's text, the passé simple of "allongea" and "déposa" conflicts with the rest of the passage, presented in fact in the present tense, a stylistic technique often employed by Flaubert throughout his works. Also, the removal of the pluperfect subjunctive reduces the formality of the writing, allowing a more personal connection with the language that is now presented in a more contemporary form. Finally, in line twelve, "de l'Homme-Dieu" becomes in Claro's text "de l'Homme-Aimé, a transformation that points to the ways in which Claro deliberately manipulates and transforms Flaubert's language and style, while creating his own version of the celebrated scene. Further, these alterations focus the reader's attention from the immediate recognition of the image to the more specific changes on the level of the discourse itself, highlighting the *bovaryste* transformation of Flaubert's text in a very creative way. Indeed, in Claro's image, readers encounter simultaneously an "open" view of the origins of Realist art and of Realist literature, as well as an allusion to Emma being "open," producing a fusion of

both aesthetic realms in a contemporary work of fiction, an accessibility that also becomes discernable in Doumenc's interpretation of *Madame Bovary*.

In *Contre-enquête sur la mort d'Emma Bovary*, there is an allusion to Ferry's and to Claro's invitation to "open Emma," specifically on a visual level, from both figurative and literary perspectives because, as readers open a text about Emma, they also find Emma literally "opened" by way of an autopsy in order to investigate her death. The text reads much like a sequel to *Madame Bovary*, beginning where Flaubert's account ended, that is, with Emma's suicide. Doumenc's plot centers on ascertaining whether or not Emma ingested in fact a lethal dose of arsenic or if other, outside forces contributed to her untimely death. Interestingly, in Doumenc's text, it is Emma herself who casts doubt on the reasons behind her death when, on her death bed, she whispers in Dr. Larivière's ear: "Assassinée, pas suicidée" (15). This revelatory pronouncement serves as a catalyst for Doumenc's contemporary novel, as two police officers, Rémi and Delévoye, are dispatched from Rouen to Yonville in order to investigate the details surrounding the incident and to determine if indeed a crime was committed. In the end, the pair conclude that it was ultimately Dr. Larivière who, in order to hide his own illicit sexual relationship with her, murdered Emma by refusing to disclose the true reason she dies, through "[une] *anoxie* cérébrale, une asphyxie par arrêt de la circulation du sang dans le cerveau sans qu'aucun signe de strangulation classique apparaisse…ni même aucune trace du tout! (166). To this end, Doumenc's text endeavors to

provide an alternate ending to Flaubert's novel, by reexamining the questions that often remain with readers after reading *Madame Bovary*, such as what happened to Rodolphe and Léon or to the famous letter that disappeared after Emma's death, or what Homais' true intentions were, for example. The result is a text that invests one of the most recognizable fictional characters' fate with a new and innovative perspective, other than the one Flaubert himself envisioned.

It is interesting to note that Doumenc makes a considerable effort to retain certain original elements of Flaubert's text. Doumenc, as well as the other authors in this chapter, recognize their debt to Flaubert in the structure of their own works, a gesture that may be viewed as a literary acknowledgment of Flaubert's contributions to the act of writing, akin to the production of a work written in large part in the honor of the author. For Doumenc, the characters and setting remain the same, as do many of the components that form the plot of Flaubert's work. Yet Doumenc's text goes further, providing readers an imagined glimpse (sometimes rather comical) into the extended lives of these characters. For instance, toward the end of the text, we learn Doumenc's version of the rest of Rodolphe's story:

> Rodolphe vendit la Huchette pour s'installer à Paris. Dévoré de syphilis et de dettes, ayant gaspillé tout son argent au jeu ou avec des *créatures*, il se tua en plein Boulevard d'un coup de pistolet. Par un hasard étrange, c'était à deux pas de la maison où alors habitait Flaubert. (175)

This passage echoes another in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, when Emma implores Rodolphe to use his pistols in her defense:

> —On vient! dit-elle.
> Il souffla la lumière.
> —As-tu tes pistolets?
> —Pourquoi?
> —Mais… pour te défendre, reprit Emma.
> —Est-ce de ton mari? Ah! le pauvre garçon!
> Et Rodolphe acheva sa phrase avec un geste qui signifiait: "Je l'écraserais d'une chiquenaude." Elle fut ébahie de sa bravoure, bien qu'elle y sentît une sorte d'indélicatesse et de grossièreté naïve qui la scandalisa. (212)

With a pointed use of irony, Doumenc's text answers Flaubert's through a creative intertextual dialog, for it is with the very same pistols that Rodolphe was to defend himself that he commits suicide in the contemporary text. Further, the bravery Emma admires is transformed into cowardice and it is Rodolphe who encounters financial difficulties, a situation that mirrors Emma's own. In addition, other characters undergo changes which readers of Flaubert's text might find surprising, specifically with regard to Emma's adulterous relationships. For instance, in Doumenc's work, it is not just with Léon and Rodolphe that Emma has affairs, but also with Homais. During Rémi's initial deposition of Madame Homais (a character who has practically no voice in *Madame Bovary*), the reader learns of the affair when she states: "Monsieur, dit-elle, inutile de continuer ce jeu: j'avoue tout. Depuis longtemps je savais que mon mari entretenait une liaison avec Mme Bovary. J'étais jalouse d'elle. C'est moi qui l'ai tuée" (125). The conventional bourgeois reputation guarded so diligently by Homais in *Madame Bovary* is tarnished in Doumenc's vision as the author deliberately singles out each major character, offering his own interpretation of their motives; even Flaubert himself is no exception.

Indeed, as is the case in Claro's work, Flaubert appears as a minor character in Doumenc's text, making a brief appearance at Emma's funeral, and then vanishing for the rest of the novel. As the funeral attendees pass by in procession (in a darkly ironic reminiscence of Emma's wedding procession in *Madame Bovary*), Flaubert is the very last character to appear. When Rémi asks about the identity of this figure, Delévoye replies:

> Moi, je sais qui c'est, fit Delévoye. C'est Gustave, l'un des deux fils du professeur Achille Flaubert, le professeur à la faculté de médecine de Rouen. Il se croit doué pour les gazettes, il veut écrire des romans, cette idée! Que fait-il ici, est-il à la recherche d'un sujet? Un goujon, la gueule toujours ouverte pour gober ce qui passe à portée et le régurgiter à sa manière. Du monde à éviter!.... Mais déjà, apparition ou réalité, le jeune homme avait disparu. (47)

Delévoye's comment of "Il se croit doué pour les gazettes…" may be seen to allude to the publication of *Madame Bovary* in *La Revue de Paris*, but the phrase presents a twist since Flaubert's story is supposedly based on the real-life suicide of Delphine Delamare, an account of which the author read in a *fait divers*. Here, the process is reversed, as evidenced by Delevoye's questioning of whether or not Flaubert is looking for a subject on which to write a novel, as well as the fact that Flaubert is not researching Delphine Delamare's death, but rather Emma's.

It is also noteworthy that Doumenc's text is in fact a detective novel, and the observation that Flaubert may be researching facts for a new subject coincides with Doumenc's detectives, who are researching the facts behind Emma's death. What is more, apart from the character comparisons in both

texts, there is a potential author comparison as well. For instance, the passage above highlights Flaubert's painstaking research into the subjects of his novels and, when Delévoye states: "…la gueule toujours ouverte pour gober ce qui passe à portée et le régurgiter à sa manière," it is without doubt in reference to Flaubert's well-known "gueuloir" in which he would read aloud passages from his text in order to measure the rhythm and sonority of the writing. Also, the last part of the sentence—"régurgiter à sa manière"—may be seen as a reference both to Flaubert's writing of his characters in his own way, as well as to Doumenc who, in his contemporary interpretation, seeks out his own possible answers to questions engendered by Flaubert's novel. This relationship between the authors is suggested early in Doumenc's text, specifically when Rémi is preparing to leave for Yonville and the commissioner inquires:

> Au moins, tu n'as rien oublié?—Non, qu'aurais-je oublié?—Je n'en sais rien: ton écritoire, tes plumes, tes encres, tes rames de papier, enfin ce qu'il faut pour traiter la moindre affaire, puisque aujourd'hui c'est ainsi qu'on travaille! Des comptes-rendus, des procès-verbaux, des rapports, voila désormais ce qu'ils veulent. (24)

The tools necessary for Rémi to perform his duties as a detective are also those Flaubert employs in his own *métier*. Further, it becomes clear that Rémi's intentions are to investigate everything possible—"la moindre affaire"—an additional reference to Flaubert's attention to detail. However, in the last sentence of the passage, readers glimpse a deeper signification of Claro's choice to utilize detectives as his protagonists. As detectives, both Rémi and Delévoye are charged with the task of sifting through the minute details surrounding

Emma's death and, consequently, surrounding *Madame Bovary*. In the end, they must arrive at their own judgment, based on their findings and interpretation of the case in question. In like manner, much the same may be stated about contemporary authors' reconsiderations of Flaubert's work. Like detectives, these authors reread *Madame Bovary* through a different critical perspective, as they examine thoroughly the novel and its composition and present ultimately their opinions in the form of rewritings of Flaubert's novel. To this end, Doumenc creates the role of detective in his text not only to investigate Emma's death, but also, specifically, to reexamine the status of contemporary French literature against Flaubert's masterpiece. However, Rémi and Delévoye are not the only characters Doumenc creates for his text. In what is perhaps his most innovative authorial invention, Doumenc offers readers his unique (and fabricated) view of Homais' daughter, Marie.

While she appears few times throughout Doumenc's text, and is often referred to as "la petite Homais," Marie's secondary role is nonetheless important, especially considering the fact that she does not appear at all in *Madame Bovary*. The first major occurrence of Homais' daughter in Doumenc's text arises when Rémi is questioning the pharmacist in his home and discovers that Marie is observing their discussion from a distance: "C'était la jeune fille de l'autre jour, celle qui lui avait porté la lettre de son père pour venir visiter le laboratoire, la petite Marie Homais en somme. Elle tenait un bougeoir à la main; autour de son cou, au loin, sa croix d'or brillait" (91). Apart from the ironic

reference to the "croix d'or" (recalling Homais' "croix d'honneur"), this reference is all that Doumenc provides of Marie until, at a later point in the novel, Rémi is alone in his room at the inn and the narrator states, in a rather abrupt tone: "Le soir même, il coucha avec la petite Homais" (150). This blunt phrase, which is set apart deliberately from the text surrounding it in order to highlight its importance to what happens in the text afterward, signals what might be construed as a rewriting of a particular episode in *Madame Bovary*, that of Rodolphe's and Emma's plot to flee Yonville.

Readers familiar with Flaubert's novel will recall that, after a rather nasty dispute with Charles' mother, Emma flees to the arms of Rodolphe, begging him to take her away:

> Elle se serrait contre Rodolphe. Ses yeux, pleins de larmes, étincelaient comme des flammes sous l'onde; sa gorge haletait à coups rapides; jamais il ne l'avait tant aimée; si bien qu'il en perdit la tête et lui dit: — Que faut-il faire? Que veux-tu? —Emmène-moi! s'écria-t-elle. Enlève-moi!... Oh! je t'en supplie! (238)

For his part, Doumenc recasts entirely this celebrated scene, except that, instead of Rodolphe and Emma, it is now Rémi and Marie who follow in their footsteps.

As Rémi makes plans to return to Paris, Marie states emphatically:

> Emmenez-moi, ne me laissez pas ici! Mon père est bête, ma mère dure, personne ne comprend rien à rien. Il n'y a qu'une rue ici, les gens sont horribles, comment le supporter? Je veux vivre, vous rendre heureux, vous embrasser les mains. —Petite folle, répéta-t-il. Réalises-tu ce que tu dis? —Parfaitement. Si vous partez sans moi, je mourrais comme Emma. (152)

According to Doumenc, Marie is only sixteen, but she is trying to seduce Rémi so that he will take her back to Rouen with him, allowing her to escape Emma's

destiny. It is interesting to note that, through a literary gesture that honors Flaubert and Emma as literary models to emulate, Doumenc succeeds in inventing a new character worthy of comparison to Emma, that is, a new Emma in the making. Doumenc, however, is by far not alone in overtly revealing Flaubert's contributions to his own writing. In *Mademoiselle Bovary*, Jean creates an adaptation similar to Doumenc's, organizing the plot of his text around one of the most tantalizing questions left unanswered in *Madame Bovary*, that of the destiny of Emma's daughter, Berthe.

Jean begins his narrative by citing the last lines of *Madame Bovary*, those that describe Berthe's departure for the cotton mill. However, readers soon realize that Jean's text departs in an important way from Flaubert's, when the narrator states: "Ce qu'on sait moins, c'est que Berthe, au terme des années passées dans cette filature, connut une étrange aventure" (5). Indeed, in Jean's work, Berthe's situation in the cotton mill becomes secondary; the emphasis is placed squarely on her quest to find answers about her mother's fate. Jean, much like Doumenc, offers a new twist on the plot of Emma's fictional character, as he casts her as a victim of her day. But also, in addition to Berthe, who is Emma's offspring, Jean creates the character of Napoléon, the pharmacist Homais' son and Berthe's childhood friend. Additionally, as in Doumenc's text, the technique of inserting Flaubert himself as a character is utilized also by Jean, particularly when Berthe interrogates him about how he knew so many intimate details about Emma's life. Yet what is perhaps most striking in Jean's text is

that, over the course of the Berthe's journey of self-discovery, we too discover also the journey of the narrative itself, as Jean fuses his writing with Flaubert's in a *bovaryste* gesture of textual appropriation through which Flaubert and his text become the other of Jean's writing.

Given the brevity of Jean's text—a mere 71 pages—the plot accelerates remarkably, as the author dispenses with Berthe's past quickly in order to explore her future. Early in the text, Napoléon visits her in order to give her a gift, not surprisingly, a copy of *Madame Bovary*. As the exchange takes place, the narrator notes:

> Elle ne bougeait pas. Elle finit pourtant par avancer, très lentement, la main. Qu'est-ce que c'est? dit-elle. Un livre. Il faut que tu le lises. Elle prit l'objet en tremblant. Il l'aida à le sortir de l'étoffe qui le protégeait. C'était *Madame Bovary*. (9)

Through the deliberate use of the noun "l'objet," readers gain access to Jean's true objective: to approach both *Madame Bovary* and Flaubert's more general aesthetics as objects to explore, manipulate, and incorporate into his own writing, not through a contemporary protagonist, as is the case with Claro and Ferry, but rather through Emma's direct descendant. In Jean's adaptation, he invests the scarcely treated character of Berthe with a renewed sense of authority. Jean retraces the notion of heredity back to its first occurrence, as he presents Berthe's story as the first in a long line of descendants, from both familial and literary perspectives. Indeed, Napoléon's gesture of giving Berthe a copy of the novel that directly influenced both her mother's fate, as well as hers, Jean highlights a concept common to all authors and readers of Flaubert's

work—inheritance. As *Madame Bovary* passes from Napoléon's hands to Berthe's and, subsequently, into the hands of others after her, the question becomes one of determining how to interpret and utilize what has been passed down to future generations. For Jean, to understand the impact of Flaubert, one must return to the textual past and examine, through Berthe, the effects of *Madame Bovary* on the character who may be viewed as the novel's first successor.

For her part, after accepting the text, Berthe wastes no time in asking the question that enters into the mind of virtually all of Flaubert's readers when she states: "Comment ce M. Flaubert, dont le nom s'étalait sur la couverture, avait-il pu écrire tout cela? Comment avait-il *su* tout cela?" (10) Questioning directly Flaubert's omnipotent status as author, Berthe decides to visit him in Croisset, an action that introduces the creator to the creation. When Berthe comes finally face to face with the man who recorded her mother's history, the narrator observes: "Elle regardait avec une réelle perplexité ce vieil homme qui venait de la tutoyer, pas du tout à la manière de Napoléon, mais simplement parce qu'il aurait pu être son père" (14). It is true that Flaubert was the father of Emma's story and, from a purely literary perspective, he is also a paternal figure for Berthe. For, if it were not for Flaubert and *Madame Bovary*, Berthe simply would not exist as a literary character. And, given the fate of her mother at Flaubert's hands, Berthe is understandably angry with Flaubert. When she dares to inquire about her mother, she receives only empty gestures: "Parlez-moi de

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ma mère, dit-elle dans un souffle. Il [Flaubert] leva les bras au ciel pour manifester qu'on lui en demandait trop, ou qu'il s'était assez exprimé sur ce sujet" (16). In other words, Berthe's attempt to forge her future through reconstituting her past is foiled by Flaubert who, as a chronicler of Berthe's existence until the end of *Madame Bovary*, is in the best position to inform her. In this case, Berthe appears like a bastardized child, an orphan of the literary world surrounding her existence and abandoned by her creator. For Jean, Flaubert's mysterious refusal is indicative of the fact that his goal is not to justify or disapprove of the reasons behind Flaubert's representation of Emma, but rather to communicate his own perspective through Flaubert's writing and Berthe's voice.

In fact, Jean's narrative does not focus exclusively on *Madame Bovary*. There are also numerous references to other works by Flaubert, such as *Un Cœur simple*, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, *Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, and his correspondence with George Sand. Further, biographical details about his niece, Caroline, his relationship with Kuchuk-Hanem (a dancer who mesmerized the author on his travels in Egypt), and his friendship with DuCamp are scattered throughout Jean's account of Berthe. These inclusions bring attention to the fact that Flaubert's life and writing constitute the primary environment that furnishes Jean with his fictional material. Instead of a scenario in which Emma sees herself as other, it is now Flaubert and his legacy that are considered in this manner, through a contemporary form of *bovarysme* that seems more akin to a

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Flauberysme, especially because, in Jean's text, he is a lead character whose motives are the subject of yet another fictive account. As was the case in Gautier's formulation of *bovarysme*, based on Emma's attitude toward the real in *Madame Bovary*, in what I view as *Flauberysme*, the texts by contemporary French authors in this chapter are influenced by Flaubert's aesthetic stance on the fictive. Just as Emma models her life after what she reads, these authors *Flauberyse* their works by choosing as a model what Flaubert writes.

It is within this writerly construction of Flaubert as lead character that the true creativity of Jean's text emerges. On several occasions in Jean's work, when Flaubert speaks, he cites phrases from *Madame Bovary* as if they are his own words and not a part of the fictive realm of his novel. For instance, in one of the rare descriptions he gives Berthe of her mother, he states: "Elle était très gaie. Vraiment extravagante, crois-moi. Et superbe" (19). In Jean's text, while these words represent Flaubert speaking to Berthe, they are actually made in reference to *Madame Bovary*, specifically to Emma's adulterous relationship with Léon, when the narrator states: "Elle rit, pleura, chanta, dansa, fit monter des sorbets, voulut fumer des cigarettes, lui parut extravagante, mais adorable, superbe" (330). In an additional instance of a referential *mise en abyme*, Jean's text underscores the fact that *Madame Bovary* has become a fiction within a fiction. Here the citational process is in fact twice removed, as the fictional Flaubert cites his own fiction within the fiction of another. An additional occurrence of this technique develops at the end of Jean's text, when

representatives from the cotton mill (an inspector and a nun: provocative choices of characters given Flaubert's experience with inspectors when *Madame Bovary* was brought to trial, as well as Emma's dealings with the nuns during her time in the convent) come to Flaubert's home in search of Berthe, who has surpassed her allotted vacation time from work. When the inspector begins to speak with Flaubert on the nature of his relationship with Berthe, he asks him if he is "célibataire," to which Flaubert replies: "C'est ça. Ah, les célibataires! Tous égoïstes et débauchés. J'ai lu ça dans un dictionnaire de ma connaissance" (63). The "dictionnaire" to which Flaubert refers, and that Jean's style echoes is, of course, *Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, in which readers find the following definition for the term "célibataire": "Tous égoïstes et débauchés. On devrait les imposer. Se préparent une triste vieillesse" (II, 1003). As the narrative concludes, Berthe is spared her mother's fate because she admits her wrongdoing and returns to her mundane work in the cotton mill. However, as the group prepares to leave Flaubert's home, the inspector describes Berthe's recent behavior to Flaubert. He states: "Or vous savez ce qu'est l'hérédité! Voilà le vrai sujet de notre inquiétude…. Bientôt elle gouvernera la biologie, la médecine, la politique, la littérature. Tout" (67), concluding remarks that offer readers an additional observation on Flaubert's influence on contemporary French literature.

This passage just cited may be interpreted on several levels that reveal a literary stance on Flaubert shared by each of the authors explored in this chapter.

First, through the reference to heredity, Jean affirms not only the connection between Berthe and Emma, but also between Flaubert and his descendants. Jean's ability to write through Flaubert demonstrates an acute awareness of the nineteenth-century author's aesthetics, as well as an astute recognition of Flaubert's complex impact on contemporary French literature. Second, in the inspector's statement of "Voilà le vrai sujet de notre inquiétude," the possessive adjective "notre" recalls the celebrated plural narrator at the beginning of *Madame Bovary*, a plurality that may also now include modern readers of Flaubert's text and Jean as author. To this end, the statement: "notre inquietude," creates a potential space of interrogation, of uncertainty about the future of the act of writing in Flaubert's wake. Indeed, each of the authors in this chapter demonstrates innovative ways to reconsider Flaubert. On the one hand, Ferry and Claro interpret Flaubert as an example to emulate, as they use *Madame Bovary* as a springboard for their own *bovaryste* protagonists. On the other hand, in Doumenc's and Jean's texts, Flaubert appears as a literary edifice to question or to investigate. To this end, the task of writing after Flaubert may well represent a challenge for the future of French literature, in which case Flaubert is presented as a looming shadow to overcome, the presence of which might be construed as symptomatic of an Edifice Complex that these authors seek to conquer in their writing. In addition, these new texts serve as examples of fiction that rewrites earlier fiction, as intertextual incorporations of Flaubert's work that deepen our understanding of the creative process. These authors'

adaptive approaches to Flaubert and his legacy conceptualize both creator and creation as fragmented representations of something other than what they are, rereadings that reflect and recast Flaubert in a further prism, and reaffirm ultimately the ludic and transformative properties of literature when approached through a paradoxically positive interpretation of *bovarysme*.

Conclusion

In this chapter I offer some concluding remarks regarding the main arguments of my study—despite Flaubert's possible ironic warning addressed in Chapter Three that "la *bêtise* consiste à vouloir conclure" (*Correspondance*, III, 34). I will focus on the textualization of *bovarysme*, specifically within the works examined in the preceding chapters, while I also aim to point to possible new avenues of exploration. On a preliminary level, my argument consists first in the establishment of *bovarysme* as a universal notion, occurring not only in psychological, but also sociological realms, developments for which Gautier's seminal study, *Le Bovarysme*, serves as a guidepost. The critic's definition of *bovarysme* as "le pouvoir départi à l'homme de se concevoir autre qu'il n'est" (10), posits the term as a form of self-deception, an integral part of the human condition from which all people inherently suffer. Basing his argument on Emma Bovary's misguided attempts to transpose fiction onto reality, Gautier highlights as well the fact that *bovarysme* does not entail merely an individual's actions, but also his or her reactions toward the society, resulting in a sense of false hope, for the fictive can never correspond fully to the real.

However, in the works of many critics germane to the present discussion, it is often the case that the concept of *bovarysme* is expanded beyond the psychological and sociological realms and into the literary sphere, specifically through the act of reading, a situation in which the interaction between the text and its effects in the reader's mind produces a dysfunctionality, discernable in

the complex relationship of the fictive to the real. Chapter One addresses this process in the novel in which *bovarysme* originally takes form, that is, in *Madame Bovary*. Yet the notion is not restricted to what is likely considered to be Flaubert's most well-known text, but is also prevalent in other works by the author, such as *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and *Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, texts which form the basis for Chapters Two and Three of my study. In the analysis of these works, I present a textualized *bovarysme*, discernable on a discursive level, primarily through specific linguistic techniques such as quotation marks and italics, which represent an attempt by Flaubert to quarantine the infectious power of clichés and *idées reçues*, a *bovaryste* gesture through which the author views these components of language ultimately as other than simply a series of linguistic structures. This counterbalance of writing and commonplace language establishes a reciprocity between Flaubert and his own discourse that portrays clichés as contrary to the author's conception of writing; therein lies the paradox. If, like *bovarysme*, clichés and *idées reçues* are ubiquitous, what remains specific to writing? In fact, Flaubert's techniques of isolation that I explore in my study demonstrate the *mise en œuvre* of this problematic. They convey the reflexivity of Flaubert's writing on the nonequivalence of common language and literature, of art and the real, as a direct response to what Jacques Rancière calls "the aestheticization of everyday life" (239), as well as to the blurring of the lines between fiction and reality. Flaubert's attempt to take up a writerly stance against common language creates a *bovaryste* conception of

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language as other, involving a forced separation of language between literary and banal, text and doxa. Faced with the pervasive nature of the cliché, this paradox also raises the question of how to maintain the originality of creative or critical writing.

The problematics of the concept of originality serves as a catalyst suggesting new and innovative ways in which to approach *bovarysme* as a methodological tool to apply to other intellectual and aesthetic realms, an application which finds its beginnings in Gautier's work. As George Palante notes:

> La notion du bovarysme appliquée à la critique d'art n'est pas moins féconde. En appliquant cette notion à l'étude de quelques grandes œuvres modernes…. M. de Gautier a inauguré un genre de critique d'une rare originalité et nous a fait voir ces œuvres sous un jour tout nouveau. (64)

Palante's observations on Gautier's influence reaffirm the fact that *bovarysme*, when considered outside the psychological realm, creates the opportunity to reexamine aspects of Flaubert's work that traditional critical interpretations have not yet developed in depth. Yet when utilized as a critical lens in the current study, *bovarysme* furnishes an outlet not only for the reassessment of the novel, but also, more specifically, for uncovering the techniques that Flaubert employs in order to highlight the presence of clichés and *idées reçues* in his writing.

Indeed, instead of representing a medical or literary condition, *bovarysme* in my study serves as an additional perspective in which to view

Flaubert's aesthetic principles. Here, the authors and critical approaches that I examine seem to accept the challenge that Brombert suggests when he writes:

> The real task, as for all writers, still lies ahead: that of defining, as far as possible, the particular talent or genius of an individual artist by looking closely at the texture and structure of his work, by discussing in detail the meaningful interrelation of themes and techniques. (6)

My consideration of the textualization of *bovarysme* seeks to advance the analysis of Flaubert's isolation of clichés and *idées reçues* as forms of language alien to the text itself by performing, as Brombert suggests, a detailed study of specific techniques Flaubert utilizes in order to counteract the pervasive idea of *bêtise*. I believe that the exploration of a textualized *bovarysme* in several of Flaubert's works is a particularly useful approach that allows for the unification of current and former scholarship with an original interpretation of *bovarysme*, while it reveals additional considerations of the notion itself. To this end, my analysis demonstrates that *bovarysme* progresses beyond *Madame Bovary* and pervades other narratives, not just those by Flaubert, but also works by other, more contemporary authors, examples of which form the basis for Chapter Four.

For their part, authors such as Ferry, Claro, Doumenc, and Jean, while recognizing their debt to Flaubert, also provide original creations based in large part on *Madame Bovary*. In my view, the subject of originality points to a potentially innovative future consideration of *bovarysme*. If Flaubert's text seems condemned to a recycling of cliché and *idées reçues*, then is writing after Flaubert destined to become entangled in the same web? As Vanessa Guignery states: "Passer et repasser inlassablement dans le brisées de Gustave Flaubert

n'est-il pas le signe d'un piétinement de la production littéraire, d'un épuisement de la créativité?" (170). The works by the contemporary authors mentioned above certainly attest to the contrary, demonstrating that literary or artistic creation by descendants of Flaubert has not begun to wane. In fact, the more modern reconsiderations of Flaubert's text may be seen to participate in a form of *bovarysme* in which Flaubert's novel resembles the figure of Girard's mediator, through which these contemporary authors perceive themselves and their writing as "other", while simultaneously striving to produce a literary work of art. In other words, the *bovaryste* conception of the self as other is joined to the act of writing as other.

When *bovarysme* is approached in this way, that is, from a primarily literary perspective, Flaubert's unwavering preoccupation with the relationship between his writing and commonplace language becomes clear. Each chapter in this dissertation attests to the author's attempts to strike a harmonious balance between what his writing is, and what he wants it to become *vis-à-vis* the ubiquitous notion of *bêtise*. However, I believe that it is precisely through Flaubert's view of *bêtise* as an ominous presence that his true creativity emerges. On a psychological level, what appears to be an act of escapism, an enterprise doomed to failure through attempts to transpose the fictive onto the real represents, on a discursive level, a space in which to explore the dynamic relationship between the banal and the aesthetic. In this case, the deluding and destructive force that doomed Emma in *Madame Bovary* is invested with a sense

of optimism, of the potential of creating through both commonplace and literary language.

In this more positive conception of *bovarysme*, we discern not only Flaubert's specific perspective toward clichés, *idées reçues*, and *bêtise*, but also his ability to adapt his writing in order to circumvent their presence. On this point, Flaubert seems to embrace fully Gautier's assertion that "se concevoir autre, c'est vivre et progresser" (105), particularly through the techniques outlined in my study that demonstrate his reshaping of his writing strategies as an adaptation to his literary environment. In fact, my analysis of *bovarysme* as a critical lens points to an evolution of the notion in the texts treated in the previous chapters. From Chapter One to Chapter Four, I trace the development of *bovarysme* from the psyche to the text, that is, from its psychological inception in the fictional character of Emma Bovary, to specific instances of its textualization in *Bouvard et Pécuchet* and *Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues*. In Chapter Four, I show that this progression remains relevant, as the authors who choose Flaubert and his work as models to emulate participate wholly in their own *bovaryste* transformation of Flaubert's texts, incorporating them into their own writing and investing them with a renewed sense of interest.

In what Pennac views in *Comme un roman* as a "textually transmitted disease" (184), my study of these authors reveals an important shift in the reception of *bovarysme*. In modern interpretations of several of Flaubert's novels, the "disease" often associated with the notion, while ubiquitous, is not

necessarily something to be feared. In fact, as Pennac also suggests, we have the

right to be *bovarystes*—"le droit au bovarysme" (184)—and, as was the case

with Emma, to transform our reading and writing according to our own desires.

Given the universality of the notion addressed in both the Introduction and

Chapter One of this study, it becomes clear that all readers have the potential to

recognize their own reading through Emma's. As Buvik affirms:

> Le bovarysme d'Emma Bovary est peut-être extrême jusqu'à frôler la
> pathologie, mais en même temps, Flaubert a fait d'elle un exemple
> universel: comme elle, tout le monde est condamné à imiter des modèles
> et à se servir du langage commun inapte à rendre les pensées et les
> sentiments les plus personnels. Et tout le monde se reconnaît en elle
> lorsque, désespérant d'une existence intolérable, elle cherche à la
> transformer. (326)

Buvik's referring to "imiter des modèles," though made in specific reference to

Emma, applies nonetheless also to contemporary authors' interpretations of

Flaubert and Emma as models in their texts, unveiling a new perspective from

which to consider the impact of *bovarysme* both in contemporary French letters

and, interestingly, as an addition to the overall scope of critical Flaubert Studies

in general.

In this vein, my analysis underscores the fact there is more than one type

of *bovarysme*, and shows the importance of considering the notion of *bovarysme*

as inherently plural, as it incorporates psychological, sociological, and literary

implications that extend far beyond the nineteenth century. For instance, when

Ferry's narrator states: "Bovaryste nous sommes…" (27), his declaration not

only signals his understanding of Emma, but points to a secondary meaning that

can be found in the plurality of "nous sommes," one that encompasses the whole of the acts of reading and writing or, more specifically, of reading like Emma and writing like Flaubert, in a process that posits *bovarysme* as a useful tool to investigate the effects of this choice. Indeed, as is the case in the well-known opening sentence of *Madame Bovary*: "Nous étions à l'étude…", the plurality of *bovarysme* suggests that we all are—and always have been since Gautier's seminal work on the notion—studying, as we explore new approaches both to Flaubert's life, and to his work.

While my discussion focuses on particular instances of *bovarysme*, I have demonstrated an innovative perspective on the notion that will contribute to Flaubert Studies on a more general level, as well as encourage new areas of inquiry. Although I limit my analysis to specific works by Flaubert, this study is by no means exhaustive of the extent to which *bovarysme* influences the author's aesthetics. In fact, future extensions of my argument could involve a more detailed exploration of these influences, specifically in works such as *Salammbô*, *Trois Contes*, and *Mémoires d'un fou*. On a deeper level, it is my hope that this project will add to the scope of critical perspectives surrounding other representations of Flaubert's work, most notably in the cinematic and theatrical representations of *Madame Bovary* and *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, which may, by extension, be considered as *bovarystes* in much the same way as the contemporary authors explored in Chapter Four. For instance, an application of my argument to the numerous cinematic adaptations of *Madame Bovary*,

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outlined in great detail by Mary Donaldson-Evans in her 2008 text, *Madame Bovary at the Movies: Adaptation, Ideology, Context*, Jean-Daniel Verhaeghe's 1989 television remaking of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* or, in the theatre, Gilles Eiguier's more recent 2011 adaptation of the same text, may well create new dimensions in which to investigate the reach of *bovarysme* in numerous realms of intellectual inquiry and creative art.

To this end, my research may be also applied fruitfully to more recent critical interpretations of the pervasive idea of *bêtise* in Flaubert's works. For example, Helge Vidar Holm's 2012 publication of his text, *Mœurs de province: Essai bakhtinienne de Madame Bovary*, utilizes the link between the subtitle of *Madame Bovary* and the novel itself as an opportunity to explore the ways in which the language of provincial life in Normandy influences the discourse and comportment of characters in *Madame Bovary*. For Holm, considerations of the subtitle are vital because they demonstrate, as he notes: "…l'importance cruciale des mœurs *langagières* sur lesquelles le romancier normand fonde sa critique de la société de l'époque" (3). In his promotion of the subtitle to a position equal to that of the title of the novel itself, Holm reveals that the target for which Flaubert aims in his subtitle is not merely the dichotomy between the cities and the provinces, but also, especially, the language that permeates these spheres. To this end, Holm suggests the additional view of Emma as a *porte-parole* of the clichés and stereotypes that populate the language she employs throughout Flaubert's text, as a fictional character that should not be criticized for her use of

these hackneyed expressions, but rather as a *mise en œuvre* of their examination. In *Mœurs de province*, Holm proposes that Emma's discourse originates, as she herself does, from the province of Normandy. As a result, according to Bakhtine's analogy, her speech is recuperated and directed at someone else, *le destinataire*. It is through this process, akin to a recycling of language, that Emma becomes the focal point for an interrogation of the linguistic cliché that goes beyond the character's futile quest for an idealized happiness and into the discursive realm. In my study, Holm's approach to Emma as a product of her own linguistic patterns, engendered by her social surroundings, becomes a query into the application of this process on a discursive level. Here, the emphasis shifts from why Emma behaves as she does, to why Flaubert writes as he does, the conclusions of which show that Emma's *bovaryste* transposition of the fictive onto the real occurs also on a textual level, as Flaubert endeavors to transpose the banal onto the literary. In each case, both creation and the creator conceive of language as something other than actual language.

Additionally, in 2012, two collections directed by Herschberg-Pierrot were published that treat Flaubert's use of commonplace language in his writing. The first, *Flaubert: Éthique et esthétique*, investigates the celebrated author's view of writing *vis-à-vis* the linguistic repetition engendered by the printing press of his time. Further, Herschberg-Pierrot's use of "éthique" necessarily implicates a certain morality, social or otherwise, that she deliberately places in

direct correlation with "esthétique", suggesting a possible balance between the two concepts. Here, my analysis of the textualization of *bovarysme*, particularly with regard to the problematic notion of the copy (viewed as a form of mimesis) will prove useful in informing the reader of the ambiguous conflict between the authors and the printing press, as well as between the authors and themselves, in the continued search for originality. Also, my treatment of Flaubert's use of italics and quotation marks may serve as a means to interpret that balance between "éthique" and "esthétique" that Herschberg-Pierrot suggests in the title of her text. Indeed, Flaubert's problem seems to be how to allow the genre of the novel to regain an ethical value when entangled in the throes of *bêtise*. Flaubert seems to want to write against *bêtise*, especially social *bêtise*, but he also knows that he cannot write without it. To this end, my contributions to his use of italics and quotation marks explain two primary techniques the author employs to criticize *bêtise*, while he continues to utilize it in his writing.

The second work, *Flaubert: l'empire de la bêtise*, encompasses a recasting of Flaubert's complex relationship with writing and the pervasive "empire" that is *bêtise*, and which retains a prominent position throughout Flaubert's literary corpus. Further, in this collection of essays, Flaubert specialists such as Jacques Neefs, Françoise Gaillard, Pierre Pachet, and many others, undertake the development of Flaubert's reaction to *bêtise* into twentieth-century French literature, as they explore conceptualizations of the notion in the works of other literary critics, particularly in rereadings of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*.

In this work, emphasis is placed on Flaubert's sensibility toward the plurality of *bêtise*, as it manifests itself in social, intellectual, political, and, of course, discursive realms of inquiry. Here, my application of *bovarysme* as a critical lens through which to approach clichés and *idées reçues* relates well to these authors' attempts to situate the specific uses of *bêtise* in Flaubert's work, as well as his strategies to highlight its presence, while simultaneously participating in its usage.

With this perspective in mind, the preceding chapters of this dissertation may be best viewed as a possible answer to a simple, yet key question posed by Leclerc in his introduction to Holm's text when he asks of *Madame Bovary*: "Que dire sur *Madame Bovary* aujourd'hui, l'une des œuvres les plus commentées de la bibliothèque mondiale? Ce roman qui commence par l'entrée d'un "*nouveau*" peut-il susciter du neuf?" (IX) One possible answer to this question stems from my consideration of a textualized presence of *bovarysme*, which begins by recognizing the importance of *Madame Bovary*, and which seeks also to trace this importance throughout several of Flaubert's most well-known texts. It is my hope that future studies on *bovarysme*, as well as future considerations of Flaubert's aesthetics, will benefit from my analysis while establishing new realms of inquiry and critical perspectives that will continue to highlight Flaubert's contributions to literature. For instance, my study may well inform studies of other nineteenth-century writers and their protagonists. It would be interesting to consider if the character of Rastignac in Balzac's *Le*

Père Goriot actually succeeds in obtaining his desires at the celebrated conclusion of the novel, or if he merely embraces more fully the notion of *bovarysme*, continuing to view himself as other. Further, this question might also contribute to a more in-depth study of Stendhal's playful misrepresentation of historical dates or Julien Sorel's quest to attain a higher social status in *Le Rouge et le noir* as being ultimately *bovarystes* in that both author and character engage in deliberate misrepresentations of the truth. In like manner, my analysis can also contribute to new considerations of *fin-de-siècle* works, particularly J.-K. Husymans' *À rebours*, in which the figure of des Esseintes participates in an illusion in which he surrounds himself entirely with the artificial, conceiving of both himself, as well as his surroundings, as other than what they are. For these reasons and others, I have aimed to write this study in such as way that it can be applicable to a number of approaches and disciplines, accessible both to specialists and to a broader audience perhaps unfamiliar with the author's work. I have shown that, despite the destructive qualities of *bovarysme*, when the notion is considered as an integral part of Flaubert's writing process, it contributes to the diverse and dynamic changes that have developed after the author. The continued presence of *bovarysme*, particularly in contemporary French fiction, reaffirms the assertion that all writing is inherently *bovaryste*, seeking always to expand the boundaries of literature and to explore new and innovative ways in which to simultaneously imitate and create, intertextualize and theorize, through Flaubert's literary and artistic example.

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