Emma, or Happiness (or Sex Work)

Frances Ferguson

In 1857 three men stood as defendants, charged by the state with having corrupted the public morals in bringing *Madame Bovary* into the world. They were Leon Laurent-Pichat, editor of the *Revue de Paris,* in which *Madame Bovary* first appeared in installments; Auguste-Alexis Pillet, printer for the *Revue;* and Gustave Flaubert, author of the novel. Although the defendants were all acquitted, it has been difficult (or, in other words, all too easy) for modern readers to see why the prosecution was brought in the first place. Historians and critics generally conclude their inquiry into the matter by quoting Flaubert's remark that the authorities wanted to strike a blow against the *Revue* and that they almost accidentally charged him in the process. When the prosecution of *Madame Bovary* is mentioned, it is nearly invariably seen under Flaubert's rubric of the random or misdirected prosecution.[1] Yet that view minimizes an important feature of Flaubert's writing that has intrigued and disquieted many, something that is difficult to localize and yet so palpable that Sartre explicitly names it the desire to demoralize and makes it the chief burden of his magisterial (if incomplete) biography; Jonathan Culler, by contrast, connects this element with Flaubert's desire to induce reverie, to lead people to withdraw from the world of purposeful activity.[2]

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

1. A brief description of the trial appears in Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary,* trans. Paul de Man (New York, 1965); hereafter abbreviated *M.* See also the transcript of the proceedings, "Procès: Le Ministère public contre Gustave Flaubert. Réquisitoire de M. l'Avocat impérial M. Ernest Pinard; Plaidoirie du Défenseur, M. Sénard; Jugenet," in Flaubert, *Oeuvres,* ed. René Dumesnil, 2 vols. (Paris, 1951), 1:615–83.

2. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Family Idiot: Gustave Flaubert 1821–1857,* trans. Carol Cosman, 5 vols. (Chicago, 1981–1991), 1:430, hereafter abbreviated *I;* and Jonathan Culler, *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1985), pp. 173–74.

Critical Inquiry 28 (Spring 2002)

In what is the most sustained attempt we have yet had to explain the importance of this prosecution, Dominick LaCapra points to a pattern that has come to characterize obscenity trials more generally.[3] The prosecution identifies the shortcomings of the novel's central character and pronounces the book an insult to public morals and religion. The defense counters that it is reading the same pages, attending to the same acts and events of the novel, and, indeed, quoting all the same passages that the prosecution has.[4] Both Flaubert in his letters and Sénard in his defense of the novel deride the ignorance of a prosecution that can take issue with the scene at Emma's deathbed in which most of the words are merely formulaic. Drawn from the sacrament of extreme unction and reproduced, as Flaubert says, as closely as one could reproduce them without actually plagiarizing, these are words, the defense argues, that can hardly be seen as disrespectful of religion—unless one were to imagine that the church routinely set out to mock itself. The prosecution and the defense go toe-to-toe in addressing the same portions of the text, but the defense insists that the text's significance is absolutely determined by its outcome. The defense, that is, treats the novel as morally unimpeachable because its chief sinner suffers at the end, dying a tormented and absolutely unenviable death—a death of such agony that Lamartine, the novel's most improbable admirer, provided a letter attesting to the fact that he found it insupportable.[5] The defense's argument is, in other words, that the novel provides its own judgment, its own punishment to such a degree that there is no need for the court or anyone else to do a thing. The tragedy is complete not merely because the protagonist, by virtue

3. LaCapra sees the obscenity trial as a matter of the "text" coming to "challenge its context and the adequacy of its framing or boundary-marking devices" and goes on to argue that "'crime' of this sort [that is, "ideological" crime] is not amenable to more or less regular judicial proceedings because it contests the very right of the trial to judge it" (Dominick LaCapra, *"Madame Bovary" on Trial* [Ithaca, N.Y., 1982], p. 31). The difficulty of this approach is that it suggests that the obscenity trial is unique, when any trial inevitably raises the question of the right of the state to argue that individuals ought to hold views that are different from those they actually have.

4. LaCapra notes that "the difference between the lengths of the [prosecutor's and defense attorney's] speeches is the most obvious one" (ibid., p. 33).

5. Lamartine's admiration is surprising only because he clearly would have had to struggle to overcome his consciousness of the insult delivered to him by having his name signed to various of Emma's more saccharine musings. See Flaubert, letter to Louise Colet, 19 Dec. 1852, *Correspondance,* ed. Jean Brumeau, 4 vols. (Paris, 1980), 2:211–12; Flaubert, letter to Élisa Schlésinger, 14 Jan. 1857, ibid., 2:665; and Flaubert, letter to his brother Achille, 25 Jan. 1857, ibid., 2:674.

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of having "ceased to exist," will not be able to act again—for good or ill. (This would be the pattern for the virtuous sufferers of classical or Shakespearean tragedy.) Instead, in the defense's view, the novel is complete because it has already settled its scores; the tragedy can't grow by an inch or an ounce because Emma has not simply died but has died a death that is a punishment.

Now, it is easy enough to see the debate between prosecution and defense as simply the negative and positive judgments of the same thing and to see this particular trial as one of the many recurrent instances of such dissensus. On this scheme, one needs a strong version of individual or political motivation—an overzealous prosecutor, a repressive government—to explain the fact of the trial. Were we to cling to this scenario, we would be left with a frequent impasse in discussions of pornography—one that suggests that there are virtually no grounds for deciding that a particular work is pornographic or obscene. Written and visual signs, in this view, cannot be said to have meaning reproducible enough for texts and images to do anything more than provide an occasion for the exercise of individual fantasy. While Sartre was interested in particular persons as examples of singular universality, much of the work I'm thinking of here establishes the fantasizing self as an alternative to the kind of epochal universality that engaged him. Instead, proponents of that contrary view see selves, however discontinuous they may be, as ultimately impervious to their epochs because fantasy enables them to specialize their perceptions. Insofar as a trial is not simply a contest between opposing sides but an effort to determine which evaluations an epoch attempts to make its individuals heed, the very notion of a trial looks irrelevant or absurd on the face of it.

As suspicious as I am of that line of reasoning, I must nevertheless concede that, in the case of *Madame Bovary,* the question of what provocation the text provided for a trial is peculiarly difficult to answer if we think in the readily available terms of sexual explicitness or bad moral example. For the prosecution proceeded even though one of the defendants (Laurent-Pichat) had already cut the most suggestive passage (the carriage scene with its car sex *avant la voiture*) from the novel before it ever appeared in print. We are left with the familiar conjecture that the story of an adulterous young wife—even without sexual detail—might provide sufficient ground for legal action in the Second Empire, in which a prosecution would succeed only a few months later against Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal.*[6] Yet the surprising aspect of the court's judgment is that *Madame Bovary,* a novel that might on

6. Flaubert corresponded with Baudelaire on the occasion of the prosecution of his poetry. See Flaubert, letters to Baudelaire, 14 Aug. 1857 and 23 Aug. 1857, ibid., 2:758, 759.

the face of it seem to have all the shapelessness that had historically been attributed to the novelistic form, is seen more obviously as art than Baudelaire's poetry, which the court judged more harshly. While Flaubert had repeatedly written in his letters that poets had it easy, that they had traditional forms to give them some sense of what was required of them, this assessment of the standing of the two types of writing comes to look suspect in the face of Flaubert's acquittal and Baudelaire's conviction.[7] Poetry's historic privilege over prose was publicly renegotiated in those twin prosecutions. If Flaubert seemed to simply be declaring a chauvinistic attachment to his medium when he declared in his corresponence that, although poetry is the ancient literary art, the advantage of prose is that it was invented yesterday, that sense of prose as having actually been *invented* comes to seem like a publicly available view. And this was the case in part, I would argue, because the novel's condemnation of its heroine to death seemed to make the novel more obviously complete than even the sonnet form might do for Baudelaire's poems.[8] In the moment that the judge announced that "Le tribunal les acquitte de la prevention portée contre eux et les renvoie sans dépens," he provided at least as much support for the notion of "art for art's sake" as did any of the psychologico-familial and socioeconomic conditions that Sartre and Bourdieu detail in their accounts of Flaubert.[9] Doubtless, as Sartre says, Flaubert saw himself as repudiating medicine, the bourgeois profession of his father and brother, and law, the twin to medicine that was just inferior enough to be perfectly suited to the younger son of the family, the one who was seen as never quite managing to live up to the family's standards for success.[10] Doubtless, as Bourdieu says, he was willing and able to commit himself to his art because he enjoyed the peculiarly high bourgeois privilege of not needing to think of his work as a livelihood.[11] As some-

7. Flaubert, letter to Colet, 29 Jan. 1853, ibid., 2:245.

8. One might also conjecture that Baudelaire's address to his reader aroused new suspicions of the lyric poem and its speaker.

9. "Procès," *Oeuvres,* 1:683. Sartre describes himself in his preface as attempting to determine "what, at this point in time, can we know about a man?" He goes on to outline this project as one of acknowledging that "man is never an individual" but "a *universal singular.* Summed up and for this reason universalized by his epoch, he in turn resumes it by reproducing himself in it as singularity. Universal by the singular universality of human history, singular by the universalizing singularity of his projects, he requires simultaneous examination from both ends" (*I,* 1:ix). Because Sartre's account of Flaubert ends before he has reached a full discussion of *Madame Bovary,* we have more information about his views of Gustave in relationship to his family and to his school than to the trial, with its insistence upon giving a reprise of his view of the relationship between the writer in his singularity and the epoch in its universality. See also Pierre Bourdieu, "Flaubert's Point of View," trans. Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson *Critical Inquiry* 14 (Spring 1988): 539–62.

10. See particularly "Father and Son," *I,* 1:173–438.

11. See Bourdieu, "Flaubert's Point of View."

one who would worry about the scale of his inheritance rather than earning his next meal, Flaubert could work with a time frame quite different from that of most workers. Some might work for their daily bread; others, like his father and brother, had professions that exerted a constant pressure on both their individual actions and their earnings. Gustave, however, worked on a scale disconnected from both the dailiness of life and a lifetime career—not because he didn't care deeply about his work but because he insisted upon largely ignoring the effects that his work might have on his life. Since his writing would never enable him to have the truly fabulous and life-changing wealth that he toyed with in his imagination, he maintained a peculiar detachment from the popular success and the sales of his first novel. (Indeed, the most pronounced emotion that he expresses is the sense of irritation at not being left alone, an irritation that he describes in the peculiar idiom of not being allowed to finish his novel.)[12]

Sartre's and Bourdieu's accounts of Flaubert's motives and situation explain a great deal about Flaubert the individual and the larger world of family and society in which he could be Flaubert. Yet because they seek to recapture the crucial terms of Flaubert's own point of view, they are not particularly concerned with what the judge thought in making his decision, which neither affirmed Flaubert's disrespect for the bourgeois professions nor his decision not to have gainful employment, to "have" or inherit money rather than to earn it. Given that the judge doubtless disagreed with many of the views that commentators have seen in the novel and Flaubert's handling of it, the question that we must ask is, What made it possible for the judge to send the novel and its producers off scot-free? For the judge's view—which literary historians have greeted as enlightened—was, improbably enough, that of a literary critic. Indeed, the judge's decision (down to and including the observation that there were a few blemishes, that Flaubert had failed to realize that some of his remarks might mislead the unsuspecting reader) are ones that Saint-Beuve immediately adopts as his own and acknowledges in making his summary assertions that "the work now belongs to the domain of art, and art alone" and that the project of the critic is not simply to rehearse the glories of past art but to acknowledge art that is contemporary.[13] Thus, the perhaps surprising fact is that the judge's ruling establishes the notion of autonomy for the work of art to a degree previously unimagined. Art—whether in the form of fiction-writing or painting—might not have organized curricula like medicine and law; it might not speak the specialized language of law. Yet when the judge ruled that "liter-

12. See Flaubert, letter to Frédéric Baudry, 11 Feb. 1857, *Correspondance,* 2:680–81.
13. Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, review of *Madame Bovary,* in *M,* p. 325.

ature, as art, does not have only to be chaste and pure in its expression to accomplish the best that it is called upon to produce," he essentially accepted the notion that it had spoken in its own terms.[14] That is, the judge accorded Flaubert's novel the same kind of standing that the logics of the professions enjoyed. The judgment established the strong view that literature did not need, any more than medicine and law, to justify itself in its incidentals. Although art could not command assent any more than the recognizably established professions could, an author need not, any more than a physician or an attorney, pause to defend his every word. Art was, in other words, being treated as a special field in which one could make the same kinds of statements that were sensible in medicine and law but nonsensical or shocking if they were taken as the language of daily life. It was granted professional jargon, even as that jargon was seen to be coextensive with the natural language.

It was thus not simply that Flaubert's first published novel enjoyed a *succès de scandale,* that its notoriety provided it with more attention than it might otherwise have had. It was also the case that the judge, in deeming Flaubert's novel to be art, made him an artist. In making that assertion, I don't mean to suggest that Flaubert was not what we would call a meticulous craftsman or that he didn't sweat the bullets he says he did in writing the novel. I mean, rather, to insist that the judge provided Flaubert with a new confidence that he had indeed "finished" *Madame Bovary* and provided him with a way of imagining that there was a rationale for thinking that he didn't, as he had so often before, need to renew his labors on the novel. For the judge had essentially affirmed that the novel had developed such internal consistency that no one would take its words as if they meant what they might outside of its pages. Although the question of the novel's realism could always be broached on a scene-by-scene or an image-by-image basis, the judge was treating it as if it had managed to establish itself as the exact equivalent of a professional language. In other words, technique had won the privilege of the technical.

It is a distinct peculiarity of the modern era that many artists have received some of their most intense acknowledgment as artists through the circuitous route of being tried and acquitted of affronting public morals. Even though most commentators lament the repressiveness of governments and praise the radical nature of art, one of the most important effects of obscenity trials is that they give government a role in authenticating art as art.[15] The inefficiency of the process may serve to remind us of how im-

14. "Procès," *Oeuvres,* 1:683.

15. In an essay in *Diacritics,* Carla Freccero rehearses the common view that it is repressive even to raise the question of whether a particular book or image might do harm. Thus, she is outraged that Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* was seen by some women as a misogynistic text, and she

perfectly professionalized art was (and, to a lesser degree, remains) when public prosecution served as its means of acknowledgment. Yet the obscenity trial and the review are simply different aspects of the argument that art is art not simply by virtue of its author's conviction but by virtue of its having a recognizable value to its readers. It is, thus, not really surprising that obscenity trials have regularly included testimony from critics and from other writers and that they have treated such testimony as expert. Nor is it surprising that Sainte-Beuve would see the trial as in part an exercise in literary criticism and adopt its language and conclusions or that Flaubert himself would write to one correspondent that he was increasingly interested in literary criticism.[16] For the trial and the review merely offered various avenues toward a recognition that Flaubert had already incorporated into his work when he appointed his friends as a kind of review committee and read passages aloud to them to be sure that his writing passed muster. (The work was not done until an auditor could declare that it was done; and Flaubert's commitment to making fine distinctions between the moments for *style indirect libre* and direct discourse, along with the red-pencilling he did in his letters to Louise Colet and Louis Bouilhet, are part of the process of coming to define art in terms of its revision and its having already taken into account the project of not just self-presentation but also self-justification.) Thus, when the prosecution begins by taking the words of the novel for descriptions of incidents that might occur in the real world, it quickly becomes clear that those words are not merely descriptive but also justified. As the trial concludes that the novel's words speak of incidents only in the novelistic world, the decision thus counts to convince both those who witnessed it and the novel's author that the novel provides a valid new measure of work, a new unit by which action may be measured.

In describing the prosecution and the verdict in this way, I disagree with a host of critical commentaries on the novel that stress the uncertainty of identifying the attitude of the author in relation to his character. That view—classically represented in Henry James's remark that Flaubert refused to stand and fight it out in his writing—takes two forms, one suggesting that the prosecution would never have been initiated if the court had recognized that Flaubert himself was not speaking (and was not therefore endorsing) Emma's thoughts as represented in the *style indirect libre* of

takes their desire to regulate its distribution as both naive and contemptible. My own view differs from hers in that I think that the history of the public discussion of novels and images does not suggest that the debate is so rigged that it is necessary to immunize novels from it, even when it occasionally eventuates in trials. See Carla Freccero, "Historical Violence, Censorship, and the Serial Killer: The Case of *American Psycho*," *Diacritics* 27 (Summer 1997): 44–58.

16. Flaubert, letter to Colet, 30 Sept. 1853, *Correspondance*, 2:445.

the novel, the other suggesting that the prosecution could never clearly identify who was speaking and, therefore, did not know where to attach blame.[17] What seems mistaken about those positions is that they suggest that the novel left something open, that it appeals equivocally to its reader, when the novel's most surprising element was that it left nothing open at all in its insistent reach toward professionalism for art in prose. Such criticism has stressed exactly the sort of thing that Flaubert would have identified as getting Baudelaire into trouble—the appeal to the reader, the address to the "hypocrite lecteur" that represented Baudelaire's understanding of the imperatives that would enable the ancient art of poetry to survive in the modern world.

Flaubert makes prose a profession, gives it ways of justifying itself if not of exactly following rules. While it is true that poetry in mid–nineteenth-century France becomes more committed to sublimity (if we temporarily restrict that notion to the idea that a work will insist upon its completion in its readers' consciousness), Flaubert aims to make prose the art of the beautiful in making the novel an insistently complete form that has no real reliance upon or appeal to its readers. The Beauty that he is continually chasing in the novel is, in that sense, impersonal, not simply because one can't exactly form an image of the novelist who speaks, but also, and more importantly, because Flaubert has recognized the significance of having the novel become scientific: "It's there that the natural sciences have their virtue: they don't care about proving anything."[18] Thus, while gossip will become important for many writers, in his novel demonstration replaces opinion. And the project of "demoralization" is not, as Sartre would have it, a desire to inspire dejection but rather a desire to remove all the opinions, all the moralizing assumptions, that have hedged the novel previously.

The significance of Flaubert's move toward pure demonstration not only becomes apparent in the trial's outcome but also emerges in Flaubert's way of writing about "criticism" in various letters. He can write that criticism seems of particular interest and that there is something useful for his novel about the idea of criticism (generally rather than particularly conceived) because he is not simply acknowledging that someone like Sainte-Beuve already practices it. (He would say that Sainte-Beuve's critical work represented an adequate example of criticism's possibilities.) Rather, he is imagining that a novel of demonstration rather than morals or opinions would

17. See Henry James, "Gustave Flaubert," *The Future of the Novel,* ed. Leon Edel (New York, 1956), pp. 125–61.

18. Flaubert, letter to Colet, 31 Mar. 1853, *Correspondance,* 2:295.

be an appropriate object of criticism because it would already have subjected itself to that very same process of justification; it would continually have insisted that its observations were simply the A + B of demonstration. Indeed, the most remarkable thing about Flaubert's relationship to his profession is that he aligns himself much more closely with the critic than with other novelists. However much he may luxuriate in the reading of Rabelais and Sade, he continually identifies the limitations of the novel—both in the sentimental form that Rousseau and Lamartine give it and in the antisentimental form in which Balzac produces it. In the one mode, tears repeatedly identify the period of the novel, and the essentially episodic format of the epistolary novel gives the markers of emotion and the expressions of opinion particular weight; in the other, the project of producing the reaction against such emotion occupies center stage as the novel tries to demonstrate its hard-boiledness. For Flaubert, by contrast, the novel is in league with criticism insofar as criticism participates in the process of justification; the novel checks over its own demonstration to see how far it is correct in its deductions. And literature "as we imagine it" would reach its culmination in the moment in which it would become an "occupation for an idiot," the moment at which one would need as little of a personality or a moral sense or an opinion for writing prose as one did for adding two and two.[19] It is this aspect of Flaubert's project that Baudelaire's essay on *Madame Bovary* captures in basically recapitulating the movements of Poe's "Philosophy of Composition." For if Poe deductively produced an understanding of poetic inevitability—by asking what the most poetic subject would be and what the perfect length for a poem on such a subject would be (instead of choosing to write a sonnet that proceeded from feelings about a particular subject)—then what Baudelaire recognized was that Flaubert had made prose look as though it had all the same deductive inevitability, the same method, that poetry had regularly achieved rather more easily.[20] While the sentimental novelists had found themselves continually producing a punctuation technique and the prose of exclamation in which the characters' emotional judgments tried to capture the process of passing judgment on one's own life, Flaubert had converted prose into a methodical activity in

19. Flaubert, letter to Colet, 13 Apr. 1853, ibid., 2:303.

20. Baudelaire, review of *Madame Bovary,* in *M,* p. 339. Although Baudelaire does not mention Poe directly, his series of questions and answers ("What is the tritest theme of all . . . ?" "Adultery.") clearly echoes the questions and answers that Poe produced to account for his choices in composing "The Raven." See Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," *Essays and Reviews,* ed. G. R. Thompson (New York, 1984). Baudelaire recurrently refers to Poe as a touchstone. See Baudelaire, *Oeuvres,* ed. Le Dantec and C. Pichois (Paris, 1961), pp. 647–57.

which the actual suffering would take place *in the composition*—not on the page or in the reader—and in which the author necessarily had to "enter absolutely minutely into the skin of people who are antipathetic" to him.[21]

Yet to say that Flaubert resisted the sentimental novel for making action look like a simple reflex of the emotions of individual characters is only to begin to see the importance he will attach to the question of identifying and measuring action in the novel. The problem of the measurement of action here revolves, first, around the prominence that the trial attaches to Emma's death as evidence that the novel has already completed the process of judgment. (The novel comes to function, in this view, less as an occasion for the reader to exercise judgment—to decide as an individual how he or she feels about Emma Bovary—than as an organized delivery system for a process of judgment that is already contained within the novel.)

In the civil proceeding in which editor, printer, and author are codefendants for having variously participated in the circuit of action that exposes the reading public to *Madame Bovary,* the defendants are all exculpated on the basis of the claim that the novel has left no business undone, no distribution of justice incomplete. Indeed, that claim finds reinforcement in what might otherwise sound like the defense's fairly silly descriptions of Flaubert's hard work on the novel. For it is not simply that the defense is echoing the language that Flaubert (author of many famous laments about his mule-like, slavelike exertions in writing about his Bovary) doubtless supplied to the defense. It is not simply that Sénard describes Flaubert's intense labor in the effort to establish his client's good character and his roots in a good family with a good work ethic. It is, instead, that the defense must insist upon the work that went into the novel, to insist that Flaubert worked to make it complete, and that such completeness made any additional judgment about the business of the novel *de trop.*

I suggest that the debate over whether an individual work of art can be treated as self-judging, whether it constitutes a self-completing and organic whole, is the first way in which action is assessed in the trial. For the purposes of the trial, that debate is resolved by the emphasis on the novel's resemblance to a drama, with drama being seen as particularly important for depicting an action as complete in the purest Aristotelian sense. Yet if it is easy enough to see the point of arguing that the novel is a drama completed by Emma's judgment on herself in committing suicide, the peculiarity of that defense is that Flaubert, while writing, repeatedly complained about the hard time his novel was giving him because it was not a drama. It was, he said, a biography. And it was a biography for the good reason that

21. Flaubert, letter to Colet, 6 Apr. 1853, *Correspondance,* 2:297.

the novel is centrally concerned with portraying action in a new way. For *Madame Bovary* is, as Flaubert said, a novel with precious little action, if we think of action as involving anything like major events. Indeed, Flaubert spends a great deal of time in his letters worrying "that there is not enough action" and reassuring himself with the thought that "*ideas* are action." On the one hand, he frets that he now has

> fifty pages in a row without a single event. It is an uninterrupted portrayal of a bourgeois existence and of a love that remains inactive—a love all the more difficult to depict because it is timid and deep, but alas! lacking in inner turbulence, because my gentleman has a sober nature. I had something similar in the first part: the husband loves his wife in somewhat the same fashion as her lover. Here are two mediocrities in the same milieu, and I must differentiate between them. If I bring it off it will be a great achievement, I think, for it will be like painting in monotone without contrasts—not easy. But I fear that all these subtleties will be wearisome, and that the reader will long for more movement. But one must be loyal to one's conception. If I tried to insert action I should be following a rule and would spoil everything.[22]

Even as he recognizes that he is more than halfway through his writing, he worries that he has

> so far 260 pages containing only preparations for action—more or less disguised expositions of character . . . , of landscapes and of places. My conclusion, which will be the account of my little lady's death and funeral and of her husband's grief, will be sixty pages long at least. That leaves, for the body of the action itself, 120 to 160 pages at the most. Isn't this a real defect? What reassures me (though not completely) is that the book is a biography rather than a fully developed story. It is not essentially dramatic; and if the dramatic element is well submerged in the general tone of the book the lack of proportion in the development of the various parts may pass unnoticed.[23]

Now, even though this passage and others with affinities to it are customarily seen as statements about the radical nature of Flaubert's commitment to autonomous art and high modernism, the possibility that Flaubert was more than a little sincere in his anxiety about the story's lack of action is worth noting. (The necessity of Emma's death is perhaps the purest ex-

22. Flaubert, letter to Colet, 15 Jan. 1853, in *M,* pp. 313, 314.
23. Flaubert, letter to Colet, 25–26 June 1853, ibid., pp. 314–15.

pression of this anxiety; if she had not died, would the novel ever really have seemed to have a shape?) For Flaubert was not content to address the questions that had long preoccupied the novel as it moved from chronicles and diaries to the domestic world; he was not content to suggest that there was more to the stories of daily life than literature—and especially heroic literature—was accustomed to notice. Instead of representing incidents that are public, instead of following the traditional route of the domestic and sentimental novel and representing private incidents, his novel finds its material in the question of when an action is complete. On the one hand, then, he exposes the flaw at the heart of the sentimental novel as Richardson and Rousseau had practiced it—that all action seems to be resolved into the thought of individual characters and that it thus requires an elaborate apparatus of blushes, sighs, and tears to punctuate these thoughts and give them the termination that will enable them to resemble action. On the other hand, he provides a description of how action had changed in his own epoch.

Thus, Flaubert's concern to portray the "existence" of "inactive" love—to portray it in both Emma's husband and in her first lover (the Leon of the first portion, the lover who loves her so deeply that he can only leave Yonville l'Abbaye without ever openly declaring his love)—continually insists upon its own peculiar version of the debates over how existence and actions relate to one another. Indeed, it is only when we take into account the significance of the debates over what an action is—and when an action is completed, satisfied, fulfilled—that we can begin to understand the otherwise baffling decision to prosecute the *Revue* for having already removed the most highly suggestive passage, the carriage scene, *before* it published the novel. Only then can we understand why Flaubert could protest the omission of that passage with his defiant remark that "the brutal element [was] basic, not incidental," that it could no more be excised by dropping one passage than "the book's blood could be changed."[24] For the novel essentially absorbs itself with the question of what it means to write a biography—or, indeed, to have a life in a world in which the very notion of action has been made infinitely more complicated than it was for the Don Quixote with whom Emma Bovary is so regularly compared. *Don Quixote* portrays a figure who is so deeply committed to the notion that people once could and did act in substantial ways that he continually refashions the world before him to create occasions for such actions. Emma Bovary resembles the Don in that she too is less committed to impossible dreams than to the insistence upon seeing action everywhere, seeing it not as merely possible but as necessary.

24. Flaubert, letter to Léon Laurent Pichat, 7 Dec. 1856, *Correspondance*, 2:650.

From Flaubert's standpoint, the very confidence in the notion of action was the illusion. As he had maintained when his friend Alfred married, "I believe that you are suffering from an illusion, and a big one, as always when one effects an action, whatever it may be."[25] Moreover, the question of measuring and recognizing action is easily more important for him than the question of distinguishing between good and bad action. Indeed, one of the most striking features of the novel is its obsession with formulating action in terms that are more efficient than moral. To be sure, Emma Bovary "falls," as the prosecution puts it, three times. Her lovers Rodolphe and Léon, corrupting and corrupted in their relationships to her, are clearly not candidates for sainthood. Yet people behave rather decorously in the novel, so that the most notoriously bad man—the old nobleman at Vaubyessard who impresses Emma with his glamour (as she learns, he once had affairs with queens)—seems detached from any evil that might seem to infect his entire character. Apart from Homais and his attempts to slander the blind man whom he injured, the novel has far fewer villains than we might expect. It certainly has fewer hypocrites and pious frauds. For if Flaubert relentlessly shows Homais to be as adept at imitating a good man as he is at imitating a certified medical practitioner, he is remarkably unconcerned to show up the characters in the novel. Indeed, this is so notably true that Senard was able to argue without fear of impeachment that the novel did not disrespect the religion and morals of the nation, that it did not, after the fashion of much other literature, depict corrupt or lascivious priests as Rabelais had. Instead, he justly observed, it depicts priests who never betray their vows—priests (like the curate who tried to teach Latin to the young Charles Bovary) who fall asleep at their work, priests like Abbe Bournisien, who may fail to provide Emma with spiritual comfort in the process of putting duty first and teaching the catechism class to the boys of the parish, and priests (like Abbe Bournisien, again, who administers extreme unction to Emma) who are so ready to perform their duties that they do not stay to ask if the object of their ministrations is worthy of them or not (see *M*, pp. 5–6, 79–82, 236–

25. Quoted in *I*, 2:426. Although many have offered different conjectures about the identity of the actual person on whom Emma Bovary is supposed to be based (with a young provincial doctor's wife described in the newspapers seeming to be the favorite candidate), I think I am merely anticipating a claim that Sartre did not get around to making (when he left off his writing of *The Family Idiot)* when I say that Flaubert's friend Alfred is the likeliest candidate. Sartre calls attention to Flaubert's conviction of an "intersubjective unity" between him and Alfred that was so intense that they "'mutually forged [their] two handwritings, until one of us by himself could do the school work for both'" (*I*, 2:431). In Flaubert's account, actions were not so much evidence of individual intentions and predispositions of character; they were, instead, a delusive process of establishing a kind of sham character that will come to antagonize the unacted ideas that Flaubert continually described as more real than any publicly discernible actions.

38). Epitomized in the person of the verger in the cathedral in Rouen who tried to give Emma and Leon the full tour of the church, such figures might lose their audiences but would never dream of deserting their posts. Flaubert may not describe such characters with admiration, but his descriptions don't express full-blown disrespect, a negative judgment on the very figures whom society cherishes.

Rather, the novel will manage to be stained throughout with a corruption that can't be excised, because the insult will be to describe persons produced through modern techniques with absolute deadpan.[26] If we can imagine the malicious glee he took in making certain characters the victims of their own credulity, it is clear from the letters he wrote during the process of composition that he was sketching Abbé Bournisien as "chaste and dutiful" and that he intended to make Homais evil through an excessive optimism: "What he doesn't realize," Flaubert says of the enlightened pharmacist preparing a salve for the blind man's eyes, "is that the fellow's blindness is incurable."[27] Baudelaire mentions the critics's objections (such as that of the generally enthusiastic Sainte-Beuve) to the fact that the novel has no "central character who acts as a moral judge" that would stand in for the author.[28] Yet perhaps the most historically significant aspect of this novel is its concern with the fact that French society of the mid-nineteenth century had taken on a "style" and a method that was at least as effective as Flaubert's own highly wrought style.

This is to say that Flaubert's command of *style indirect libre,* his ability to enter the consciousness of his characters or, more accurately, to make his characters say things that they couldn't quite have put their fingers on without him, shares something important with the utilitarian structures of daily life in nineteenth-century France. What they share, however, is not so much ambition or a general commitment to a notion of progress. Rather, it is, first, the sense that an individual can be recognized as performing an action only when it appears in the form of what scientists will come to call work—the output of a system. (Significantly, the novel begins in the classroom, where the students are routinely evaluated both in relation to what they know and in relation to the knowledge of others. The young Charles Bovary is singled out as a country bumpkin, awarded an incomprehension of a

26. This distinction, which is that of the language philosopher W. P. Grice, aims to distinguish between the kind of understanding available on the basis of a simple rehearsal of the words of any utterance and the kind of understanding available on the basis of a recognition of the context of that utterance. See W. P. Grice, "Meaning," in *Philosophical Logic,* ed. P. F. Strawson (Oxford, 1967), pp. 39–48.

27. Flaubert, letter to Louis Bouilhet, 16 Sept. 1855, *Correspondance,* 2:593.

28. Baudelaire, review of *Madame Bovary,* in *M,* p. 340.

world in which gratifications are conspicuously mediated. As the newcomer, he is made the pretext for a detailed inventory of the impressively familiar routines of the organized class. The Charles Bovary who enters the new classroom besotted with love of his cap is an innocent who can't quite conceive that the new group structures that he is entering might interfere with the aesthetic pleasure that he takes so directly.) Second, the novel routinely features one of utilitarianism's great contributions to the theory of action: the reward, which is understood in the novel less as a gift or payment (a way of marking out the exchange-value of an action) than as a kind of label that functioned to identify an action as complete. (As Marx understood very clearly, the aim of utilitarian rewards was to isolate the value of actions rather than of property.) For even though utilitarianism has been described as sacrificing the interests of the individual to the interests of the group, one of its major accomplishments was to produce a series of social technologies that demonstrated to individuals that they had been acting. That is, if utilitarianism judged the actions rather than the status of individuals in its efforts to sift its populations for persons of merit rather than persons of birth, this process of judgment develops extraordinary perspicacity in discerning actions. Think, for instance, of the moment in the novel in which "Catherine Nicaise Elizabeth Leroux, of Sassetot-la-Guerrière, for fifty-four years of service at the same farm" is awarded "a silver medal—value, twenty-five francs" (*M,* p. 108). She shrinks "within her clothes" as she reluctantly comes forward on the platform to receive her medal, but she shrinks less from modesty or shyness than from a plausible incomprehension—that what she had thought of as daily life is now recognized as a job, that simple duration has been converted into length of service, and that there is a process of entirely secular analysis that effects such conversions. Homais, the representative of bourgeois enlightenment, may disapprove of her "fanaticism" in resolving to give the medal "to our curé at home, to say some masses for me," but her resolve demonstrates her dawning grasp of the new system of singling out actions and making them translatable into other actions (*M,* p. 108).

If we think of the highly articulated social structures that come to dominate the classroom, the workhouse, and the prison from the late eighteenth century, their most conspicuous feature is their insistence upon correlating individuals with the groups in which they temporarily participate. In the hands of a figure like Jeremy Bentham, moreover, these social structures were more than techniques for reducing the chaos of large groups to a kind of order. Rather, they carried a series of implicit claims about action. First, their contribution to morality was to replace the older catechetical procedures that had coordinated specific hypothetical cases with more general

principles. Instead of encouraging people to anticipate, in the fashion of a casebook, the different moral dilemmas that might present themselves, these structures minimized the role of forethought in action (on the ground that one would never be prepared simply by forethought for the life one led). Second, their contribution was to try to identify merit in a way that would detach it from one's status and, more ingeniously, would detach the process of uncovering merit even from ambition and self-confidence. Individuals in a Benthamite schoolroom (of the kind that Andrew Bell and Jeremy Lancaster developed) never needed to know how good they really were, never needed to believe in themselves.[29] For the system related all individual efforts so strongly to their value in the group economy that each individual was continually being told something *new* by the process of being evaluated in relation to the group. Each time the system responded to a student's knowledge not merely with a judgment on its correctness but also with the judgment that the student was first, or seventh, or twenty-sixth, it offered up a perspective on individual action that was quite different from any offered by self-examination. Third, their contribution was to register the impact of one person on another with astonishing rapidity. Insofar as morality can be said to be a concern for the effect one's actions have on other persons, these structures aimed to give morality a concrete instantiation. One could literally see the effects of one's actions in a system in which even one's failure to respond could become apparent as a delinquency alongside the actions of one's companions.

Monitorial systems were among the few joint ventures of the English and the French in the eighteenth century. They were generally inspired by Lockean and Hartleyan associationism and developed as a way of working out the implications of the association of ideas when it was applied to the association of persons. When Elie Halévy describes their intellectual genealogy, moreover, he speaks of the English tradition being transmitted through France; it was, he claims, the French who enabled Bentham to come to recognize the importance of Lockean and Hartleyan empiricism and to think about the weight and force of emotions and ideas for individuals in groups.[30] Indeed, both Napoleonic bureaucracy and Fourierism were more and less

29. See Andrew Bell, *An Experiment in Education Made at the Male Asylum of Madras* (London, 1797); Joseph Lancaster, *Improvements in Education* (London, 1798); and Jeremy Bentham, *Chrestomathia,* ed. M. J. Smith and W. H. Burston (Oxford, 1984). Each of these texts presented plans for schools on what was called the "monitorial system." They stressed the importance of using students themselves as monitors, elements of the school's system of observation. Foucault uses these schools as examples of "discipline" in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1977).

30. See Elie Halévy, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism,* trans. Mary Morris (Boston, 1955), pp. 8–9.

practical expressions of the nascent social scientific view that individuals achieve themselves only in cooperation with groups. The science of sociality was to observe how "the various egoisms harmonise of their own accord and automatically bring about the good of the species."[31] It aimed to establish morals as an exact science and to see how the basic feelings of egoism of each individual reconcile themselves with the continuation of the species in demonstrable terms.

In Flaubert's hands, the novel becomes a laboratory for the social scientific depiction of action–what people would do, as opposed to what people have done. The novel distinguishes itself from history because it cares less about past action than about the social sources of individual action. That is, Flaubert's famous claims to have put the novel on a "scientific" basis are completely justified.[32] They are, however, justified not because the novel attains what we might think of as the documentary scientism of a realist presentation but because Flaubert continually deploys a method that is scientific. Moreover, unlike the earlier scientific method, this one does not revolve around observation of phenomena but around the analysis of production, of work seen in terms of outcomes. This is as much as to acknowledge that there is something deeply plausible about all the intuitions that readers have had over the years that Emma would have fared all right "if only she had had a career," or "if only she had been able to live in Paris." Those intuitions simply register the fact that Emma is herself the novel's greatest champion of modern social engineering, that her ability to marvel at Charles's apparent lack of embarrassment in the presence of Hippolyte, the stableboy at the Lion d'Or whose clubfoot Charles so spectacularly failed to correct, is part and parcel of her sense that there is nothing genuinely bad or sad, only misplaced persons, responses calling out for a different context (so that even the desire to die can be subtly transposed into the desire to live in Paris, and so that Emma on her deathbed can bestow a passionate kiss upon the crucifix less because she is embracing an afterlife than because she is persisting in making instantaneous assessments and readaptations of her life).

And if utilitarianism has regularly been represented as largely indifferent to individual emotions (as Martha Nussbaum has recently argued in her *Poetic Justice*), Flaubert's project is to demonstrate how adept it is in engineering them.[33] The part of Emma that might seem most cloyingly sentimental, her sense that she is like someone stranded, an imaginative alien in

31. Ibid., p. 15.

32. See Flaubert, letters to Colet, 24 Apr. 1852 and 22 July 1853, *Correspondance*, 2:79, 387–88.

33. See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston, 1995). See esp. pp. 13–52, 53–78.

an all-too-familiar world, is a sentimentality that Flaubert will find at the heart of utilitarian social engineering, with its sense that people can come to have their own efficacy, their own potential goodness demonstrated to them by a context that continually shows them that even their waiting has been an action and that makes life a constant swallowlike migration in search of the place they "really" belong. Thus, Flaubert's commitment to producing fiction that he suspects will not be appreciated in his lifetime is not simply a dogged commitment to art for art's sake that strikes an amusing contrast with his desire to "live like a bourgeois."[34] It is, instead, the essence of the new bourgeoisie to imagine that no human creation ought to go without a market, a reception that will give it back to itself as good, as validated. Action is always, that is, seen as assisted action, involving not only agents but auxiliaries (assistants who may assist only by being the failed competitors that enabled individuals to come to perceive their own actions as having value).

Now it may seem surprising from today's perspective to claim that Flaubert's novel manages to depict the utilitarian social structures without much obvious contempt for them, but that is, indeed, what I am claiming. The only time that the narrator adopts the first person in the novel is in the opening passage, which recounts that "we" were in the classroom when the young Charles Bovary entered. Homais's boosterism may look contemptible, but Flaubert's depiction of the kind of thing that Homais celebrates is merely matter-of-fact. The agricultural fair—with its modern way of analyzing the diurnal routines of rural life, dividing it into classifications so numerous as to create a nearly infinite number of occasions for distributing prizes and awards, and publicly announcing the victor in each of these contests that are so peaceable that the contestants never encounter one another—merely merits description as well as juxtaposition with Emma and Rodolphe's serious conversation of mutual seduction.

Two questions appear at this point—one about what happens to individuals in this account, the other about why sexual action is singled out. First, why is it difficult for these characters to criticize the utilitarian worldview that they pit themselves against? For although conformism and mediocrity are everywhere the target of Emma's scorn, the novel does not simply point to the impotence of her discontent with the world she lives in by awarding the medal of the Legion of Honor to Homais at its conclusion. The problem is, rather, that Emma is continually trying to combat the elements of the society she loathes by coming up with weapons that regularly turn out to be merely more of the same, aspects of the world she imagines

34. Flaubert, letter to Colet, 21 Aug. 1853, *Correspondance,* 2:402.

herself breaking free of. That is, the novel repeatedly suggests that a kind of luck inheres in the very rational structure of the artificial classes (the collections of people who fill the classrooms of utilitarian education and the factories of work) that are a regular feature of utilitarian society. In arguing that individuals might really derive different kinds of value from their associations with different kinds of persons, utilitarianism seemed to deprive characters of themselves by making all their actions so reliant upon their connections with other people that they could scarcely recognize themselves as tied to their own actions.

The importance of this detachment from even the actions in which they have most completely participated manifests itself throughout the novel—most notably in the way Flaubert uses *style indirect libre*. Flaubert does more than simply give the narrator privileged access to the thoughts of the characters; he makes it clear that their experience requires as much representation to themselves as it does to other people. The Charles who can see the dress of his first wife immediately after her funeral and say, "She had loved him after all!" is someone who comes at his emotions through a process of representation (*M,* p. 14). And the Emma who says to herself "I have a lover!" is not simply marveling at her situation but is also narrating it to herself and producing the emotions to go with that situation (*M,* p. 117).

That feature of the novel—the way that characters are shown describing the effects of their actions and deducing the emotions that they come to have—makes it possible to understand Flaubert's celebrated claim that he *was* Emma Bovary in a slightly different fashion from the one in which it has commonly been understood. For the fact is that lots of people *are* Emma Bovary. Moreover, this identity between the character and the legion of others who *are* Emma does not reflect a similarity of circumstance or a deep psychological identification. It is, rather, an inevitable product of the fact that it is as easy for many another to occupy Emma's emotions as it is for her, since others come to her emotions the same way that she does—through deducing them from the effects that she sees around her. Moreover, this point seems to me the essential one to make about the oft-debated and often mistakenly resolved question of whether Flaubert based his novel on an actual case (the story of the second wife of a doctor who had studied medicine under Flaubert's father). Although there is every reason to believe that Flaubert might have read the newspaper accounts of the woman's suicide and might have particularly noticed them on account of the connection between his own family and the principals in this drama, Flaubert repeatedly protested that he had not drawn the novel from that story—or from anything else in life. One could, that is, argue that he might have known every detail of that case without its having much to do with the novel he

wrote because what is important to him—what is scientific—about his novel is that it proceeds from the effect to the causes, from the rewards to the actions, as if it were offering a prize that would then produce prize-winning actions, prize-winning livestock, prize-winning novels. As Baudelaire understood when he described *Madame Bovary* as if he were straightforwardly adapting Poe's "Philosophy of Composition," the point of deductive description is to produce a necessity that will fall with particular intensity upon a certain number of actors who are singled out as if by fate.

I am describing a regular feature of Flaubert's practices of composition and research. For unlike a writer like, say, George Eliot, who worked up a subject and created quarries for her novels out of her research, Flaubert sent out for and ordered up his details. Thus, the process of composition frequently puts him in the position of requesting that his correspondents send him not just books but very particular facts that are "pre-tweaked." He writes to Alfred Baudry, for instance, both that he needs information and exactly what information he would like for it to turn out to be.[35] Moreover, it is this aspect of his work that enables him to reassure himself that a novel of Champfleury's [*Les Bourgeois de Molinchari*) that was being serialized as he was writing was completely different from his *Bovary;* the two novels might have the same basic story and the same basic setting, but the "conception and the tone" are quite dissimilar.[36] Clearly, they would have to be, because Champfleury reads the newspapers, while Flaubert dictates what they should have said and what they will have said (which helps to explain why his letter of response to a young aspiring novelist singles out journalism as a particularly disabling avenue into literary work).[37] Journalism reports what has happened; scientific fiction demands that reality justify itself.

Indeed, this aspect of Flaubert's work marks the opening of *Madame Bovary* itself and produces such surprising construction that many critics have described it as a lapse—the peculiar opening in which the narrator begins by recalling that "we were in class when the headmaster came in, followed by a new boy," proceeds to produce elaborate details about the boy's family history and about the appearance that he makes with his cap of composite origin, and later announces that "it would now be impossible for any of us to remember any thing about him" (*M,* pp. 5, 6). This anonymous and transient narrator is, in the manner of anyone reading a newspaper story about someone they know they once "knew" in the vague way

35. See Flaubert, letter to Baudry, Feb. or Mar. 1855, ibid., 2:570–71.
36. Flaubert, letter to Bouilhet, 2 Aug. 1854, ibid., 2:566.
37. Flaubert, letter to Monsieur X***, Apr. 1858, 2:805–06.

that we know the distant members of our elementary school classes, not so much about remembering as producing an account of what they think they ought to remember, a story of what this terrorist bomber or that president was like at that age.

And it is this strange collapse between the inductive and the deductive that continually fuels Flaubert's distinctive use of *style indirect libre,* so that it comes across as a more-or-less sneering description because it analyzes how things work without any of the emotional enthusiasm and endorsement that usually accompanies such analysis. (Think of how a household advice columnist like Heloise doesn't just provide you with instructions on how to remove a spot in the carpet with soda water but also accompanies the advice with an exclamation. Think of how the cross-cut scene at the agricultural fair depends in the first place on having its principals—Rodolphe and Emma, on the one hand, and the mayor, on the other—produce absolutely formulaic speeches for seduction and for morally uplifting public ceremonies. The cross-cutting achieves a description of these scenes that eliminates their exclamation points and deprives them of the chance to bask in the success they have so obviously achieved.) Moreover, this way of making individuality look like a mistaken conclusion prompts one of the most famous passages from Flaubert's letters, an account of how he had, a couple of days earlier, discovered

> in a charming spot beside a spring . . . old cigar butts and scraps of pate. People had been picnicking. I described such a scene in *Novembre,* eleven years ago; it was entirely imagined, and the other day it came true. Everything one invents is true, you may be sure. Poetry is as precise as geometry. Induction is as accurate as deduction; and besides, after reaching a certain point one no longer makes any mistake about the things of the soul. My poor Bovary, without a doubt, is suffering and weeping at this very instant in twenty villages of France.[38]

Although critics can say and have said, with Harry Levin, that Flaubert "decid[ed] to portray a particular individual who also happened to be a universal type," it is more to the point to stress that there is nothing universal at all about Flaubert's approach.[39] For Flaubert is stressing an important contribution that utilitarianism makes even to art—the recognition that persons are neither completely internally consistent nor so unique that one can't always see them as tokens of groups of which they are typical. On the one hand, Emma could easily be shown to have something like twenty lives,

38. Flaubert, letter to Colet, 14 Aug. 1853, in *M,* p. 316.
39. Harry Levin, *The Gates of Horn: A Study of Five French Realists* (New York, 1963), p. 255.

and not from any real duplicity but from what is a very familiar pattern in the novel—one in which characters come to do what they should as professionals or as amateurs in a fashion that involves no real commitment of their identities and that has no particularly lasting impact on their future behavior.

The Emma who can go from being completely intrigued by her flirtation with Léon to being conspicuously absorbed in being a good housewife attending to her needlework when Léon comes to tell her that he is leaving Yonville l'Abbaye is not so much interested in putting on a show as in fulfilling the requirements for showing herself—and anyone else—that she knows how to be a good housewife. Like the promise that Charles's first wife Héloïse extorts from him not to return to the Rouault's farm, behavior in one place scarcely outlives its immediate occasion. Charles can think "with a kind of naive hypocrisy, that this interdict to see her gave him a sort of right to love her" (*M,* p. 13). Once one's actions are seen to be defined by their fulfilling someone else's needs, someone else's desires, success can come with only minimal engagement from those who achieve it. Thus, when Emma requests that Léon write love poems to her, it is predictable that he would respond by copying something from a Keepsake (see *M,* p. 201). In this chain of persons whose behavior costs them next to no effort, it is not that Emma's treatment of Charles counts as revenge on Charles for his behavior to Héloïse, nor that Léon's treatment of Emma counts as revenge on her for her behavior to Charles. Rather, the utilitarian project of emphasizing outcomes and providing an audience for the slightest gestures has become such a way of life that agents have lost contact with their actions even through a process that was supposed to have made them more conspicuously valuable.

The Emma Bovary who has had something very close to twenty lives is the Emma Bovary whose life could easily be lived by twenty others. While it may seem like a joke on the citizens of Yonville that they move rapidly from gossiping about Emma's gifts to Léon and about his being her lover to praising her exemplary behavior as the manager of her household and her husband's billings, the point of the drastic variation is not to show the crowd's fickleness. The function of publicity in Yonville is to respond instantaneously to any new behavior, to judge it without regard to an individual's previous behavior, to encourage individuals to express their better selves. Thus, although Flaubert depicts them crowding to the windows to get good seats for the theater of life, they are not demonstrating a personal trait like curiosity in this. They are fulfilling what has become an obligation, the commitment to enabling (and requiring) people to be seen, and they

are neither immoral nor fickle. Rather, the virtue of this public lies in its willingness never to hold it against Emma the exemplary housewife that they had only recently thought of her as Emma the adulteress. Yet for both Emma and the people of Yonville this efficiency in updating their views with little interference from even their previous views constitutes a considerable limitation as well. For in this society of the weightless past, Emma can easily lose track of herself.

It thus becomes possible for us to identify with some exactitude why sexual relationships are prominent in the novel. For if Dickens presents his readers with a domestic sphere that is continually invoked as a stay against the confusion of the world outside its borders, Flaubert is interested in analyzing how even marriage is being modernized by the pressure of utilitarian morals. For modern marriage—particularly when one is married to such an inert character as Charles Bovary—is simply not competitive with the efficiency of modern adulterous sexuality. In the recognizably similar but various worlds of Emma's convent school and its prizes and laurel wreaths, the ball at Vaubyessard and its world of recognition and acknowledgment, and the small-town life of Yonville and its ever-renewed assessments of how people are doing, we are presented with situations in which the notions of action and reward for action have been brought into extraordinary proximity.

Now it might seem a flaw in this description of the modern that it appears to apply as well to Charles, that antiquated and bovine figure who is continually represented as ruminating on his own happiness. Charles, on the one hand, approaches the condition of becoming an emblem of happiness, in which satisfaction registers itself organically without his ever needing to refer it to anyone else. He seems like an old-fashioned allegorical cartoon. On the other, the novel depicts him as someone who regularly identifies his own happiness and who conspicuously approximates success and reward with his regular consumption of meals (his passing of his medical examination, his wedding, and then his daily life become the occasion for taking meals that are, for him, both simple sustenance and sustenance that bespeak his complete satisfaction). Yet Charles's happiness is not modern but something that the novel outlines as deeply primitive—a satisfaction in the ordinary rhythms of life that cannot imagine what it would be not to like that life, happiness that feels unmediated and uncompetitive because it never needs to reassure itself that it cannot possibly be misery since it is so conspicuously "happier" than other people's happiness.

This is as much as to say that Charles actually does fail Emma and that he fails her for the very simple reason that he cannot imagine making a

judgment on his life that would be different from the direct experience of it. He cannot, in other words, imagine a happiness that can count itself as success only insofar as it travels through someone else. A simpler and better-hearted version of Sade's sexual athletes who are interested in other people as mere occasions for the production of their own individual pleasures, Charles is portrayed in the novel as solitary from the classroom of his youth to the household of his marriage. For Charles's limitation is not simply that he is too innocent to imagine himself sinned against but that he is unconscious of the possibility that he might be doing something other than succeeding by living his daily life. Emma is driven to distraction by the very husband who is devoted to her—through her life, her death, and his discovery of her adultery. Her fury merely registers the fact that he cannot imagine that she is unhappy and that her unhappiness might be a judgment on him.

The novel is nothing if not simultaneously vague and precise about treating the notion of satisfaction in sexual terms. Charles bounds from the marriage bed; Emma develops a sense of uneasiness and melancholy. Her first sexual experience with Rodolphe is clearly marked as the first satisfying sexual experience of her life, and Flaubert presents it in terms that sound the note of the cliche so strongly that there is no temptation to produce an historical genealogy that would identify them as having been fresh once ("nothing around them seemed changed; and yet for her something had happened more stupendous than if the mountains had moved in their places" [*M,* p. 116]). But it would not be worth remarking on these facts if we were to see them as drawing the moral of the supreme importance of sexuality to individuals and to the marriages and affairs that unite them (and thus as hailing an account of Freud's significance as an interpreter of the fundamentally sexual basis of human identity).

For what is at stake is the discovery of sexual action as a rationalized utilitarian action, complete with an insistence upon the happiness standard and the insistence that it must apply to the greatest number. Sexual action becomes not simply the stuff of advice books but is also discovered as a synchronized success, a feat of timing in which two individuals simultaneously produce the judgment of their own happiness. Sexual experience comes to need to be justified, to meet new standards. For, as Flaubert recognized in his remarks about the development of "love" and Byronic satire's inability to discourage its rise, sex was being made to answer to *bonheur,* so that one's actual experience was continually shadowed with the sense of expectation and disappointment. Its only real alternative, he suggested, was prostitution, which he admired for its professional detachment rather than

for its golden-hearted practitioners and for the detachment that it afforded him (a detachment he rather spectacularly displayed in insisting upon keeping a cigar in his mouth while having intercourse at one brothel he frequented with his friends).[40]

What I am arguing here is that Flaubert, in describing utilitarianism's appropriation of and application to sexuality, ceases to need sexual explicitness because sexuality, in having been socialized, operates according to a logic that plays itself out on a variety of fronts. Thus, though it might be controversial if I were to insist upon the importance of counting Emma's experience of orgasmic sex and were to say that I think that she experienced orgasm exactly once (on the day of the agricultural fair), I think that it's easy to see that a premium attaches to synchronized success and simultaneous happiness and that this emerges in the language of objects that develops around the gifts that circulate as love tokens in the novel.

Flaubert's depiction of gift exchanges makes them continually bespeak the promise of sexual satisfaction; and this is the case even when they are gifts like the new waistcoat (cut as if for a man) that Emma gives herself. Gifts in the novel are treated as if they were packets of happiness (exactly as they should be, coming from Monsieur Lheureux) and as if they were merely detached material units of the happiness that is frequently rendered in terms of sexual acts. Although "his conviction that he was making her happy looked to [Emma like] a stupid insult," Charles's gifts, like his assessments of happiness, are always oriented toward duration, toward the sense that an object is qualified to be a gift because it has previously been owned, as if the object's being valued by someone else and road-tested made its value obvious (*M,* p. 77). Thus, this owner of multiply owned volumes of the *Dictionary of Medical Science* ("uncut, but the binding rather the worse for the successive sales through which they had gone,") bestows on Emma a "second-hand dogcart" and a horse that someone else has broken in and largely broken down (Monsieur Alexandre's "old filly, still very fine, just a little broken in the knees," in much the same way that he bestows himself, a secondhand husband whose previous wife's affection ought to count as a good reference, and in much the same way that he takes Héloïse's jealousy of the young Mademoiselle Rouault as confirmation of the appropriateness of his attraction to her (*M,* pp. 22, 23, 117). He replicates his mother's awareness of the value of what is already established, even if his attentions are not so exclusively financial that he seeks out for himself only the kind of wife his mother had secured for him—a widower supposed to

40. Flaubert, letter to Colet, 12 Apr. 1854, *Correspondance,* 2:549–50.

have substantial holdings. Like people who don't know what they like until they are told, Charles only knows happiness as confirmed happiness. And he thus cannot imagine that he feels a happiness that might be unshared.[41]

By contrast with Charles's sense that objects have and hold value, Léon and Emma proceed to an exchange of gifts that revolves around staging occasions for experiencing what the other does, as if through their eyes. The two exchange books and romances; he gives her—and himself—matching cactuses; and she installs in his room "a rug in velvet and wool with leaves on a pale ground" (*M,* p. 70). They can continue the effects of their initial conversation about the soul-expanding effects of landscapes, music, and poetry by reading the same books, by pricking their fingers (sometimes even simultaneously), and by her gifts of household furnishings that she can deliver to the rooms in which he lives (see *M,* p. 71). Moreover, they come to share the pleasures of self-renunciation in not proceeding to an affair. Thus, Emma's self-gratulation ("How good I was" [*M,* p. 75]) for not having bought anything from Monsieur Lheureux on his first visit is thus simply a version of the process of sharing with Léon a consciousness of love relinquished. It has become possible to take satisfaction in actions that involve inaction. If she takes up her needlework and learns to note her husband's goodness, and if he decides to leave to study in Paris while making enough preparations as if he were going on a trip around the world, the descriptions of each function to indicate that they don't need to exchange actual objects in order to express their sentiments toward one another. They come to give one another the gift of consciousness—here, finally, represented as the refusal of both objects and actions.

Against these two ways of bestowing gifts we can set the practices that Emma and Rodolphe establish between them, which are remarkable in the first place because Emma's gifts become "an embarrassment" for Rodolphe and "humiliating"—despite the fact that only he and she know of them (*M,* p. 137). Emma, that is, produces her gifts to create a private language much like that that she had established with Léon before his departure for Paris; and she gives him gifts that also announce their demands on his identity. The riding crop, the signet ring with the motto *Amor nel cor,* the cigar case copied from the one that Emma and Charles had found as they were leaving La Vaubyessard create a role for Rodolphe as insistently as Emma's suggestion that Rodolphe might have to have a violent confrontation with Charles.

41. René Girard's notion of triangulated or mediated desire and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's related discussion of male homosocial desire describe what I am identifying in utilitarian terms, but they treat the phenomenon in psychological terms. See René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure,* trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore, 1972); and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, 1985).

Emma, that is, may be desperately in earnest in trying to retain Rodolphe's affections but only because she creates a completely profligate image of who he is. Thus, when he comes to write his farewell letter to her, the horror of the scene lies not just in the difficulty he has remembering exactly who she is. It is, instead, that his difficulties in picking out which of his memories are memories of her in particular have already been so thoroughly anticipated by the fact that she has been treating him as someone else, the exotic sea captain whom she will later describe to Léon.

Gifts here are as freely given as they might ever be, as there is no public decorum to maintain, but Flaubert describes the gifts that Emma gives to Rodolphe as essentially tyrannical. They are tyrannical, moreover, because they so clearly announce a command that Rodolphe think about her. Like her insistence upon creating a miniature private holiday by proclaiming midnight to be a moment out of time when they will turn their thoughts to one another, her giving him various love tokens involves her producing relics designed to prompt him to "recapture something of her presence" (*M,* p. 145). These mementos, however, curiously erode the very memory they were supposed to preserve. As Rodolphe tries to remember whom he is writing to style his farewell letter fittingly, he opens the "old Rheims cookie-box, in which he usually kept his love letters":

> First he saw a handkerchief stained with pale drops. It was a handkerchief of hers. Once when they were walking her nose had bled; he had forgotten it. Near it, almost too large for the box, was Emma's miniature: her dress seemed pretentious to him, and her languishing look in the worst possible taste. Then, from looking at this image and recalling the memory of the original, Emma's features little by little grew confused in his remembrance, as if the living and the painted face, rubbing one against the other, had erased each other. [*M,* p. 145]

Rodolphe's use of his archive makes it clear that he has already replaced memory with history. Recovering the material evidence of his past relationships, he believes that they occurred but can't always connect the evidence with vivid images of exactly who was involved; letters upon letters from various mistresses (with writing and style "as varied as their spelling"), "bouquets, garters, a black mask, pins, and hair . . . lots of hair" cause "all these women" to crowd "into his consciousness" and shrink "in size, leveled down by the uniformity of his feeling. A word recalled . . . certain gestures, the sound of a voice; sometimes, however, he remembered nothing at all." Given the fact that Rodolphe begins to compose his letter telling Emma he won't run away with her as soon as he arrives at home, that is, *immediately after* having seen her and reassured her that he is "forgetting nothing" (pass-

ports, tickets) that they will need for their journey, it's remarkable that Rodolphe has to visit his personal archives "to recapture something of her presence" (*M,* pp. 144, 145). And it's more remarkable still that it should end by enabling him to forget her almost entirely ("for pleasures, like schoolboys in a school courtyard, had so trampled upon his heart that no green thing was left; whatever entered there, more heedless than children, did not even, like them, leave a name carved upon the wall"). Composing a farewell letter to a woman he has seen within the hour, he can render his own very nearly present experience remote as soon as he begins to speak to himself like his own editorial assistant prodding him to begin writing the right sort of thing: "Come," he said, "let's go" (*M,* p. 145).

The key point to be made is that no one—neither novelists nor the characters they might depict—works from life any more because the judgment of happiness is harder to make than the utilitarianism that they live by had quite imagined. For if the distinction between pleasure and pain had anchored the Benthamite project of replacing personal virtue with public behavior, and individual goodness with the capacity to produce good effects, Flaubert wants to say that the difficulty with that project is that it has no clear sense of what it's evaluating. If pleasure and pain had seemed to Bentham to provide good evidence about outcomes, Flaubert suggests, the real question is when an outcome has come out. Does the happiness of a marriage appear on the wedding day, the wedding night, the honeymoon, or a golden anniversary? Does the pleasure of a sexual relationship appear in the anticipation or in the orgasmic conclusion that marks a sex act's success? In a world in which happiness is constantly being checked, the measurement of happiness itself seduces individuals into producing readily identifiable actions, to valuing the techniques of measurement itself. This is to say that the happiness-measuring system itself promotes both the adultery and the spendthriftiness that lead to Emma's eventual downfall and that it does so by insistently shortening the unit of action and by insisting on making it ever more insistently perceptible.[42] With the happiness-measuring system, individuals are always on the lookout for occasions in which to demonstrate their happiness to themselves, and sex acts—defined very explicitly as physical pleasures that reach their limit in the satisfaction of orgasm—simply

42. For Leo Bersani, neither adultery nor its exposure could actually produce either happiness or catastrophe for Emma. The novel needs "the crisis of her debts" (that is, a crisis precipitated by the action of others) since it "dramatizes the anxiety of a consciousness living entirely off itself" and therefore could not possibly depict a solution in the outside world. Bersani's telling observation in support of his view is that Emma is "never more exasperated than during her love affairs" (Leo Bersani, *Balzac to Beckett: Center and Circumference in French Fiction* [New York, 1970], pp. 159, 157, 159).

become easier to work with than the notion of a married state that expresses itself in its continuation rather than in its constant production of altered states.

Moreover, acts of purchasing follow this same logic in that value inheres not in the objects that are purchased or passed up but attaches primarily to the transaction itself, the identification of the point of sale. This explains why Flaubert is concerned to depict so many things that get lost. The cap of composite origin that the young student Charles Bovary loses in the impersonal malice of the classroom never turns up again, nor does Emma's greyhound Djali—however this may disappoint the proverbial wisdom one of Emma's fellow passengers on the Hirondelle has produced about dogs seeking out their masters and mistresses after many years and over great distances. The cigar case discovered on the road from the ball at Vaubyessard does not return to its original owner but becomes Emma's possession and the model for the copy that she gives to Rodolphe. But, most importantly, Rodolphe's farewell letter, which Emma drops just before her delirium sets in, completely disappears from her consciousness by the time she rises from her sickbed after forty-three days.

This letter and its eventual discovery, of course, make *Madame Bovary* the novel that it is and that, more importantly, indicate just how disingenuous Flaubert and Senard were in focusing on Emma's suicide as an act of self-execution that rounded out the novel's circuit of action. For something that Flaubert had observed of Emma—namely, that "she did not believe that things could remain the same in different places"—suggests the problems that will attach to the notion of objects, actions, and selves in the utilitarian scheme as Flaubert represents it (*M,* p. 61). For if Emma continually develops so many new versions of her life in her constant production of new avatars for herself that it's unimaginable that she could figure out which one to punish, Flaubert makes it abundantly clear that her work isn't really done at the time of her death. In death, she corrupts the husband who had remained so extraordinarily innocent throughout her life:

> To please her, as if she were still living, he adopted her taste, her ideas; he bought patent leather boots and took to wearing white cravats. He waxed his moustache and, just like her, signed promissory notes. She corrupted him from beyond the grave. [*M,* p. 250]

We are told that Charles, having discovered Rodolphe's long-since-discarded farewell letter to Emma and a cache of his love-letters, accidentally met Rodolphe in the market. "They both turned pale when they caught sight of one another." Then, with the adaptive ingenuity that the novel had given so abundantly to Emma, they sit down to share a bottle of beer. Charles,

looking at "the face she had loved," Rodolphe's face, "seemed to find back something of her there." In the place of what might, in another novel set in another world, have been jealousy, Charles expresses a strange wistfulness: "He would have liked to have been this man" (*M,* p. 254). The "demoralization" for which the novel was prosecuted is, in this moment, complete. Although the demoralization might have seemed to manifest itself in Charles's having imitated Emma's extravagance, her love of fashionable clothes, her neglect of her daughter, it does not really revolve around these particular instances of flawed behavior. For the demoralization consists less in Charles's coming to behave badly because he has come to recognize his deception than in his confronting someone whom he takes to have been better at being him than he was himself. It replicates Charles's professional failure by comparison with Monsieur Canivet, the "famous surgeon from Neufchâtel" who is called in after Charles's bungled procedure on Hippolyte (*M,* p. 131). It makes competition enter so thoroughly into every aspect of life that there is no refuge. Flaubert's novel, then, inaugurates the novel of modernized "fate," the world in which people come to know their actions so much after the fact and from the evidence of happiness that they come to see themselves less in terms of what they have done than in terms of what they might have done if they had been someone else.

The scandal of *Madame Bovary,* is, in other words, not that it suggests how passionate love or adulterous sexuality gives the lie to modern rationalized structures (or to the "conspiracy of . . . " that Emma and Rodolphe lament in their early conversation) but rather that it depicts the ways in which those structures can betray their most ardent partisans (*M,* p. 105). For Emma Bovary, however much face she is given in the novel, is herself on the side of the faceless bureaucrat, the social engineer who is continually casting about to see how life might be different from what it is. Flaubert's novel will adapt that bureaucratic vision by making his characters think about nothing except how things might have been different (so that Fate becomes a constant interlocutor in the novel). Sexuality and adultery are not thus the private and subversive alternatives to a utilitarian calculation that evaluates actions in terms of their promoting the greatest happiness for the greatest number. They do not offer themselves as a defense of the claims of the individual against a conformist society. Instead, they participate in an analysis of action that leads you to realize that you weren't really happy then or else that you–in this case, Charles—were happy as someone else, Rodolphe.

After the publication of *Madame Bovary,* Flaubert receives a letter from an unknown admirer, Mademoiselle Leroyer de Chantepie, who becomes

his regular correspondent after she discloses that she's an old maid twenty-two years his senior and not seeking an amorous relationship. They exchange letters about his success and her sadness. She identifies her sadness with Emma's; he corrects her, saying that Emma is superficial and that Leroyer herself is more like him, that they have both been afflicted with an unhappiness that he takes to be wrong: "Life is such a hideous thing that the only way of bearing it is to avoid it."[43] He advises her to leave off her charitable efforts and to set to work in earnest, by which he means that she should distance herself from what she has called "les chagrins" and "l'ennui."[44] And the work he urges on her is reading. This may seem an especially surprising recommendation from a man who has been supplying his own other correspondents with detailed quantified reports on how much work he's been doing: "I've been smoking fifteen pipes a day. I've jerked off three times. I've written eight pages."[45] But the point of Flaubert's recommendation is to claim that the act of reading involves never feeling that anything is missing. In the world of production, one might need to worry about how much one had done, about when one had finished. And it was for this reason that Flaubert was almost insanely vexed when the *l* was left out of his name in the *Revue*'s announcement of the publication of *Madame Bovary;* he saw it not as a simple printer's error but as a statement that his work wasn't done yet. The novel about nothing was, simply by virtue of its always feeling complete, by virtue of its always being available for a reading that was always synchronized with it, not pornographic but pastoral, not disruptive but therapeutic. It enabled its readers to enter and exit without ever needing to ask themselves if they were happy, and what they had done. Like the inherited money that enabled Flaubert not to work for money, the novel was heritable work that would enable its readers not to work and simply to rest in its completeness.

43. Flaubert, letter to Leroyer de Chantepie, 18 May 1857, *Correspondance,* 2:717.
44. De Chantepie, letter to Flaubert, 28 Mar. 1857, ibid., 2:690.
45. Flaubert, letter to Bouilhet, 17 Aug. 1854, ibid., 2:567.