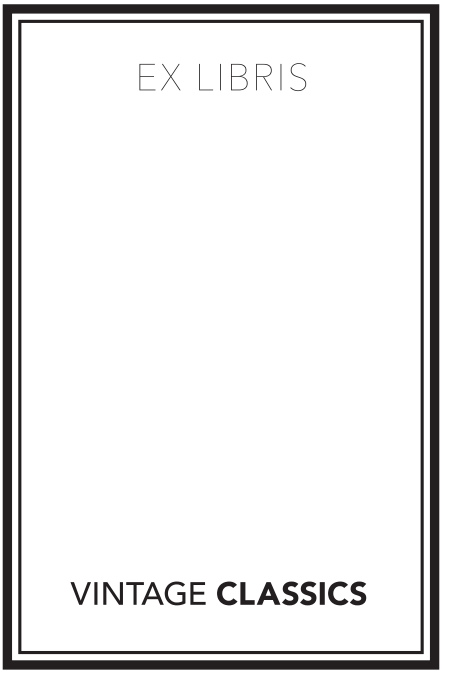

Gustave
Flaubert
Madame
Bovary



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GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

Gustave Flaubert was born in Rouen in 1821, the son of a distinguished surgeon and a doctor's daughter. After three unhappy years of studying law in Paris, an epileptic attack ushered him into a life of writing. *Madame Bovary* won instant acclaim upon book publication in 1857, but Flaubert's frank display of adultery in bourgeois France saw him go on trial for immorality, only narrowly escaping conviction. Both *Salammbô* (1862) and *The Sentimental Education* (1869) were poorly received, and Flaubert's genius was not publicly recognized until *Three Tales* (1877). His reputation among his fellow writers, however, was more constant and those who admired him included Turgenev, George Sand, Victor Hugo and Zola. Flaubert's obsession with his art is legendary: he would work for days on a single page, obsessively attuning sentences, seeking always *le mot juste* in a quest for both beauty and precise observation. His style moved Edmund Wilson to say, 'Flaubert, by a single phrase – a notation of some commonplace object – can convey all the poignance of human desire, the pathos of human defeat; his description of some homely scene will close with a dying fall that reminds one of great verse or music.' Flaubert died suddenly in May 1880, leaving his last work, *Bouvard* and *Pécuchet,* unfinished.

The translator, Adam Thorpe, was born in Paris in 1956. His first novel, *Ulverton*, appeared in 1992 and he has published two books of stories and ten further novels, including *Missing Fay* (2017), and seven poetry collections.

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ALSO BY GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

Memoirs of a Madman
November
Salammbô
Sentimental Education
The Temptation of Saint Anthony
Three Tales
Bouvard and Pécuchet

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GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

Madame Bovary

Provincial Morals

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH, INTRODUCED,
AND ANNOTATED BY
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Adam Thorpe 2011

This edition reissued in Vintage Classics in 2021
This translation first published by Vintage in 2011

Madame Bovary was first published in France in 1857

penguin.co.uk/vintage

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the
British Library

ISBN 9781784877460

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorised representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House
Ireland, Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68.

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TO

MARIE-ANTOINE-JULES SÉNARD

MEMBER OF THE PARIS BAR
EX-PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
AND FORMER MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR

Dear and illustrious friend,

Allow me to inscribe your name in the front of this book and even before its dedication; for it is to you, above all, that I owe its publication. On submitting to your magnificent defence in court, my work has acquired for me a kind of unforeseen authority. Accept here, then, the acknowledgement of my gratitude, which, as great as it may be, will never be equal to your eloquence and your devotion.

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

Paris, 12th April 1857.

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TO

LOUIS BOUILHET

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INTRODUCTION

Gustave Flaubert was born in Normandy in 1821, the son of a renowned surgeon. Brought up in the domestic wing of Rouen's main hospital, the boy was often within earshot of the sick wards' moans and in sight (if he climbed a trellis) of his father at work on the anatomy theatre's corpses. He learnt to read only at the age of eight, despite the efforts of his anxious, migrainous mother. He studied law in Paris for a short time but in his early twenties suffered a probable epileptic attack which curtailed his law career and, with some relief, he devoted himself to writing, 'with the stubbornness of a maniac'. Within two years both his father and his beloved sister, Caroline, had died – the latter in childbirth.

Madame Bovary appeared initially as a serial in the *Revue de Paris* in 1856, and was the author's first published work. An account, based on real cases, of provincial adultery in the flatlands of Normandy, it is also 'brutal' (the author's word) in its realism; notorious for its dissection of the consumerist, industrialising France of the mid-century; prescient in its depiction of a woman alienated from the life that surrounds her; and often, it must be said, piercingly funny. Its author, the *Revue* and the printer were put on trial for the novel's perceived sexual frankness, although this turned out to be an illusion of the book's sensual, meticulous prose: while, for example, the waltz scene was attacked for immorality, the book's fetishistic and phallic content of shoes, feet, gloves, cigars, cactus plants, spires, apricots, pen-knives and so on went unnoticed.

Thanks to Flaubert's abundant letters, particularly to his mistress Louise Colet and to the novelist and feminist George Sand, we know that the novel's five-year composition, inked with a quill (Flaubert hated metal nibs as much as he hated railways), was both agonising and exhilarating. 'We love what tortures us,' he claimed. The trial helped to make the book, and its unknown author, famous overnight. The

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work's startling newness was immediately recognised: in the words of Maupassant commenting some thirty years later, *Madame Bovary* 'revolutionised the art of letters'. As much as the paintings of Manet or Courbet, Flaubert's work heralds the start of the modern.

The novel was, however, written against the grain: Flaubert was at heart a romantic in love with exotic tales, realms and ruins – not the gritty, the seedy, the banal. He was no Zola, whose own tale of adultery, *Thérèse Raquin* (1867), takes urban ennui and shabbiness to a gruesome extreme. Flaubert had abandoned his previous work, a seething phantasmagoria concerning the life of Saint Anthony in his desert retreat, after a thirty-two hour reading had numbed his long-suffering friends Maxime du Camp and Louis Bouilhet, who suggested he write something 'down-to-earth'. Flaubert took the hint: a disciple of the master prose stylist Chateaubriand, he may have declared that 'style is everything', yet this time he rooted his fiction in the messiness of the everyday. This would not be easy for a man who wrote, 'Life is such a hideous business that the only way to tolerate it is to avoid it . . . by living in Art.' There is something in this of the desert hermit's self-flagellating discipline and denial.

Concerning his new book, he told Louise Colet, 'I'm striving to be buttoned-up and to follow a geometrically straight line.' Yet he would refer to the novel as a poem, and although it borrows from poetry a willed tendency to let language lead the way, this is always in taut tension with the demands of narrative and of the muddy fields, overfurnished rooms, trite conversation and closed minds of the story's rural setting, where Paris remains 'vaguer than the Ocean'. Above all, the author was taking on his greatest enemy: the bourgeois – defined by him as 'anyone who thinks ignobly'.[1]

Here we find a contradiction, part of that inner freedom belonging to the greatest artists. Although Flaubert loathed the ultra-bourgeois, conservative France of the mid-nineteenth century, he was himself both deeply conservative politically ('the whole dream of democracy is to raise the proletarian to the level of stupidity attained by the bourgeois')

[1] I'm assuming the term's pre-Marxist connotation.

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and passed a thoroughly regulated existence in a riverside *maison de maître*, in the Normandy hamlet of Croisset, living off the proceeds of family land and cosseted by his mother and assorted servants. Apart from occasional bouts of Parisian *libertinage* and travels to, among other places, Tunisia, the Levant, Italy and London, Flaubert did nothing but work at words in his tobacco-fugged study – so obsessively that it led to his final collapse from a stroke in 1880.

Not long before his death, he had advised his friend, the society hostess Gertrude Tennant (who hated *Madame Bovary*), to be 'regular and orderly in your life like a bourgeois, so that you may be violent and original in your work'. The art came first. He detested over-romantic works as exemplified by the poet Lamartine[2] (one of Emma Bovary's favourite authors), yet his professed literary aim was beauty and harmony. Beauty, for Flaubert, was less to do with conventional mellifluousness than the precise matching of word to experience. Recording the reality of human society – including its peevishness, ugliness, hypocrisy and stupidity – meant honouring it with language just as a poet might honour a sunset or the eyes of a lover.

Thus Flaubert's ideal was both a rational fidelity to the truth – an enlightened, quasi-scientific concept – and a desire somehow to match that truth in the parallel and quite fictive universe of words: to reduce the distance between language and things. The heartbeat of that universe, for Flaubert, was rhythm. There is not a sentence in *Madame Bovary* that does not bear its own particular pulse, rippling against the shimmering surface-patterns of assonance and alliteration, in themselves subservient to the lived experience being described – the tap of Hippolyte's wooden leg in the church, a fresh breeze blowing through reeds, the bulkiness of cattle moving back to their stalls, the scoop of a hand in sugar-white arsenic.

The thousands of pages of drafts, now transcribed by the University of Rouen and viewable on the web (www.bovary.fr), are testament to Flaubert's inky struggle: but the process can also be viewed as a highly refined one of condensation – distilling the material to the *mot juste*.

[2] Who was nevertheless to tell Flaubert that *Madame Bovary* was the best book he had read in twenty years.

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There are alarming excisions. Long and intricate episodes of great poetic power – such as Emma looking at the dawn landscape through panes of coloured glass after the ball at Vaubyessard – are discarded even at proof stage, sometimes leaving an image or even a sentence stranded in ambiguity. When Scott Fitzgerald did something similar to *The Great Gatsby*, he was aided by a brilliant editor: Flaubert seems to have achieved it in isolation, cutting a path into virgin territory.

This self-control extended even to the depiction of characters who would be at home in a period 'sensation' novel or melodrama: the salesman and moneylender Lheureux is all too plausible in his commonplace cunning (his schemes never quite criminal), while the upper-class libertine Rodolphe is closer to nihilism than to fashionable cynicism. As for the minor characters, the servant-boy Justin's story is a miniature masterpiece of tragic infatuation, while even the brief glimpses of the peasant wet-nurse and her scrofulous charge, approached through what can only be described as a remarkable tracking shot of dishevelled ruralism, absorb not a drop of sentiment. As for the 'advanced' pharmacist Homais, a self-righteous Rabelaisian grotesque whose views occasionally sound close to Flaubert's own (particularly about religion), the author never allows his loathing of that type to interfere with the merciless portrayal[3] – an even more remarkable achievement when one knows that *Madame Bovary* was written in a state, as he put it, of 'continual rage'.

In a letter to Louise Colet in 1853, Flaubert worries that, after 260 pages, he has written only descriptions of place and expositions of character, consoling himself with the notion that it is a biography, not a developed event. Or several biographies. Much of Part One is an account, not of farmer's daughter Emma, but of the dull medical officer with an 'almost interesting' face, who timidly loves her and becomes her husband – Charles Bovary. The book's structure is, therefore, unconventional: a lengthy and often slow preparation for Emma's downfall, whose last phase takes place in a breathless rush that feels alarmingly authentic.

[3] Except in the last chapter, when he refers to the man's shallow intellect and the 'nefariousness of his vanity' ('*la scélératesse de sa vanité*').

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During this final crisis, Emma experiences hallucinations drawn from Flaubert's first-hand knowledge of epileptic attacks (he is always, as in everything, medically accurate). Throughout, *Madame Bovary* skilfully negotiates inner and outer experience with such subtlety that it is only in the modulation of a phrase, a minutely calibrated change of rhythm or vocabulary, that we pass from one to the other, even in the shifting of point of view. Where the latter coincides with the narrator's view, we have what has been termed *style indirect libre* or free indirect discourse, where the narrative is coloured by the tone or vocabulary of one of the characters. It is, in one sense, the overlapping of spoken (or thought) language with the written. Flaubert was probably the first to use it in French literature, where the division had been especially marked.

Although the technique appears in earlier English authors such as Jane Austen, Flaubert uniquely combines it with the complete absence of the authorial 'I', or the kind of moralising commentary we find in Charles Dickens or George Eliot. His revolutionary decision to keep himself out of the picture ('author's personality absent', as he put it), left the job to language alone. It freed him from sounding, as he feared, like '*Balzac Chateaubrianisé*' – that is to say, like a highly stylised social realist. And it offered Flaubert a treasure-house of possibilities: he could play the full range of linguistic and literary devices – parody, pastiche, nuance, irony, wordplay, imitation, contrast, repetition and so on – without any apparent intermediary. This, above all, is why the critic Roland Barthes dated modernism, not from a particular year, but 'from Flaubert'. The way was prepared for James Joyce's multi-tongued *Ulysses*, T.S. Eliot's cubist collage of voices in *The Waste Land*, the subjective fluidities of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. All that remains of Flaubert's own voice is its insistent and justly famous irony: a tone we come to hear and recognise, nevertheless, and savour for its familiarity.

There is a further twist, however. The first word of the novel (a last-minute alteration) is '*nous*', or 'we'. This sets up two elements: a collusion with the reader, and an apparent narrator. An eye-witness, a schoolboy in a rowdy class, recalls watching the trembling new boy,

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Charles Bovary, arrive during term time. A few pages later, the same narrator, his voice popping up without warning, claims to remember 'nothing about him'. Having annulled himself, he vanishes. We then have a supple narrator who seems both limited and omniscient, varying between microscopic intimacy and a disdainful loftiness that apparently reaches its extreme with Emma's unseen coupling in the hackney coach. Jean-Paul Sartre, in his psychoanalytical study *The Family Idiot*, described this as 'copulation in general . . . viewed by a being . . . [who] takes his place outside humanity'. The 'being' is also, surely, the exhausted driver, who sees the world only through street names and the glimpsed details of ivied terrace, spur-stones and a field of red clover.

Furthermore, the opening scene itself was a standard subject for school compositions: thus one of the most sophisticated novels ever written begins with a derivative school exercise. The simple directness of the first paragraph reflects this. These are literature's humble beginnings; the schoolroom's scratch of letters.

But what looks at first like a simple communion between life and language is something much more complex. Flaubert was living in the first period of mass communication, when the combination of newspapers and the railway gave the printed word a new potential for both good and bad: it was certainly more likely to spread stupidity than wisdom, as we see in the go-ahead figure of Homais, both an avid consumer of print and a deadly contributor: his eulogy on the club-foot operation and science in general remains singularly relevant in our own disappointed age. Emma's sentimental reading gives her an inauthentic vision of life's potential, an eternal dissatisfaction with what she has, 'her dreams tumbling into the mud like swallows'. Her first lover, Rodolphe, mimics romantic discourse in his seducer's letter of rupture, reducing words to empty husks, vehicles of lies, in the same way that Léon, the besotted, blue-eyed lawyer's clerk, can spout only poetic clichés. Fragments of poems, stereotypes drawn from literature, technical manuals, medical parlance, scientific facts and statistics, newspaper articles, religious tracts, litter the characters' conversations, making us doubt what they are saying or thinking, or even whether they know what they really think.

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Flaubert continually reminds us, then, that what we are reading is itself an artifice, subject to the same critical scepticism as any other verbal matter. There is no such thing as a neutral, omniscient narrator – even in the lyrical glimpses of the Normandy landscape, long used in French schools as stylistic exemplars. The lengthy opening description in Part Two of Yonville l'Abbaye, the country market-town ('this poor village') where Charles has his practice and Emma her emotional prison, is thoroughly Homais-like in its emphasis on utilitarian progress, and climaxes like the authorial signature on the pharmacist's name written 'in letters of gold on a black ground': the place has already been appropriated by the bourgeois mind.

So it is perhaps no coincidence that one of the recurring words in the novel is '*étaler*': to put in the window; to display; to show off; to spread or stretch out; to sprawl (*s'étaler*). Flaubert loved to denigrate his task, to liken himself to an organ-grinder or, like Yonville's tax-gatherer Binet, a turner of napkin rings. The excitement of the modernist experiment was just this thrill of tension, like an electric current, between the two opposite poles of reality and artifice: a self-consciousness that reveals, not surface, but a vertiginous depth, a glorious *mise en abîme* in which humanity struggles to find meaning.

In a secular age, this question of life's ultimate meaninglessness provokes art to its finest efforts; and throughout Flaubert's life, public events conspired to provoke a general ennui in anyone of an idealistic or romantic temperament. At the time *Madame Bovary* was being written France was still traumatised by the collapse of the *ancien régime* a half-century earlier, followed by revolutionary experiment and terror; imperial aggression and grandiloquence under Napoleon; a consolidation of both religion and monarchy under the ultra-reactionary Charles X; before a further revolution established a more genial figure on the throne, the bourgeois Louis-Philippe, in 1830 (the novel's action mostly takes place in the 1830s and 1840s). The period continued to be spattered with civilian blood, however, as the disenfranchised, often starving, failed to be included in the utilitarian drive for progress – manned by armies of bureaucrats and businessmen whose generals were

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members of Flaubert's hated bourgeoisie. By the 1850s, their leader had become an emperor, the farcical little Louis-Napoléon, who dissolved the Assembly in a bloody coup that left hundreds dead in the Paris streets. No wonder democracy, for Flaubert, felt sham; his retreat into his rural study and the creation of a fictive, parallel world was something of a survival technique.

Madame Bovary is, among many other things, a quest for meaning in which only one character searches; the others see no point in setting out, or believe they have already arrived. Part of Emma's plight is the elusiveness of that meaning: between episodes of stasis or '*immobilité*', she races from hedonism to self-denial, from country to town, from grisette-like freedom to bourgeois motherhood, from despair to faith, from charitable works to extravagant shopping sprees, just as she does from man to man. Early in her marriage, she endeavours 'to find out what precisely was meant in life by the words *delight*, *passion* and *intoxication*, which had seemed so beautiful to her in books'.

Her impossible reverie is to be free and happy in a painted backdrop that is always elsewhere – Italy, for preference. Yet these reveries are themselves manufactured – cheap, hand-me-down versions that she fails to evaluate as fraudulent. She is an embedded product of her culture, as helpless in that guise as the ancient, work-crippled farm servant shuffling in front of the Agricultural Show's worthies. And yet few characters in fiction feel more real to us than Emma Bovary, endlessly evoked since in other media, including those Flaubert would have deemed 'vulgar'.

While taking her fate into her own hands[4] and embarking on daring affairs, Emma lacks the superhuman force needed to break free imaginatively from a world in which women were relegated to roles dictated by men (and it was almost impossible for middle-class women to go out and work); the novel has three 'Madame Bovary', after all – each nominally subsumed. When Emma briefly flirts with bohemianism in the streets of Rouen, she feels disgusted, even fearful. For a provincial woman like Emma, a farmer's daughter who dislikes the countryside

[4] She does so in a very different and more plausible way to, say, the remarkable and headstrong Magdalen of Wilkie Collins's *No Name* (1862).

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yet does not know the town, this would mean an inevitable slide towards social rejection, prostitution and death.

A moment of genuine insight comes in the chateau at Vaubyessard, the apogee of her social pretensions, when she recalls her widowed father (one of the few sympathetic characters) on the family farm, and the simple sensuousness of her lost existence. The register, for once, is not ironic, but touching: it is set brilliantly at the very moment it seems furthest off, against a window (a central leitmotif in the novel) that has just been shattered by a servant to let in the night air on a stifling ballroom.[5] Yet there is never any implication that she has somehow strayed from her natural milieu, as a conventional novelist might have suggested; instead, her memory remains a painful emotional truth, a shard of loss made more poignant by its context, and from which she is separated by the 'lightning-flashes' of the present.

This truth certainly fails to save Emma, exiled from herself as much as from the 'imbecilic petty burghers' or the 'tedium' of her surroundings – which are not only cultural, but stickily physical: her rendezvous with Rodolphe survives on her footwear in the form of mud which, when the servant-boy Justin longingly reaches for the boots to clean them, 'came off in powder under his fingers, and which he would watch gently rising in a beam of sunlight'. It is a very rare writer who can combine illicit sex, a boyish crush, precise observation, time's merciless passage and lyrical beauty in a single image: Shakespeare comes to mind.

'I am pledged to contradictory ideals!' the author complained to George Sand in 1869, '*living* is a métier for which I am not cut out!' Emma, had she a more articulate insight, might well have cried the same. Yet she acts her various roles – daughter, wife, mother, housewife, secretary, lover, bohemian – to perfection, at least briefly (her failure to feel maternal love for more than short bursts is perhaps the most painful thread in the book); even her cultural accomplishments – drawing, playing the piano – make Charles marvel. The realism of the novel includes its emotional truth: Flaubert's understanding of

[5] On writing the first lines of the novel, Flaubert wrote to Louise Colet: 'This is my third attempt. It's high time I succeeded or jumped out of the window.'

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human nature is not only complex but, for all his grumpiness and bluster, deeply compassionate; Emma is no material for a sympathetic heroine, but in keeping her true to herself and her situation, Flaubert renders her fate not only moving, but genuinely shocking.

One of Emma's difficulties is that life itself is not conveniently categorised into genres or registers, high, middling or low, but is a dishevelled entity on which we struggle to impose order; it may travel in one direction (Flaubert's 'geometrical straight line'), but it is continually disrupted by dissonant elements, and confused by the interpenetration of the subjective and the objective. Even the performance of a great romantic opera barely holds its own against the whiff of gas and bad breath, a husband's clumsiness, or inward feelings of worthlessness heightened by the bright stage romance and its inflated characters.

As for direct dialogue, which like most novelists Flaubert found especially challenging and which he crucially reserved for key scenes, it becomes as much about a failure to communicate as an occasional penetration of solitude (Emma is lonely as well as bored). The characters hear what they want to hear, or mishear, or do not listen at all: Emma's spiritually anguished conversation with the priest being the clearest example: 'You are troubled? . . . doubtless that's the digestion.' In the celebrated scene in the Agricultural Show, in which Rodolphe's seduction of Emma in stock phrases is comically interspersed with the equally stock phrases ('For good general husbandry!') of the farming prizes, Flaubert's collage technique empties both of meaning, reduces both to simple techniques of persuasion and oppression.

Everywhere in the novel, then, the exquisitely conjured physicality of ordinary life at a particular historical moment is ready to deflate human pretension and roughen its frail hopes, just as Flaubert's breathtaking descriptions – whether of Rouen's dawn cityscape or a door's latch-bar knocking a wall – allow us to marvel at the closing gap between words and things; at the miraculous and, finally, the salving possibilities of art.

Adam Thorpe
Nîmes, June 2011

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A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

I WAS LUCKY ENOUGH TO FIND a battered copy of the two-volume first edition (Michel Lévy, 1857) with the characteristic typos of the first printing. It was affordable only because a page had been torn out, I presume by the reader who had scrawled '*oeuvre immorale*' ('immoral work') with a quill pen on its flyleaf. The missing page described the senile Duc de Laverdière, bedder of queens (pp.45–46 of the present edition): particularly upsetting for a royalist.

Alongside this magical relic, I have used the modern edition edited by Jacques Neef (Le Livre de Poche, 1999), which is based on the so-called 'definitive edition' (Charpentier, 1873), and draws on Claudine Gothot-Mersch's magisterial critical edition (Garnier, 1971). It has long been recognised that the punctuation of the first edition is often clearer and suppler. Alexander Spiers's celebrated *General English and French Dictionary* (Paris, 1853) has been my stalwart desk-companion.

The peculiar difficulties that *Madame Bovary* presents for the translator include the author's fondness for the imperfect tense, varying levels of pastiche, and his habit of extending a certain lexical field (legal, military, etc) through a whole paragraph;[1] any translation has to be alert to changes of nuance and tone that are micrometrically calibrated, as well as the changing shades of irony, and attempt to find an equivalent for Flaubert's verbal mimicry of wordless states or experiences.[2]

This last is part of Flaubert's complex music: what he referred to

[1] See, for instance, the accounting vocabulary on p.103: 'So she carried over to him . . .'

[2] A striking example being the waltz scene on p.49, when the words blur and all but decompose as Emma is whirled: '*Ils tournaient: tout tournaient autour d'eux . . .*' See also the blending of palm ('*paume*') and 'pommel' ('*pomme*') when Emma cools her hands on the iron firedogs after refreshing her hot cheeks (p.21).

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as 'style'. No novel, except perhaps Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, has been more carefully composed at the level of sound and rhythm: the action seems to seep from the words themselves, and in real time (when Flaubert occasionally lapses into the present, it is not the historical present used by Dickens).

I made two decisions before embarking on this task some three years ago: that I would track the original syntax wherever possible (without producing 'translationese') in order to preserve its pressure, weight and balance; and that I would only use pre-1857 vocabulary and expressions. To avoid the feeling of period pastiche, my principal models were Henry James and early James Joyce, both later than Flaubert but best corresponding, in my view, to the modernity of his style.

My reasons for keeping strictly within the period lexicon are various, the most important being that the novel's startling or even shocking nature can only be appreciated when placed back in its own context. If we cannot hope to read this reverberating masterpiece with purely nineteenth-century eyes, that furious '*oeuvre immorale*', scratched on the flyleaf, urges us to honour the attempt.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My grateful thanks to Laura Hassan, my editor at Random House, for her patience and support, and to her assistant Frances MacMillan; to Alison Samuel for her remarkable close-reading editorial work – and without whose suggestions and corrections this translation would have been much the poorer; and to Alison Hennessy and the original instigator of the project, Liz Foley. Numerous people have provided encouragement and untied knots at various critical moments: these include Jean-Louis Habert, David Owen, Niek Miedema, Bernard Péchon, Patricia and Laurent Decornet, Simon Elmes, Julian Barnes, Anne-Marie Privat, Corinne Pinferi, Robert Chandler, my late father Barney Thorpe, my daughter Anastasia Thorpe and my tireless agent Lucy Luck. Finally, a special thank you to my wife Jo Wistreich for putting up with Emma for so long and with such tolerance, and for seeing her through.

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PART ONE

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I

We were in study-hour, when the Headmaster entered, followed by a *new boy* dressed in his everyday clothes and by a classroom servant carrying a big desk. Those who were asleep woke up, and each of us rose as if caught working.

The Headmaster nodded at us to resume our seats; then, turning to the usher:

'Monsieur Roger,' he said to him in a near-whisper, 'here is a pupil I entrust to you, he will start in the fifth class. If his work and behaviour are deserving, he may go *up to the seniors*, as befits his age.'

Remaining in the corner, behind the door, so much so that we could scarcely make him out, the *new boy* was a country lad, about fifteen years of age, and taller than any of us. His hair was cut straight across the forehead, like a village cantor, and he looked sound enough and exceedingly embarrassed. He was not broad-shouldered, but his short green woollen coat with its black buttons must have been tight at the armpits and revealed, through the slits in the back of its cuffs, red wrists used to being exposed. His legs, in blue stockings, emerged from yellowish trousers hitched up tight by the braces. He was wearing stout shoes, poorly polished and studded with nails.

We started reciting our lessons. He was all ears, as if attending to a sermon, not daring even to cross his legs or lean on his elbow, and when the bell went, at two o'clock, he had to be alerted by the usher to join us as we lined up.

It was our trick, on coming into class, to toss our caps on the floor so as to have our hands freer afterwards; right from the doorway, you had to hurl them under the bench, so that they hit the wall and made lots of dust: that was the *thing*.

But, whether he had failed to notice this stratagem or had not dared succumb to it, when prayers were over the *new boy* was still holding

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his cap on his lap. It was one of those composite types of headdress, which hints at bearskin, chapka,[1] round hat, otterskin hat and cotton bonnet; one of those sorry contraptions whose dumb ugliness has certain expressive depths, like the face of an imbecile. Egg-shaped and bulging with whalebone, it began with three circular sausage-shapes; then came alternate lozenges of velvet and rabbit-skin separated from each other by a red band, followed by a sort of bag ending in a pasteboard polygon covered with a complicated piece of braid, and from which hung, at the end of a long and too-slender string, a little criss-cross of gold thread by way of a tassel. It was brand-new; the peak shone.

'Stand up,' said the teacher.

He stood up; his cap fell off. The whole class started to laugh.

He bent down to retrieve it. A neighbour made it fall with a jab of the elbow, he picked it up yet again.

'Do get rid of your helmet,' said the teacher, who was a witty fellow.

A loud burst of laughter from the pupils disconcerted the poor boy, so much so that he had no idea whether he should keep hold of his cap, leave it on the floor or put it on his head. He sat down again and placed it on his lap.

'Stand up,' resumed the teacher, 'and tell me your name.'

The *new boy* pronounced, mumbling, an unintelligible name.

'Again!'

The same mumble of syllables could be heard, showered with hoots from the class.

'Louder!' the master shouted, 'louder!'

The *new boy*, coming then to a drastic decision, opened an enormous mouth and hurled forth at the top of his voice, as if calling out for someone, this word: *Charbovari*.

A roar shot up, rose in a *crescendo* on bursts of high-pitched shrieks (we yelled, we barked, we stamped our feet, we repeated: *Charbovari! Charbovari!*), then kept itself going on single notes, dying down with great difficulty, only to revive at times all of a sudden along a bench's row, where it gushed forth here and there in a stifled laugh, like an ill-snuffed firework.

Nevertheless, beneath a rain of extra lines, order was restored bit

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by bit in the classroom, and the teacher, managing to understand the name Charles Bovary by having it dictated, spelt out and reread, ordered the poor devil to go and sit on the idlers' bench, at the foot of the rostrum. He started to move, but, before heading off, hesitated.

'What are you looking for?' asked the teacher.

'My ca . . .' said the new boy, casting worried eyes around him.

'Five hundred lines for the whole class!' – delivered in a furious voice – quelled, like the *Quos ego*,[2] a new squall. 'So now keep quiet!' the indignant teacher continued, and wiping his forehead with a handkerchief that he had just drawn from beneath his headpiece: 'As for you, *new boy*, you will copy out for me, twenty times, the verb *ridiculus sum*.'[3]

Then, in a softer voice, 'Well now, you'll find your cap, it hasn't been stolen.'

All calmed down once more. Heads bent to books and for two hours the *new boy* behaved in an exemplary fashion, even if, from time to time, the odd paper pellet launched from a pen nib splattered his face. But he wiped himself with his hand, and remained completely still, eyes cast down.

In the evening, at study-time, he pulled his sleeve-guards from his desk, set his little pile of belongings in order, painstakingly ruled his paper. We could see him working hard, looking up every word in the dictionary and going to great trouble. Thanks, no doubt, to the willingness he showed, he avoided dropping down a class; because, though he knew his rules of grammar tolerably well, he had scarce any elegance in his turn of phrase. It was his village priest who had started him in Latin; his parents, for reasons of thrift, sending him to college only at the last possible moment.

His father, Monsieur Charles-Denis-Bartholomé Bovary, former assistant-surgeon-major, compromised around 1812 in some conscription scandal and forced at about that time to leave the service, had then turned his personal attractions to advantage by grabbing as it passed a dowry of sixty thousand francs, which presented itself in the shape of a bonnet merchant's daughter, who had fallen in love with his bearing. A handsome man, boastful, loudly ringing his spurs, sporting side

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whiskers that met his moustache, fingers forever bristling with rings, dressed in gaudy colours, he had the look of a gallant, with the facile gusto of a commercial traveller. Once he was married, he spent two or three years living off his wife's fortune, dining well, rising late, smoking large porcelain pipes, coming back in the evening only after the theatre and forever in and out of the cafés. The father-in-law died and left hardly a thing; he was furious, launched out *into fabrics*, lost some money there, then retired to the country, where he wished to *exploit the land*. But, as he knew scarcely more about cultivation than about printed calico, and rode his horses rather than turning them out to plough, drank his cider in bottles rather than selling it in the cask, ate the finest poultry from his yard and greased his hunting boots with the lard of his pigs, he soon saw that it would be better to give up all speculation.

Averaging two hundred francs a year, he then found, on the borders of the Caux and Picardy country, a dwelling that was a kind of half-farm, half-mansion; and – despondent, gnawed by regrets, blaming the heavens and envious of everyone – he shut himself up from the age of forty-five, disgusted by men, as he put it, and determined to live in peace.

His wife had doted on him once upon a time; she had loved him with innumerable cringings[4] that had weaned him from her all the more. Previously cheerful, out-going and entirely loving, on growing older she had (in the way a stale wine turns vinegary) become testy, screechy, nervous. She had suffered so, without at first complaining, when she saw him running after all the village strumpets and that a score of disreputable places sent him back to her in the evening, worn out with pleasures and reeking of drunkenness! Then her pride had revolted. So she had kept quiet, swallowing her rage in a mute stoicism that she kept to the day she died. She was endlessly out shopping and on business. She went to the solicitors' office, to the tribunal president, remembered to settle bills, won delays; and, at the house, she ironed, sewed, laundered, watched over the workers, settled the memorandums; so much so that, without worrying about a thing, Monsieur, perpetually benumbed in a sullen stupor from which he only stirred to say unkind

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words to her, stayed puffing in the chimney corner, hawking on the cinders.

When she bore a child, it had to be put out to a wet nurse. Returned home, the brat was spoilt like a prince. His mother fed him jams; his father let him run around without shoes, and, acting the philosopher, even said that he could go about naked, like the young of animals. To counter any maternal leanings, he had in his head a certain virile ideal of childhood by which he endeavoured to mould his son, wanting him to be brought up the hard way, in the Spartan manner, to give him a sound constitution. He sent him to bed without a fire, taught him to take great swigs of rum and to insult the church processions. But, being naturally easy-going, the child responded poorly to his efforts. His mother was always dragging him after her; she would cut up pasteboard boxes for him, tell him stories, converse with him in unending monologues, full of melancholic gaieties and babbling blandishments. In the loneliness of her life, she transferred onto this child's head all her scattered, broken vanities. She dreamed of high positions, she saw him as already tall, handsome, witty, established in civil engineering or in the magistracy. She taught him to read, and even, on an old piano of hers, to sing two or three sentimental ballads. But, to all this, Monsieur Bovary, who cared little for the arts, objected that it *was not worth it!* Would they ever have what was needed to support him at a government school, buy him a practice or a business? *Besides, if he has the cheek, a fellow always succeeds in the world*. Madame Bovary bit her lip, and the child roamed the village.

He followed the ploughmen and, with clods of earth, would drive off the crows that flew away. He ate blackberries all along the ditches, kept watch over the turkeys with a stick, tossed the hay at harvest, ran in the woods, played hopscotch in the church porch on rainy days, and, during the main festivals, would beg the verger to let him ring the bells, so that he could hang full length from the great rope and feel its peals carry him away.

And he shot up like an oak. He acquired strong hands, a healthy bloom.

When he was twelve, his mother was finally allowed to start him

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on his studies. They assigned these to the priest. But the lessons were so brief and so poorly followed, that they could serve little purpose. They were given at spare moments, in the sacristy, standing up, in a rush, between a baptism and a burial; or else the priest would send for his pupil after the evening Angelus, if he had not to go out. You went up to his room, you settled down: the midges and the moths swirled around the tallow. It was hot, the child fell asleep; and the old fellow, dozing off with his hands on his belly, was soon snoring, mouth agape. At other times, when Monsieur le Curé, returning from giving the eucharist to some sick person or other in the neighbourhood, spotted Charles up to mischief in the open fields, he would call him over, give him a good talking-to for a quarter of an hour and use the opportunity to make him conjugate his verbs at the foot of a tree. Rain would come to interrupt them, or an acquaintance passing by. Yet he was always pleased with him, even saying that the *young fellow* had an ample memory.

Charles could not stop there. Madame was insistent. Ashamed, or weary rather, Monsieur yielded without resistance, and they waited one more year until the boy had made his first communion.

Another six months went by; and, the following year, Charles was sent for good to school in Rouen, taken there personally by his father, towards the end of October, at the time of the Saint-Romain fair.

It would be impossible now for any of us to remember a thing about him.[5] He was an even-tempered boy, who played at break-time, worked in the study-hour, listened in class, sleeping well in the dormitory and eating well in the refectory. He had a wholesale ironmonger in the Rue Ganterie as guardian, who took him out once a month, on Sundays, after his shop was shut, would send him off to walk around the harbour to look at the boats, then take him back to school as soon as it was seven o'clock, before supper. Each Thursday evening, he wrote a long letter to his mother using red ink and three bars of sealing wax; then he would go over his history exercise books, or read an old volume of *Anacharsis*[6] lying about in the school-room. On walks, he chatted with the servant, who was from the country just like him.

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By dint of application, he always remained around the middle of the class; once, he even gained a first certificate of merit in natural history. But at the end of his fourth year, his parents took him out of school to have him study medicine, convinced that he could make his own way up to the baccalauréat.

His mother chose a room for him, on the fourth floor, along the Eau-de-Robec, with a dyer of her acquaintance. She concluded the arrangements for his board and lodging, bought some furniture, a table and two chairs, had an old cherrywood bed sent from home, and in addition bought a little cast-iron stove, with a supply of wood to keep her poor child warm. Then she left at the end of the week, after innumerable recommendations to behave well, now that he was to be left to his own devices.

The curriculum, which he read on the noticeboard, made him feel giddy: lectures in anatomy, lectures in pathology, lectures in physiology, lectures in pharmacology, lectures in chemistry, in botany, and in clinical and therapeutic medicine, not to mention hygiene and *materia medica*, all names of whose etymologies he was ignorant and which were like so many sanctuary doors full of august shades.

He understood nothing; he listened in vain, he did not grasp it. Yet he worked, he had well-bound notebooks, he would follow all the lectures, he missed not a single ward round. He performed his little daily task like a mill horse, that turns on the same spot blindfold, ignorant of what it is crushing.

To spare him expense, his mother sent him, each week, by messenger, a piece of roast veal, on which he would breakfast in the morning, when he returned from the hospital, all the while beating his feet against the wall to warm them. Then he had to run to classes, to the amphitheatre, to the hospice, and come back home, right across town. In the evening, after his landlord's meagre dinner, he went up again to his room and got back down to work, in wet clothes that steamed on his body, before the glowing stove.

On beautiful summer evenings, when the warm streets are empty and the servant girls play battledore on the front step, he would open the window and lean on his elbows. The river,[7] which made a vile little

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Venice of this area of Rouen, flowed below, right beneath him, yellow, violet or blue between its bridges and its railings. Workers, crouched by the edge, washed their arms in the water. On poles protruding from the lofts, hanks of cotton dried in the open air. Opposite, beyond the rooves, the great pure sky stretched, with a red setting sun. How good it must be over there! How cool under the beech grove! And he opened his nostrils wide to breathe in the good smells of the countryside, which did not reach him.

He thinned out, he grew taller, and his face took on a sort of doleful expression which made it almost interesting.

Naturally, out of indolence, he began to release himself from all the resolutions he had made. Once, he skipped a ward round, the next day his lecture, and, savouring the laziness, little by little, returned there no more.

He became a tavern-regular, developing a passion for dominoes. Shutting himself up every evening in a squalid public bar, tapping the little black-dotted sheep-bones on marble tables, seemed to him a precious act of liberty, which gave him back his self-esteem. It was his initiation into the world, his admittance into forbidden pleasures; and, on entering, he would place his hand upon the door-knob with a joy that was almost sensual. Then a lot of things that were squeezed in him began to expand; he learnt little songs by heart that he sang at the initiation drinks, was infatuated with Béranger,[8] learnt how to make punch and knew what love was at last.

Thanks to these preparatory labours, he completely failed his medical officer's exam. They were waiting for him that very evening at the house to celebrate his success!

He set off on foot and stopped at the entrance to the village, where he sent for his mother, told her everything. She forgave him, shifting blame onto the unfairness of the examiners, and stiffened his resolve a little, taking it upon herself to sort things out. It was another five years before Monsieur Bovary knew the truth; it was hoary old news, he accepted it, not being able to imagine, anyway, that his male issue could be a dunce.

So Charles went back to work and revised for his exams without

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a break, learning all the questions in advance by heart. He passed with quite a good mark. What a wonderful day for his mother! They gave a huge dinner.

Where would he go to practise his skills? To Tostes. There was only an old doctor there. For a long time Madame Bovary had been on the watch for his death, and the gentleman had not yet turned up his toes when Charles was installed opposite, as his successor.

But it was not enough to have raised her son, to have had him study medicine and to have found a practice for him in Tostes: he needed a wife. She found him one: the widow of a Dieppe bailiff, who was forty-five and worth twelve hundred livres a year.

Although she was ugly, thin as a rake and pimply as a goose, it has to be said that Madame Dubuc did not lack for choice when it came to a match. To achieve her ends, Mère Bovary had to oust them all, and she foiled – and very skilfully too – the intrigues of a pork butcher who was backed by the priests.

Charles had dimly envisaged in the marriage the advent of a better life, imagining that he would be freer and could have at his disposal her person and her money. But his wife was the master; in front of people he must say this, must not say that, had to abstain from meat on Fridays, dress as she thought fit, harass on her instructions those clients who were not settling up. She unsealed his letters, spied on his every move, and put her ear to the partition wall as he was giving consultations in his surgery, when there were women.

She must have her hot chocolate every morning, and his never-ending attentions. She would complain ceaselessly of her nerves, her chest, her fluids. The noise of footsteps gave her pains; you went away, and the solitude grew hateful to her; you came back to her side, and it was to watch her die, no doubt. In the evening, when Charles returned, she produced her long, scrawny arms from under the sheet, slipped them around his neck, and, having made him sit on the edge of the bed, set about telling him her sorrows: he was forgetting her, he loved another! People had indeed told her she would be unhappy; and she ended up asking him for a syrup for her health and a little bit more love.

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II

One night, at about eleven o'clock, they were woken by the noise of a horse which stopped just in front of the door. The maid opened the attic skylight and argued things over for some time with the man still down below, in the street. He had come looking for a doctor; he had a letter. Nastasie descended the steps shivering, and went to open the lock and slip the bolts, one after the other. The man left his horse and, following the maid, appeared behind her all of a sudden. From his grey-tasselled cotton bonnet he pulled out a letter wrapped in a piece of rag, and daintily presented it to Charles, who leaned his elbow on the pillow to read it. Nastasie, near the bed, held the light. Madame, out of a sense of decency, stayed with her back turned, facing the wall.

This letter, sealed with a little seal of blue wax, begged Monsieur Bovary to go immediately to the farm at Les Bertaux, to set a broken leg. Now, between Tostes and Les Bertaux, there are a good eighteen miles to cross, by way of Longueville and Saint-Victor. The night was black. Madame Bovary the younger was fearful of accidents befalling her husband. So it was decided that the stable boy should set off first. Charles would leave three hours later, when the moon rose. They would send a child to meet him, in order to show him the way to the farm and open the gates ahead.

At about four o'clock, Charles, wrapped up well in his cloak, set off for Les Bertaux. Still drowsy from the warmth of sleep, he let himself be lulled by the peaceful trot of his beast. Whenever it stopped of its own accord before those thorn-wreathed holes they dig on the boundaries of ploughed fields, Charles, waking up with a start, would remember the broken leg, and endeavour to remind himself of all the fractures he knew. The rain was no longer falling; day was breaking, and, on the leafless apple trees, the birds stayed motionless, ruffling their little feathers in the cold morning wind. The flat country stretched out as far as the eye could see, and the clumps of trees around the farms made, at rare intervals, deep violet patches on this

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vast grey surface that fused at the horizon with the gloomy tint of the sky. Charles, from time to time, opened his eyes; then, his mind wearying and sleep returning of its own accord, he soon slipped into a kind of slumber where, his recent feelings merging with his memories, he perceived himself in duplicate, both student and married man, lying in his bed as he had been just now, crossing an operating room as in the past. The hot smell of poultices blended in his head with the fresh scent of the dew; he heard the beds' iron rings trundling on their curtain-rods and his wife sleeping . . . As he came through Vassonville, he noticed, on the edge of a ditch, a young boy seated on the grass.

'Are you the doctor?' the child asked.

And, at Charles's reply, he took his clogs in his hands and began to run ahead.

Along the way, the medical officer[9] understood from the chatter of his guide that Monsieur Rouault must be among the better-off farmers. He had broken a leg, the evening before, on his way back from a Twelfth Night revel at a neighbour's house. His wife had been dead two years. He had only his *young lady* with him, who helped him keep house.

The ruts grew deeper. He was approaching Les Bertaux. The little lad, slipping through a hole in a hedge, vanished, then reappeared at the bottom of a courtyard to open the gate. The horse slipped on the wet grass; Charles ducked down to pass under the branches. The guard dogs barked in a kennel, tugging on their chain. When he entered Les Bertaux, his horse took fright and shied.

It was a fine-looking farm. In the stables, through the open upper doors, heavy plough horses could be seen, feeding calmly from new racks. An ample muck-heap stretched the length of the buildings; steam rose from it, and, among the hens and turkey cocks, five or six peacocks pecked about on top, a luxury of Caux farmyards. The sheepfold was long, the barn was high, its walls smooth as your hand. Inside the shed were two large carts and four ploughs, with their whips, their chains, their full harness, whose blue wool fleeces were being soiled by the fine dust that fell from the haylofts. The yard sloped upwards, planted with

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