

ROMANTIC BOREDOM, BORING ROMANCES : *MADAME BOVARY*

IST, Term 3 (June-July 2017)

Session 1

Thursday 15 June 2017

PART I

CHs. 1-4

Charles' youth, early adult life and first marriage

Encounter with Emma and marriage day

1

CHs. 5-9

First months of Emma with Charles in Tostes

Emma's youth at the convent

Daily life and boredom settle, the ball at the Marquis', sickness and decision to shift to Yonville-l'Abbaye

2

PART II

CHs. 1-6

Yonville and its characters ; Emma gives birth to a girl, Berthe

Innocent romance with Léon, Emma dwells in her spleen and Léon, bored, leaves for Paris

3

CHs. 7-10

Emma meets Rodolphe, the Comices (popular festival)

She grows obsessed about him, he takes her for granted and grows indifferent

4

CHs. 11-15

Charles fails a serious surgery

Emma daydreams of an escape with Rodolphe, a date is set

Rodolphe cancels the plan through a letter, pretending an excess of emotions

Emma is sick, silent and imbalanced for months ; impressions of a sudden intense, religious zeal

Charles invites Emma to attend an opera in Rouen ; they stumble upon Léon

5

PART III

CHs. 1-5

The romance starts and peaks, scene of the fiacre

Emma starts intervening in the debts of Charles and engages more money-lending

Emma makes a habit, with excuses, to visit Léon more in Rouen

6

CHs. 6-8

The money-lender increases the due amount and threatens Emma with a seizure, she panics and goes to everyone desperately to borrow more money

After even Rodolphe refuses to help, she ingests arsenic, the visit of legendary doctors does not help, she undergoes a torturous death

7

CHs. 9-11

Last moments around Emma's body, till the funeral and burial — the whole village is present but the overall indifference persists

Charles finally discovers the letters of Emma's lovers, he grows solitary and finally dies, discovered by his daughter Berthe

8

HIGH LIGHTS !

SUSAN

“

On fine summer evenings, at the hour when the warm streets are empty, when servant girls play at shuttlecock in front of their doors, he would open his window and lean on his elbows. The stream, which makes this part of Rouen into a kind of sordid little Venice, flowed past below him, yellow, violet, or blue, between its bridges and its railings. Workmen, squatting on the bank, washed their arms in the water. On poles projecting from the tops of attics, hanks of cotton dried in the air. Across from him, beyond the rooftops, extended the great, pure sky, with the red sun going down. How good it must be out there! How cool under the beech trees! And he would open his nostrils wide to breathe in the good smells of the country, which did not reach him.

”

Ch. 1

THREADS OF STYLE



eBOOK Selected passages



eBOOK A genius of words

CHAPTER 1

Setting the scene : “so that he would get in line with *us*”. Us ? An indirect entry for an indirectly primary character :

“

Still standing in the corner ... get in line with us.

”

Resté dans l'angle ... avec nous dans les rangs.

Fr : 47-48
Ch. 1

— and after the flashback is closed :

“

*It would be impossible by now for any of us
to recall a thing about him.*

”

Il serait maintenant impossible à aucun de nous de se rien rappeler de lui.

Fr : 54
Ch. 1

Charles' father : a life in one paragraph

“

*His father, Monsieur Charles-Denis-Bartholomé ...
... he soon realised that it would be better
to abandon all financial enterprises.*

”

Son père ... planter là toute spéculation.

Fr : 50-51

Ch. 1

Local expressions are merged within the third person, descriptive narrative voice :

“

*She dreamed of high positions ...
... roam at will through the village.*

”

Elle rêvait de hautes positions ... vagabondait dans le village.

Fr : 52-53

Ch. 1

Exclamations : *who* is feeling ?

“

How good it must be out there ! How cool under the beech trees !

”

Qu'il devait faire bon là-bas ! Quelle fraîcheur sous la hêtrée !

Fr : 56

Ch. 1

CHAPTER 2

Local names — the novel as an invitation into the particular :

“

Tostes ... Les Bertaux ... Longueville ... Saint-Victor

”

Fr : 58-59

Ch. 2

How to help you see ? Literary realism and visual impressionism :

“

patches of dark violet ... vast gray surface ... bleak tones of the sky

”

des tâches d'un violet noir ... grande surface grise ... ton morne du ciel

Fr : 59

Ch. 2

A cinematic *tracking shot* (“travelling”) in words :

“

The ruts became deeper ... his horse took fright and shied violently.

”

Les ornières devinrent plus profondes ... son cheval eut peur et fit un grand écart.

Fr : 60

Ch. 2

Emma's head, hair, face : the sinless, 'innocent' body ?

“

*“Her neck rose out of a white, turned-down collar ...
noticed for the first time in his life.”*

”

Son cou sortait d'un col blanc, rabattu ... remarqua-là pour la première fois de sa vie.

Fr : 63

Ch. 2

Charles' romance, or the opening of sensibility ... but not reflexive :

“

*“As for Charles, he did not try to ask himself ... with a dry sound
against the leather of her ankle boots.”*

”

*Quant à Charles, il ne chercha point à se demander ...
avec un bruit sec contre le cuir de la bottine.*

Fr : 64

Ch. 2

Phrasing the flexibility of reasons :

“

*“Out of lassitude, Charles stopped going back to Les Bertaux ... in
some way, the right to love her.”*

”

Par lassitude, Charles cessa de retourner aux Bertaux ... comme un droit de l'aimer.

Fr : 66

Ch. 2

Downfall and death of Héloïse in just one page : why choosing such a speed ?

“

“She was dead ! How astonishing it was!”

”

Elle était morte ! Quel étonnement !

Fr : 67
Ch. 2

CHAPTER 3

Père Rouault : rural language and the assumption of psychological simplicity

“

*to divert you a little ...
he stopped thinking about her.*

”

pour vous dissiper un peu ... il n'y pensa plus

Fr : 68-69
Ch. 3

How to describe boredom and availability in a simple scene :

“

*As was the fashion in the country ...
licked with little stabs at the bottom of the glass.*

”

Selon la mode de la campagne ... léchait à petits coups le fond du verre.

Fr : 70
Ch. 3

The looks of boredom :

“

She would have liked very much ... her thoughts wandering.”

”

Elle eût bien voulu ... la pensée vagabondant.

Fr : 70-71

Ch. 3

CHAPTER 4

A festival of witty descriptions (see question 19 below). With a symbolically premonitory sentence ?

“

Emma's dress, too long, trailed a little at the hem ; from time to time, she would stop to lift it up, and then, delicately, with her gloved fingers, she would remove the coarse grass and small spikes of thistle, while Charles, his hands empty, waited until she had finished.

”

La robe d'Emma, trop longue, traînait un peu par le bas ; de temps à autre, elle s'arrêtait pour la tirer, et alors délicatement, de ses doigts gantés, elle enlevait les herbes rudes avec les petits dards des chardons, pendant que Charles, les mains vides, attendait qu'elle eût fini.

Fr : 76

Ch. 4

THEMES & DEBATES



eBook Illustrative passages

1

Young Charles joins a new school. How is the mockery and bullying of Charles by his schoolmates different from similar scenes in settings more familiar to you ? (different epoch, different culture)

Charles does not seem to have a bullied/submissive person. What could Flaubert want to show in this seeming scene of formative trauma... which did *not* create a bullied character ?

—

Brief but repeated mentions of Charles being older than his classmates and risking to go to even lower classes. What is Flaubert hinting at ? Non-educated boy joining school late ? Would that foretell later events in the story ?

Where to locate the origin of Charles' father's rural, ideological resistance to city education ? Ego ? "Tiredness ?"

2

"Ashamed, or, rather, tired out, Monsieur gave in without a struggle."

The father learns about Charles' failures at his degree five years after the fact.

"Only five years later did Monsieur Bovary know the truth ; it was old by then, he accepted it, incapable, moreover, of supposing that any man descended from him could be a fool."

—

Charles' mother : blindly (and innocently) in love with his father, and

"then her pride had rebelled"

A modified, foretelling life-line for Emma ? Another 'feminist' trajectory ?

3

But Charles' first wife is also dominating. Or only superficially ?

"Charles had foreseen in marriage the advent of a better situation, imagining that he would have more freedom and would be able to do as he liked with himself and his money. But his wife was the one in charge..."

—

"... imagining himself an enlightened thinker" ("pour faire le philosophe")

"He taught him ... to jeer at church processions"

4

To what extent are Charles (and Emma, and Charles' parents), post-Enlightenment individuals ? How are they 'modern' characters ? (And resistances to this extreme : Charles described as

"peaceable by nature")

Country side and 18th century urbanisation :

“Out walking, he would talk to the servant, who, like him, was from the country.”

5

The novel as a “social coming-of-age” : transition from a socio-cultural world to another — to *the* other world.

“And he would open his nostrils wide to breathe in the good smells of the country, which did not reach him.”

“He understood none of it ; though he listened, he did not grasp it.”

Charles, figure of the mediocre doctor, and man of science performing without understanding. Already the ironic feedback on the scientific hopes of the Enlightenment century ? Why focusing on this paradox ?

6

“The fracture was simple, without complications of any kind. Charles could not have dared to hope for an easier one. And so, recalling his teachers’ manners at the bedsides of the injured, he comforted the patient with all sorts of lively remarks — a surgeon’s caresses that are like the oil with which he greases his scalpel.”

“Quite naturally, out of indifference, in time he released himself from all the resolutions he had made.”

More classical, ‘psychological’ coming-of-age — but also ‘liberal’ coming-of-age, with the new liberties permitted by an independent life in the city.

7

“To shut himself up every night in a grimy public room, in order to tap on a marble table with little mutton bones marked with black dots, seemed to him a precious assertion of his freedom, which raised him in his own esteem.”

Is this quest for freedom organic ? I.e. did he crave for it before being in the city (Charles did not seem particularly curious or frustrated by rural life) or is it an external distraction/temptation provoked by the city life ?

Bride research in 19th century rural France :

8

“To achieve her ends, Mère Bovary was obliged to supplant them all, and she very skilfully foiled even the intrigues of a pork butcher favoured by the clergy.”

The brief dream of Charles (second chapter) :

9

“He would soon enter a sort of somnolence in which, his recent sensations becoming confused with his memories, he would see himself double, at once student and married man, lying in his bed as he had been just now, crossing a surgical ward as in the past.”

Where is he ? What does he feel about his condition ? Did his independence escape him ?

—

Enter : Emma. Symbolics of the heroine's first appearance :

“... and Mademoiselle Emma worked at sewing some pads. She was a long time finding her needle case, and her father grew impatient ; she said nothing in response ; but, as she sewed, she kept pricking her fingers, which she then raised to her mouth to suck.”

10

And of Charles' first observations :

“Charles was surprised by the whiteness of her fingernails. They were glossy, delicate at the tips, more carefully cleaned than Dieppe ivories, and filed into almond shapes.”

Later :

“Because the room was chilly, she shivered as she ate, revealing her full lips, which she had a habit of biting in her moments of silence.”

—

Domestic aesthetics of the country side :

11

“As decoration for the room, there hung from a nail, in the middle of the wall whose green paint was flaking off under the saltpetre, a head of Minerva in black pencil, framed in gilt and bearing on the bottom, written in Gothic letters : “To my dear Papa.”

—

Madame Bovary the younger (Héloïse, first wife) guesses there is something going on with Rouault's daughter. What is the formulation of her jealousy revealing about her self-image ?

12

“Ah ! Because there was a certain person there, someone who knew how to make small talk, who did embroidery, who had a fine mind.”

—

13

“When everything was over at the cemetery, Charles went back to his house. He found no one downstairs ; he went up to the second floor, into the bedroom, saw her dress still hanging at the foot of the alcove ; then, leaning on the writing desk, he remained there till evening, lost in a sorrowful reverie. She had loved him, after all.”

What did Charles keep of his story with his first wife ?

—

14

“On the other hand, his wife’s death had been rather useful to him professionally, because for a month people had said over and over : “That poor young man ! What a misfortune !” His name had gotten around, his practice had increased ; and in addition he could go to Les Bertaux as he liked.”

Is Flaubert ironic about the very implications of life and death to relatives ? What is the emotional effect aimed at through this irony — just humour ?

—

Flaubert gives us to understand Charles’ developing attraction towards Emma before he himself realises it. What effects is this provoking in you as the reader ? Which psychological insights on human nature is it adding ?

15

“That evening, as he was returning home, Charles took up again one by one the words she had used, trying to recall them, to complete their meaning, in order to re-create for himself the portion of her life that she had lived during the time when he did not yet know her. But he could never see her, in his mind, differently from the way he had seen her the first time, or the way he had just left her. Then he wondered what would become of her, whether she would marry, and whom. Alas ! Père Rouault was very rich, and she ! ... so lovely!”

—

16

“Père Rouault would not have been sorry to have someone relieve him of his daughter, who was hardly any use to him in his house. ... He took his meals in the kitchen, alone, facing the fire, at a little table they brought to him already set, as in the theatre.”

Is Père Rouault standing for a particular social class ? Or a more idiosyncratic character and personality type ?

—

The close-circuit of marriage opportunities in 19th c. rural France :

17

“He certainly found him a little *puny*, and this wasn’t the sort of son-in-law he would have wished for ; but he was said to be sober in his habits, thrifty, well educated, and he would probably not haggle too much over the dowry.”

—

18

“Around Michaelmas, Charles had come to spend three days at Les Bertaux. The last had slipped away like the ones before, receding from one quarter hour to the next quarter hour. Père Rouault was seeing him on his way ; they were walking in a sunken lane, they were about to take leave of each other ; this was the moment.”

Flaubert indicates clearly that both characters know the proposal for Emma, to her father, is coming. What is the author indicating about such social practices, when Charles believes Mr. Rouault does not expect it, and Mr. Rouault knows Charles does not know he knows ?

19

Chapter 4, the marriage of Emma and Charles, is a festival of original, subtle, witty and very evocative descriptions. What emotions and impressions grew in you while reading those few pages ? How would you describe the mood of the event — and what do you think Flaubert felt about such days ?

20

The elder Monsieur and Madame Bovary at the wedding : two social worlds meet.

“As for the elder Monsieur Bovary, who, really despising all these people, had come simply in a frock coat of military cut with one row of buttons, he was delivering barroom compliments to a blond young peasant woman. She bowed her head, blushed, not knowing what to answer.”

“The elder Madame Bovary had not opened her mouth all day. No one had consulted her about either her daughter-in-law’s toilette or the arrangements for the banquet ; she went to bed early.”

21

Rural humour and good intentions : what is Flaubert telling us ?

“The bride had begged her father that she be spared the customary pranks. Nevertheless, one of their cousins, a fishmonger (who had actually brought, as a wedding present, a couple of soles), was about to squirt water with his mouth through the keyhole, when Père Rouault came along just in time to stop him, explaining that the importance of his son-in-law’s position did not permit of such improprieties. The cousin, however, yielded only with difficulty to these arguments.”

22

How to build an anti-hero :

“Charles was not a wit by nature, he had not been brilliant during the wedding festivities. He had responded feebly to the quips, puns, double entendres, compliments, and off-color remarks people felt duty bound to level at him from the moment the soup was served.

“The next day however ... Charles hid nothing. He called her “my wife,” addressed her as *tu*, asked everyone where she was, looked for her everywhere, and would often draw her out into the grounds, where he could be seen from a distance, among the trees, putting his arm around her waist and continuing to walk half bent over her, his head rumpling the lace in the opening of her bodice.”

“By now, their son would have been thirty !”

23

Even decades after the fact, the nostalgic memory of Monsieur Rouault crosses the old dream of having a son instead of Emma.