

The Sublime and the Bovine: Petronius' *Satyricon* and Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*

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Gustave Flaubert's masterpiece *Madame Bovary* has been compared to the great classics of world literature.¹ Flaubert himself acknowledges his debt to many precursors, including a Roman author, Petronius, who wrote his novel *Satyricon* under the reign of Nero (and who fell out of favor with the emperor, for which he paid with his life, in a long, elaborate, stylized suicide). As Eric Gans points out, 'The adolescent Gustave's favorite figure was not a romantic hero but the Roman emperor Nero, whom he admired for his "aesthetic" cruelty' (1989, 79; see also Rubino 1991). In his early essay 'Rome et les Césars' (1839), Flaubert gives a vivid description of Nero:

penché en avant sur les poitrines ouvertes des victimes, il regardait le sang battre dans les cœurs, et il trouvait, dans ces derniers gémisséments d'un être qui quitte la vie, des délices inconnues, des voluptés suprêmes.... L'histoire alors est une orgie sanglante, dans laquelle il nous faut entrer; sa vue même enivre et fait venir la nausée du cœur. (219–220)²

¹ The most obvious models and companions are Don Quixote (see, for example, Levin 1963, 246–269), Anna Karenina, Edna Pontellier, Effie Briest, Hedda Gabler, Nora Helmer, Tess Durbeyfield, to name but a few. A recent MLA search yielded several comparative analyses: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, William Faulkner, George Sand, George Eliot, Mario Vargas Llosa, William Shakespeare, Franz Kafka, Virgil, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Virginia Woolf, T.S. Eliot, Joseph Conrad, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Henry James, James Joyce, Lord Byron, Somerset Maugham, Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens, Thomas Mann, D.H. Lawrence, Mark Twain, Richard Wagner, Willa Cather, Honoré de Balzac; for a bibliography of Petronius' *Nachleben* in modern literature, see Endres 2003.

² 'Leaning over his victims with their chests slit open, he watched the blood beating in their hearts, and it was in these final wailings of a human being leaving life that he found unknown delights, supreme pleasures.... History, therefore, is a bloody orgy that we need to enter; its very sight intoxicates us and makes the heart feel nauseous.' All translations

Flaubert's epistolary correspondence contains several references to Petronius and the *Satyricon*. In a letter to Emmanuel Vasse (January 1845) he describes how he is sick in bed and complains: *J'ai bien souffert, pauvre vieux, depuis la dernière nuit que nous avons passée ensemble à lire Pétrone (Correspondance 1.159)*.³ To Louise Colet (18 July 1852) Flaubert, in a more cheerful mood, writes: *J'ai bien ri de ton excitation à propos du Satyricon. Il faut que tu sois fort inflammable. Je te jure bien, quant à moi, que ce livre ne m'a jamais rien fait. Il y a, du reste, peu de luxure, quoi que tu en dises. Le luxe y domine tellement la chair qu'on la voit peu (2.468)*.⁴ A few months later, his understanding of Petronius becomes more profound (4 September 1852): *Le temps n'est pas loin où vont revenir les langueurs universelles, les croyances à la fin du monde, l'attente d'un Messie. [...] Les livres comme le Satyricon et l'Ane d'or peuvent revenir (3.16–17)*.⁵ To Mademoiselle Leroyer de Chanterie (June 1857) Flaubert recommends reading Petronius (in addition to Montaigne, Shakespeare, Goethe, Homer, Plautus, and Apuleius) in order to broaden her horizon: *Mais ne lisez pas, comme les enfants lisent, pour vous amuser, ni comme les ambitieux lisent, pour vous instruire. Non, lisez pour vivre (4.197)*.⁶ And to Madame Roger des Genettes (17 June 1874) he makes fun of a member of the Académie Française who has never read Petronius: *O France! Bien que ce soit notre pays, c'est un triste pays, avouons-le! Je me sens submergé par le flot de bêtise qui le couvre, par l'inondation de crétinisme sous laquelle peu à peu il disparaît (7.153)*.⁷

In light of Flaubert's enthusiasm, it seems strange that a study of Petronius' legacy is virtually absent from *Madame Bovary* criticism.⁸ I want

of *Madame Bovary* are by Eleanor Marx Aveling and Paul de Man (2005); unless indicated otherwise, all other translations are mine.

³ 'I have suffered a lot, my dear, since our last night that we spent together reading Petronius.'

⁴ 'I had to laugh about your excitement for the *Satyricon*. You must get aroused easily. I swear to you, as far as I'm concerned, that book never did *anything* for me. By the way, whatever you're saying, there is little lust. The excess there dominates the flesh so much that you see little of it.'

⁵ 'It won't be long for the universal lassitudes to return, the beliefs in the end of the world, the waiting for a Messiah. [...] Books such as the *Satyricon* or *The Golden Ass* may come back.'

⁶ 'But do not read like children read, to amuse yourself; nor read like ambitious people read, to instruct yourself. No, read *in order to live*.'

⁷ 'O France! Although it is our country, it is a sad country, let's admit it! I feel flooded by the stream of dim-wittedness that is covering it, by the inundation of stupidity, under which it is gradually disappearing.'

⁸ There are a few exceptions (but all lacking in depth or detail): Gagliardi 1993, 144–151 and 1999; Collignon 1905, 128–130 and 134; Laüt-Berr 2001, 324–333; Goddard 1999.

to fill this gap by suggesting Petronian parallels for Flaubert's use of reality and ideality, the sublime and the bovine, fragmentation and consumption, life and death, food and drink, sex and religion.



In the *Satyricon*, nothing turns out the way it is. Pretense, theatricality, and camp underline Petronius' modern appeal: 'Encolpius and his companions are constantly placed in situations where the deceit and the aridity of modern life are shown up' (Cameron 1970, 425). In this context it is interesting to note that Petronius' famous portrait by Tacitus (*nam illi dies per somnum, nox officiis et oblectamentis vitae transigebatur [...]; Annales* 16,18), who together with the Elder Pliny and Plutarch is our only biographical evidence from the classical period, depicts Petronius not as a debauchee, but as a *poseur* of vice (*vitiorum imitatione*). At one point, the protagonist Encolpius contemplates suicide and tries to hang himself, when his boyfriend Giton proclaims that he will die with him ('*erras*' inquit '*Encolpi, si putas contingere posse ut ante moriaris*'; *Sat.* 94,10).⁹ In imitation of great literary models (here Nisus and Euryalus in Virgil's *Aeneid*),¹⁰ Giton grabs a razor, dramatically moves it to slash his throat, and falls to the ground, drop-dead. Encolpius quickly picks up the blade and prepares to pass away alongside him, when he notes that it was a blunt one for practicing. It was a staged

One critic who does mention Flaubert and Petronius in the same vein is Erich Auerbach, in his acclaimed *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (1946), but he draws no direct comparisons. In Petronian scholarship, Flaubert is only mentioned in passing: 'The Flaubertian objectivity of his style; the complete absence of the author's personality from the main narrative, achieved through the use of a dissociated and carefully "placed" narrator; even the ironic and detached expression of his principles through the medium of different (and differentiated) *personae*; while these cannot, or at any rate, do not, produce great satire in the classical sense, they are Petronius' means to a different sort of end: a creative and humorous presentation of an imaginatively realized world. (Despite her satiric potentialities, Emma Bovary is not satirized either.)' Sullivan 1968, 264.

⁹ References to the *cena Trimalchionis* in the *Satyricon* are to the edition of M. Smith (1982), the rest to the edition of K. Müller (1961); translations are by W. Arrowsmith (1959).

¹⁰ Other histrionic invocations include Giton casting Encolpius and himself as Socrates and Alcibiades in Plato's *Symposium: non tam intactus Alcibiades in praeceptoris sui lectulo iacuit* (128,7); Giton equaling his friend Ascyrtos with Lucretia and himself posing as Tarquin (9,5); Giton hiding, like Ulysses in Homer's *Odyssey*, under a mattress/ram (97–98); Eteocles and Polynices fighting over Thebes (80,3); Cleopatra being delivered to Caesar in a carpet (102,10–11).

death, a *mimica mors* (94,15), a *fabula inter amantes* (95,1). The serious is converted into the frivolous. Later in Croton, Encolpius' entourage swears a solemn oath like *legitimi gladiatores*, but it is again a rehearsed scheme, this time for legacy-hunting (*mimum componere*, 117,5; cf. 95,8). Or, the schools fail to teach real-life lessons, so the pupils think they have landed on another planet (*in alium orbem terrarum*; 1,2). The world in the *Satyricon* is a Shakespearean stage:

The comic actors strut the stage, bow and grin.
The cast: old Moneybags, Father and Son.
The farce ends, the smiles come off, revealing
the true face below, the bestial, leering one.

(grex agit in scaena mimum: pater ille vocatur, / filius hic, nomen divitis ille tenet. / mox ubi ridendas inclusit pagina partes, / vera redit facies, assimulata perit; 80,9)

Realistic as the *Satyricon* is, it really is 'less concerned with the representation of reality than with its misrepresentations' (Conte 1996, 180).¹¹ Reality, in all its triviality, has worn itself out; therefore, it needs to be spiced up, surpassed, scandalized.¹²

In Flaubert's novel, the real and the ideal clash equally. Emma's wedding is one example: *Emma eût [...] désiré se marier à minuit, aux flambeaux* (24), but the reality turns out to be rather pedestrian. Here are the wedding guests and their attire:

Et les chemises sur les poitrines bombaient comme des cuirasses! Tout le monde était tondu à neuf, les oreilles s'écartaient des têtes, on était rasé de près; quelques-uns même, qui s'étaient levés dès avant l'aube,

¹¹ Moreover, theatricality secures secrecy. Many episodes in the *Satyricon* involve scenes of concealment, suspicious behavior, voyeurism, and often take place after dark (like Petronius' predilection for playing at night). For example, in the episode on Lichas' ship, Encolpius and Giton pretend to look like Ethiopian slaves by blackening their skins, shaving their heads and eyebrows, and putting on wigs to avoid detection (*mimicis artibus*; 106,1). In the same vein, many scenes in *Madame Bovary* take place at night, feature skewed vision, cloud reality, and create shadowy/crepuscular settings; see also Gray 1978.

¹² On theatricality in Petronius, see also Rosati 1999; Sandy 1974; Jones 1991; Elsner 1993; Conte 1996, 73–103; Walsh 1970, 24–27; Rankin 1969; Slater 1990, 27–37; Wooten 1976; Panayotakis 1995; Dupont 1977, 91–119; Rimell 2002, 32–48, 98–112, and 140–158.

*n'ayant pas vu clair à se faire la barbe, avaient des balafres en diagonale sous le nez, ou, le long des mâchoires, des pelures d'épiderme larges comme des écus de trois francs, et qu'avait enflammées le grand air pendant la route, ce qui marbrait un peu de plaques roses toutes ces grosses faces blanches épanouies. (25)*¹³

These shorn animals would indeed look better around midnight and under torchlight. Similarly, Emma's honeymoon remains unremarkable (virtually withheld from the text) and does not materialize, in her terms, until her affair with Léon: *Ce furent trois jours pleins, exquis, splendides, une vraie lune de miel* (238), which they savor *comme deux éternels jeunes époux* (246).¹⁴ As regards Emma's dwelling, she wishes to live *dans quelque vieux manoir* (35), only to lament *sa maison trop étroite* (101).¹⁵ For her daughter, she envisions *un berceau en nacelle avec des rideaux de soie rose et des bégains brodés* (82),¹⁶ but no such fairy-tale child turns up, as she vividly realizes when Berthe spills vomit and saliva on Emma's dress (87, 107). Love, of course, is always ideal for Emma: *L'amour, croyait-elle, devait arriver tout à coup, avec de grands éclats et des fulgurations – ouragan des cieux qui tombe sur la vie, la bouleverse, arrache les volontés comme des feuilles et emporte à l'abîme le cœur entier* (94).¹⁷ But the only *coup* Emma receives is a *coup de grâce*. Paris, too, offers blissful happiness: *une existence au-dessus des autres, entre ciel et terre, dans les orages, quelque chose de su-*

¹³ 'Emma would [...] have preferred to have a midnight wedding with torches' (23). 'And the shirts stood out from the chests like armor breastplates! Everyone had just had his hair cut; ears stood out from the heads; they had been close-shaven; a few, even, who had had to get up before daybreak, and not been able to see to shave, had diagonal gashes under their noses or cuts the size of a three-franc piece along the jaws, which the fresh air had enflamed during the trip, so that the great white beaming faces were mottled here and there with red spots' (24). Jeffrey Spires brings out the failure of Emma's wedding: 'A peasant wedding is nothing more than the prolongation of a country life that Emma already finds boring. The entire *noce* scene thus recounts an initiation into a society of frustration, monotony, mediocrity, alienation, and fragmentation' (2002, 354).

¹⁴ 'They were three full, exquisite, magnificent days – a true honeymoon' (202) ... 'like an eternally young married couple' (209).

¹⁵ 'She would have liked to live in some old manor-house' (33) ... 'her too cramped home' (90).

¹⁶ 'a suspended cradle with rose silk curtains, and embroidered caps' (74).

¹⁷ 'Love, she thought, must come suddenly, with great outbursts and lightnings, – a hurricane of the skies, which sweeps down on life, upsets everything, uproots the will like a leaf and carries away the heart as in an abyss' (84).

blime (55).¹⁸ As so often, this location escapes established patterns and definable topography, remains literally clouded or cloudy. Flaubert represents a world

in which structures – with the categories, identities, oppositions, and norms that subtend them – are too rigid, fragile, or exhausted to order life in a meaningful way that is confident enough to allow for challenges to its very meaning. [...] And as order becomes hollow, excess itself veers toward the hysterical sublime which threatens to become equally hollow in that it has little of substance to engage it. (LaCapra 1982, 212–213)

At one moment, the sublime is stable, a moral and/or aesthetic ideal; at another, it is unstable, debased by the grim ‘manure’ of reality.¹⁹

Both Emma and Encolpius fail in their effort to render banality into melodrama. In his chapter on Encolpius, the ‘mythomaniac narrator,’ Gian Biagio Conte proposes:

The great literary model provides ready-made a noble and solemn representation, the one dramatized version capable of giving a little meaning to the empty container that is the petty reality of the everyday. Such theatrical treatment is necessary to promote ordinary life in its narrow scope to the level of grandeur. The elevated literary model has been appropriated “melodramatically” by Encolpius in the sense that he is seeking enhanced significance for his own situation, that is, for his words and gestures. It is as though trivial affairs could acquire grandeur and importance purely by being experienced as theater: as though by giving theatrical voice to experience one could actually make sense of the indifference of reality. [...] For him great literature becomes a universe inhabited by suggestive myths, indeed it becomes the secularized mythology of a culture determined to seek out intense emotions which would otherwise be denied to it by immediate experience. (1996, 5–6)

¹⁸ ‘They lived far above all others, among the storms that rage between heaven and earth, partaking of the sublime’ (51).

¹⁹ Too, Flaubert never reveals what particular concept of the sublime Emma is pursuing (Sappho, Plato, Longinus, Kant, Burke, Addison... would have been obvious choices), but maybe that is the very point. Because of this inconsistency or lack of a clear tradition, the sublime *must* remain elusive for Emma. On the sublime in *Madame Bovary*, see also Schaub.

Like Encolpius, Emma creates a sublime world, a second-hand experience: *Elle entrait dans quelque chose de merveilleux où tout serait passion, extase, délire; une immensité bleuâtre l'entourait, les sommets du sentiment étincelaient sous sa pensée, l'existence ordinaire n'apparaissait qu'au loin, tout en bas, dans l'ombre, entre les intervalles de ces hauteurs* (152).²⁰ Her literary texture and nourishment are, of course, the novels she read in the convent. Petronius, too, derives his model from the trivial romance:

The reader of the *Satyricon* could not fail to notice that the very composition of the text as a concentrated anthology of the sublime resembled the kind of construction produced by the pathetic romance. It is precisely the melodramatic excess in the treatment of these situations that forces us to recognize the degradation undergone by these sublime literary archetypes. At one time exemplary realizations, they have now been drained of all the original capacity to represent life. (Conte 1996, 29)

In *Madame Bovary*, the sublime has been literally dragged into the gutter, onto the dung heaps of modern experience and into the malodorous manure of empty dreams.

Flaubert is at great pains to frustrate Emma's longing for the sublime, which never escapes the bovine.²¹ At the very beginning, Charles is introduced as 'le nouveau' (at least seven times), which suggests 'veal' – something he ingests repeatedly as a student; his name is then revealed as Charles Bovary. His first wife turns out to be an old nag (*une haridelle semblable, dont les harnais ne valaient pas la peau*; 18); her family name, Dubuc, may call to attention the beak of various poultry. Emma's father unwittingly reminds his daughter of her bovine existence by sending a turkey every year. Charles 'ruminates' his happiness with Emma (32) and savors truffles (truffles, a sublime luxury, are of course sniffed out by bovine pigs), and his conversation is flat as a sidewalk (*plate comme un trottoir de rue*; 38). Even the fabulous ball at *Vaubyesard* (incidentally, an invitation secured through an abscess in the mouth; 43) evokes the bovine and sure enough, the castle is surrounded by cows (44). Charles, while reading a medical journal, approaches horse-like placidity: *Il en lisait un peu après son dîner, mais la chaleur*

²⁰ 'She was entering upon a marvellous world where all would be passion, ecstasy, delirium. She felt herself surrounded by an endless rapture. A blue space surrounded her and ordinary existence appeared only intermittently between these heights, dark and far beneath her' (131).

²¹ As Phillip Duncan (1979) makes clear, the concept of the sublime is not limited to Emma but, to a certain degree, extends to Charles also, especially the young Charles.

de l'appartement, jointe à la digestion, faisait qu'au bout de cinq minutes il s'endormait [...] les cheveux étalés comme une crinière jusqu'au pied de la lampe (57).²² In Yonville, Emma and Charles' abode, *il faut beaucoup de fumier pour engraisser ces terres friables pleines de sable et de cailloux* (66),²³ over which presides the mayor, Monsieur Tuvache (Mr. You Cow or Kill Cow). Madame Homais is placid as a sheep (90); the priest's services are needed to deflate a bloated cow (105); Emma is perceived by Rodolphe as a fish: *Ça bâille après l'amour, comme une carpe après l'eau sur une table de cuisine* (122).²⁴ A recipient of a prize at *les comices agricoles* (agricultural fair) emphasizes the discharge of manure everywhere present: Monsieur Cullembourg (139). Right before her elopement, Emma receives 'high' praise from the narrator: *Jamais Mme Bovary ne fut aussi belle qu'à cette époque* – just like a flower nourished by *le fumier, la pluie, les vents et le soleil*, all agricultural staples (181).²⁵ Jonathan Culler is certainly right: *Madame Bovary* is not a 'realist' but a 'vealist' novel (1984, 7), and what Conte argues about the *Satyricon* can easily be extended to Emma:

Petronius introduces into the text a character who is like himself in longing for great literature, but who is essentially different because he lacks the critical awareness. The error that makes Encolpius absurd is that of not seeing the distance – or rather the inaccessibility – of the great literary models. These may seem near, or even easy to imitate, just because

²² 'He read it a little bit after dinner, but in about five minutes, the warmth of the room added to the effect of his dinner sent him to sleep; [...] his hair spreading like a mane to the foot of the lamp' (52).

²³ In Yonville, 'much manure is needed to enrich this brittle soil, full of sand and stones' (58).

²⁴ 'She is gaping after love like a carp on the kitchen table after water' (106).

²⁵ 'Never had Madame Bovary been so beautiful as at this period' – just like a flower nourished 'on manure, on rain, wind and sunshine' (157). When Emma seeks help from the clergy, the sublime/spiritual yields once again to the profane/bovine (French edition, 103–107). The hotel in Rouen, where Charles and Emma descend for the opera, is surrounded by stables, chickens scratching for oats, muddy gigs, windowpanes yellowed by flies, and vegetable gardens (205–206). Even after Emma's demise, the bovine continues. Léon, the lion of her exotic dreams, marries a Mademoiselle Léocadie Leboeuf (317), a cheeky amalgamation of the lion and the ox. At the very end, instead of commemorating Emma as his sublime lover, Rodolphe, in the presence of Charles, evades the love affair by rehashing the trivial: *L'autre continuait à parler culture, bestiaux, engrais, bouchant avec des phrases banales tous les interstices où pouvait se glisser une allusion* (323; 'The other went on talking of agriculture, cattle and fertilizers, filling with banalities all the gaps where an allusion might slip in,' 274).

they are well known, but any imitation of them can only produce a caricature. (1996, 84–85)

Flaubert and Petronius amalgamate the bovine and the sublime as closely as possible – the one flourishes and perishes with the other. To heighten the bovine intrusion into the sublime, Flaubert almost marries the two, creating a parallel structure or split screen, where the one reinforces the other. When Emma helps Charles find his riding crop, *son nerf de bœuf* (16), we have a powerful conflation of bull-like potency and ox-like triviality. Emma's first seduction of Charles is accompanied by a clucking hen and buzzing flies (21). Emma and Léon's first Romantic *rapprochements* are framed by the pharmacist's chemical effusions, including bronchitis, scrofula, ammonia, humus, and other cattle emanations (74–79); later, on their excursion to a new flax mill, they move closer to each other, amidst the apothecary's son stepping into a heap of lime (94–95). The pleasures awaiting Léon in Paris – gay parties, masked balls, sizzling champagne, bohemian affairs... – are imperiled by Charles' worries about food poisoning, typhoid fever, diarrhea, and other drainage problems (113–114). *Les comices agricoles* are of course the most notable example (123–144), with a subtle detail: a merino ram (the bovine) receives a prize and Rodolphe's sex appeal (the sublime) is conveyed through his status as a ram (139, 192). Initially, Rodolphe courts Emma with game and chickens (122–123), and in order to gain access to Rodolphe's castle, Emma needs to raise the cow plank, clutches faded wall-flowers, soils her shoes in the freshly plowed fields, and runs away from oxen (153). Emma's ideas of a grand escape with Rodolphe are abruptly terminated by her daughter's coughing and her husband's snoring (183). Emma's sublime swoon of complete abandonment is quickly linked by the chemist to similar feline and canine anomalies (194–195). In the famous *fiacre* (carriage) scene, Flaubert evokes, implicitly and explicitly, oxen, pigs, turkeys: the gig passes Rue d'Elbeuf, Boulevard Bouvreuil, Boulevard Cauchoise, Rue Dinanderie, Quartier Beauvoisine, or the perfectly appropriate Sotteville (227–228), and just as the horses build up a good sweat, Emma and Léon presumably do the same. Or, drawing on the multifarious connotations of *culture* (something Emma both loathes and longs for), Flaubert proposes one his most subtle ironies (or most outrageous puns) when Père Rouault muses that Emma has *trop d'esprit pour la culture* (22).²⁶ Both Emma and Encolpius 'would be happy to be treated at least like characters of an idealizing novel, to live a life composed of melodramatic intrigues: but

²⁶ *Culture* in French means both 'culture' and 'agriculture.'

forced as they are into a low and petty way of life, they see their own sublime ambitions fail even as the characters of a novel' (Conte 1996, 169).

Not only does Flaubert follow Petronian subjects here, I propose that he also appropriates his choice of form. The *Satyricon* features Menippean satire, which, crudely put, alternates between verse and prose (*prosimetrum*).²⁷ Joel Relihan defines the genre as 'a satire in the sense of a mixture of opposites, of things that do not belong together'; it is 'so fashioned of warring components as to make it a literary anomaly' – a sublime bovinity or bovine sublimity; finally, it is 'a fantastic tale that calls into question the intelligence and perception of its author/narrator' (1993, 20),²⁸ which is a particular apposite concept to explain Emma's habit of uncritical reading. In the *Satyricon*, the teacher Agamemnon laments: 'we don't educate our children at school; we stultify them and then send them out into the world half-baked. And why? Because we keep them utterly ignorant of real life' (1,3; cf. 58,13–14, 88, 118). It seems that Emma received exactly that kind of education, well beyond her social status, intellectual grasp, and aesthetic appreciation. Topically, in Menippean satire

Vocabulary and grammar are allowed to be as fantastic as the action that they describe, and are suffered to alternate in the wildest swings from grand to low style, from fustian to textbook simplicity, from the *recherché* to the banal. Parallel to this is the juxtaposition of relevant and irrelevant material which keeps a work from marching uninterrupted to its appointed ends. (Relihan 1993, 26)

Emma's fantastic vocabulary of her Romantic visions merges continents and ages, countries and architecture: tigers on the right and lions on the left (35–36); Indian plants, idle-houred castles, and beflowered boudoirs (55); domes, lemon trees, marble cathedrals, storks' nests, pyramids, fishing villages, palm trees, gondolas, hammocks... (183). Horatian dolphins in the woods

²⁷ For example, at one point, Encolpius loses Giton to Ascyrtos, a rather trivial affair narrated in prose (we would expect nothing less from a *ménage-à-trois*), followed by a poetic reflection on friendship: 'Friendship lasts while there's profit in the name. / The dice are fickle; fortune spins about. / But oh, my smiling friends of better days, / where was your love, when my luck ran out?' (*nomen amicitiae sic, quatenus expedit, haeret; / calculus in tabula mobile ducit opus. / cum fortuna manet, vultum servatis, amici; / cum cecidit, turpi vertitis ora fuga*; 80,9).

²⁸ Howard Weinbrot argues along similar lines: 'Menippean satire, then, is a format that uses at least two other genres, languages, cultures, or changes of voice to oppose a dangerous, false, or specious and threatening orthodoxy' (2005, 6); see also Courtney 1962.

and wild boars in the sea or Coleridgean sunny domes and caves of ice, everything evaporates in the end, becomes irrelevant, interrupts its meaning.

Relihan concludes: 'The genre is an indecorous mixture of disparate elements, of forms, styles, and themes that exist uneasily side by side, and from which no coherent intellectual, moral, or aesthetic appreciation may be drawn. Consistent with the mixture of prose and verse is the juxtaposition of seemingly serious material and a comic, fantastic setting' (1993, 34) or, in *Madame Bovary*, the collapse of the sublime and the bovine. In both works and generally in Menippean satire, 'the narrative text runs on placidly from prose into poetry, to resume in turn its prosaic flow. No steps or thresholds are marked between the two forms of discourse' (Conte 1996, 154).²⁹ The bovine is already inherent in the sublime; because the two are jumbled together, Emma gets mired up, crossing non-existing thresholds and solidifying her phonetic and semantic jungle.

In addition to the clashing bovine and sublime and consistent with Menippean satire, Flaubert features fragmentation, virtual ruins that fail to cohere and draw attention to their disjointed nature. Charles' cap at the beginning is a famous example (4), but also his studies, a curriculum like so many doors to sanctuaries filled with magnificent darkness (*comme autant de portes de sanctuaires pleins d'augustes ténèbres*; 9). Emma's eyes are invariably blue, brown, black (15, 31, 47, 78, 121, 151, 218). The wedding cake stands on infirm ground: stucco temple, medieval castle, and *locus amoenus* (27) – as does Emma's coffin: oak, mahogany, lead, velvet, wool (304, 310), to say nothing about her tomb: Greek, Egyptian, Roman, Romantic, ruinous (320). Yonville is really only half a town (65–66), a no man's land between Normandy, Picardy, and the Île de France,³⁰ a patchwork heightened by the Parisian, Greek, Ionic, Gothic, and Gallic town hall (67) and by the multifarious offerings in Mr. Homais' pharmacy (67–68). When

²⁹ The alternation between prose and poetry is of course negligible in *Madame Bovary*, but there are some exceptions. After Emma and Léon imagine *comme deux Robinsons, vivre perpétuellement dans ce petit endroit, qui leur semblait, en leur béatitude, le plus magnifique de la terre*, Emma breaks into song (238–239; 'like two Robinson Crusoes, they would gladly have lived forever in this spot; in their bliss, it seemed to them the most magnificent place on earth,' 203). Or, Flaubert amalgamates various genres in Emma's literary tapestry: *Elle était l'amoureuse de tous les romans, l'héroïne de tous les drames, le vague elle de tous les volumes des vers* (246; 'She was the mistress of all the novels, the heroine of all the dramas, the vague "she" of all the volumes of verse,' 209). And toward the end, the blind beggar breaks into 'love' poetry, among all the prosaic prose. Although the form is usually prose, Flaubert's style is singularly poetic and/or relentlessly prosaic.

³⁰ In addition, Paul Andrew Tipper (1999) shows how 'dirty' and 'clayey' that region is.

Charles tries to embrace dead Emma in his dreams, the center cannot hold: *il s'approchait d'elle; mais, quand il venait à l'êtreindre, elle tombait en pourriture dans ses bras* (320).³¹ Moreover, as Mario Vargas Llosa makes clear, Flaubert, to heighten evanescence, doubles everything in *Madame Bovary*: 'The theme of doubleness in general and of duplicity in particular is not a gratuitous one. In all probability its source is the constant dividing of the self' (1986, 163) – everything is second-hand, nothing unique.³² Last but not least, in terms of formal patchworks, we find multiple narrators (from first-person *nous* or 'we' to omniscient), textual gaps (for example, *Madame Bovary* 23), or *discours indirect libre* (free indirect discourse).

Once again, Flaubert is indebted to Petronius.³³ In the *Satyricon*, life is a patchwork, too: 'Mythomania functions as an inexhaustible narrative energy. Encolpius is never content to have found one point of reference; he must seek out others to saturate all the possibilities of scholastic comparison, all the associated possibilities registered in an ideal mythological dictionary arranged on analogical principles' (Conte 1996, 102). At the same time, his energy never picks up speed:

Buffeted by the erratic tide of events in his life, Encolpius is ever searching for some knowledge or system of explanation that might give him some control over that experience – and never finds more than a temporary foothold. Meaning, or the power to interpret, and thereby subjugate, his experience, is the perpetually elusive object of Encolpius' quest. (Slater 1990, 241)

And he is not the only one. Encolpius attends a banquet, a microcosm of the *Satyricon*, with 'all the resentment, all the deceit, all the confusion, all the conflicts of pretension and vulgarity, art and self-indulgence, critical taste and extravagant display, hedonism and morbidity, pragmatism and cynicism' (Hubbard 1986, 194). Like Emma, Trimalchio, the vulgar host, badly garbles his literary dream world: Ilium captured by Hannibal, Cassandra killing her sons, Daedalus shutting Niobe in the Trojan Horse, Diomedes and Ganymede

³¹ 'He approached her, but when he was about to embrace her she fell into decay in his arms' (272).

³² Additionally, according to Llosa, four 'planes of time' – singular/specific time, circular/repetitious time, immobile time or 'plastic eternity,' and imaginary time – emphasize hybridization (168–183).

³³ D.L. Demorest (1965) draws attention to the notion of shipwreck in *Madame Bovary*, which echoes Encolpius' summation of the *Satyricon*: 'Shipwreck is everywhere' (*ubique naufragium est*; 115,16).

as Helen's brothers, Electra marrying Achilles, Agamemnon in pursuit of Diana....³⁴ One of his cooks produces a fattened goose and smaller birds from pork, fish from a sow's belly, a pigeon from lard, a dove from ham, a chicken from pork knuckles... (69,8–70,2). Trimalchio's tomb owes nothing to Emma's (71,5–12). William Arrowsmith excellently summarizes the *Satyricon*'s literary buffet:

Like *hybris*, *luxuria* affects a man so that he eventually loses his sense of his specific function, his *virtus* or *aretē*. He surpasses himself, luxuriating into other things and forms. It is for this reason that the *Satyricon* is so full of luxuriant falseness, pretenses, fakes, metamorphoses. Forms of life are jumbled incongruously, transformed, degenerated. (1966, 317)

Petronius' characters, like Emma, further encounter the chaos, meaninglessness, transitoriness, evanescence, and flux of life. They always get lost, search but never find, are trapped in a Daedalean labyrinth, fall into abysses, run in circles, feel quixotically bewitched by magic, fall prey to sudden changes of mood, live in a world governed by Fortune, see 'death' lurking everywhere, tread on broken glass, cry for help with nobody around to hear them, and experience laughter for no obvious reason – all heightened by the fragmentary state of the text. Froma Zeitlin puts it best:

That Petronius should create a character who is a delinquent, an outsider, a marginal man, who belongs in no social milieu, who has no past or future, no destination or purpose beyond passing pleasures and the will to survive, whose personality is unstable, whose relationships are insecure, and who should have learned by experience that the world is roguish, unpredictable, and ultimately without any coherent design, marks the first step taken in literature towards the vision of our modern desacralized world and the image of the radically alienated man who is familiar to us from the pages of modern fiction. (1971, 683; cf. 652–666)

³⁴ We laugh at these preposterous confusions, but a recent movie, *Troy* (2004), hardly fares better: Achilles and Patroclus as 'cousins,' Agamemnon being killed by Briseis and dying in Troy, coins (which, by the way, had not been invented yet) placed on the eyes of a corpse rather than in the mouth, the morning sun rising over the sea – in the west, that is.... Or, if one were to travel to Las Vegas, one would find – within viewing distance – an Egyptian pyramid, the Statue of Liberty, the Eiffel Tower, a medieval castle, the Colosseum, or the Piazza San Marco.

In fact, in one of Flaubert's most modern passages, Emma visualizes exactly this Petronian void:

*N'importe! elle n'était pas heureuse, ne l'avait jamais été. D'où venait donc cette insuffisance de la vie, cette pourriture instantanée des choses où elle s'appuyait?... [...] Rien, d'ailleurs, ne valait la peine d'une recherche; tout mentait! Chaque sourire cachait un bâillement d'ennui, chaque joie une malédiction, tout plaisir son dégoût, et les meilleurs baisers ne vous laissaient sur la lèvre qu'une irréalisable envie d'une volupté plus haute. (263–264)*³⁵

Both Emma and Encolpius also fail to *produce* anything sublime – or anything at all: 'Thus we have posturing and gesticulation instead of real actions. Indeed actions, when put to the test of fact, are often avoided and simply renounced: only true heroes are allowed to act' (Conte 1996, 6). In the *Satyricon*, for example, Encolpius is worthless in a materialistic culture because he cannot 'sell' himself anymore (*neque puero neque puellae bona sua vendere potest*; 134,8). Emma consumes, too: she neither produces nor reproduces (since Berthe is a girl, she does not count for Emma); or, when she does produce, she does so with breathtaking brevity. Whatever good motives she takes on (charities, prayer, books, music, Italian, drawing, sewing, cooking, child raising...) remain fleeting, hectic, vain. She rejects everything that does not contribute *à la consommation immédiate de son cœur* (34). The grass is, proverbially, always greener: *Elle ne croyait pas que les choses puissent se représenter les mêmes à des places différentes, et, puisque la portion vécue avait été mauvaise, sans doute ce qui restait à consommer*

³⁵ 'No matter! She was not happy, she never had been. Why was her life so unsatisfactory, why did everything she leaned on instantly rot and give way? ... [...] Besides, nothing was worth the trouble of seeking; everything was a lie. Every smile concealed a yawn of boredom, every joy a curse, every pleasure its own disgust, and the sweetest of kisses left upon your lips only the unattainable desire for a greater delight' (223). Even earlier, after Léon leaves her, Emma starts heading toward Petronian shipwreck: *les réminiscences les plus lointaines comme les plus immédiates occasions, ce qu'elle éprouvait avec ce qu'elle imaginait, ses envies de volupté qui se dispersaient, ses projets de bonheur qui craquaient au vent comme des branchages morts, sa vertu stérile, ses espérances tombées, la litière domestique, elle ramassait tout, prenait tout, et faisait servir tout à réchauffer sa tristesse* (116; 'the most distant reminiscences, like the most immediate occasions, what she experienced as well as what she imagined, her wasted voluptuous desires that were unsatisfied, her projects of happiness that cracked in the wind like dead boughs, her sterile virtue, her lost hopes, the yoke of domesticity, – she gathered it all up, took everything, and made it serve as rule for her melancholy,' 102).

serait meilleur (80).³⁶ Carla Peterson (1994) appropriately refers to her as ‘Dionysian,’ a Bacchic reveler unmitigated by Apollonian stability. Even Emma’s most striking resolve and insight at the opera, *Mais ce bonheur-là, sans doute, était un mensonge imaginé pour le désespoir de tout désir. Elle connaissait à présent la petitesse des passions que l’art exagérait* (210),³⁷ only plunges her into the arms of another lover. Too, the Romantic vision, so dear to her on every page, is finally transcended into the pornographic and orgiastic (*des tableaux orgiaques avec des situations sanglantes*; 268).³⁸ The fictional eventually becomes mythological and consequently even less attainable: *Elle aurait voulu, s’échappant comme un oiseau, aller se rajeunir quelque part, bien loin, dans les espaces immaculés* (271).³⁹ Even sexual transgression wears itself out, when Emma finds in adultery *toutes les platitudes du mariage* (269). Léon, once her dream lover, quickly loses appeal: *il était incapable d’héroïsme, faible, banal, plus mou qu’une femme, avare, d’ailleurs, et pusillanime* (262).⁴⁰ Love, sex, adultery, orgy, orgasm, prostitution – it is all one: *ces élans d’amour vagues la fatiguaient plus que de grandes débauches* (270).⁴¹ In her aptly titled article ‘Petronius as Paradox: Anarchy and Artistic Integrity,’ Zeitlin similarly classifies the relationships in the *Satyricon* as ‘a “dance pattern” which teases us with the possibility of a meaningful pattern but which is then denied’ (1971, 653).⁴² As Emma finds

³⁶ ‘She did not believe that things could remain the same in different places, and since the portion of her life that lay behind her had been bad, no doubt that which remained to be lived would be better’ (72).

³⁷ ‘But such happiness, she realized, was a lie, a mockery to taunt desire. She knew now how small the passions were that art magnified’ (180).

³⁸ This is in accordance with Petronius’ antagonistic language to describe sex: *pugnare, extorquere, caedere, invadere, miles, arma, iniuria, praeda*...; cf. Adams 1982, 145–159.

³⁹ ‘She would have liked to take wing like a bird, and fly off far away to become young again in the realms of immaculate purity’ (232).

⁴⁰ ‘he was incapable of heroism, weak, banal, more spiritless than a woman, avaricious, and timorous as well’ (222).

⁴¹ ‘these vague ecstasies of imaginary love would exhaust her more than the wildest orgies’ (231).

⁴² Encolpius praises Giton as *verecundissimus* (25,3), *mitissimus*, and as speaker of *moderationis verecundiaeque verba, quae formam eius egregie decebant* (93,4). Their intimacy seems to be longstanding and powerful: *vetustissimam consuetudinem [...] in sanguinis pignus* (80,6). Encolpius enjoys Giton’s proximity: *toto pectore adstrinxit* (91,9). A poem celebrates a night of bliss: *qualis nox fuit illa, di deaeque, / quam mollis torus. haesimus calentes / et transfudimus hinc et hinc labellis / errantes animas. valete, curae / mortales. ego sic perire coepi* (79,8). To Encolpius, his mistress Circe praises their relationship highly: *eum sine quo non potes vivere, ex cuius osculo pendes, quem sic tu amas* (127,4). Encolpius even thinks of true love: *si vere Encolpion dilexisti, da oscula* (114,9).

out only too well, love – everything – is *always* a tease, a non-production literally prey to combustion.

Flaubert and Petronius employ the same technique here: ‘The irony of the hidden author consists entirely in his apparent condescension towards his protagonist. He lets him promote himself to a great mythical figure, but only in order to frustrate at once his pretenses and illusions’ (Conte 1996, 85). We thus have a wonderfully ironic pattern, typically Flaubertian and Petronian. The sublime and the bovine, which Emma (and Encolpius) would strenuously prefer to divorce, go hand in hand all the time, while other objects and concepts that *ideally* could verge on the sublime – architecture, clothes, identity, travel, love – refuse to materialize and, therefore, represent nothing but bovinities. But Flaubert has far from exhausted his Petronian treasure trove.

Not only are the sublime and the bovine in the same boat, life and death suffer the same fate. Time is running out in the *Satyricon*. Two poems urge *memento mori*: ‘Nothing but bones, that’s what we are. / Death hustles us humans away. Today we’re here and tomorrow we’re not, / so live and drink while you may!’ (34,10); ‘We think we’re awful smart, we think we’re awful wise, / but when we’re least expecting, comes the big surprise. / Lady Luck’s in heaven and we’re her little toys, / so break out the wine and fill your glasses, boys!’ (55,3). Counting balls that drop to the ground, as Trimalchio enjoys, is probably the ultimate in aimlessness (27,3). Trimalchio famously and ominously evokes the Sibyl: ‘I once saw the Sibyl of Cumae in person. She was hanging in a bottle, and when the boys asked her, “Sibyl, what do you want?” she said, “I want to die”’ (48,8). The fact that this is an allusion that he gets right, among multiple examples of astrological, mythological, historical, philosophical, and literary ignorance, emphasizes his despair and desperation. Then, after one reminder of death after another, Trimalchio finally exhorts his guests to pretend that he is dead (78,5). At the same time, Petronius’ characters do not seize the day, they *double* it in their *taedium vitae* (*de una die duas facere*, 72,4; cf. 99,1). Both Petronius’ dinner guests and Emma (and not only she), though separated by millennia, live in a society

choking itself on luxury and satiety. The overeating at Trimalchio’s banquet, the fascination with exotic foods presented in strange ways, Trimalchio’s obsession with death, the unusual sexual practices throughout the novel can all be seen as a reaction against boredom on the part of the

men and women who live in an affluent and permissive society. (Wooten 1984, 136)⁴³

In *Madame Bovary*, Charles is instructed between *un baptême et un enterrement* (8), between, in the Christian calendar, the beginning and end of life. His first wife remains a *veuve* (widow) even when married to Charles and embodies death in life: *elle portait en toute saison un petit châle noir dont la pointe lui descendait entre les omoplates; sa taille dure était engagée dans des robes de fourreau, trop courtes, qui découvraient des chevilles avec les rubans de ses souliers larges s'entre-croisant sur des bas gris* (18);⁴⁴ her feet are cold as glaciers (32). Emma's life in Tostes is as cold as an attic facing north (*froide comme un grenier dont la lucarne est au nord*; 42); upon moving into Charles' abode, she already wonders about death (31). Then she wants to die *and* live in Paris (56), and in her house all the bitterness of life is served up on her plate (*toute l'amertume de l'existence lui semblait servie sur son assiette*; 61). In Yonville, time stands still (68), and when Emma enters her new home there, she feels the cold plaster fall on her shoulders like damp linen (*comme un linge humide, le froid du plâtre*; 80). After Léon leaves town, Emma experiences *une journée funèbre* (113). Emma and Rodolphe complain about country life: *de la médiocrité provinciale, des existences qu'elle étouffait, des illusions qui s'y perdaient* (129).⁴⁵ Léon, like Trimalchio, stages his own funeral: *Léon tout de suite envia le calme du tombeau, et même, un soir, il avait écrit son testament en recommandant qu'on l'ensevelît dans ce beau couvre-pied, à bandes de velours, qu'il tenait*

⁴³ The erotic manifestation of death is impotence. There seems to be only one crime in Petronius: sexual abstinence. Encolpius laments the burial of his one body part as powerful as Achilles (*funerata est illa pars corporis qua quondam Achilles eram*; 129,1). Despite sexual enticement, he becomes colder than a winter in Gaul (*frigidior hieme Gallica*; 19,3), feels his private parts chilled with a thousand deaths (*inguina mea mille iam mortibus frigida*; 20,2), and is frosted worse than cold winters (*frigidior rigente bruma / confugerat in viscera mille aperta rugis*; 132,8). He even addresses his member and its escape to the underworld: *hoc de te merui, ut me in caelo positum ad inferios traheres?* (132,10). On the pervasiveness of death in the *Satyricon*, see also Arrowsmith 1966; Bodel 1994; Herzog 1989; Schlant 1991; Bacon 1958; Slater 1990, 50–86 and 114–133; Döpp 1991; Toohey 1997; Rimell 2002, 181–202.

⁴⁴ '[She] wore in all weathers a little black shawl, the edge of which hung down between her shoulder blades; her bony figure was sheathed in her clothes as if they were a scabbard; they were too short, and displayed her ankles with the laces of her large boots crossed over grey stockings' (19).

⁴⁵ 'Then they talked about provincial mediocrity, of the lives it stifles, the lost illusions' (112).

d'elle (218; Flaubert's emphasis),⁴⁶ and indeed, the *fiacre* (where Emma and Léon have sex) appears more tightly sealed than a tomb (*plus close qu'un tombeau*; 228). Toward the end, Emma *aurait voulu ne plus vivre, ou continuellement dormir* (270).⁴⁷

Fear of death shipwrecks the body. Petronius emphasizes culinary reminders of death, a literal *tempus edax*: bloatedness, constipation, nausea, intoxication, gas, *la grande bouffe*. Stylistically, the *Satyricon* thus parodies Roman *gravitas* and *severitas* (or the sublime) in favor of *levitas* and *licentia* (the bovine): 'The realism of satire had its association with the seamier side of life, the low sexual elements which were studiously avoided in the more elevated literary forms of epic and tragedy' (Sullivan 1968, 100). Or, as P.G. Walsh observes, 'it is the canons of *pietas* and *virtus*, *dignitas* and *pudicitia* which the amoral hero subverts' (1970, 79). Trimalchio's feast 'becomes an exhaustive mapping of the world,' with dishes from the entire orb that bear the signs of the zodiac, but, as Conte infers, 'geography has become gastronomy'; it is 'a life completely subordinated to the needs of the body, a life in which food becomes a Protagorean "measure of all things"' (1996, 122–123; cf. also Dupont 1977, 121–151). In an existentialist and hedonistic pun, being and eating coalesce in the *Satyricon*: *dum licet esse bene* (34,10). Because people have nothing but appetites in the *Satyricon*, there is 'sensuality without joy, satiety without fulfillment, degradation without grief or horror' (Bacon 1958, 267). Life is all you can eat.

Victor Brombert puts a 'Petronian' spin on gastronomic matters in Flaubert:

Food plays an extraordinary role in his novel: feasts, orgies, bourgeois meals, peasant revels. This concern for appetite and digestion corresponds unquestionably [...] to the larger themes of his work: the "appetite" for the inaccessible, the voracious desire to *possess* experience, the preoccupation with metamorphoses, the tragedy of indigestion, and ultimately the almost metaphysical sense of nausea as the mind becomes

⁴⁶ 'Léon was quick to express his longing for "the quiet of the tomb"; one night, he had even made his will, asking to be buried in that beautiful coverlet with velvet stripes he had received from her' (186).

⁴⁷ 'She would have liked not to be alive, or to be always asleep' (231). David Shukis elaborates on the dust imagery, which is also related to death: 'Dust is suggestive of an oppressive, suffocating environment, of an atmosphere of age and death, of a world which has lost the freshness of youth' (1979, 214); see also Goodwin 1994; Orr 2004; Green 2004; Schehr 2004.

aware that not to know everything is to know nothing. The very essence of *bovarysme* seems involved in this frustrated gluttony. (1966, 49)⁴⁸

But food consumption does more than kill off. In *Madame Bovary*, food is all over the place. Interestingly, rarely do we see Emma actually eat the dishes placed in front of her, but she does ‘eat’ erotically and visually. She seduces Charles with a drink: *la tête en arrière, les lèvres avancées, le cou tendu, elle riait de ne rien sentir, tandis que le bout de sa langue, passant entre ses dents fines, léchait à petits coups le fond du verre* (21).⁴⁹ The wedding cake is eroticized, topped by a statue of *Amour* (27; see also Stein 1965). For Charles, a kiss and a dessert become interchangeable (41). For Léon, the hope of becoming Emma’s *amant* keeps dangling for him like a golden fruit from a fantastic tree (215), and Emma literally makes love to a baker, Rodolphe Boulanger. At the ball at Vaubyessard, the old lecherous man has gravy dripping from his mouth, perversely suggesting that in old age he ejaculates orally (46); at the same table, Emma eats phallically: *Elle mangeait alors une glace au marasquin, qu’elle tenait de la main gauche dans une coquille de vermeil, et fermait à demi les yeux, la cuiller entre les dents* (49).⁵⁰ Too, at the ball, Flaubert offers examples of aesthetic consumption:

*Les pattes rouges des homards dépassaient les plats; de gros fruits dans des corbeilles à jour s’étageaient sur la mousse; les cailles avaient leurs plumes, des fumées montaient; et, en bas de soie, en culotte courte, en cravate blanche, en jabot, grave comme un juge, le maître d’hôtel, passant entre les épaules des convives les plats tout découpés, faisait d’un coup de sa cuiller sauter pour vous le morceau qu’on choisissait.*⁵¹

⁴⁸ Lilian Furst offers a keen analysis, but with a different focus: ‘food plays a vital role in *Madame Bovary* in four different ways: as an environmental factor, as a social indicator, as a means of characterization, and as a source of imagery’ (1979, 54). Joyce Lowrie (1990) looks at the wedding cake specifically.

⁴⁹ ‘she bent back to drink, her head thrown back, her lips pouting, her neck straining. She laughed at getting none, while with the tip of her tongue passing between her small teeth, she licked drop by drop the bottom of her glass’ (21).

⁵⁰ ‘She was eating a maraschino ice that she held with her left hand in a silver-gilt cup, her eyes half closed, and the spoon between her teeth’ (45–46).

⁵¹ ‘The red claws of lobsters hung over the dishes; rich fruit in woven baskets was piled up on moss; the quails were dressed in their own plumage, smoke was rising; and in silk stockings, knee-breeches, white cravat, and frilled shirt, the steward, grave as a judge, passed between the shoulders of the guests, offering ready-carved dishes and, with a flick of the spoon, landed on one’s plate the piece one had chosen’ (42).

This *objet d'art* is topped by a woman, ready to be stripped of her draperies (45), obviously to be ingested by various orifices simultaneously.

Flaubert here exploits Petronius' conflation of sex and eating. Quartilla (a priestess, supposedly), for example, finds Giton delicious, who will make a nice dessert for her: 'Tomorrow [...] this will make a fine antipasto for my lechery' (*'haec' inquit 'belle cras in promulside libidinis nostrae militabit; hodie enim post asellum [both 'fish' and the potent 'ass'] diaria non sumo'*; 24,7); an *embasicoetas* (24,1) is both an obscene drinking vessel and a one-night-stand; a *satyrium* or aphrodisiac enchants the characters throughout. The Priapean cake at Trimalchio's party (60,4–7) is a sexual travesty: 'the spray of saffron juice, hitting the faces of the guests, is intended to stand for ejaculation' (Rudich 1997, 208); his zodiac dish features a myriad of sexual innuendo (*Sat.* 35). In the Story of the Widow of Ephesus, food and sex coalesce, too (111,10–112; see also Adams 1982, 138–145). People are so satiated that they need to sexualize food, or they are so sexed that they need to eat the body. And of course, the whole dinner party is the showpiece *par excellence* for aesthetics; everything Trimalchio puts on the table is meant for the eyes first of all – a donkey made of Corinthian bronze with saddlebags containing black and white olives, flanked by welded little bridges with cooked dormice dipped in honey and sprinkled with sesame seed, and a toy silver grill with sausages on top and Syrian plums and pomegranates underneath it to symbolize hot coals (just the first meal, followed by a dozen more) – only to be bovinized by actual consumption.

Finally, in both Petronius and Flaubert, religion (something that could be sublime) is sexualized. In the convent, Emma *s'assoupit doucement à la langueur mystique qui s'exhale des parfums de l'autel, de la fraîcheur des bénitiers et du rayonnement des cierges* (33);⁵² confession is a sado-masochistic experience (33–34); thoughts of the Virgin Mary lead to orgasmic ecstasy and exhaustion (*un attendrissement la saisit: elle se sentit molle et tout abandonnée*; 103). Emma eagerly receives the body of Christ: *ce fut en défaillant d'une joie céleste qu'elle avança les lèvres pour accepter le corps du Sauveur* (199); the addressee of her prayer is invariably a body: *au Seigneur les mêmes paroles de suavité qu'elle murmurait jadis à son amant, dans les épanchements de l'adultère* (200).⁵³ Rodolphe, pretending to adore

⁵² Emma 'was softly lulled by the mystic languor exhaled in the perfumes of the altar, the freshness of the holy water, and the lights of the tapers' (30).

⁵³ 'she fainted with celestial joy as she advanced her lips to accept the body of the Savior presented to her' (171) and 'she addressed to the Lord the same suave words that she had murmured formerly to her lover in the outpourings of adultery' (172).

Emma, *Vous êtes dans mon âme comme une madone sur un piédestal, à une place haute, solide et immaculée* (150),⁵⁴ cannot wait to degrade her to a fallen Mary Magdalene. The cathedral of Rouen succumbs to *un boudoir gigantesque* (223). To Léon, Emma appears in many guises, but angel first of all (*mais elle était par-dessus tout Ange!* 246; cf. 145, 181, 188, 224). In their love ritual, they re-enact/pervert the creation of the world as described in Genesis: *l'impatience qu'avait Emma de ressaisir son bonheur – convoitise âpre enflammée d'images connues, et qui, le septième jour, éclatait tout à l'aise dans les caresses de Léon* (249).⁵⁵ On her death bed, Emma bestows the greatest kiss of all (*le plus grand baiser d'amour qu'elle eût jamais donné*; 301) on the body of God. Needless to say, the sublimity of transubstantiation remains elusive to Emma – all she manages to do is, without metaphor, *eat* (just like the animals around her) her 'heavenly' lovers.

Most of the characters in Petronius similarly lack a sense of the sublime, of good and evil.⁵⁶ Quartilla is a priestess – of Priapus (whose wrath moves the plot forward). According to Amy Richlin's *The Garden of Priapus*, the ithyphallic Priapus penetrates his victims – to punish them for their trespasses – orally, vaginally, anally (1992, 58).⁵⁷ Unlike the penetrated Christ on the cross, Priapus does the penetrating himself. Blasphemously, Quartilla, the lecher, declares that she lives in a 'land so infested with divinity that one might meet a god more easily than a man' (*Sat.* 17,5). In Encolpius' encounter of sexual prowess and paralysis with Circe, religious rites are perverted and sex is literally sacrificed (127–131); she will induct Encolpius into her temple if he renounces sex with Giton – only to savor Encolpius herself. The same is true for Oenothea, the *wine* goddess. She promises a strange remission and absolution of Encolpius' 'sin': 'All I require is that you agree to spend one night here in bed with me, and if I don't make you stand up stiffer than a bull's horn, my name is not Oenothea' (134,10–11); transgressing all sexual, let alone religious, boundaries, Oenothea inserts a dildo into his anus and restores him to his former powers – thanks to the gods (*dii maiores sunt qui me restituerunt in integrum*; 140,12), while just a line earlier, Encolpius

⁵⁴ 'In my soul you are as a Madonna on a pedestal, in a place lofty, secure, immaculate' (129).

⁵⁵ 'her impatience to once again seize her happiness, – this fierce lust, enflamed by recent memories, which on the seventh day would erupt freely within Léon's embraces' (211–212).

⁵⁶ As has often been commented on, among the hundred or so characters that populate *Madame Bovary*, there are, if at all, only three good ones: Catherine Leroux, Justin, and Dr. Larivière.

⁵⁷ See also Conte 1996, 93–103; Fehling 1988; Obermayer 1998, 190–213.

could not enter a willing boy because of the gods' adversity (*numen inimicum*). Encolpius brutally slaughters a sacred goose; to make up for his sacrilege, Oenothea turns the goose into a delectable meal (137,12). Sodomy is a 'sacred rite': *pigiciaca sacra* (140,6 – from *πυγίζειν*, 'to butt-fuck'; cf. Henderson 1991, 201–202). Last but not least, Encolpius and Giton make love that renders the gods jealous (*votis usque ad invidiam felicibus*; 11,2).



Reality and ideality, the sublime and the bovine, fragmentation and consumption, life and death, food and drink, sex and religion...⁵⁸ Flaubert, in *Madame Bovary*, pays a greater tribute to Petronius than he acknowledges in his letters. Dominick LaCapra suggests:

Flaubert's novelistic world is one wherein the clear and present danger is the systematic profanation of ideals culminating in the addled nature of ideals themselves. This constant state of trivialized transgression threat-

⁵⁸ Another comparison is gender: Emma's fingernails (14), her glasses (15), her unmaning of Charles during their wedding night (28), her taking charge of financial affairs (39), her way of dressing (116, 179), her hairdo (116), her smoking cigarettes in public (179), and her obtaining the power of attorney from her husband (236); with Léon, she becomes the aggressor, turning him into a *maîtresse* (258), and Léon resents her for her *victoire permanente* over him (263); Emma is ghost, sphynx, Circe alike: *la vague créature pernicieuse, la sirène, le monstre, qui habite fantastiquement les profondeurs de l'amour* (269; 'that vague and terrible creature, the Siren, the fantastic monster which makes its home in the treacherous depths of love,' 229), a gliding snake (262), even a Medusa that turns men to stone (284); see also Llosa 1986, 140–145.

The *Satyricon* features a 'complete absence of any favourable reference to women,' Sullivan 1968, 124. Petronius' women lack all the characteristics of *l'éternel féminin*: 'douceur, soumission, pureté, besoin de protection, qualités de femme d'intérieur,' Fisher 1976, 11 ('sweetnees, submission, purity, need for protection, qualities of a housewife'). The first woman we encounter in the novel (as we have it) is a pimp (*Sat.* 7). In violation of the stereotype of the vital young man as the seducer, it is old women and women in general who are particularly voluptuous: 'no woman was so chaste or faithful that she couldn't be seduced; sooner or later she would fall head over heels in love with a stranger' (*nullamque esse feminam tam pudicam, quae non peregrina libidine usque ad furorem averteretur*; 110,7). The healer Quartilla is a *mulier libidinosa* (113,7; cf. *tot anorum secreta, quae vix mille homines noverunt*, 17,9; *Iunonem meam iratam habeam, si umquam me meminerim virginem fuisse*, 25,4). The passenger Tryphaena, whose name suggest luxury, hedonism, and cosmopolitanism, travels the world in search of pleasure (*omnium feminarum formosissima, quae voluptatis causa huc atque illuc vectatur*; 101,5). Although Pannychis is a seven-year old girl, she is already sexually active – even all night long, as her name connotes.

ens to make all actions and words either hypocritical or parodic. It deprives transgression itself of its possible fascination, for there is no real temptation when everything is profaned. What this world lacked is an engaging tension between commitment and transgression – the social and personal rhythm that sets up a viable interplay among the affirmation of norms, the allure of forbidden desire, and the evanescent effulgence of liminal invitations or non-fixated events of “transcendence.” (1982, 132)

True enough, but Flaubert is hardly creating this world out of nothing. The sublime, systematically profaned, is itself an unstable signifier, an addled ideal, the *telos* of Encolpius’ mythomania that he manically searches for but, as is the case with myth, fails to aspire to. As Howard Weinbrot argues, ‘Petronius practiced an additive art in which the additions suggest additional corruption’ (2005, 46). In the *Satyricon*, is there a single relationship that did not fail, that was not instigated for sexual gratification, that did not end prematurely, that was not described in military language, that did not genuinely alienate the reader, that did not testify to the seemingly modern revelation that all human intercourse is dysfunctional?

There is a book published in 1966 and composed by ‘Petronius’: *New York Unexpurgated: An Amoral Guide for the Jaded, Tired, Evil, Non-Conforming, Corrupt, Condemned and the Curious – Humans and Otherwise – to Under Underground Manhattan* (see McElroy 2001, 361). A century earlier, *Madame Bovary* pays a much more sophisticated, much more subtle, much more moral, much more intense, much more sublime (and bovine) homage to Petronius. In his juvenile piece ‘Rome et les Césars’ (1839), Flaubert refuses to believe that the glory that was Rome has vanished (*Oh! non, vous avez beau faire, le monde romain n’est pas mort! il vit en vous, il vous obsède de ses souvenirs et de sa gloire éternelle; ses empereurs vous font oublier ses papes, ses artistes, ses fidèles*; 218) and predicts a return of *le sensualisme excité, la débauche savante de Pétrone, l’inspiration fiévreuse d’Apulée, les soupirs amoureux de Tibulle* (219).⁵⁹ *Madame Bovary* is his greatest testimony. One only wonders why Emma herself, the voracious reader, did not savor Petronius – or maybe she did in her sublime dreams, only to realize, for once, that the world of the *Satyricon* is just too bovine for her: ‘Encolpius’ fall is inevitable once the speech is matched to his real na-

⁵⁹ ‘Oh, no! Try as you must, the Roman world isn’t dead. It lives in you, it obsesses you with its memories and its eternal glory; its emperors make you forget its popes, artists, believers’... ‘the exasperated sensualism, the learned debauchery of Petronius, the feverish inspiration of Apuleius, the amorous sighs of Tibullus.’

ture and not to his pretenses: what fits him is *bathos*, not *hypsos*' (Conte 1996, 11). Bathos and melodrama in Petronius, tragedy within the ridiculous in Flaubert – like Charles, Encolpius knows what it means to conjugate *ridiculus sum* twenty times over.⁶⁰

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