

Gustave Flaubert's Symphonic Form: A Musical Analysis of the Country Fair in Madame Bovary

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In Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, the chapter featuring the *comices agricoles* is a stylistic *tour-de-force*. It is well-established that Flaubert had conceived extensive plans for this portion of the novel. In a preliminary outline revealed in one of his letters dated July 15, 1853^{1,2}, we learn of the ambitious nature of his project: Flaubert wished to create a chapter in which the actions of the primary and secondary characters are thematically linked. In it, a woman, the eponymous heroine, is seduced by a man, another significant character and instrument of her fate. All of this takes place while country-fair officials give long-winded speeches. True to his perfectionism, Flaubert devoted three months to the writing of this chapter alone³, chronicling at turns his intentions as well as his frustrations⁴ through his correspondence with Louise Colet. In a letter from September 7, 1853, he notes how and why the process proves so difficult: "C'est un dur endroit. J'y ai *tous* mes personnages de mon livre en action et en dialogue, les uns mêlés aux autres, et par là-dessus un grand paysage qui les enveloppe."⁵

⁶ The effect of bringing together characters and their actions in a unifying and lively ensemble will be rich and polyphonic: "si je réussis, ce sera bien symphonique."^{7,8} Merely a month later, he again refers to this chapter by the same musical term: "Si jamais les

effets d'une symphonie ont été reportés dans un livre, ce sera là. *Il faut que ça hurle par l'ensemble*, qu'on entende à la fois des beuglements de taureaux, des soupirs d'amour et des phrases d'administrateurs."^{9,10} Given Flaubert's description of the episode as musical, the question arises: are we to interpret his use of the term *symphonie* only as a metaphor for the general tone of the chapter, or are we to understand it as referring to a symphonic model by which he elaborates his polyphonic writing? I suggest that Flaubert, whether consciously or subconsciously, constructs the *comices agricoles* chapter according to certain principles found in symphonic form¹¹. I present arguments which establish a relationship between the architectural principles guiding this form and the way Flaubert shapes the dialogue and themes in the *comices* scenes. More specifically, I reveal how in his style, thematic structure, and contrapuntal textures, Flaubert adheres to the fundamental scheme of the most common symphonic form, the *sonata-allegro*.¹²

Flaubert's sensibility to music has been noted by scholars such as G. Jean-Aubry, who states in *Gustave Flaubert and Music* that "musical comparisons came easily to his pen"¹³. Flaubert's connection to music was a personal one: his sister, Caroline Flaubert, was an accomplished pianist, and

he nurtured a friendship with Hector Berlioz, violinist Antoine Orłowski (who taught Caroline¹⁴), and the composer Amédée Lefroid de Méreaux¹⁵. We know that Flaubert experienced intense pleasure while listening to music, as evidenced in this ardent and musically-knowledgeable commentary found in the semi-autobiographical *Mémoires d'un fou*: «Je ne sais quelle puissance magique possède la musique; j'ai rêvé des semaines entières au rythme cadencé d'un air ou aux larges contours d'un chœur majestueux; il y a des sons qui m'entrent dans l'âme et des voix qui me fondent en délices. J'aimais l'orchestre grondant, avec ses flots d'harmonie, ses vibrations sonores et cette vigueur immense qui semble avoir des muscles et qui meurt au bout de l'archet; mon âme suivait la mélodie déployant ses ailes vers l'infini et montant en spirales, pure et lente, comme un parfum vers le ciel»^{16,17}. We also know that Flaubert often attended concerts, frequented *salons*¹⁸, and was familiar with musical works both past and present¹⁹. We find ample evidence of his musical proclivities in his letters to Louise Colet as well. In two missives²⁰ dating from 1853, Flaubert refers not only to the symphonic character of the *comices* chapter, but also employs musical terms such as “ensemble” and “phrases” as literary metaphors. Indeed, Flaubert seems to have conceived of his creative works as musical and recognized the writer or poet's goal as synonymous with that of a composer²¹. In this light, it is not unlikely that Flaubert would find inspiration in music for his pivotal *comices agricoles* chapter in *Madame Bovary*.

There are precedents for comparisons between musical works and literary texts. Some scholars, such as Margaret Atkinson, have noted the similarities between literary and musical form. Atkinson studies the works of several nineteenth-century writers,

including Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder. She determines that Wackenroder's essays possess a “ternary thematic scheme”²² similar to a “third movement of sonatas and symphonies”²³. But most often, researchers have discovered latent musical structures in the works of twentieth century authors²⁴, most notably in James Joyce's *Ulysses*²⁵. Ezra Pound was the first to claim that Joyce structured *Ulysses* according to sonata form²⁶. Following his lead, Robert Boyle made a detailed analysis of each chapter of the novel in his essay *Ulysses as Frustrated Sonata Form*²⁷. It is noteworthy that writers such as Vladimir Nabokov see Flaubert as a precursor of Joyce in his treatment of the *comices* chapter's “farcical synthesis”²⁸ of contrasting themes, and that Boyle takes this analogy a step further by arguing that both Flaubert and Joyce use musical form to emphasize a unifying theme of bourgeois philistinism.

To understand how a literary text can mirror the musical form of *sonata-allegro*, it is necessary that we provide a proper definition of its properties. But before proceeding, we should note that the *sonata form* is not static, and that -- according to musicologist Charles Rosen -- there are not one but many sonata forms. What we recognize as *sonata-allegro* form in the works of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven reflect certain principles of balance and contrast that were constantly evolving. The form “is not definite (...) like a minuet, a da capo aria, or a French overture: it is, like the fugue, a way of writing, a feeling for proportion, direction, and texture rather than pattern.”²⁹ It was not until the nineteenth century that the form was referred to as *sonata-allegro* and presented as an easily-identifiable template from which composers could model their works. The general consensus is that *sonata-allegro* structure consists of three large sections: an *exposition*,

a *development*, and a *recapitulation*. The *exposition* features two primary themes: a first theme, and a second, subordinate theme in a contrasting key. An introduction may precede the *exposition*. In the *development* section which follows, the composer gives free-rein to his ideas. He accomplishes this in the working out of contrapuntal material and the manipulation of “themes and rhythmic components he has set forth in the Exposition”³⁰, as Beethoven does in the first movement of his *Razumovsky Quartet*, Opus 59, No. 1, for example. In the *development*, ‘conflict’ comes into play: themes might be truncated, elongated or change tonality. *Sonata-allegro* form ends with a *recapitulation*, in which the composer restates the themes from the *exposition*. The *recapitulation* may include modification or embellishments from this scheme. However, in every *recapitulation*, the second theme must remain in the key of the first. This provides a resolution for the conflict manifest in the *exposition* and the *development*.³¹ Oftentimes, the *recapitulation* is followed by a coda, sometimes extended, which concludes the movement.

Numerous scholars have discussed the narrative quality of *sonata-allegro* form. Alan Shockley points out dramatic similarities between the symphony and the novel. He esteems Beethoven as “the first composer of novels”³², asserting that the plot of his symphonies³³ as well as the programmatic subtexts accompanying them - - most prominently in the Pastoral Symphony³⁴ -- mirror the unfolding of a novel. Adolf Bernhard Marx - who was the first to use the term *sonata form*³⁵ - commented in the 1845 version of his treatise *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition, praktisch-theoretisch* that the concept of sonata form dramatizes the conflict between masculine and feminine elements³⁶. Marx’s interpretation -- however general -- became

prevalent throughout the nineteenth century³⁷. Alan Shockley expanded on this idea by using the symbol of union as broadly defined in human psychology and sexuality: “The man (exposition: first theme) encounters the woman (exposition: second theme). There is a buildup of tension between them, and they have some sort of conflict (the development section). Their differences are resolved, or the man defeats the woman (...) and the woman “sings” or speaks her material (...) with the man’s “name” -- (the recapitulation).”³⁸ The narrative of *sonata-allegro* form can thus be described as a romantic plot, played out in purely musical form. Noteworthy to our subject, Flaubert himself was sometimes apt to describe the relationship of a man and woman through musical metaphor: “Leur [femmes] coeur est un piano où l’homme, artiste égoïste, se complaît à jouer des airs qui le font briller, et toutes les touches parlent.”^{39 40} Flaubert’s scenario recalls Shockley’s explanatory scheme for *sonata-allegro* form, in which the “feminine” second theme plays a subordinate role to the “masculine” first.

In this light, if we transpose Shockley’s characterization of musical themes to literary protagonists, we discern that the *comices* chapter in Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* adumbrates a *sonata-allegro* form in music. We can view each character, or group of characters as corresponding to the first or second theme of sonata form. Flaubert’s sub-themes are made up of individual sentences or details that mimic the phrases of musical motives; these smaller motivic components are what constitute the main and secondary themes. With this scheme in mind, the thematic structure of the *comices agricole* chapter is as follows: the exposition includes two primary themes: the masculine world of bourgeois philistinism as represented by multiple characters -- the *conseiller* Lieuvain,

Monsieur Derozerays, the *colonel*, Binet, the *maire*, Lheureux, and the *pharmacien* Homais. The second feminine theme of the exposition explores romantic philistinism, as embodied by Emma and Rodolphe. The sub-themes for both primary themes are those of mediocrity and pretension, the first exposed frankly to the reader and the second veiled through the prettified lens of romance. Flaubert then guides the reader into a section emulating a sonata's development. Both themes are expanded upon and permuted; at this point, the counterpoint appears, and the worlds of bourgeois and romantic philistinism collide and intermingle, shedding light on the sub-themes in the process. Finally, the recapitulation prompts a restatement of both themes, which disentangle themselves from the counterpoint, with the feminine secondary theme weakened and dissolved, as it were, back into the first theme of bourgeois philistinism. In the following paragraphs, I will examine the elements structurally comparable to musical motives and sub-themes and explain their function in developing the two main themes.

The chapter begins with the first theme of the exposition introducing us to the philistinism displayed in the country fair scene and its characters. Regarding this central theme, it is crucial to our understanding of Flaubert's literary intentions not to regard his negative view of bourgeois values as a socio-economic critique. In the words of Vladimir Nabokov, when Flaubert wryly satirizes the bourgeoisie, he means to highlight their obsession with "the material side of life and (...) [the] conventional ideals of his or her group and time. (...) of which [they] entirely consist."⁴¹ Flaubert draws our attention to the philistine's trivial mentality by employing a language entirely consisting of "a collection of (...) stock ideas, (...) set phrases, clichés,

[and] banalities."⁴² Flaubert is interested in revealing the fakery of the philistine; a bourgeois is "pseudo-idealist, (...) pseudo-compassionate, (...) [and] pseudo-wise"⁴³, and since he feels a constant need to ostentatiously display his feelings and knowledge to others, his relationships are characterized by "deception (...) [and] mutual cheating."⁴⁴ Since Flaubert's bourgeois is "a state of mind, not a state of pocket"⁴⁵, the borrowing of symphonic leitmotifs allows the reader to identify the presence of pretense and mediocrity whenever they appear, in government officials and humble agriculturalists alike⁴⁶. In the first sentence, which ushers in the initial statement of the theme, Flaubert ironically alludes to the provincial country fair as "fameux". At the same time, in keeping with sonata form, he introduces the reader to the first motivic element suggesting the sub-theme -- that of mediocrity: an old-fashioned cannon in front of the church ("une espece de bombarde")⁴⁷ meant to represent Yonville's military prowess. He further notes that Yonville has no militia of its own (the "garde nationale de Buchy"⁴⁸ is a borrowed militia from another town, reminding us of Homais' borrowed clichés which appear later in the chapter). Another recurring motive suggesting mediocrity consists of the rivalry between Binet and the colonel: Binet with his firemen and the colonel with his militia repeatedly lead drills in order to show off "leurs talents"⁴⁹, which leads Flaubert's narrator to exclaim in mock admiration: "Jamais il n'y avait eu pareil déploiement de pompe!"⁵⁰. This motive reappears at the beginning of a passage which I identify as the development section, when the cannon fires off at the wrong moment and the men are not ready for the arrival of the conseiller. This is an example of how the subtheme of mediocrity comes into play with the first theme of the sonata form and reemerges later in the

chapter.

The second sub-theme of pretension is woven into the exposition's first theme through a description of the fair's banners, which rather ambitiously read "Au Commerce"; sur l'autre: 'À l'Agriculture'; sur le troisième: 'À l'Industrie'; et sur le quatrième: 'Aux Beaux-Arts'.⁵¹ Here, Flaubert suggests an effect of luxuriousness in his description of the banners as "verdâtre" and "enrichi d'inscription en lettres d'or"⁵². This sharply contrasts with the simple, provincial surroundings laconically evoked in the first sentence of the paragraph ("La foule arrivait dans la grande rue par les deux bouts du village."⁵³ ⁵⁴). This sub-theme reappears later in the development during the conseiller Lieuvain's speech, in which he "enriches" his language with grandiloquent references to the State, revolutions, civilization; platitudes such as the "les orages politiques"⁵⁵ are almost sarcastically interrupted by a bellowing of cattle; "En effet, les vachers et les bergers avaient poussé leurs bêtes jusque-là, et elles beuglaient de temps à autre (...)"⁵⁶. Pharmacist Homais' idiosyncrasies embody the sub-theme of pomposity which is exemplified in his conversation with innkeeper Madame Lefrançois. He attempts to justify his practical involvement in the *comices* to the skeptical woman, and aggrandizes his role in it as no less than a "commission consultative"⁵⁷. Although his profession is merely that of a pharmacist, he considers himself a chemist, resorting to a failed metaphor which Madame Lefrançois expectedly misunderstands: "plus confiné dans mon laboratoire que le rat du bonhomme dans son fromage -- Quel fromage? fit l'aubergiste."⁵⁸. The paragraph where Homais spews out his knowledge on cider especially suggests his egocentric use of "pseudoscience and journalèse"⁵⁹. He ends on a pompous note in which he shows off his

command of grammar as well: "Plût à Dieu que nos agriculteurs fussent des chimistes, ou que du moins ils écoutassent davantage les conseils de la science!"⁶⁰ By using the past subjunctives "fussent" and "écoutassent", Homais is unnecessarily making use of a written and literary form of language merely to satisfy his sense of importance. Needless to say, Madame Lefrançois is unimpressed, as his words are merely the hollow repository of a philistine mind⁶¹.

The second theme follows with the appearance of Rodolphe and Emma strolling through the village. Both characters embody the theme of bourgeois love, based on ideals from romance novels. As in the musical form of a sonata, there is a transition from the first theme to the second. It is not through the narrator's voice that we become aware of Emma's and Rodolphe's presence. Rather, Mme. Lefrançois' observes them as they are passing by her inn; "il [Lheureux] salue madame Bovary (...). Elle est même au bras de M. Boulanger."⁶² As soon as she notices them, Homais, "the successful philistine",⁶³ rushes to greet them. Thus these two characters provide the bridge between the two themes, between the world of the *comices* and the world of the couple. The second theme, as in a *sonata-allegro* form, is closely linked to the first theme, although there is an attempt by both Rodolphe and Emma to distance themselves from the philistine pragmatism of Homais and of Lheureux⁶⁴; Rodolphe and Emma make an excuse to leave so as to escape his attentions and commiserate on the 'vulgarity' of the farmers and women in their midst, and, by extension, on the 'médiocrité provinciale'. Further, building upon the 'romantic love' theme, the following sub-themes bring the second theme closer to the first. First, Rodolphe encapsulates pretension as the brutish perpetrator of insincerity and "bogus passion"⁶⁵. Emma, whose mentality is guided

by the clichés of romantic love, represents the mediocre and pathetic state of the duped philistine⁶⁶⁶⁷. Yet at the same time, she herself is a perpetrator of them in the false ideals or illusions she espouses and so desperately pursues.

The second theme also embeds motives akin to echoing musical sequences. Descriptive vignettes intersperse Emma's and Rodolphe's dialogue, seemingly referring back to the *comices* (people entering the meadow where the *comices* is taking place, the animals grazing in the field, etc.⁶⁸), but in reality, they are parts of the overarching second theme. These little moments are viewed through the lens of the couple as they promenade through the fair, and in some cases, are paramount to illuminating the sub-themes associated with Rodolphe or Emma. Like musical motives highlighting a thematic phrase, the vignettes parallel other scenes in which the lovers are interacting or described. One such motive is scenes involving animals, which mirror Emma's scenes. There are two passages which exemplify this parallelism: the first is a description of Emma's physical appearance, and the second (found later) depicts "les bêtes". Emma's "profile [est] (...) calme"⁶⁹ and meanwhile the mares "restaient paisibles"⁷⁰; Emma's decorations on her hooded cloak include pale-looking ribbons ("des rubans pâles"⁷¹) which resemble the reed-leaves ("des feuilles de roseau"⁷²); this parallelism is spun further in the water imagery which connects the ribbons to the white manes of the ponies⁷³. The description of her eyelashes recalls that of the description of the eyelids of the cows: Emma's "longs cils courbes"⁷⁴ and the cows' "paupières lourdes"⁷⁵. Like the animals, she is treated by Flaubert in this passage in a gentle manner, through his language and a rhythmic cadence; "cils courbes", "doucement", and "peau fine" from Emma's passage are

delicate words and imagery which are also reflected in the cows' passage ("lentement"). There are parenthetic phrases in both ("quoique bien ouverts" and "à cause du sang"⁷⁶ in Emma's passage, and "ruminant lentement"⁷⁷ in relation to the cows) parsed with commas and an "et", which contribute to the ebb and flow of the sentences⁷⁸. This creates a syllabic rhythm which is consistent in both sentences; Emma's contains 10 or 11 syllables with 5 or 4 syllables; the cows' phrase begin and end with 10 and 12 with two groups of 6 syllables in between. What does the relationship between the description of the animals and Emma signify? It metaphorizes several aspects of Emma's situation: the submissive position she finds herself in as she trusts Rodolphe (the strong bull muzzled and led by a child in rags⁷⁹) and the pitiful existence she will lead when her heroic, romanesque ideals will later be frustrated in the novel.

The motivic elements relating to Rodolphe consist of his clichés and romantic jargon, which he uses as weapons of manipulation in order to satisfy the fantasies Emma craves. His relationships with women have been many and never of a serious nature⁸⁰; therefore, he is a philistine in regards to true passion. However, in the previous chapter he does gauge Emma's longing for romantic escapades and her dissatisfaction with her current society⁸¹. He adapts to her by making quaint statements full of hackneyed metaphors: "Voici de gentilles pâquerettes, dit-il, et de quoi fournir bien des oracles à toutes les amoureuses du pays"⁸², "à la vue d'un cimetière, au clair de lune, je me suis demandé si je ne ferais pas mieux d'aller rejoindre ceux qui sont à dormir..."⁸³ One of the other musical motives attached to this character are these romanesque speeches in which the rhythmical emphasis lays on the exclamatory phrases ("Oui! (...) Ah! (...) Oh! (...)"),

punctuated with phrases beginning with the anaphoric 'si'⁸⁴ (“*si* j’avais eu un but dans la vie, *si* j’eusse rencontré une affection, *si* j’avais trouvais quelqu’un...”), and later with ‘j’aurais’⁸⁵ ((...) *j’aurais* dépensé toute l’énergie dont je suis capable, *j’aurais* surmonté tout, brisé tout!”); the last four words musically cadence every other word on ‘tous’. In fact, Rodolphe’s whole paragraph appears to be lilting as the libretto for a dramatic opera would, gently lulling Emma’s romanesque sensibilities.

This paragraph, as well as six lines of a dialogue between Rodolphe and Emma, end the exposition. Following a clear delineation between the end of the *exposition* and the start of the *development*, the cannon belonging to the first theme mistakenly fires, breaking into the couple’s conversation⁸⁶ and marking the beginning of the development. Flaubert’s famed use of counterpoint, which Vladimir Nabokov terms “parallel interruption”⁸⁷, begins later in the development when Rodolphe and Emma have found a place to sit in the top story of the town hall, overlooking the platform with the *comices*’ official speakers. Counterpoint is a type of musical polyphony, and in purely musical terms can be defined as two or more voices in a work of music which are both dependant on each other harmonically and independent from each other melodically⁸⁸. In the case of literary counterpoint, Rodolphe and Emma’s romantic conversation (a separate voice in its own right) is interrupted and cut up by the officials’ speeches (a completely different voice which, as we will see in the climax, is independent yet related to the first voice); this is the basis of the counterpoint⁸⁹.

It is of interest that in the beginning of the passage, the dialogue of the couple and the interjecting speech of the officials are of a rather substantial length, mostly paragraphs. Beginning and ending with

Lieuvain’s time on the platform, we can count seven interruptions of the first theme and six of the second theme. These interspliced passages appear to generally mirror each other in length and even in content, especially at points of greater thematic tension. An example of this is found in the longest section in the development, when the first theme begins “M. Lieuvain venait de s’essuyer la bouche avec son mouchoir de poche”⁹⁰ ending with a description of the cowherds and shepherds tending the noisy animals⁹¹, while the following second theme starts from “Rodolphe s’était rapproché d’Emma, et il disait d’une voix basse, en parlant vite (...)”⁹² ending with “Elle retira ses gants, elle s’essuya les main; puis, avec son mouchoir, elle s’éventait la figure, (...)”⁹³. At first glance, the two themes which follow each other in this section appear independent from each other; Lieuvain is extolling the ‘virtues’ and the ‘utility’ of agriculture in highfalutin language (“d’ingénieux appareils” “un aliment” instead of ‘bread’) and florid metaphors (birth metaphor: “L’agriculteur (...) fait naître le blé”⁹⁴, clichéd mother nature and her children allusion: “telle qu’une mère généreuse, prodigue à ses enfants”⁹⁵) while Rodolphe alludes to his romantic intention through sentimental language and metaphor (“pauvres âmes”; “instincts (...) plus nobles”; “sympathies (...) plus pures”; birth metaphor: “[pauvres âmes] sont nées l’une pour l’autre”⁹⁶) while Emma daydreams about her past fantasized loves. However, this section is quite striking for its structural parallelism, which is reminiscent to the gradations of circular ripples left after a pebble is dropped in a pool. For the first theme, Lieuvain’s speech -- full of obvious niceties -- is the inner circle. Then, there are the jurors on the platform behind him, including Homais, who listen with “bouches (...) ouvertes”⁹⁷. Then, the third ripple is Binet and his lieutenant, who are most likely not

paying heed to the speech (Both of their hats are comically impeding their vision⁹⁸, while the lieutenant is 'blissfully' sleepy⁹⁹). The fourth ripple is the 'agriculteur', or the farmers, herdsmen, and servants who the loquacious Lieuvain praises. The irony comes from the fact that these people are not listening to the speech in their honor; Justin the servant is staring into the distance, while the cowherds and shepherds are going about their business¹⁰⁰. This rippling effect is meant to highlight the different levels of philistinism, beginning with the self-satisfied Lieuvain and ending with the simple, provincial people who are merely satisfied with their existence. This comparison can be drawn to the second theme; Rodolphe is the first ripple, and Emma's gradual retreating into her fantasies from reality are the other ripples. She first notices acutely Rodolphe's eyes, then his scent. This scent leads her into a sensual remembrance of the viscomte she danced with not so long ago. She creates even more distance from Rodolphe when a passing carriage brings her memories of Leon. The next level is then her dreamy confusion of recollections regarding these two men, transforming into the expectant Rodolphe beside her. If one observes the rippling effect in the second theme in regards to the first theme, we can see that she is just as philistine as the characters in the first theme; she is not falling in love for Rodolphe for the sake of the person Rodolphe, but rather for an imaginary, frustrated emotion conjured up through fantasies of what romantic love is like.

The two themes, as with the previous example, continue to become more and more enmeshed, not only thematically but even structurally. Shortly after the previous section, a thematic climax takes place after Monsieur Derozerays, following Lieuvain, takes to the podium. The counterpoint appears to accelerate in a manner reminiscent

of musical *stretto*, often found in the development sections of sonata form. First, there is a paragraph in which the actions of the couple are embedded in the action of the *comices*: "Rodolphe, avec madame Bovary, causait rêves, pressentiments, magnétisme. Remontant au berceau des sociétés, [Derozerays] vous dépeignait ces temps farouches où les hommes vivaient de glands, au fond des bois (...) Du magnétisme, peu à peu, Rodolphe en était venu aux affinités, et, tandis que M. le président citait Cincinnatus à sa charrue (...) le jeune homme expliquait à la jeune femme que ces attractions irrésistibles tiraient leur cause de quelque existence antérieure."¹⁰¹ Then, the acceleration intensifies with every sentence of dialogue alternating between Rodolphe's passionate declaration of love and the pronouncement of the winners of the *comices* by M. Derozerays. This is purely musical; as Daniel C. Melnick observes in his *Fullness of Dissonance: Modern Fiction and the Aesthetics of Music*, "to the extent that these voices clash and destabilize the reading process, there is a dissonant counterpoint to be heard."¹⁰² The two themes are so much intertwined that in the end, the full satirical import of the structure is realized. There is an "ironic assault" and a "sinister dissonance"¹⁰³, the romantic overtures are crushed by the short, pragmatical phrases of names, prizes, and 'cultures'. Rodolphe, by the end of the climax, wins the prize as M. Bizet for his "ensemble de bonnes cultures"¹⁰⁴; his fake nature is revealed for a moment within the musical structure.

The recapitulation -- which is a repetition of the themes -- occurs after the thematic climax, after Rodolphe declares his love for her and she does not resist, but rather reciprocates his advances¹⁰⁵. The first theme of the *comices* strongly returns with the rewarding of the old servant woman. As the counterpoint is suspended, the *comices* theme

engulfs the second theme (the budding romance) and a shift of perspective in the dialogue from the two lovers to the judge's as he announces the winner on the platform occurs, signifying the triumph of hypocrisy. The second theme appears briefly and faintly when Rodolphe thinks about Emma¹⁰⁶ and the failing fireworks foreshadow Emma's romantic failures later in the novel. As in the *sonata-allegro* form, in which the second theme joins the original key of the first theme, here we also observe that in fact Rodolphe and Emma are philistines¹⁰⁷, just like Homais and the officials of the *comices*¹⁰⁸. The passage ends on an extended *Coda*, with Homais as the primary character and the main theme. His comical obsession with the dying fireworks and the firemen, and his 'erudite' and grandiose article he writes about the event, lends an air of finality to Flaubert's symphony. It is with bitter irony that the chapter ends not with Emma's romantic illusions (as she "ne trouve[nt] rien de plus grand que cette misère, même de la vie, dont elle tache sans cesse de se dégager"¹⁰⁹), but with the triumph of self-satisfied mediocrity. Through contrapuntal clues, Flaubert is able to subvert Emma's fantastical dreams of romance and alert the reader to the presence of the pseudo-true, the pseudo-deep, and the pseudo-sincere in her misguided notions of love. By employing a symphonic form which results in the eventual subordination of the romantic theme, the perspicacious reader is already able to apprehend that Emma's idealistic aspirations are unsound, and that she is imprisoned and doomed to die in a depressingly philistine milieu of which she is fully a member.

When Flaubert undertook the writing of his *comice* chapter, he was heralding an "innovation"¹¹⁰ in literature that no one had previously made use of: "the method of *parallel interlinings* and interruptions of two or more conversations or trains of thought."

¹¹¹ Only in musical counterpoint would he find a device to effectively unite his intricate themes. And even though he may not have consciously taken emulated a textbook template of sonata form, it seems evident that he discovered them intuitively, since his quest for stylistic perfection encompassed the notions which composers also grapple with: the concepts of balance, equilibrium and contrast which gave rise to the form. And we apprehend something else, in his musical approach that proves essential in our understanding of his creative process. Flaubert was disgusted by the bourgeois subject of *Madame Bovary*, and would frequently express frustration with having to create a world populated by the philistine inanities he so despised¹¹². However, he also purposely chose the theme in keeping with his belief that beauty could be attained through style alone. He wished to "bêlé après l'infini"¹¹³ in "la forme, le Beau indefinissable, résultant de la conception même et qui est la splendeur du Vrai, comme disait Platon"¹¹⁴. The highest goal of Art, Flaubert once asserted, was to "faire rêver (...) [de] quelque chose de singulièrement doux [qui] plane sur l'ensemble."¹¹⁵ Despite the unsavory subject matter, Flaubert achieves this "douceur" by eliciting a sense of aesthetic repose in the reader. Just as one can thrill in the skilled interweaving of specific harmonic progressions, motives, or counterpoint, the observant reader realizes that Flaubert's mastery becomes something beautiful in itself. In the end, his consummate command of architecture transcends the subject matter. Even when the mediocrity of his characters begin to weigh on us, when we witness his maneuvering of the elaborate symphonic form, imbibing his chapter becomes an aesthetically exhilarating experience.

References

1 “Elle sera énorme ; ça aura bien trente pages. Il faut que, dans le récit de cette fête rustico-municipale et parmi ses détails (où tous les personnages secondaires du livre paraissent, parlent et agissent), je poursuive, et au premier plan, le dialogue continu d'un monsieur chauffant une dame. J'ai de plus, au milieu, le discours solennel d'un conseiller de préfecture, et à la fin (tout terminé) un article de journal fait par mon pharmacien, qui rend compte de la fête en bon style philosophique, poétique et progressif.”

Gustave Flaubert, Letter to Louise Colet, July 15 1853.

2 English: “It will be huge -- about thirty manuscript pages. This is what I want to do. While describing that rural show (where all the secondary characters of the book appear, speak, and act) I shall pursue...between its details and on the front of the stage a continuous dialogue between a lady and a gentleman who is turning his charm on her.

Moreover, I have in the middle of a solemn speech of a councilor and at the end something I have quite finished writing, namely a newspaper article by Homais, who gives an account of the festivities in his best philosophic, poetic, and progressive style.”

Translation by Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, ed. Fredson Bowers (San Diego, CA: Harvest, 1982), 155.

3 Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, ed. Fredson Bowers (San Diego, CA: Harvest, 1982), 155.

4 “Mes comices m'embêtaient tellement que j'ai lâché là, pour jusqu'à ce qu'ils soient finis, grec et latin.”

Flaubert, Letter to Louise Colet, October 12, 1853.

5 Flaubert, Letter to Louise Colet, September 7, 1853.

6 English: “How difficult it is...A tough chapter. I have therein all the characters of my book intermingled in action and in dialogue, and...a big landscape that envelops them.” Translation by Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 156.

7 Flaubert, Letter to Louise Colet, September 7, 1853.

8 English: “If I succeed it will be most symphonic.” Translation by Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 156.

9 Flaubert, Letter to Louise Colet, October 12, 1853.

10 English: “If ever the values of a symphony have been transferred to literature, it will be in this chapter of my book. It must be a vibrating totality of sounds. One should hear simultaneously the bellowing of the bulls, the murmur of love, and the phrases of the politicians.” Translation by Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 156.

11 Flaubert thought that the comices chapter particularly lent itself to a dramatic musical treatment, and compares his composition of the chapter to that of a composer: “l'orchestration des comices, les plans sonores, les contrepoints” -- orchestrating, coloring its textures, and creating polyphony. (Christian Goubault. “Flaubert et la Musique.” *Les Amis de Flaubert et de Maupassant Bulletin* n° 51 (1977): 12.

[http://www.amis-flaubert-maupassant.fr/article-bulletins/051_012/.](http://www.amis-flaubert-maupassant.fr/article-bulletins/051_012/))

12 The term typically refers to the initial movement of a multi-movement work -- such as a symphony or sonata -- in a brisk tempo, hence the term *allegro*.

13 G. Jean-Aubry, “Gustave Flaubert And Music,” *Music and Letters* XXXI, no. 1 (1950): 16.

14 “Caroline Flaubert was a fairly skilful pianist at the age of seventeen, but also that her choice of composers [(Chopin, Spohr and Beethoven)] was an improvement on those who as a rule delighted the musical amateurs in the French provinces fourteen years after Beethoven's death and eight before Chopin's.” G. Jean-Aubry, “Gustave Flaubert And Music,” *Music and Letters* XXXI, no. 1 (1950): 14.

15 Christian Goubault. “Flaubert et la Musique.” *Les Amis de Flaubert et de Maupassant Bulletin* n° 51 (1977): 12. [http://www.amis-flaubert-maupassant.fr/article-bulletins/051_012/.](http://www.amis-flaubert-maupassant.fr/article-bulletins/051_012/)

16 Gustave Flaubert, *Oeuvres complètes: tome 1* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977), 243.

17 English: “I do not know of what magic power music is possessed: for weeks together I have dreamed of the rhythmic cadences of some air or of the spacious outlines of a majestic chorus: there are sounds which enter into my soul and voices that make me dissolve in delight. I loved the roaring orchestra, with its floods of harmony, its mute vibrations, and that immense vigour which seems to have muscles and dies at the point of the bow; my soul followed the melody unfolding its wings towards infinity and rising in spirals towards heaven, pure and slow, like a perfume.” Translated by G. Jean-Aubry, “Gustave Flaubert And Music,” *Music and Letters* XXXI, no. 1 (1950): 18.

18 “[Flaubert] did not forget to let her know that he went to hear Adelina Patti, who that night had seemed “marvellous” to him, and that he had met and heard Sarasate at the Viardots' [salon].” G. Jean-Aubry, “Gustave Flaubert And Music,” *Music and Letters* XXXI, no. 1 (1950): 17.

19 “I have been to the theatre only twice this winter, both times to hear Mme. Viardot in [Gluck's] 'Orphee'.” Letter to Mile. Leroyer de Chantepie, March 30, 1860, as quoted in G. Jean-Aubry, “Gustave Flaubert And Music,” *Music and Letters* XXXI, no. 1 (1950): 17.

20 Flaubert, Letters to Louise Colet, September 7 and October 12, 1853.

21 « Poètes, sculpteurs, peintres et musiciens, nous respirons l'existence à travers la phrase, le contour, la couleur ou l'harmonie, et nous trouvons tout cela le plus beau du monde » Letter to Louise Colet, January 29 1854.

English: "As poets, sculptors, painters and musicians, we breathe air through the phrase, the contour, the color or the harmony, and we find all of this the most beautiful thing in the world." by Sarah Le Van

22 Margaret E. Atkinson, "Musical Form in Some Romantic Writings," *The Modern Language Review* vol. 44, no. 2 (1949): 219, doi:10.2307/3716982.

23 *Ibids.*,

24 Alan Frederick Shockley, *Music in the words: musical form and counterpoint in the twentieth century novel* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009), 10. In this work, Shockley analyses several 20th century novels and the musical forms they derive themselves from.

25 Robert Boyle, "'Ulysses' as Frustrated Sonata Form," *James Joyce Quarterly* vol. 2, no. 4 (Summer 1965): <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25486519>.

26 Robert Boyle, "'Ulysses' as Frustrated Sonata Form," *James Joyce Quarterly* vol. 2, no. 4 (Summer 1965): 247, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25486519>.

27 Robert Boyle, "'Ulysses' as Frustrated Sonata Form," *James Joyce Quarterly* vol. 2, no. 4 (Summer 1965): 247, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25486519>.

28 Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 160.

29 Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* (London: Faber, 1987), 30.

30 Robert Boyle, "Ulysses as Frustrated Sonata Form", 247.

31 There is an excellent description of sonata form in Robert Boyle's *Ulysses as Frustrated Sonata Form.*, 247

32 Alan Frederick Shockley, *Music in the words: musical form and counterpoint in the twentieth century novel* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009), 11.

33 *Ibids.*,

34 Ludwig van Beethoven, *Sixth Symphony, Op. 68* (New York: Dover Publications, 1976).

35 James Hepokoski. *Masculine. Feminine. Are Current Readings of Sonata Form in Terms of a 'Masculine' and 'Feminine' Dichotomy Exaggerated? James Hepokoski Argues for a More Subtle Approach to the Politics of Musical Form.* 494.

36 "In this pair of themes... the first theme is the one determined at the outset, that is, with a primary freshness and energy - consequently that which is energetically, emphatically, absolutely shaped... the dominating and determining feature. On the other

hand, the second theme... is the [idea] created afterward [Nachgeschaffne], serving as a contrast, dependent on and determined by the former - consequently, and according to its nature necessarily, the milder [idea], one more supple [schmiegsam] than emphatically shaped, as if it were [gleichsam] the feminine to that preceding masculine. In just this sense each of the two themes is different, and only with one another [do they constitute something] higher, more perfect."

(Adolf Bernhard Marx, *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition, praktisch-theoretisch.* (Leipzig: na, 1845), quoted in James Hepokoski, "Masculine. Feminine. Are Current Readings of Sonata Form in Terms of a 'Masculine' and 'Feminine' Dichotomy Exaggerated? James Hepokoski Argues for a More Subtle Approach to the Politics of Musical Form," *The Musical Times* vol. 135, no. 1818 (August 1994): 494, doi:10.2307/1003328.)

37 "[T]he notion of gendered themes is in fact the most widely perpetuated aspect of his [Marx's] theory throughout the later nineteenth century: it may well be the single most influential idea in Marx's entire oeuvre."

(Stephen Burnham, "A.B. Marx and the gendering of sonata form," 183, quoted in Alan Frederick Shockley, *Music in the words: musical form and counterpoint in the twentieth century novel* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009), 10.)

38 Alan Frederick Shockley, *Music in the words: musical form and counterpoint in the twentieth century novel*

(Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009), 10.

39 Flaubert, Letter to Louise Colet, April 24 1852

40 English: "Woman's heart is a pianoforte on which man, that artistic egoist, chooses to play tunes with which to shine, and all whose keys respond." Translation by G. Jean-Aubry, "Gustave Flaubert And Music," *Music and Letters* XXXI, no. 1 (1950): 16, doi:10.1093/ml/xxxi.1.13.)

41 Nabokov, *Lecture on Literature*, 126.

42 Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov, *Lectures on Russian Literature*, ed. Fredson Bowers (London: Picador, 1983), 309.

43 Nabokov, *Lectures on Russian Literature*, 310.

44 Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 126.

45 Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 127.

46 In the development, the agriculturists designate the cowherds and shepherds, who are only concerned with their own activities and have no interest than those related to their immediate needs. *Ibids.*,173.

47 English: "Some sort of old-cannon" Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary: moeurs de province* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1983), 156.

48 *Ibids.*, 156.

- 49 *Ibids.*, 156.
- 50 English: "Never was there such a deployment of pomp!" *Ibids.*,
- 51 *Ibids.*, 157.
- 52 English: "greenish" "enrichen by inscriptions in golden letters" *Ibids.*, 157.
- 53 Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, 157.
- 54 "All such great words as "Beauty," "Love," "Nature," "Truth," and so on become masks and dupes when the smug vulgarian employs them." Nabokov, *Lectures on Russian Literature*, 310.
- 55 *Ibids.*, 169.
- 56 *Ibids.*, 173.
- 57 *Ibids.*, 158.
- 58 *Ibids.*, 158.
- 59 Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 149.
- 60 Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, 159.
- 61 "Ainsi, moi, j'ai dernièrement écrit un fort opuscule, un mémoire de plus de soixante et douze pages, intitulé : Du cidre, de sa fabrication et de ses effets ; suivi de quelques réflexions nouvelles à ce sujet, que j'ai envoyé à la Société agronomique de Rouen ; ce qui m'a même valu l'honneur d'être reçu parmi ses membres, section d'agriculture, classe de pomologie ; eh bien, si mon ouvrage avait été livré à la publicité..." *Ibid.*, 159
- 62 Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, 160.
- 63 Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 142.
- 64 Lheureux greets them with trivialities and clichés, referring to the good weather as coming from the gentle east wind: "Voici une journée superbe ! tout le monde est dehors ! les vents sont à l'est." *Ibids.*, 161.
- 65 Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 156.
- 66 Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 156.
- 67 According to Vladimir Nabokov, romantic is defined by "(...) characterized by a dreamy, imaginative habit of mind tending to dwell on picturesque possibilities derived mainly from literature." (...) A romantic person, mentally and emotionally living in the unreal, is profound or shallow depending on the quality of his or her mind. Emma Bovary (...) has a shallow mind (...) [with] a fatal streak of philistinism in her." Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 132.
- 68 Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, 162.
- 69 *Ibids.*, 160.
- 70 *Ibids.*, 162.
- 71 *Ibids.*, 160.
- 72 *Ibids.*, 160.
- 73 "[O]n voyait se lever au vent, comme un flot, quelque crinière blanche" *Ibids.*, 162.
- 74 Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, 160.
- 75 *Ibids.*, 162.
- 76 *Ibids.*, 161.
- 77 *Ibids.*, 162.
- 78 "[Y]eux aux longs cils courbes regardaient devant elle, et, quoique bien ouverts, ils semblaient un peu bridés par les pommettes, à cause du sang, qui battait doucement sous sa peau fine" *Ibids.*, 160-61.
; "étaient leur ventre sur le gazon, et, ruminant lentement, clignaient leurs paupières lourdes, sous les moucherons qui bourdonnaient autour d'elles." *Ibids.*, 162.
- 79 "[I]l y avait un grand taureau noir muselé , portant un cercle de fer à la narine, et qui ne bougeait pas plus qu'une bête de bronze. Un enfant en haillons le tenait par une corde." *Ibids.*, 162.
- 80 "il était de tempérament brutal et d'intelligence perspicace, ayant d'ailleurs beaucoup fréquenté les femmes, et s'y connaissant bien. Celle-là [Emma] lui avait paru jolie" *Ibids.*, 154.
- 81 "Elle en est fatiguée sans doute. Il porte des ongles sales et une barbe de trois jours. Tandis qu'il trotte à ses malades, elle reste à ravauder des chaussettes. Et on s'ennuie ! on voudrait habiter la ville, danser la polka tous les soirs ! Pauvre petite femme ! Ça bâille après l'amour, comme une carpe après l'eau sur une table de cuisine. Avec trois mots de galanterie, cela vous adorerait, j'en suis sûr ! ce serait tendre ! charmant !... Oui, mais comment s'en débarrasser ensuite ?" *Ibids.*, 154
- 82 *Ibids.*, 161.
- 83 *Ibids.*, 164.
- 84 "if"
- 85 "I would have"
- 86 "Et elle jurait qu'elle ne se moquait pas, quand un coup de canon retentit; aussitôt, on se poussa, pêle-mêle, vers le village." Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*. 165.
- 87 Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 156.
- 88 "Counterpoint." *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed. rev.. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e2498>.
- 89 "[They] sit down on the balcony of the town hall to watch the show on the platform, listen to the speakers, and indulge in a flirtatious conversation" Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 157.
- 90 Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, 171.
- 91 *Ibids.*, 172.
- 92 *Ibids.*, 173.
- 93 *Ibids.*, 174.
- 94 *Ibids.*, 171.
- 95 *Ibids.*, 172.
- 96 *Ibids.*, 173.
- 97 Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, 172.
- 98 "La visière de son casque qui lui descendait sur le nez." *Ibids.*,

- 99 "Une expression de jouissance, d'accablement et de sommeil." *Ibids.*,
 100 *Ibids.*, 173.
 101 Flaubert, Madame Bovary, 175.
 102 Daniel C. Melnick, *Fullness of Dissonance: Modern Fiction and the Aesthetics of Music* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994), 36.
 103 *Ibids.*,
 104 Flaubert, Madame Bovary, 175.
 105 "Un désir suprême faisait frissonner leurs lèvres sèches; et mollement, sans effort, leurs doigts se confondirent." *Ibids.*, 177.
 106 "[Rodolphe] pensait si fort a Emma" *Ibids.*, 179
 107 "A romantic person, mentally and emotionally living in the unreal, is profound or shallow depending on the quality of his or her mind. Emma Bovary[’s] charm, beauty, and refinement do not preclude a fatal streak of philistinism in her. Her exotic daydreams do not prevent her from being small-town bourgeois at heart, clinging to conventional ideas or committing this or that conventional violation of the conventional, adultery being a most conventional way to rise above the conventional." Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 132.
 108 "She lives among philistines, and she is a philistine herself. Her mental vulgarity is not so obvious as that of Homais. [...] one cannot help feeling that Homais and Emma not only phonetically echo each other but do have something in common- and that something is the vulgar cruelty of their natures. In Emma the vulgarity, the philistinism, is veiled by her grace, her cunning, her beauty, her meandering intelligence, her power of idolisation, her moments of tenderness and understanding, and by the fact that her brief bird life ends in human tragedy." Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 142.
 109 Flaubert, Gustave. *Oeuvres Complètes Et Annexes — 69 Titres*.
 110 Will Norman, Nabokov, *History and the Texture of Time* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 15.
 111 Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 147.
 112 "[C]e sujet bourgeois me dégoûte" Flaubert, Letter to Louise Colet, September 12, 1853.
 113 "Je trouve que l'homme (...) belle apres l'infini" (Flaubert, Gustave. *Oeuvres Complètes Et Annexes — 69 Titres*)
 114 Flaubert, Letter to Mademoiselle Leroyer de Chantepie, May 18, 1857.
 115 Flaubert, Letter to Louise Colet, August 26, 1853.

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