

# and Emma at the Opera

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A major preoccupation for nineteenth-century writers was whether and how literature might be associated with the other arts. Flaubert shared this preoccupation, though the kind of association he envisaged did not involve any crude correlation. His interests lay more with the visual arts than with music. Certain musical forms do occupy a privileged position in his *œuvre*, but these forms tend to escape the traditional canon. The music of the barrel-organ is one example – Flaubert ascribes his own fascination with this form to Emma Bovary;<sup>1</sup> or half-heard songs almost lost on the air – again, Flaubert's own responses lie behind those of his characters.<sup>2</sup> Part of the charm of this kind of music lies in its imperfection: the words are banal, and struggle to emerge from the music, and both words and music are often half-obliterated by other, *natural* sounds. However, this seems to make their impact all the more powerful and expressive – Emma hearing the song of the *Aveugle* is shaken to the core, though she does not hear the words until she dies. Music is always a focus for strong emotion, and that

<sup>1</sup> See Flaubert, *Correspondance* (Paris: Gallimard, Éditions du Pléiade, 1973–), i. 112; *Novembre, Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 'L'Intégrale', 1964), i. 252, 274; *L'Éducation sentimentale* (1845), *Ibid.* i. 307; *Madame Bovary*, ed. C. Gothot-Mersch (Paris: Garnier, 1971), 67; *CP* i. 221. All subsequent references to Flaubert's *Correspondance* will be to the Pléiade edition listed above, abbreviated to *CP*; references to *Madame Bovary* will be to the Garnier edition; references to Flaubert's other works to the 'Intégrale' edition (Int.).

<sup>2</sup> See *Pyrénées et Corse*, Int. ii. 431; *Par les champs et par les grèves*, ed. A. Tooke (Geneva: Droz, 1987), 384; *Madame Bovary*, 262; *L'Éducation sentimentale*, Int. ii. 10.



emotion is often, if not always, love: Léon is enraptured as Emma 'murders' *Le Lac* in their boat in Rouen harbour; Mâtho falls in love with Salammbô when she sings songs he cannot understand, Frédéric with Mme Arnoux as the struggling harpist sings. Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* shares some of the same characteristics as these more lowly musical forms, stirring Emma to her depths, and tilting her into her final love-affair, with Léon.

Though Flaubert was in the habit of ascribing his own responses to art to his characters, in varying guises, there is no evidence that he responded to opera quite so feverishly as Emma does, whereas his passionate response to paintings is amply recorded. The only indication that opera did move him deeply is in a letter of 1846, where he states that Mozart's *Don Giovanni* is one of the three most beautiful of God's creations (the others being *Hamlet* and the sea).<sup>3</sup> However seriously we take that statement, it is certain that, as one of what Lindenberger calls the 'extravagant arts', opera was ideal for Flaubert's purposes in *Madame Bovary*. Lindenberger points out that many nineteenth-century novels, English and French, incorporate an opera, to represent the 'high style' which they voluntarily deny themselves.<sup>4</sup> Where *Salammbô* and *La Tentation de saint Antoine* are operatic, *Madame Bovary* is about opera. E. M. Forster gives *Lucia* much the same role in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, and his textual reference to *Madame Bovary* seems to reinforce that point.<sup>5</sup> For Forster, as for Flaubert, *Lucia* represents something larger than life, upsetting the staid visitors from Sawston but enabling one of them, Philip, to make a temporary escape into a more liberated and liberating existence. The opera has a twofold function, representing a richer, fuller life for Philip, a richer, grander art

form for Forster. That is also the case in *Madame Bovary*. For Emma, the opera seems to offer everything that normal life cannot; for Flaubert, it is part of his continuing private project, the long meditation on art that constitutes his entire *œuvre*, above and beyond the subjects of his books. The opera is part of Flaubert's 'higher narrative'<sup>6</sup> as it is of Emma's. As a multiple art-form, combining music, theatre, the visual arts, and the written and spoken word, opera embodies most of what he would have liked his own art to be able to do—he tells the Goncourt brothers that he would like his novels to evoke a colour, for example,<sup>7</sup> and his wish for what might be called a musical dimension to his writing is reflected in his habit of 'performing' his texts in the famous 'gueuloir', as if they were a libretto. Dubious as he was about associations between the arts, he was nevertheless very enthusiastic about the idea of Verdi making an opera of *Salammbô* (with Gautier providing the libretto).<sup>8</sup> Opera, then, represents some kind of ideal, for writing—'attendrir les étoiles', as against writing's actual achievements which may be better represented by the little popular ditties which haunt Flaubert's characters as they haunted him: the 'mélodies à faire danser des ours'.<sup>9</sup>

*Lucia di Lammermoor* was the ideal choice for Emma's opera. First, there were the connections with Scott and his *Bride of Lammermoor*. Scott was childhood reading for Emma, as he had been for Flaubert himself.<sup>10</sup> Scott's Lucy is in some ways rather like Emma, though

<sup>6</sup> Lindenberger, *Opera*, 159: 'This scene [the opera], which serves as the culmination of the novel's second part, in turn continues and intensifies the higher narrative that had been going on in Emma's consciousness since her first appearance in the book.'

<sup>7</sup> See E. et J. de Goncourt, *Journal*, ed. R. Ricatte, 3 vols. (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1989), quoting Flaubert: 'J'ai la pensée, quand je fais un roman, de rendre une coloration, une nuance. Par exemple dans mon roman carthaginois, je veux faire quelque chose pourpre. Dans *Madame Bovary*, je n'ai eu que l'idée de rendre un ton, cette couleur de moisissure de l'existence des cloportes [...]', i. 673-4 (17 mars 1861); and Alan Raitt, 'Flaubert Off-Stage and On-Stage', *Essays in Memory of Michael Parkinson and Janine Dakyns*, ed. Christopher Smith, Norwich Papers IV, 1996, 107-12.

<sup>8</sup> See CPiii. 317, letter of 3. 4. 1863 to Gautier, and note. For Flaubert's plan for the opera see *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Club de l'Honnête Homme, 1971-6), ii. 365 ff.

<sup>9</sup> *Madame Bovary*, 196: 'la parole humaine est comme un chaudron fêlé où nous battons des mélodies à faire danser les ours, quand on voudrait attendrir les étoiles'.

<sup>10</sup> See *Madame Bovary*, 38 and *L'Éducation sentimentale*, Int. ii. 13. For Flaubert's reading of Scott see J. Bruneau, *Les Débuts littéraires de Gustave Flaubert* (Paris: A Colin, 1962),

<sup>3</sup> CPi. 373 (3. 10. 1846): 'Les trois plus belles choses que Dieu ait faites c'est la mer, l'*Hamlet* et le *Don Juan* de Mozart.'

<sup>4</sup> 'The presence of operatic scenes in fiction is a tacit admission of the limits that the novel set for itself from its beginnings in *Don Quixote* until the linguistic experiments of our own century attempted to erase these limits [...]. Seen through the novelists' eyes, opera pursues the high style with an unselfconscious ease impossible within any of the literary genres' (H. Lindenberger, *Opera: The Extravagant Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 166).

<sup>5</sup> E. M. Forster, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics), 107-12. See below for the cross-reference.



not perhaps in the ways Emma herself perceives. Lucy is a dreamer, like Emma, and loves what Scott calls 'old legendary tales'.<sup>11</sup> The opera itself, Romantic and 'extravagant', is programmed to elicit exactly the response it receives from Emma (and indeed from the audience as a whole). Its setting is exotic (Scotland) so guaranteed to appeal to Emma's wish to be 'out of this world'. Flaubert himself knew the opera from having seen it in Constantinople, in Italian, in 1850;<sup>12</sup> and there was a French version, so that Emma could follow the libretto.<sup>13</sup> The French version had moreover been performed in Rouen at least twice—on 29 December 1839 and again on 28 August 1851.<sup>14</sup> There is no evidence that Flaubert saw either of these

and the works listed in n. 15. Flaubert owned Scott's complete works: see the 'Inventaire après décès de la bibliothèque de Flaubert', reproduced in Flaubert, *Carnets de travail*, ed. P.-M. de Biasi (Paris: Balland, 1988), 947–56.

<sup>11</sup> This connection is made by both Lindenberger, *Opera*, and Graham Daniels, 'Emma Bovary's Opera—Flaubert, Scott and Donizetti', *French Studies* (1978), 286–7. Others, too, have compared and contrasted Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819) with Donizetti's opera (1835) (see n. 14). The major differences are that the opera simplifies and selects, in ways which seem consistent with Scott's intentions, though these are not always plainly manifest: it deletes the character of Lucy's mother, who in Scott was the main instigator of the plan to separate Edgar and Lucy—thus the sense of Lucia being hounded by men, which is implicit in the novel, is emphasized in the opera; in the opera Edgar kills himself, whereas Scott has him perish in a quicksand, no doubt symbolically (one could imagine several reasons for that substitution, including the difficulty of singing in sand); the opera concentrates on drama and plays down serious social facts—thus, it covers only the last third of the novel, and omits all of what Lindenberger calls the novel's 'lower narrative', that is, the details of political machinations, of everyday life and local colour, which act as a fascinating backdrop for the love-affair between Lucy and Edgar, one representing a family of the commercial classes, the other the fast-vanishing feudal aristocracy; also, in the novel, Arthur Buckwell is an amiable ne'er-do-well—he is given more dignity in the opera; while Lucy's brother Henry, who in the novel is just a little boy, whose main fault is to be entirely self-absorbed, is transformed in the opera to become a cruel patriarchal figure (the father in the novel is not stern at all, except when pushed by his domineering wife). There is more to say on the relationship between Flaubert and Scott.

<sup>12</sup> Flaubert, *Voyage en Orient*, Int. ii. 644 and *CP* i. 704.

<sup>13</sup> *Lucia* was first performed in Naples in 1835. The French version was supervised by Donizetti himself, with a libretto by Alphonse Royer and Gustave Vaex (see n. 16 for bibliographical details). This French version was first performed in Paris in 1839 at the Théâtre de la Renaissance, and was a huge success. See Daniels, 'Emma Bovary's Opera', 302.

<sup>14</sup> Information, *ibid.* 302 n. 24. This note also gives details of the Paris productions.

productions, though his remark on the Constantinople production ('représentée convenablement') does suggest that he had other productions to compare it with.

Several scholars have turned their attention to this most flamboyant of 'set pieces'.<sup>15</sup> Most have dwelt on the ramifications of the fact that the opera is an ironic *mise en abyme* of Emma's life, and far more tellingly so than she herself recognizes. She is selective: she 'identifies' enthusiastically with Lucie<sup>16</sup> in Acts I and II, loses interest when Léon appears, and eats ice creams through the 'scène de la folie' and the deaths which follow. I should like to suggest further applications of the *mise en abyme*, examining in particular how the opera may relate to that other, neglected spectator, Charles. Also, as a subsidiary aim, I would like to begin by clarifying the relationship between Flaubert's text and the French libretto.

The *Lucia* most people know today is the original Italian version. Musically, the French version does not differ from it greatly. It is slightly longer. There are four short acts instead of two longer ones. There are several changes, but none of them is substantial. One minor character is dropped, others expanded. Some scenes are cut, others added. The effect, I think, is to make the French *Lucie* more Romantic than the Italian, with more activity and business on stage. Any new music as such was mostly only for the recitative. But there is one substantial change which affects *Madame Bovary*: the *cavatina* we hear today is not the one Flaubert made Emma hear, as we shall see.

It is remarkable that all Flaubert had to work with when writing this episode was the French libretto, which he seems to have had to hand, as it has left very precise traces in the text, and his memories of only one, or two, performances. His evocation

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 285–303; Joël-Marie Fauquet, 'Emma et Lucia, ou "l'attirante fantasmagorie des réalités sentimentales"', *L'Avant-scène Opéra*, 55 (Sept. 1983), 92–5; Nathaniel Wing, *The Limits of Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 62–6; John R. Williams, 'Emma Bovary and the Bride of Lammermoor', *Nineteenth Century French Studies* (1991–2), 352–60; Lindenberger, *Opera*, 156–66. For studies of the opera, see Herbert Weinstock, *Donizetti and the World of Opera in Italy* (London: Methuen, 1964) and William Ashbrook, *Donizetti and his Operas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>16</sup> I use the French versions of names, as Flaubert does.



of the drama and the music is astonishingly accurate, and the reminiscences of the libretto in the text are more telling than has yet been recognized.<sup>17</sup>

The opera episode is narrated almost entirely from Emma's point of view, though this view is laced, typically, with an alternative ironic narrative perspective. The rhythm of Flaubert's writing echoes the pattern of Emma's responses, lingering where she lingers, and echoing the sudden *coups de foudre* in the tenses of its verbs—'une jeune femme s'avança' (228), 'Lagardy parut' (229), 'un homme parut' (231). Irony is all-pervasive, as has been frequently remarked—Emma, 'plus sentimentale qu'artiste', is enthusiastic and responsive but sees only what can fit her own experience (distorting and ignoring where necessary); and the performance itself seems to leave much to be desired, Lagardy overweight and over-acting, Lucie possibly not quite up to it ('entama d'un air brave...'), the singers in the sextet gesticulating like puppets, the scenery wobbling. However, irony is never necessarily Flaubert's last word—Lagardy may be a 'charlatan' but he is also a 'toréador', and there is no suggestion that his singing is deficient; the sextet may resemble a line of singing puppets, but puppets have powerful aesthetic appeal in Flaubert; the scenery may wobble, but in Flaubert art that draws attention to its own illusion by whatever means never fails to charm.

As has often been remarked, the opera recedes from the text as Emma's attention first falters and is then withdrawn entirely as the pleasures of art give way to those more obviously of the flesh. However, the opera is present in the text in its entirety, though with varying degrees of intensity. What follows is a summary of the French version of the opera, with references to Flaubert's text at critical points. (I use the French names as they appear in *Madame Bovary* not the libretto: that is, 'Edgar' not 'Edgard', 'Ashton' not

<sup>17</sup> Daniels discusses the libretto ('Emma Bovary's Opera', 295–7) and its relationship to the text, but there are some inaccuracies and omissions. My quotations from the libretto are from the original score: Donizetti, *Lucie de Lamermoor* [sic] Gd. opéra en 3 [sic] actes. Alphonse Royer and Gustave Vaëz, Paris: B. Latte, 1839. See Daniels for information on subsequent publications of the libretto, including the change from three acts to four. (See also Donizetti, *Lucia di Lamermoor*, Dover Opera Guide (1972), 165–83, for an English translation of the libretto of the French version.)

'Ashton' (sic).) Audience response (mainly Emma's and Charles's) will be considered later.

Act I (scenes 1–3) begins by a magic fountain (a central symbol in Scott, too) with a hunting song, interrupted by an exchange between Ashton, who is Lucie's brother, and his servant Gilbert: we learn that the Ravenswoods and the Ashtons are divided by a feud, but that Edgar Ravenswood and Lucie Ashton are in love. Ashton invokes 'l'ange du mal' and vows to marry Lucie to his friend Arthur Buckwell. Arthur enters (sc. 4), and sings of his love for Lucie ('j'aime Lucie et je m'en crois aimé', *Madame Bovary*, 229). The three men exit together, swearing revenge on Edgar.

Flaubert's version of these three scenes, as seen through Emma's eyes, is correct, but vague in certain particulars: Ashton is just 'un capitaine', Arthur even more vaguely 'un autre', thus reflecting no doubt Arthur's insignificance (Charles will shortly show some sympathy with Arthur). This is how Emma perceives the scenes I have just evoked:

C'était le carrefour d'un bois, avec une fontaine, à gauche, ombragée par un chêne. Des paysans et des seigneurs, le plaid sur l'épaule, chantaient tous ensemble une chanson de chasse; puis il survint un capitaine qui invoquait l'ange du mal en levant au ciel ses deux bras; un autre parut; ils s'en allèrent, et les chasseurs reprirent. (*Madame Bovary*, 228)

Act I continues with the entrance of Lucie (sc. 6), handing her purse to Gilbert, who she believes, erroneously, is working for her. She sings her *cavatina*. This sequence is faithfully represented in the novel; Emma has now successfully 'placed' the action, thanks to her memories of Scott and her reading of the libretto.<sup>18</sup>

Mais une jeune femme s'avança en jetant une bourse à un écuyer vert. Elle resta seule, et alors on entendit une flûte qui faisait comme un murmure de fontaine ou comme des gazouillements d'oiseau. Lucie entama d'un air brave sa cavatine en *sol* majeur; elle se plaignait d'amour, elle demandait des ailes. (*Madame Bovary*, 228–9)

<sup>18</sup> It is probable that Daniels worries needlessly about the likelihood of Emma being able to read the libretto during the performance. Lindenberger points out (*Opera*, 131) that houselights were not fully dimmed during performances until fairly late in the nineteenth century, so that audiences customarily followed the libretto in the theatre.



Flaubert's textual references here will be puzzling to the person who knows only the Italian version of this aria, the famous 'Quando, rapiti in estasi...'. For the French version, Donizetti replaced the original with an aria borrowed from an earlier opera called *Rosamonda d'Inghilterra* (1834; also known, confusingly, as *Eleonora de Guyenne*).<sup>19</sup> This is the text of the *cavatina* Flaubert intended Emma to hear (minus several repetitions of phrases):

Que n'avons-nous des ailes  
Au loin portés par elles hors des routes mortelles  
Vers les étoiles, vers les étoiles d'or  
Nos deux esprits fidèles uniraient leur essor,  
Ah! quand la haine barbare en ce monde nous sépare  
Levons les yeux  
Un phare brille, brille au port éternel  
Ceux qu'ici l'on sépare sont unis dans le ciel  
Toi par qui mon coeur rayonne  
Ton amour que Dieu me donne  
Sur mon front chaste couronné  
Fait resplendir le bonheur de nos transports.<sup>20</sup>

Emma's verbal counterpart is somewhat basic, but does after all catch the general drift: 'elle se plaignait d'amour, elle demandait des ailes'.

Act I concludes with the entrance of Edgar (sc. 8)—'Tout à coup, Edgar-Lagardy parut' (*Madame Bovary*, 229). He is about to leave for France, against his will. He and Lucie sing of love and fate and of his hatred of her family, and pledge their love by exchanging rings. Again, Flaubert refers closely to the libretto, though extremely selectively:

Dès la première scène, il enthousiasma. Il pressait Lucie dans ses bras, il la quittait, il revenait, il semblait désespéré: il avait des éclats de colère, puis des râles élogiaques d'une douceur infinie, et les notes s'échappaient de son cou nu, pleines de sanglots et de baisers...; les amoureux parlaient

<sup>19</sup> I am indebted to the late Nicholas John, of English National Opera, for supplying me with this information.

<sup>20</sup> The text of the *ariosos* appears pp. 34-9 of the original score. I quote from pp. 34-7.

des fleurs de leur tombe, de serments, d'exil, de fatalité, d'espérances, et quand ils poussèrent l'adieu final, Emma jeta un cri aigu [...]. (*Madame Bovary*, 229-30)

Emma, 'esprit positif au milieu de ses enthousiasmes', cuts through adipose tissue to focus exclusively on the key words, the favoured Romantic triggers of emotion: nature, death, vows, exile, fate, hope, farewell. What Emma despaired of ever seeing—the realization of all her Romantic icons—is here, incredibly, embodied (as, later, Madame Arnoux embodies for Frédéric all the heroines from Romantic books).

This is the text of the duet, with the key phrases italicized:

E. Sur la tombe de mon père  
J'ai juré dans ma colère à ta race vengeance et guerre  
J'ai juré mort en retour  
Mais je te vis et dans mon âme  
Dieu mit un doux rayon d'amour,  
Mais ma tâche me réclame  
Je pourrais oui oui je pourrais l'accomplir un jour  
L. Ah qu'il me reste qu'il me reste l'espérance  
De mon cœur vois l'angoisse, vois la souffrance  
De celui qu'en ta vengeance tu maudis moi je suis la sœur  
Eteins, éteins de tes yeux la flamme  
Vois les miens s'emplier de larmes  
Ah! ta vengeance est infâme Edgard si j'en dois mourir  
E. La vengeance me réclame  
Je pourrais je pourrais l'accomplir encore,  
Ma vengeance me réclame,  
Je pourrais un jour l'accomplir,  
je pourrais un jour punir  
L. Grâce grâce pour moi, veux-tu me voir mourir  
E. Viens sous l'ombre de ce chêne où tu m'as juré ta foi  
*[il la conduit devant la fontaine]*  
Sois témoin sainte fontaine et toi Ciel!  
Elle est à moi. Prends cet anneau

[ils en changent]

*Le tien m'engage. Garde mon gage*



L. Jusqu'au tombeau

L + E. Ah! que Dieu seul vous dénoue,

*Liens formés sur cet autel*

L. *Où mon âme à toi se voue*

L + E. *Que mon pacte s'inscrive au ciel* [ $\times 2$ ]

*J'invoque Dieu même, j'invoque le ciel*

E. Séparons-nous ma Lucie

L. Cher Edgard je meurs d'effroi

Avec toi s'en va ma vie

E. Et mon cœur reste avec toi [ $\times 2$ ]

L. Me quitter ô mon Dieu

E. Nous devons nous dire adieu

L. Qu'une lettre en ma misère vienne au moins me consoler

Et rattache à cette terre l'âme prête à s'envoler.

E. Ma pensée et ma prière vont de loin vers toi voler.

L. Ah! vers toi toujours s'envolera *mon rêve d'espérance*

Le bruit des flots pour toi sera l'écho de ma

souffrance,

Si mon pauvre cœur désolé à sa douleur succombe

*Ah cueille dans ce bois isolé une fleur pour ma tombe*

*Adieu adieu! tout mon bonheur*

La mort la mort est dans mon cœur

*Adieu adieu bonheur*

E. Vers toi toujours s'envolera... l'écho de ma souffrance

Et si ton amant désolé à sa douleur succombe

*Donne une larme à l'exilé*

Que ton cœur soit sa tombe

*Adieu! adieu! tout mon bonheur* [repeatedly]

E. Je pars

L. *Adieu*

E. Nous sommes unis devant Dieu

L. Edgard

E. *Adieu*

By the beginning of Act II, Charles is out of his depth. The first two scenes are full of incident: Gilbert has stolen the ring Lucie had given Edgar; Ashton returns it to Lucie, assuming that she will

interpret this as a sign from Edgar that he does not love her any more; this she duly does, and agrees, with death in her heart, to marry Arthur. Charles asks for explanations, and Emma is obliged to try to explain to Charles an episode which is really in essence only a peg on which to hang the music:

Malgré les explications d'Emma, dès le duo récitatif où Gilbert expose à son maître Ashton ses abominables manœuvres, Charles, en voyant le faux anneau de fiançailles qui doit abuser Lucie, crut que c'était un souvenir d'amour envoyé par Edgar. (*Madame Bovary*, 230)

The marriage contract is signed (scs. 3-4), but Edgar returns unexpectedly in the middle of the ceremony (sc. 5) and not surprisingly is devastated and furious: 'un homme apparut en manteau noir' (*Madame Bovary*, 231). The act ends with the famous sextet, all the men at odds with each other and with Lucie:

Edgar, étincelant de furie, dominait tous les autres de sa voix plus claire. Ashton lui lançait en notes graves des provocations homicides, Lucie poussait sa plainte aigüe, Arthur modulait à l'écart des sons moyens, et la basse-taille du ministre ronflait comme un orgue, tandis que les voix de femmes, répétant ses paroles, reprenaient en chœur, délicieusement. (*Madame Bovary*, 231)

After the interval (and the meeting with Léon, which offers the hope of a solution to Emma, and begins to lessen her identification with the still hapless Lucie), Act III opens with a series of set pieces, simply noted by Flaubert, because his heroine is not attending: 'le chœur des conviés' (sc. 1), 'la scène d'Ashton et de son valet' (sc. 2), 'le grand duo en ré majeur' between Ashton and Arthur (sc. 3) (233). Lucie's marriage to Arthur, the murder of Arthur by Lucie, and her subsequent loss of reason are merely alluded to (the 'scène de la folie', p. 233).

Act IV is devoted wholly to Edgar. Hearing of Lucie's death, he deals himself a mortal wound and sings his final aria, which reaches Emma, Charles, Léon, and the text itself only as the tiniest fragment, through the intermediary of a set of extremely imperfect interpreters emerging from the theatre (this in itself being a *mise en abyme* of Flaubert's assessment of the way we habitually perceive meaning). 'Des gens qui sortaient du spectacle passèrent sur le



trottoir, tout en fredonnant ou braillant à plein gosier: *O bel ange, ma Lucie!* (*Madame Bovary*, 234)

In his presentation of Acts III and IV, then, Flaubert sets up an apparent contrast between the plot of the opera and the plot of his novel. It would seem that, with the end of Act II and the meeting of Léon, the opera narrative lifts away from Emma's at that point. But Flaubert then, typically, undercuts the contrast. One narrative is in fact a continuation of the other by other means:<sup>21</sup> as has been noted, Emma withdraws her attention at the point when tragedy, madness, and death are about to dominate, not only in the opera but also in her life. It has also been noted that the real-life lover Léon takes over from the imagined, idealized 'Edgar-Lagardy'. Emma had been fully engaged in the opera through Acts I and II; their grand climaxes echoed in her. Now that the opera has fulfilled its function, and prepared her for a new love affair, it ceases to signify. Daniels makes the point that this process echoes a similar sequence earlier in the novel: the ball at la Vaubyessard, with the shadowy vicomte figure, prepares her for the earlier relationship with Léon and the subsequent relationship with Rodolphe.<sup>22</sup> Léon takes the place of Lagardy the following evening, when he is supposed to be chaperoning Emma to a repeat performance; and the day after that the transition from ideal to real is complete as they make love in the *fiacre*.

In other words, this episode nudges Emma into the rest of the novel. Theatre itself, it generates the many theatrical motifs in part III: not just the 'stagey' conversation between her and Léon the next night, but afterwards also—the lovers meet in the theatrical quarter of Rouen, Emma is mistaken for an actress by her hairdresser, her sexual encounters with Léon are orchestrated, dramatic and fantasy-ridden, she herself lives in a web of fictions, and her death is theatrical in intent, if not in fact—the Blind Man's song an ironic, distant echo of the operatic arias.

<sup>21</sup> Flaubert uses this method also in *L'Éducation sentimentale*: passion and politics run parallel, and explain each other.

<sup>22</sup> Daniels, 'Emma Bovary's Opera', 288.

So the opera encapsulates the entire narrative of the novel, analeptically and proleptically, pointing back to what has happened and forward to what is to come. Once prefiguring is in question rather than analepsis, that is, once Act III has begun, the opera gradually fades into the background, with only cryptic fragments emerging from the buried hulk. At that point, it assumes a status similar to that of other proleptic fragments in Flaubert's works, such as the only half-apprehended prophecies in *La Légende de saint Julien* or *Hérodiade*.

By 'entire narrative' I do mean the *whole* of what follows, not just the chapters that take us up to the end of Emma's life. Those who have made the point<sup>23</sup> that the opera reflects and anticipates Emma's narrative in its entirety, not just the bits she chooses to apply to herself (with all necessary distortions and modifications), have not considered that the novel continues after Emma is dead. What connection might there be between the final aria 'O bel ange, ma Lucie' and the novel? Are readers, too, inclined to withdraw their attention too soon? Should not the reader pay some attention to Charles?<sup>24</sup> Flaubert has given Charles a back seat throughout the opera episode. But he has supplied enough information to make an alternative reading possible, from Charles's point of view. Charles is there, of course, to accompany Emma; but he approaches the opera with tremendous good will, and wishes only to understand—'C'est que j'aime... à me rendre compte, tu sais bien'. However, without the benefit of Scott or the libretto (has his wife got the only copy?) he floats through Act I in a sea of incomprehension: 'Il avouait, du reste, ne pas comprendre l'histoire, — à cause de la musique — qui nuisait beaucoup aux paroles.' (*Madame Bovary*, 230) In this respect he resembles Forster's Harriet: 'Harriet, like M Bovary on a more famous occasion, was trying to follow the plot. Occasionally she nudged her companions, and asked them what had become of Walter Scott.'<sup>25</sup> At the beginning of Act I Charles asks for explanations. Not knowing the story, and

<sup>23</sup> See e.g. Daniels, 'Emma Bovary's Opera', 297.

<sup>24</sup> J. R. Williams is the only person to note that Charles's grief resembles Edgar's; but he does so in passing.

<sup>25</sup> Forster, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, 109.



not having been able to hear the words, he constructs his own version of the libretto, casting Edgar as a cruel nobleman, persecuting Lucie—'Pourquoi donc, demanda Bovary, ce seigneur est-il à la persécuter?'—while he sees Arthur as being really in love with Lucie. Moreover, Arthur gets on very well with the man Charles perceives to be Lucie's father (who is in reality, as we know, the arrogant, oafish brother, Ashton). So, clearly, according to Charles, Edgar is a brute, and Arthur is the gentle lover:

Pourtant il jure de se venger sur sa famille, tandis que l'autre, celui qui est venu tout à l'heure, disait: 'J'aime Lucie et je m'en crois aimé.' D'ailleurs, il est parti avec son père, bras dessus, bras dessous. Car c'est bien son père, n'est-ce pas, le petit laid qui porte une plume de coq à son chapeau? (*Madame Bovary*, 230)

In Act II, Charles fares no better. He misreads the complicated business of the ring and when he asks for explanations in mid-Act, he is silenced by an exasperated Emma. The text then in its turn is silent about him, leaving him presumably to subside once more into the fog.

His reactions are exactly the inverse of Emma's. He becomes interested and involved at precisely the moment at which she loses interest, that is, after the interval. He expresses that interest in entirely banal terms. He is interested in the 'scène de la folie' because the singer has let her hair down and so 'cela promet d'être tragique' (p. 233). In the café, as he ingests his rum sorbet, he is tantalized by the fragments of song he hears in the street and regrets what he has missed, again in the most banal terms: 'je regrette d'être parti avant la fin, car ça commençait à m'amuser' (p. 234). However, despite their differences, Charles resembles Emma in that he understands the opera according to his lights—he wants to see the mad scene because it looks exciting; he wishes he had witnessed Edgar's final aria because people say it is stupendous. Earlier, his interpretations go haywire not just because Emma has got the book, but also in large part because he is too keen (as she is) to 'identify' with certain characters. Where she sees herself as Lucie, he sees himself as Arthur. So much is clear from his questions and misunderstanding at the end of Act I. He catches and retains Arthur's

line 'J'aime Lucie et je m'en crois aimé' because that is exactly how he feels about Emma; and he assumes that the man Arthur goes off arm in arm with is Lucie's *father*, not her brother, because that reflects exactly the kind of relationship Charles had with Emma's father. Readers who register Charles as *bête* are correct; not only is he *bête* in his own right, but he shares Emma's brand of *bêtise*: he, too, seeks to *copy*. But in fact Charles's *bêtise* is of a superior kind. He may not be able to name characters correctly, he may be deficient in decoding verbal language, but his reading of essence and decoding of musical signs is otherwise impeccable. His assumption that Ashton was Lucie's father was wrong, factually, but has a poetic truth—Ashton behaves in every respect in a paternalistic way to Lucie, dominating and hectoring: Charles is simply interpreting what he sees and hears. Later, Charles's question about Edgar: 'Pourquoi ce seigneur est-il à la persécuter?' receives the answer from Emma: 'Mais non c'est son amant.' Daniels thinks Charles just 'misunderstands'; and Lindenberger calls it (p. 161) 'a foolish question'; but it is foolish only on one level—his *emotional* response is accurate. Emma sees only the love-interest in the duet transcribed above; but Edgar's role in this duet is a violent one. His voice dominates. He has more words to sing; Lucie's responses are mainly one-liners, and consist of many repetitions of 'Ah' and 'Edgar' and 'Oh ciel' (I did not include all of these in the transcription). Whereas Emma thinks Lucie is in the grip of a charming illusion, in fact the situation is the reverse: Lucie feels that she is being abandoned by Edgar, and that to be able to hope is her only hope—'qu'il me reste qu'il me reste l'espérance' (l. 8). Torn between her fierce lover and her bullying brother, she begs Edgar to calm himself and declares, in line 19, that he is killing her: 'Grâce grâce pour moi veux-tu me voir mourir.' We may understand why Charles thinks Edgar is persecuting her. Edgar is a violent character (Scott, already, presents him in this light). That violence, of course, is part of the reason for Edgar's own tragedy—in the sextet, his very fury prevents him from allowing Lucie to say why she is marrying Arthur. The poignancy of the opera's final scene, devoted entirely to Edgar, lies precisely in the fact that Lucie's death is in large part his own fault. With his violence and *machismo*, Edgar could not possibly



correspond to Charles's idea of a lover. Arthur, who in Donizetti is gentle, unsure, kindly, and attentive, fits the bill far better.

Flaubert seems to be making a contrast, here, between a 'literary' and a 'non-literary' response to music. Charles's response is non-literary, akin to the kind of (programmed) *bêtise* apparent also sometimes in Flaubert's own recorded responses to art; while of Emma it might be said that she knows the words but not the score.

As for the Mad Scene and Edgar's final aria, Charles's interest is ironically all too justified by subsequent events. He will be devastated by Emma's madness and death, as Edgar is by Lucie's. The novel, like the opera, ends with the solitary grieving male, who dies. Edgar's final aria, 'O bel ange, ma Lucie', speaks for Charles.

Charles 'identified' with Arthur. Daniels, too, identifies him with Arthur. But he is also Edgar.<sup>26</sup> Emma reflects at one point that Roldolphe was no Edgar (pp. 229-30). Neither, it will emerge eventually, is Léon. Charles, however, is (and, while he is not violent like Edgar, knows he has contributed too, in his way, to Emma's death). As the opera ends with Edgar, so the novel ends with Charles, and both have nothing left but immense regret.

Even the reactions to Charles's grief mirror those expressed by the chorus to Edgar in the last scene of the opera. Both become pariahs. The chorus tries to bring Edgar to his senses: 'Insensé quel délire'. That is exactly what people will say about Charles. 'Rappelle tes sens' urges the chorus to Edgar. Edgar refuses. Similarly Homais plays chorus to Charles: 'Modérez-vous' he says (p. 333); but Charles refuses to be moderate: 'ces messieurs s'étonnèrent beaucoup des idées romanesques de Bovary' (p. 335). It is ironic that Charles should have turned into Edgar after all, when he and we thought he was Arthur.

Suspicious of associations of literature with the other arts, Flaubert nevertheless uses Donizetti's opera in his own final scenes to open up a kind of harmonic to his own prose, which itself maintains a poetic silence—Charles's death occupies only a line or two, and

we do not see into his mind. Emma may have been quite obviously wrong to try to 'fit' the opera onto and into her life, but the opera in fact does fit, if not as she thinks: her comment on the singer, 'elle crie trop fort', is horribly prophetic of her own death. The opera fits also with Charles, speaking for him too, as if Romanticism were not, after all, incompatible with 'real life'. Still, the last word is for Homais; in the novel, life goes on.

<sup>26</sup> Daniels notes that, on his first visit to the Rouault farm, Charles's horse shies as Edgar's shies when it approaches the ill-fated fountain, but he does not take the connection further.