Chapter Three

A Triad of Images:
Nature as Structure in Madame Bovary

Ortega y Gasset points out in Meditations on Quixote that "the characters of the novel [unlike those of the epic] are typical and non-poetic; they are taken, not from the myth but from the street, from the physical world, from the living environment of the author." In June 1852 Flaubert wrote to Louise Colet, "I discover all my origins in the book that I knew by heart before I read it, Don Quixote." And according to Ortega, Emma may be seen as "a Don Quixote in skirts with a minimum of tragedy in her soul." Both Quixote and Emma are "typical and non-poetic," "taken from the street" and from the environments of their creators. "The consciousness of the human species has expanded since the time of Homer. Sancho Panza's belly has broken the sash about Venus's waist," writes Flaubert in 1853.

Flaubert's enthusiasm for Don Quixote began at the age of ten and persisted throughout his lifetime, as recurrent references to Don Quixote in his letters show. While working on Madame Bovary, he wrote in November 1852, again to Louise Colet:

In the matter of reading, I do not give up Rabelais and Don Quixote on Sundays with Bouilhet. What overwhelming books! they grow in proportion to one's contemplation of them, like the pyramids, and one finishes them almost in fear. What is wonderful in Don Quixote is the absence of art and that perpetual fusion of illusion and reality which makes a book so comic and so poetic. What dwarfs all other books are by comparison. God, how small one feels! how small!

Although Flaubert admires in Cervantes' book the lack of self-conscious artistry, or "l'absence d'art," Flaubert's own
artistic devices are more evident, his fusion of illusion and reality is more consciously structured. In another letter written in 1853, he speaks of the importance of understanding "the anatomy of style, to know how a phrase is constructed and what it modifies." In no other novel discussed in this book is an anatomy more diligently and painstakingly created than in *Madame Bovary*. Flaubert's choice of the word *anatomie* is, of course, deliberate. A well-known anecdote is that of Flaubert as a boy perched on the wall of the hospital in Rouen in order to observe his father perform dissections in a nearby building. One cannot help but remember, too, in this context a follower and heir of Flaubert's techniques, James Joyce, who in his skeleton plan for *Ulysses* assigns an organ of the body to delineate each of his eighteen chapters. The purpose of the metaphor is, of course, to suggest that the coherence and unity of the work of art will equal nature's as manifest in the living body.

The mechanism in *Madame Bovary* perhaps most frequently cited is the counterpoint technique developed in the scene at the Agricultural Show in part two. Less attention has been given, however, to the means by which Flaubert fashions coherence within and among the three parts of the novel, building slowly triadic structures within the larger triad of the book itself. In the interests of verisimilitude, and in imitating physiology, Flaubert selects three basic components of life on earth (vegetable, animal, and mineral) as the imagistic gridiron for his novel. For both Cervantes and Flaubert, then, as Ortega tells us, "the form contains the same thing that was in the content, but it presents in a clear, articulated, developed way what in the content was only a tendency or mere intention."

The agrarian or rustic settings of part one articulate the nature of Emma's early experiences at Les Bertaux; of Charles's vegetable existence ("he throve like an oak") as a youth and young married man. The animal images in part two develop the theme of Emma's growing lusts and of the nature of her lovers (Léon—lion; Rodolphe—red); finally
inanimate natural phenomena dominate part three, parallel­
leling Emma’s growing death wish, fulfilled through a
metallic substance, arsenic; and Charles’s death scene in
which he is pushed over as if he were a puppet by little
Berthe, who thinks he is playing. Both Emma and Charles
become inanimate objects, like the predominant imagery
in part three.

For a writer with the detachment of Flaubert, the image
is a particularly fitting device because, as Benjamin Bart
shows, it has a “natural place within the character por-
trayed.” Flaubert was, he himself said, “devoured by
comparisons as beggars were by lice.” D.-L. Demorest
offers perhaps the most complete treatment of imagery in
the work of Flaubert. Demorest goes beyond the scope of
earlier discussions of Flaubert’s imagery (such as those by
Brunetiére, Faguet, Maynial) by studying the grouping of
imagery in the works, or the techniques and tendencies
apparent in Flaubert’s use of imagery. One grouping noted
by M. Demorest is that of nature imagery, but he goes little
further than to indicate that Flaubert consistently employs
banal natural objects “which surround us everywhere,” as M.
Brunetiére had already shown in his work on Flaubert.

Claudine Gothot-Mersch, in the chapter “Une Sym­
phonie” in her book on the genesis of Madame Bovary,
writes of the series of structural schemes that give Madame
Bovary its unity. She goes on to point out that although a
study of the technique of contrast in Madame Bovary is be-
yond the scope of her work, the oppositions in the book
respond to a tendency in the temperament of the author.
One of the structures mentioned by Mlle Gothot-Mersch is
that of the triad. Madame Bovary is, of course, written in
three parts; there is also a relatively obvious grouping of
episodes into three stages.

What is not noted is that the nature imagery employed
by Flaubert generally falls into three main groupings.
These groupings are constantly acting as foils for one an-
other and as foils for the characters themselves. Situations
and people in the novel are, as Mlle Gothot-Mersch shows, continually defined by opposition. Water or liquid imagery, one central grouping of the nature imagery, universally symbolizes the vital and flowing quality of experience. Yet Flaubert's water images are often either sentimentalized or muddy, stained or medicated, as a result of man's intervention. Significantly, in table five, given at the end of M. Demorest's work, water imagery far outnumbers all other elemental images listed; Demorest counts a total of 259 water images in *Madame Bovary*.

A second grouping of images, vegetation images (Demorest lists 101 in *Madame Bovary*), symbolizes both fertility and growth. But Flaubert continually contrasts the flowering natural beauty of the Norman countryside with the squalid existences of those who live within its beauty and who convert its grasses to coarse stubble and its flowers to dried bridal bouquets, or who sentimentalize the exotic lemon tree of distant lands.

The third important grouping of natural imagery is that of animals and insects (Demorest lists 205), living counterparts to man himself. The virility and the simple instinctual nature of the animal stand in opposition to man, who harnesses the animal for his own purposes, which are frequently tawdry and lacking in real direction.

These three groups of images are skillfully alternated throughout each of the three parts of the book. Part one predominates in vegetation imagery, part two in animal imagery, and part three in water symbols. But in each part the two groupings that do not predominate provide counterpoint for the central image grouping. The myth of bovarism is the myth of sterility and civilized deformity. Natural productivity is constantly seen in the light of man's efforts to pervert its force. At the end of the book, the natural cycle continues although individual man dies as a result of his own misdirected efforts. The central thematic concern of the book—the cleavage between real and ideal, which controls it on many levels (as well as controlling its author)—is seen as a cleavage created
synthetically by the mind of man, a schizophrenic pattern appearing also in *Don Quixote*. Neither real nor ideal has meaning for nature itself, which incorporates both in its very being. Emma and Charles Bovary are perhaps grotesque shadows of Don Quixote and Sancho, and they present for the reader two alternative extremes of human behavior, two extremes that Flaubert treats ironically (even scathingly) by means of nature imagery.

It is possible to examine in detail the employment of Flaubert’s three groups of symbols. The vegetation images in part one are sometimes arranged so that they form the positive pole of that part with which the negative pole, represented by nature distorted by man, interacts. For example, in chapter one, Charles thrives like an oak; later he imagines the coolness of a beech grove in the country. Yet the stream by which he lives is stained yellow and purple by dye factories; and as he pursues his studies, he is like the mill-horse walking blindfolded in a circle. On old Rouault’s farm in chapter two, the houses, occupied by man, are dark stains by comparison, with even the leafless trees and the birds ruffling their feathers in the cold. As Charles’s courtship of Emma progresses, the pear trees flower, although old Rouault wishes someone would stew pears for him. In these early chapters, where vegetation images are often used to suggest natural innocence, water and animal symbols are seen in a negative context, contorted by man.

Yet in the wedding scene in chapter four, it is as if all nature, even the vegetation, stands in opposition to this marriage. Coarse grasses and thistles attach themselves to Emma’s wedding gown, the birds for long distances are frightened away by the sound of the fiddle, and foaming cider mugs and brimming wine glasses take their revenge on humans rather than on flies.

At Tostes the vegetation imagery, which at the Rouault farm had been a positive force, begins to be replaced by the imagery of Emma’s fantasy world in which nature is contorted and idealized. The dried wedding bouquet of the
first wife, some scrawny rose bushes, a thorn hedge are all that remains of Rouault's flowering pear, and Emma longs for a fountain and a fishpond to indulge her vanity. As Flaubert points out, her temperament was "more sentimental than artistic, and what she was looking for was emotions, not scenery." Fish and water are both rerouted to this end.

In chapter six, the chapter taking the reader back to Emma's youth, Flaubert relates how she had rejected country life with its lowing herds, its animal-like simplicity, and replaced it by the sea, which she loved only for its storms, and by vegetation, which she loved only when it grew among ruins. In this paragraph the triad of vegetation, animal, and water imagery is clearly apparent. Here it is the passive animal imagery that retains its original innocence, whereas water and vegetation are seen aslant through the eyes of the heroine. Later in the chapter, the three natural elements are all contorted as Emma imagines turtle doves in Gothic bird cages, an "orderly virgin forest" (p. 43), and a sunbeam quivering perpendicularly in water.

A contrasting triad is formed as Emma's sentimental daydreams continue; she conjures up a honeymoon in which "the tinkling of goat bells," "the dull roar of waterfalls," and "the fragrance of lemon trees" (p. 45) coincide. Here it is the combination of the three images that is contrived, thereby sentimentalizing the scene.

From the idealized world of Emma's daydreams, we return abruptly to another world in chapter seven, to the dull landscape of Tostes with its sharp-edged rushes, to boredom ("like a silent spider"), and to sea winds that fill the country with a salt smell. The central animal image at Tostes, however, is Emma's bitch, Djali, representing nature tamed and domesticated by man, yet also yearning for its freedom. Symbolically the dog's Indian name, in addition to its exotic connotations, suggests the distances for which it longs. Flaubert is also obviously aware of the prosaic nature of Emma's name compared with the poetic name of the dog. Like Emma's thoughts, Djali strays, for in
captivity she exists in an unnatural mode. Yet unless nature is held captive by man, it can threaten man’s very being. The ugliness that Emma sees near at hand in Tostes and in her marriage to Charles is merely the same benevolent captivity in which Djali is held. But like Djali, Emma runs away. The animal imagery, which begins to move into the foreground at this point, leads smoothly into part two where this second image group predominates.

But before this occurs, we turn to Vaubyessard, which offers a curious parallelism with Rouault’s farm, which had introduced the vegetation imagery in part one. Vaubyessard points to the close of the circular pattern of this section. The triad at the opening of chapter eight consists of cows, shrubbery, and a flowing stream. The grazing cows represent the same sort of simple bucolic setting that Emma had rejected at Les Bertaux, but which is now exalted in her eyes by its proximity to the château. The variegated shrubbery and the bridge under which the stream flows are, of course, man’s improvements on nature. Furthermore, the elaborate dinner prepared at Vaubyessard sharply contrasts with the simple but abundant wedding dinner served at Les Bertaux. Instead of an entire suckling pig, meat is brought on in slices; in place of cider, the marquis serves champagne; and pineapples and pomegranates replace the almonds, raisins, and oranges. What has changed is the quality of the relationship to food, which is less direct at Vaubyessard than at Les Bertaux. The categories of food served are similar, but the means by which they have been obtained differ, adding to their character a romantic appeal. Parallelism, however, is established by Emma herself, who is reminded of the farm at Les Bertaux as she sees the faces of the peasants pressed against the panes. She conjures up the muddy pond, the apple trees, and herself skimming cream with her finger. The ironic contrast with the scene at Vaubyessard is marked. Back at Tostes there are onion soup and veal for dinner, and Emma stares in amazement at fruit trees and flower beds once so familiar.
The use of the triad device enables Flaubert to create a variety of effects. Parallels may exist both within the triad and between triads. Thus the differences noted in the two landscapes are reinforced by the differences in the two meals. Every detail inserted by Flaubert is calculated, so that the reader participates in Emma's mounting frustrations. At the same time, Emma's memories of Les Bertaux stress the muddy pond and her menial task, whereas her vision of Vaubyessard ignores the ugliness of the marquis's father-in-law, Marie Antoinette's lover, who sits dribbling gravy from his mouth.

Next spring at Tostes when the pear trees burst into bloom, Emma finds it difficult to breathe. Man and his institutions are seen to be stunted by comparison with the regular and luxuriant flowering of nature, the pear trees that had been associated with Charles's courtship of her. The liquids in this final chapter of part one consist of camphor baths and valerian drops, concoctions for the ailing, and vinegar, Emma's means of losing weight. The animal, Djali, becomes in Emma's sick imagination a confidante, and to the dog she tells many secrets. The burning of the bridal bouquet at the end is a symbolic rejection of the flowering and growth of the vegetation that dominates part one. It is fitting that this imagery accompanies the announcement of a pregnancy Emma hates. From now on we will note the gradual development of the animal imagery in part two, which is dominated by this image cluster. At the end of part one, portions of the burned bridal bouquet fly up the chimney like black butterflies, suggesting both the metamorphosis in the imagery as well as the metamorphosis in Emma's nature, as she becomes more debased, more animal-like and as the name, Bovary, becomes more and more fitting.

II

Although the animal imagery increases with the intensity of Emma's appetites, part two opens with a nature
passage stressing vegetation and tying this part to the one that precedes it. The pastures, the grainfields, and the streams extend below the oaks of the Aragueil forest. This is the same kind of landscape Flaubert has visualized near the marquis’s château and has connected with Emma’s childhood on the farm. The cider presses also are a link with Les Bertaux. On the outskirts of Yonville, the image triad consists of aspens and hedges, cider presses and distilling sheds, and window panes with a bull’s-eye in the center of each. The pear trees are espaliered and scraggly, supplying a note of foreboding and contrasting with the blooming pears found early in part one.

However, the character of the imagery in part two is suggested by the Gallic cock on the top pediment of the town hall. This image, aggressive and assertive, contrasts with the more passive vegetation images of part one and points to the growing sensual nature of Emma’s affairs in this part. Furthermore, the name of the hotel in Yonville is Lion d’Or, clearly reinforcing the central motif. Both Léon and the Lion d’Or, however, represent somewhat less virility than the king of beasts. On the main street of Yonville, we encounter a dry goods shop and a pharmacy, the sterile companions of the golden lion. As the Hirondelle (the swallow) pulls up before the inn, we learn that Djali, Emma’s greyhound, has escaped. Emma, like Djali, is soon to escape the mold of the dry society that she despises, for with the freeing of Djali comes the freeing of Emma’s passions as she stretches out her foot toward the leg of mutton turning on the spit and talks to Léon of idealized natural settings, pastures at the top of bluffs, huge pine trees, roaring streams, and infinite oceans. Although Charles is always on horseback in the course of his work, for Léon “there’s nothing more charming than riding. If you have the opportunity, of course” (pp. 91-92). It is clear from these examples that animal imagery plays the central role in part two as vegetation and water symbols take second place. Yet the three kinds of symbols are still usually found in conjunction with one another. Thus from Emma’s
new bedroom, we have a view of the tops of trees and of moonlight on the river, but inside the room we find the disorder left by two moving men, nature's serenity in contrast to animal-man's confusion.

The wet nurse, in chapter 3, whose role is that of the animal provider for Emma's baby, lives in a house surrounded by a scraggly garden, a walnut tree, and a trickle of dirt water. Returning from her house, however, Emma and Léon walk by a swiftly running river, long grasses bending in the current, and spidery-legged insects poised on lily pads. This particular scene is brightly lighted by sunbeams, a positive force; Emma's sentimental dreams are often lighted by the rays of the moon.

As Emma's passion for Léon grows, both lovers tend hanging gardens in their windows. At the same time, love is compared by Flaubert to an engulfing thunderstorm leaving its pools of rain on roofs, pools that may pose a danger to the house. It is water imagery that accompanies Emma's downfall in part three.

A bouquet of straw and wheat, tied to the peak of one of the gables at the new flax mill, introduces chapter five. This image of dried vegetation sharply contrasts with the hanging gardens, the swift streams, the long grasses that have accompanied the initial phase of the love affair; the bouquet also reminds one of the two dried wedding bouquets in part one. Emma's carnal desires, her inner storms, continue for the moment, but the dried bouquet of vegetation suggests an outcome ironically different from that signified by the earlier image—the Gallic cock.

Chapter six brings us full circle to another April with its flowers, its full streams, and its grazing cattle. It was April when Emma had arrived in Yonville. Nature, imperturbable and indifferent to human activity, continues its fruitful cycle although the cycles of man are full of interruptions and reverses. Although nature flowers, Léon departs for Paris. The Agricultural Show, at which the animal theme receives its culminating emphasis, serves to bridge Emma's two affairs in part two, for Homais announced the event at the end of the chapter in which Léon leaves.
The affair with Rodolphe abounds in various animal symbols. In fact, the emphasis on this imagery increases. After Léon's departure Emma has looked back with "mournful melancholy" at the water and flower scenes that accompanied her romance with Léon, but her hopes are now "like dead branches in the wind" (p. 140). By contrast blood imagery accompanies the meeting with Rodolphe, the forceful and animal spurt of blood from the peasant's arm. The name Rodolphe, of course, connotes red, a different red from that of the blood Emma has been spitting during the depression over Léon's removal. Life and death are curiously knotted in this scene of bloodletting. Both Justin and the peasant faint, temporarily die, as the animal stream gushes forth; but Emma and Rodolphe remain conscious, for their roles are connected with the "undoing" of life.

The Agricultural Show represents the obvious climax of the animal theme in part two. Even the townspeople at the show are described by Flaubert by means of animal symbols. The legs of Binet seem to contain all of his vital energies, like the legs of a horse; or Homais's reverse-calf shoes represent the character of the apothecary, an "inside-out" animal who poses as a man of civilization. Water and vegetation are overwhelmed in this chapter by a proliferation of human animals and domestic beasts, even though the pediment of the town hall has been looped with ivy, a sign of perennial plant vitality. Pigs, calves, cows, rearing stallions, mares are lined up to be judged by a group of gentlemen who advance with heavy step. Horses and Hippolyte (a name derived from the Greek word for horse) go off together toward the stables. And Emma and Rodolphe, sitting on the second floor of the town hall, half listen to the speeches, while Rodolphe argues that casting off the animal skins of savage ages cost man more disadvantages than benefits. The planting scenes cited by Monsieur Derozerays are accompanied by Rodolphe's eulogies of the instinctive animal man and by the imagery of water as he compares his inclinations and Emma's to two rivers at their confluence—another variation of the
nature triad basic to the imagery of the novel. The merging of man and animal is made total by the appearance of Catherine Leroux, who through living among animals has taken on "their muteness and placidity" (p. 170). Yet Catherine Leroux is an authentic figure by contrast with the studied savage reversion suggested by Rodolphe. Her life has been one of service to man and to animal; Rodolphe's and Emma's aim is temporary gratification of both vanity and the senses. Man's fireworks, like those stored in Monsieur Tuvache's cellar (vache, of course, meaning cow), are damp and will not go off.

Homais's article, which concludes the chapter, combines once again all three nature images. The topic is, of course, the Agricultural Show, but a show transformed by his pen beyond recognition, a show festooned by garlands of flowers and attended by crowds rushing "like the billows of a raging sea" (p. 173). Flaubert makes it perfectly clear in this chapter that authentic animal existence has no relation to the sick and contorted image made by social man. Catherine Leroux with her fifty-four years of service wins her medal by means far more honorable than Homais's methods in winning "la croix d'honneur." The animal imagery in this chapter counterpoints the activity of man in the same way that the vegetation imagery at Les Bertaux and La Vaubyessard counterpointed the petty idealisms displayed by humans who inhabited these places and who tampered with nature for their own selfish and narrow ends. Yet man is finally defeated in his foolish pursuits, whereas nature, like Catherine Leroux, persists, and the cycle of seasons produces ever new vegetation, new foals and calves, and spring freshets. These for Flaubert stand in stark contrast to the fevered imaginings and cerebrations of Emma Bovary and her lovers in their sterile and short-range affairs. The irony of this chapter is sharp because of the abrupt animal-man contrasts brought out by the well-known counterpoint technique. The very name Bovary suggests that these contrasts were to be of major importance in Flaubert's novel.

After this point in part two, animal imagery commences
gradually to recede in favor of water imagery, which is to dominate part three. (In the same way, the dog Djali in part one foreshadowed the animal theme in part two.) Although the lovemaking between Emma and Rodolphe is connected with horseback riding, their union takes place in the woods, in the midst of vegetation, by a little pond. Emma's blood flows like a river of milk. Earlier in the scene Emma looks as if she were swimming "under limpid water" (p. 180). It is a sense of becoming submerged that overcomes Emma in the final portion of the book and that makes the water symbolism appropriate for part three. It should be noted in this connection that, according to M. Demorest's table 5, water is the dominant nature image in the entire book.

The waning pleasures of Emma's love affair with Rodolphe are compared in chapter ten to the ebbing of the water of a river. At the same time, the yearly gift of a turkey and an accompanying letter from M. Rouault remind Emma of foals whinnying and galloping in the fields, of bees and beehives. M. Rouault has planted a plum tree under Emma's window at Les Bertaux, but in Yonville-L'Abbaye, Lestiboudois rakes up the cut grass. Although at the Agricultural Show and in the lovemaking scene horses had played an immediate and vital role, now foals are memories for Emma, as are the bees. Likewise the new plum tree is far removed from Emma's present window under which not planting but cutting and raking (performed by the sexton who will dig Emma's grave) is taking place. Furthermore, the cock to be sent by M. Rouault will be a dead cock. The ebb of water is symbolically removing both plant and animal life, all growth, from Emma and her environment. The cock imagery is particularly appropriate at this point, for it recalls the Gallic cock on the pediment of the town hall at the beginning of part two, an image used to prefigure the more virile nature of this section. However, it is clear by chapter ten that the cock is doomed to die, and that by next year Emma may need more than M. Rouault's gift of a dead bird.

The horse imagery, which has been part of the entire
episode involving Rodolphe, forms the basis, indirectly at least, of the next chapter concerning the operation on Hippolyte’s foot. Horses appeared at the Agricultural Show; Emma and Rodolphe rode out to the consummation of their affair. Now an operation is about to be performed on a man whose name bears at least two associations with horses. *Hippos* is, of course, the Greek word for horse. Furthermore, Hippolytus in Greek mythology was dragged to his death by horses after Theseus had petitioned Poseidon for punishment. The use of the name Hippolyte suggests complex but unmistakable mythical overtones. Hippolyte himself is hardly more than a horse, very like the horses he tends. Moreover, like his mythical forebear, he receives an unjust punishment at the hands of the gods. The modern Phaedra is Emma Bovary, who is using Hippolyte for her own selfish and vain ends. Hippolyte is maimed as Hippolytus had been killed. Dark liquid oozes from his leg. This operation symbolically injures the very root of his existence, for to the horse the leg means survival, and he is destroyed when his legs no longer perform. The operation and the ensuing amputation also symbolically indicate the excision of the thematic concern with animals in part two.

In the evening after the amputation, Emma meets Rodolphe in the garden on the lowest step of the river stairs. As Brunetiere has pointed out, Flaubert’s nature imagery is often so banal that it goes unnoticed. Yet after the animal screams of Hippolyte, which have rent the village that day, the simple and idyllic conclusion involving a garden and a river provides welcome relief. Although the horses of pain and passion have been stilled, the passive garden and river persist and remain as backdrop for the imprudent enterprises of man. The animal, the dominant concern of part two, is destroyed or maimed when it is used as it has been by Emma for her own vain ends. And yet ironically it is this very animal that serves man most faithfully. Rather than frightened horses, it is the raging sea of Poseidon, the sea of passion, that will cause Emma’s
death. (Still, the myth element remains. Out of the sea comes the bull [symbol of lust] that terrifies the horses; it is, thus, the sea that is the source of death in the myth, also. The irony is that Emma has offended not Aphrodite but Athena.) Meanwhile the river threatening and writhing like a serpent flows in the background at Emma’s last meeting with Rodolphe, although their memories are concerned with the silent rivers, the perfumed syringas, and the prowling night animals they have seen in earlier days. After Emma’s desertion by Rodolphe, she feels as if she were on a pitching ship. She develops an aversion to her garden and has it re-landscaped; her horse is sold.

The tumult of a storm at sea (the kind of storm she had dreamed of in the safety of the convent) descends upon Emma in the final chapter of part two. The animal-man is now in the clutches of Poseidon as the double basses at the opera (cf. the operation) remind Emma of the cries of shipwrecked sailors “against the tumult of a storm” (p. 252). And yet the animal motif is not entirely submerged, for among the crowd at the opera Emma meets Léon (lion). The elements of the nature triad—vegetation, animal, and water—will continue to interact in part three. M. Demorest has called Flaubert’s writing of Madame Bovary a “new and perilous voyage of discovery.” Surely Flaubert’s complex use of imagery proves Demorest’s point. Rarely in novels do we find such a conscious and calculated use of common objects to enrich thematic patterns.

III

The waters of part three are not, however, always the crashing and tumultuous storms of Emma’s youthful dreams. Still, the tempest evoked at the opera is skillfully carried over by Flaubert into chapter one of part three through the comparison of the carriage in which Emma and Léon make love to a ship tossing at sea. (At the same time, Flaubert echoes the scene of lovemaking in part two, for horses have carried Emma and Rodolphe to that scene
as horses now draw Emma and Léon.) Accompanying the image of the sea and completing the triad are the torn bits of paper (thrown from the cab by Emma) that are compared to white butterflies alighting on a field of red clover. The sea image here, however, is the dominant image—the butterflies and the clover evoking merely pastoral quietude. (The white butterflies may also recall the black butterflies that floated up the chimney as Emma burned her bridal bouquet and so suggest the theme of another metamorphosis.) Thus Emma’s resolution to reject Léon is discarded, as are the vegetation and animal symbols of part one and two, in favor of the tossing cab, the stormy sea, to which the heroine abandons herself. This final love affair with Léon is accompanied not by images of growth and life, plant and animal, but by the inanimate elements.

However, instead of romantic storms at sea, the liquid imagery in part three is often of a medical or chemical nature, as the function of Homais’s Capharnaum becomes apparent. The liquids of chapter two are the acids and alkaline solutions of the pharmacy. The chapter opens with a description of jelly-making in the village, not with the boiling ocean but with the sticky, boiling jelly of the kitchens of Yonville. This picture corresponds to the pictures of foaming cider in part one, but the temperature of the juice is now at the boiling point. The arsenic, with which Justin absentmindedly threatens the lives of Homais and his family, could have combined with the juice to bring destruction. This boiling cauldron of liquid is the dominating image of the chapter, rather than the maimed Hippolyte, who stumps in with Emma’s bags, or the fragile violets brought by Léon. Vegetable and animal life now play secondary roles by comparison with the role of liquids in part three.

Chapter three of this section is full of water imagery. The hotel where Emma and Léon stay is on the riverfront. At dusk they drift downstream (suggesting the direction of their affair) on a river polluted by great oily patches. The river flows toward the ocean, but Emma and Léon land on
an island where vegetation imagery once more predomi­nates, the grass, the poplars, and the breeze in the branches, reminiscent of part one, as if Emma’s progress toward death, toward the ocean, were temporarily halted. Left behind in the city is the barking of dogs, the animal theme of part two that has been associated with Rodolphe.

When the lovers next meet, it is in Yonville during a thunderstorm. Again the suggestion of inundation by water occurs, and the scene takes place, of course, in the garden.

But in the city where Emma goes to take her “music lessons,” the trees are leafless, and Rouen has “the static quality of a painting” (p. 299). The islands in the river look like huge black fish, and smoke pollutes the air as oil has polluted the water. In the city, nature is despoiled as the result of man’s presence. But the three galloping horses that draw the Hirondelle bearing Emma into the city take us back to the imagery of part two, and the bed in the form of a boat, in which she and Leon sleep, to the tossing cab, now unyoked, at the beginning of part three. Liquids flow not only in the rivers and fountains in chapter five but in the running sores of the blind beggar and in the perspiration of Emma as she hurries through the streets of Rouen. Finally the triad of absinthe, cigars, and oysters (liquid, vegetable, animal)—smells in the rue Nationale—symbolizes in microcosm the larger imagery pattern in the book.

As adultery begins to pall, Emma’s thoughts return to the protective elms near the convent of her youth and to her rides in the forest. Vegetation scenes and animals exist now only in memory, and “the leaden river shivered in the wind” (p. 331). It is as if even the water shivers before the coming storm that will engulf Emma. At the beginning of her desperate search for money, she is threatened once by crowds, pouring out of the cathedral like a river, and again by prancing black horses, driven by a man who reminds her of the vicomte. Nature itself seems to collaborate in her downfall, for Emma has long courted the destructive forces of life. After her attempt to borrow money from Rodolphe
fails, night falls and crows fly overhead, dismal harbingers of her death.

Although arsenic is the immediate means of Emma's suicide, the entire section describing her death is dominated symbolically by the imagery of the storm at sea. The convulsive movements that accompany Emma's final hours, her heaving body and rolling eyes, her gasping breath and her flowing tears, become a horrible parody of the romantic storms at sea she has envisaged and of the scenes of passion with her lovers. The storm reaches its peak in the death scene, and Emma's ship at last shudders and succumbs to the furious waves. Flaubert writes: "everything seemed drowned by the monotonous flow of Latin syllables" (p. 369).

In the final chapters of the book, it is clear that nature continues to be employed by man in foolish ways to abet his vanity. Thus Charles's desire for three coffins, one of oak, one of mahogany, and one of lead, exemplifies man's frivolous attempt to forestall decay and separation. For ironically, the arsenic that was chosen by Emma for her destruction is related to the lead chosen by Charles as a means of preserving her body. Likewise the herbs, the camphor, the benzoin, and the chlorine water contributed by Homais are futile gestures, as is the holy water sprinkled by the priest. These pharmaceutical and religious panaceas seem trivial beside the joyous sounds of spring that accompany Emma's burial.

Here, once again, the three elements of the nature triad are united, as colts bolt off under apple trees, and dewdrops shimmer on the thorn hedges. Nature persists and recurs, indifferent to, and despite, man's failures. Appropriately Emma's bier moves through the cemetery "like a boat pitching at every wave" (p. 383). The sea of passion that has submerged her cannot rest until her body is interred, but meanwhile spring is rejuvenating the earth with new vegetable life, new animal life, and fresh streams of water, beside which the holy sprinkler of Bournisien seems like a gaudy trinket. The destructive imagery of the
ocean accompanies Emma’s burial to the very end, when Charles drags himself toward the grave “as though to be swallowed up in it with her” (p. 384).

With Emma’s death a final sterility seems to settle on human activity in the last chapter. The natural cycle continues as Charles sits grieving in his arbor, but the blind beggar (the animal) is locked up to satisfy Homais’s political ambitions; Homais designs even the grass in his garden to reflect his own glory, the Legion of Honor; and Charles’s mind is flooded by futile memories. The capping irony is the cotton mill where little Berthe is sent by her aunt to work. It is as if the vegetation symbolism of part one were here purposefully revived in the form of a dead fiber (like the dead wedding bouquets and the bouquet of wheat and straw on the flax mill) to remind the reader of the sterile nature of Emma’s legacy. Moreover, the dry goods dealer, M. Lheureux, has had a hand in luring Emma to her destruction.

The details studied in the course of this chapter, numerous as they are, simply serve to indicate the tremendous conscious complexity of Flaubert’s techniques. More still could be said, but proof here is sufficient to show the skill with which Flaubert manipulated these three image groups. In reading Madame Bovary, one has a feeling, as M. Demorest has well expressed it, “a little like that which one has in listening to a very beautiful and substantial new symphony played by an intelligent and sympathetic orchestra under a genius as director.”17 The same judgment could be made, of course, of Don Quixote.

1. Ortega y Gasset, Meditations on Quixote, p. 127.
3. Ortega y Gasset, p. 162.
5. Ibid., pp. 251–52.
11. Ibid., p. 426.
13. Ibid., p. 223.
17. Ibid., p. 480.