hero to fulfil a barbarous injunction without in the least forfeiting the sympathy of a more sophisticated and more sensitive age.

To be sure, Gertrude dies, and Ophelia, and Laertes, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and Polonius. And if Hamlet had killed the king at prayer all these might have been spared. But that is not to say that Hamlet is responsible for their deaths. The death of Gertrude is a cruel by-product of her husband's treachery. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern involve themselves in affairs which are too high for them and beyond their understanding. Polonius dies of being Polonius. Laertes, as he himself justly observes, is killed with his own treachery. Ophelia is the innocent bystander.

But finally, Hamlet himself dies. Is it not better so? To fulfil his duty, he makes the last supreme sacrifice: he lays down his own life. So (despite the complete absence in it of the "poetic justice" which the "tragic flaw" proponents labor so desperately to save) the end of the play is not depressing, but uplifting, purifying. The dignity of human nature, the resilient power and beauty of the human soul has been asserted and maintained once more. In the face of supreme, unconquerable obstacles, this man has triumphed. He has fulfilled a sacred obligation; he has been a minister of justice; he has kept his own soul clean. "Good night, sweet prince. And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!"

This is Shakespeare's Hamlet. This is the Hamlet that the world has taken to its heart. This is the Hamlet who is profoundly dissatisfying to his many subtle critics. What is it that they want? A brutal, unimaginative man, incapable of feeling the terrible horror of the situation, who, immediately he learns of his uncle's guilt, cavalierly challenges him, runs him through, assumes the throne, marries Ophelia, and lives happily ever afterward. Who is wiser—Shakespeare or his critics?

Flaubert's "Madame Bovary"

ROBERT WOOSTER STALLMAN

Flaubert and Henry James, among the moderns, are the great masters of ironic contemplation. Irony is a fundamental in the architectonics of Madame Bovary. Emma Bovary is Flaubert's name for the ironic chain of contradictory feelings and moods, the conflicting attitudes, that he has imposed upon her. Emma makes the most of her opportunities for romance, but her opportunities need not necessarily have appeared in the shape of Rodolphe or Léon; as Percy Lubbock

1 This essay, part of a textbook ("The Art of Modern Fiction," to be published in 1949), aims to provide the student with an introductory analysis of the novel. For further analyses see R. P. Blackmur's "Notes on Four Categories in Criticism" (explicates Emma's cordial glass as image, Part I, chap. iii), Sewanee Review, Vol. LIV (autumn, 1946); Percy Lubbock's Craft of Fiction (1921); Allen Tate's "Techniques of Fiction" (explicates Binet's latent as symbol), in Forms of Modern Fiction (1948); and especially Martin Turnell's "Flaubert," Scrutiny, Vol. XIII (autumn, 1945; spring, 1946). There is an excellent critical redaction, a scale-model of the novel, by Richard Penny, in Studies in Nineteenth Century Literature. See also Joseph Frank's "Spatial Form in Modern Literature" (explicates the comices agricolas scene), Sewanee Review, LIII (spring, 1945), 230 ff.

2 University of Kansas; coeditor of Western Review.
says, she would have found others if these had not been at hand.

None of the events really matter for their own sake; they might have happened differently, not one of them is indispensable as it is. . . . The events, therefore, Emma’s excursions to Rouen, her forest-rides, her one or two memorable adventures in the world—all these are only Flaubert’s way of telling his subject, of making it count to the eye. They are not in themselves what he has to say, they simply illustrate it.3

Emma is not a unified creation. Flaubert sacrifices her for the thesis that she represents. Her plight applies to human beings everywhere and always, the romantic pursuit of happiness being a permanent part of our nature. In the passion-pinched multitudes who crowd our movie-palaces, Emma has her present-day counterparts—the movie-screen fulfilling for them all the impossible passions which Emma Bovary failed to obtain. Flaubert’s theme, namely, that the quest for happiness cannot be realized in the world of everyday experience, is a theme of universal validity. Our world, no less than Emma Bovary’s, is split by the same tragic disparity between inner dream and external reality. We, too, are betrayed by reality at every turn.

Flaubert’s achievement is, by common consent, an achievement in technique. His originality is the method he has engineered, and it is by way of these technical innovations that his kinship with Henry James and Joseph Conrad is to be defined. It is Flaubert’s method of ironic or indirect description that places him foremost among technical innovators. The opening passage to chapter vii of Part I, for instance, aptly illustrates his technical dexterity. Observe how he analyzes Emma’s mood or emotion:

She thought, sometimes, that, after all, this was the happiest time of her life—the honeymoon, as people called it. To taste the full sweetness of it, it would have been necessary doubtless to fly to those lands with sonorous names where the days after marriage are full of laziness most suave. In post-chaises behind blue silken curtains to ride slowly up steep roads, listening to the song of the postilion re-echoed by the mountains, along with the bells of goats and the muffled sound of a waterfall; at sunset on the shores of gulfs to breathe in the perfume of lemon trees; then in the evening on the villas-terraces above, hand in hand to look at the stars, making plans for the future. It seemed to her that certain places on earth must bring happiness, as a plant peculiar to the soil, and that cannot thrive elsewhere. Why could not she lean over balconies in Swiss chalets, or enshrine her melancholy in a Scotch cottage, with a husband dressed in a black velvet coat with long tails and thin shoes, a pointed hat and frills?4

Emma’s mood is developed and defines itself (from exaltation as symbolized in “honeymoon,” to nostalgic longing, shifting to sadness) by means of a series of images which are the formula for the particular emotion. At the key-word “honeymoon,” which connotes for Emma a vague feeling of happiness, her awareness of the actual world ends and her reverie begins. Flaubert’s summoning-up of a complex of feelings by a set of images is the method of Conrad in “The Heart of Darkness,” the atmosphere in that story being engendered by a structure of sense-impressions which objectify the atmosphere and evoke it. The blue-silken curtains of Emma’s post-chaise, like the drawn blinds of Léon’s cab (in Part III, chap. i), are supposed to conceal an enactment of pent-up passion, but ironically the concealed exotic passion is celebrated without any lover—only by the lonely woman inside. The coach is empty! Emma is again without a lover in that Scotch cottage, wherein she enshrines her melan-

3 Lubbock, op. cit., p. 82.
4 The text used is the “Modern Library” edition, p. 46.
choly. The man inside, the husband "in a pointed hat and frills," is not physically present at all. This void is filled by Emma’s own impassionate visions. As when she later writes love letters to Léon:

But whilst she wrote, it was another man she saw, a phantom fashioned out of her most ardent memories, of her finest reading, her strongest lusts, and at last he became so real, so tangible, that she palpitated wondering, without, however, the power to imagine him clearly, so lost was he, like a god, beneath the abundance of his attributes. He dwelt in that azure land where silk ladders hang from balconies under the breath of flowers, in the light of the moon. She felt him near her; he was coming, and would carry her right away in a kiss [Part III, chap. vi, p. 332].

These journeys in quest of "a profound felicity" form the crux of Emma’s experiences. Her dream states are inevitably followed by fits of depression ("these transports of vague love wearied her more than great debauchery").

She was constantly promising herself a profound felicity on her next journey. Then she confessed to herself that she felt nothing extraordinary. This disappointment quickly gave way to a new hope, and Emma returned to him more inflamed, more eager than ever. She undressed brutally, tearing off the thin laces of her corset that nestled around her hips like a gliding snake. She went on tiptoe, barefooted, to see once more that the door was closed, then pale, serious, and, without speaking, with one movement, she threw herself upon his breast with a long shudder [Part III, chap. vi, pp. 323–24].

Here again, as similarly in the imagined experience of her honeymoon, the mood of anticipated joy is canceled out by an impression of emptiness.

All Emma’s romantic moods of illusory happiness crumble in countermoods of despair. The whole novel is constructed of a series of built-up moods—feelings of "felicity, passion, rapture"—which collapse in negative states of disillusioning reality. The contrast centering in the opposition between romantic aspiration or illusion and reality is Flaubert’s primary structural device. This two-part pattern of ironic contrasts defines the structural formula of Madame Bovary.

I. ILLUSION VERSUS REALITY

The aspect of illusion has its chief symbolization in Emma and Léon. She awakens in him a thousand desires, and he, in turn, stirs in her the same visionary feelings. This romantic affinity is the sole bond between them.

Love, she thought, must come suddenly, with great outbursts and lightnings,—a hurricane of the skies, which falls upon life, revolutionises it, roots up the will like a leaf, and sweeps the whole heart into the abyss. She did not know that on the terrace of houses it makes lakes when the pipes are choked, and she would thus have remained in her security when she suddenly discovered a rent in the wall of it [Part I, chap. iv, p. 117].

Her whole life is a constant discovering of "a rent in the wall" of her reverie-world. It is always being built up in the future or in the past. What happiness she had had in her childhood! As for Charles, the dull plodding country doctor, though he is the coin of commonplace reality, one side of him is minted of illusion—he, too, has naïve dreams which are doomed to disappointment. He has grandiose notions of himself as a master-surgeon, he has fireside reveries, and he has romantic ideas about funerals. The Emma that he worships, idol-like, does not exist. He makes a shrine of her memoried image:

To please her, as if she were still living, he adopted her predilections, her ideas; he bought patent leather boots and took to wearing white cravats. He put cosmetics on his moustache, and, like her, signed notes of hand. She corrupted him from beyond the grave [Part III, chap. xi, p. 372].

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Nor is Homais, the apothecary, without illusions—namely, his faith in Progress, a faith which he shared with his century. And, finally, there are the illusions of the bourgeois (their faith in religion, science, government), which are summed up for them in the speech of the councillor at the *comices agricoles* (Part II, chap. vii).

II. REALITY VERSUS ILLUSION

The antiromantic is represented by Rodolphe, the cynical squire and coarse adulterer, and by Lheureux, the dry-goods merchant and money-lender, who plies Emma with gifts for her lover on credit. They exploit Emma’s romantic malady for their own ends.

Rodolphe’s strategy for winning Emma is by professing himself to be the exponent of a New Morality, one that is absolute and eternal. He pitches his pretended moral code to the same idealistic plane as that of Emma’s romantic dreams.

“But one must,” said Emma, “to some extent bow to the opinion of the world and accept its moral code.”

“Ahh! but there are two,” he replied. “The small, the conventional, that of men, that which constantly changes. . . . But the other, the eternal, that is about us and above, like the landscape that surrounds us, and the blue heavens that give us light” [Part II, chap. viii, p. 167].

The morality of common man is but a conspiracy by which society traps and persecutes Pure Love. The moral code of Rodolphe is the code of the gods.

She noticed in his eyes small golden lines radiating from black pupils; she even smelt the perfume of the pomade that made his hair glossy. Then a faintness came over her; she recalled the Viscount who had waltzed with her at Vaubyessard, and his beard exhaled like this hair an odour of vanilla and citron, and mechanically she half-closed her eyes the better to breathe it in [Part II, chap. viii, p. 167].

Rodolphe’s sham vision, Flaubert is hinting, has a certain odor about it. And Emma, how readily she transfers her intoxication from the perfume of Rodolphe’s sentiments to the perfume of his pomade! As for the self-indulgent Vaubyessards, their moral fiber is quite as slippery as Rodolphe’s perfumed pomade. Flaubert’s commentary on them figures through his image of the imbecilic old Duke de Lavérière—that mocking piece of grim reality to which Emma is perversely blind. His physical decay symbolizes moral disintegration. But Emma, knowing what a dashing figure he had cut before the Revolution, gazes on him in reverent fascination: “He had lived at court and slept in the bed of queens!” The description of the patriots assembled at the Comte de Vaubyessard’s ball is a picture in scale-model of the French aristocratic world. Here is Flaubert’s style at its best:

Their clothes, better made, seemed of finer cloth, and their hair, brought forward in curls towards the temples, glossy with more delicate pomades. They had the complexion of wealth—that clear complexion that is heightened by the pallor of porcelain, the shimmer of satin, the veneer of old furniture, and that an ordered regimen of exquisite nurture maintains at its best. Their necks moved easily in their low cravats, their long whiskers fell over their turned-down collars, they wiped their lips upon handkerchiefs with embroidered initials that gave forth a subtle perfume. Those who were beginning to grow old had an air of youth, while there was something mature in the faces of the young. In their unconcerned looks was the calm of passions daily satiated, and through all their gentleness of manner pierced that peculiar brutality, the result of a command of half-easy things, in which force is exercised and vanity amused—the management of thoroughbred horses and a society of loose women [Part I, chap. viii, pp. 52–58].

This dramatized picture embodies Flaubert’s criticism of French aristocratic society. The images—“pallor of porce-
lain, "veneer of old furniture," "their necks moved easily in their low cravats," "a command of half-easy things . . . the management of thoroughbred horses and a society of loose women"—the images at once describe and satirically appraise. They are images telling of pride and elegance but also of decadence, telling of dignity and power but also of sterility and corruption. They hint at the doom of France’s ruling class.

As in the scene of the patricians, so in the scene at the opera (Part II, chap. xv) and in the scene of the comices agricoles (Part II, chap. viii) a dramatized picture is presented as symbol. These pictured impressions are images of reality charged with meaning. An image of reality is turned to symbol—a clock, a whip, a piano, a cactus plant, or a hat. Crass reality is represented in the loathsomely disfigured blind beggar, the vendor of romantic song. He, too, exploits deluded dreamers. He mocks them with his ditty of constant love:

To speak to you he threw back his head with an idiotic laugh, then his blushy eyeballs, rolling constantly, at temples beat against the edges of the open wound. He sang a little song as he followed the carriages—

"Maids in the warmth of a summer day
Dream of love, and of love alway."

And all the rest was about birds and sunshine and green leaves [Part III, chap. v, p. 307].

When he intrudes again, chanting beneath the window of Emma’s death-room, his song, now a death-song, coincides with Emma’s death-rattle:

"The blind man!" she cried. And Emma began to laugh, an atrocious, frantic, despairing laugh, thinking she saw the hideous face of the poor wretch that stood out against the eternal night like a menace.

"The wind is strong this summer day,
Her petticoat has flown away."

She fell back upon the mattress in a convulsion. They all drew near. She was dead [Part III, chap. viii, pp. 371–72].

Blind and with time’s clattering stick, he is Reality personified as the Eternal Menace. For Emma he is a bitterer poisoner than arsenic. Other symbols for the same mocking intent are the apricots, the token of bitter reality (Part II, chap. xii); the whip (Part II, chap. xii); and the clock (Part III, chap. v). At the opera, transported from dull life into a fantasy world of intoxicated passion, Emma measures her own personal plight against the fortunes of Lucie de Lammermoor—

The voice of the prima donna seemed to her to be but echoes of her conscience, and this illusion that charmed her as some very thing of her own life. But no one on earth had loved her with such love . . .

Oh, why had not she, like this woman, resisted, implored? She, on the contrary, had been joyous, without seeing the abyss into which she was throwing herself. Ah! if in the freshness of her beauty, before the soiling of marriage and the disillusions of adultery, she could have anchored her life upon some great, strong heart, then virtue, tenderness, voluptuousness, and duty blending, she would never have fallen from so high a happiness . . .

. . . and, drawn towards this man by the illusion of the character, she tried to imagine to herself his life—that life resonant, extraordinary, splendid, and that might have been hers if fate had willed it . . . She longed to run to his arms, to take refuge in his strength, as in the incarnation of love itself, and to say to him, to cry out, "Take me away! carry me with you! let us go! Thine! thine! all my ardour and all my dreams!"

The curtain fell [Part II, chap xv, pp. 257, 258, 259].

This unreal world is as hostile to Emma as is the real (but seemingly unreal) world from which she has momentarily escaped. Like the falling curtain, reality intrudes to mock Emma’s tragic plight. Like the gas-filled air of the theater, reality suffocates her aspirations and dreams. Emma can neither adapt herself to the world of commonplace experience nor create as compensation an inner world of her own.
Her attempts to construct a substitute world fail her again and again. Having embalmed her love for Rodolphe, she addresses the Lord—addresses the Lord, as she kneels on her Gothic **priest-dieu**, in "the same suave words that she had murmured formerly to her lover in the outpourings of adultery. It was to make faith come; but no delights descended from the heavens, and she arose with tired limbs and with a vague feeling of a gigantic dupery" (Part II, chap. xiv). This identification of religion with love is a recurrent ironic motif. It is worked out thus: The cathedral, which Emma in a last vain pretense of purity selects for her clandestine tryst with Léon, is identified as "a huge boudoir spread around her"—the arches bending down to gather the confession of her angel-like love (Part III, chap i). In this metaphor of church as boudoir, the values inherent in the one object are equated with the values in the other (both parts of the comparison are stated). At the climax of Emma's liaison with Rodolphe, we are given this image of Emma: "One would have thought that an artist apt in conception had arranged the curls of hair upon her neck; they fell in a thick mass, negligently, and with the changing chances of their adultery, that unbound them every day" (Part II, chap. xii). The mass of loosened hair symbolizes her moral decline (only one part of the comparison is given, the visual image). Her external perfections ("Her voice now took more mellow inflections, her figure also") are an ironic contrast to her spiritual disorder. We are told that Emma "found again in adultery all the platitudes of marriage." And we may add: all the platitudes of religion. The platitudes of religion are symbolized in the holy water which Monsieur Bournisien sprinkles around Emma's death-room.

For Monsieur Bournisien the holy water purifies. For Homais, it contaminates. He resprinkles the room with chlorine. The church, represented by the Abbé, has failed Emma in her quest for a faith. Religion succors her not a whit more than do her dreams of a requited love. Both are, for her, coined of the same debased quality. It was the Abbé's indifference to her plight (in the scene where she goes to him for help: Part II, chap. vi)—in a word, it was the inability of the church to provide a prop—that precipitated Emma's moral disintegration. That prop removed, "She revelled in all the evil ironies of triumphant adultery."

The blueprint upon which Flaubert pins Emma is tool-marked with ironies that doom her from the start. A passionate, overimaginative Emma is paired with a complacent, unimaginative Charles; each is the other's diametrical opposite. That Charles, the personification of humdrum commonplace reality, will be totally incapable of resolving the problem of their contrary natures is foreshadowed in the opening description of the schoolboy's oval, whalebone-stiffened hat: "It was one of those headgears of composite order, in which we can find traces of the bearskin, shako, billycock hat, sealskin cap, and cotton nightcap; one of those poor things, in fine, whose dumb ugliness has depths of expression, like an imbecile's face" (Part I, chap. i). The ridiculous hat foretells the pathetic man that the young Charles will become.5

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5 The critics who have found it a fault that the novel opens and closes with Bovary have not taken into account the use to which he is put. The novel opens with Bovary because he is to function in terms of symbolic foreshadowing. Mr. Somerset Maugham thinks it was Flaubert's purpose "to enclose the story of Emma within the story of her husband as you enclose a painting in a frame. He must have felt that so he rounded off his narrative and gave it the unity of a work of art" (Atlantic Monthly, CLXXX [November, 1947], 139).
That his marriage will turn to ash is signified by Emma’s act of throwing her wedding bouquet into the fire: “It flared up more quickly than dry straw. Then it was like a red bush in the cinders, slowly devoured. She watched it burn. The little pasteboard berries burst, the wire twisted, the gold lace melted; and the shrivelled paper corollas, fluttering like black butterflies at the back of the stove, at last flew up the chimney” (Part I, chap. ix). “Ah! my poor dreams,” she might be saying as she watches them shrivel. Their collapse is foreshadowed in this image of melted gold lace, twisted wire, and burst pasteboard berries and corollas.

Of all Flaubert’s innumerable technical devices, the one that has had perhaps the greatest influence is the device of the double mood. A built-up flight from reality collapses in a brutal fact, noble emotions are canceled out by juxtaposed ignoble ones, grandiloquent sentiments are knocked sideways by mocking intrusions. The outstanding occasion is the famous scene at the Comices Agricoles (where Rodolphe first courts Emma). The speech of the councillor is geared with the conversation of the lovers. His platitudes about progress, patriotism, and love are synchronized with Rodolphe’s platitudes about the new morality and the eternity of his passion for Emma. The two alternating attitudes answer each other and cancel out each other’s values. After the speech, prizes are awarded to deserving farmers, and here the irony reaches its culmination pitch in the intensified counterpointing of the following double talk:

And he seized her hand; she did not withdraw it.

“For good farming generally!” cried the president.

Which is to suggest that the romantic courtship of Rodolphe and Emma amounts to no more than animal breeding.

“Just now, for example, when I went to your house.”

“To Monsieur Bizat of Quincampoix.”

“Did I know I should accompany you?”

“Seventy francs.”

Which is the price of a courtesan’s favors.

“A hundred times I wished to go; and I followed you—I remained.”

“Manures!”

That Rodolphe could not tear himself away from her is derisively mocked by the shout of “Manures!” And his promise—

“And I shall remain to-night, to-morrow, all other days, all my life!”

is jeered at again: for this faithful lover, a gold medal!

“To Monsieur Caron of Argueil, a gold medal!”

“For I have never in the society of any other person found so complete a charm.”

“To Monsieur Bain of Givry-Saint-Martin.”

“And I shall carry away with me the remembrance of you!"

“For a merino ram!”

The “merino ram” figures for Rodolphe’s bestial lusts. Observe the brutal mockery in the last of these retorts:

“But you will forget me; I shall pass away like a shadow.”

“To Monsieur Belot of Notre-Dame.”

“Oh, no! I shall be something in your thought, in your life, shall I not?”

“Porcine race; prizes—equal; to Messrs. Lehérisse and Cullembourg, sixty francs!”

[Part II, chap. viii, pp. 171–72].

They are pigs, the pair of them.6

6 This scene illustrates, as Frank demonstrates, the spatial form of the modern novel. Flaubert himself hinted at its space-time logic when, in a letter, he commented on this scene: “Everything should sound simultaneously; one should hear the bellowing of the cattle, the whispering of the lovers and the rhetoric of the officials all at the same time” (see Frank’s analysis and also Albert Thibaudet’s Gustave Flaubert, 1821–1880 [Paris, 1922]).
The words "merino ram," "manures," and "porcine race" reduce the lovers to that level. They are a savage commentary on Rodolphe's vows of eternal fidelity. But it is not alone these lovers who are being satirized (as Mr. Turnell notes), it is the whole basis of love. Furthermore, Flaubert is attacking not only sexual passion but the French agricultural class as well:

The meeting was over, the crowd dispersed, and now that the speeches had been read, each one fell back into his place again, and everything into the old grooves; the masters bullied the servants, and these struck the animals, indolent victors, going back to the stalls, a green crown on their horns.

As for Rodolphe's hypocrisy, his eternity of passion soon turns into "the eternal monotony of passion," Emma being for him no different from any of his other mistresses. His hypocrisy is symbolized by the manufactured tear he fakes upon his lettre de rupture, his former love letters providing him with the required dose of inspiration for this one (Part II, chap. xiii).

We might characterize the entire novel, in its architectonics of conflicting attitudes, as a two-part house or duplex. It is a house divided into an upstairs of moral conventions—it is filled with tawdry illusions and images of felicity, passion, rapture—and a nihilistic cellar loaded with symbols of disintegration, with moods of ennui, chagrin, tristesse. Flaubert's fundamental nihilism, which denies all values, is at odds with the conventional morality supporting these very values, namely, those of love, morality, religion, science. The word "adultery," which is constantly spoken by the tenants upstairs, has no meaning in the scheme of things down below. As spectators, we do not feel with the emotions of Emma against the emotions of Rodolphe, but rather we feel emotion at Emma herself. She is the tenant, who suffers most from the moral confusion in this duplex structure of the novel. Emma, the hungry soul whose life is "but one long tissue of lies," inhabits both parts of the house. She is constantly shifting about, now upstairs (the muddled romantic) and now downstairs (the hardened realist). An instance of this last phase is occasioned when Emma returns to Rodolphe in a desperate attempt to borrow from him the money her creditors demand (one of the best scenes in the book). This is a different Emma from the self-deluding dreamer. Here is the hardened realist:

"But when one is so poor one doesn't have silver on the butt of one's gun. One doesn't buy a clock inlaid with tortoiseshell," she went on, pointing to a buhl timepiece, "nor silver-gilt whistles for one's whips," and she touched them, "nor charms for one's watch. Oh, he wants for nothing! even to a liqueur-stand in his room! For you love yourself; you live well. You have a château, farms, woods; you go hunting; you travel to Paris. Why, if it were but that," she cried, taking up two studs from the mantelpiece, "but the least of these trifles, one can get money for them. Oh, I do not want them; keep them!"

And she threw the two links away from her, their gold chain breaking as it struck against the wall [Part III, chap. viii, p. 356].

The voice is masculine, the tone brittle in its sneer.

In Flaubert's works, plot is subsidiary to the analysis of psychological motives and processes. The analysis of Emma's spiritual disintegration ends in a negation of all spiritual values. Madame Bovary has been called an onslaught on the foundations of human relationships and on human nature itself. It is not this nihilism that damns the book, however. Nor does the burden of "immorality," for which Flaubert was charged and prosecuted in 1857. The basis for critical
censure lies in the ambivalence of attitudes which conflict and cancel out each other. Nevertheless, *Madame Bovary*, even with its many defects, survives all criticism. And then there is that perfect short story "A Simple Heart." These two works represent Flaubert's outstanding achievement. There is also the extrinsic one of his immense influence on the development of the novel. Certainly, all this is achievement enough for a location of his genius (as by John Middleton Murry) among "the greatest heroes in the second rank of letters." At least that!

As Turnell says, the critic is faced with the problem of deciding "what value should be attached to Flaubert's pessimism, whether it is a mature conception of life or an immature cynicism which is masquerading as mature vision."

In his distinguished introduction to *Three Tales* (New Directions, 1944), Harry Levin points out that "A Simple Heart" is a sequel to *Madame Bovary*, "more particularly to the episode at the agricultural show, where Catherine Leroux, a single heroic figure in a crowd of *mufles*, had been cited for half a century of servitude."

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**The Function of Literary Research**

*A Reconsideration*

ROBERT E. SPILLER

What I have to say today involves rather a shift of emphasis than a fundamental revision of the generally accepted definition of the function of literary research, which, I take it, is the effort to make literature more understandable. I am not of those who believe that the amassing of information about our literary past, which has engaged our best scholarly minds for two or three generations, has been a waste of time. One of the functions of literary research has always been and always will be the effort to re-create the past so that its literary product will regain some of the sting of immediacy that it had in its own day. Appreciation follows understanding, and understanding derives in large part from accurate factual knowledge.

This is an attainable objective within reasonable limits of expectation. But, as the scholar’s investigations move inward from the external circumstances of time and place surrounding a work of art to the central problem of the work itself and the process of creating it, his methods, of necessity, become less precise as the importance of the problem increases. Scholars are trained to beware of conjecture where proof cannot be supplied, and they have tended to stop short on the threshold of their central question: the nature of the creative process itself in the particular instance and in general. We can hardly blame them as long as there was much preparatory work to be done in exploring the past; but, as knowledge accumulates, the justification for confining our investigations to ascerturable facts loses weight, and the necessity for turning our attention to the problem of literary creation itself becomes more urgent.

In the last half-century, we researchers...