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## The Pursuit of Good Food: The Alimentary Chronotope in *Madame Bovary*

Lauren Flinner

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The Pursuit of Good Food: The Alimentary Chronotope in *Madame Bovary*

By

Lauren Flinner

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Accepted by:

Alexandre Bonafos, Director of Thesis

Krista Van Fleit, Reader

Tracey L. Weldon, Interim Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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## **Dedication**

This paper is dedicated to Anna Igou, without whom I never would have started my journey studying French food. Thank you to her for sharing your passion for French, and for inspiring my own. It was a privilege to study under her, and a privilege to cite her work within my own.

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## **Abstract**

The imagery in *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert is crucial to the structure of the novel due to Flaubert's insistence on observations of *le quotidien* or daily life. Daily activities, mundane tasks, and precise descriptions take as much precedence within the chapters as the actions of Emma herself, putting focus on the importance of these activities as readers try to discern meaning from their inclusion. One such daily activity that features in many scenes and varies widely is the presence of food within the novel. As Lilian Furst, Jean-Pierre Richard, and Victor Brombert observed in their analyses of *Madame Bovary*, food plays a distinct role within the novel for varied reasons, though in this essay, I will be arguing that its primary role is to indicate class structure and reinforce Emma's onerous position within her *petite bourgeoisie* class through the use of semiotics.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, realism and an obsession with *le quotidien* gripped the literary scene at the moment when gastronomy and the advent of the restaurant took hold of the culture within France. An appreciation for the day-to-day and simplicity of life clashed with the city life's devotion to innovation and progress, a conflict reflected in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Food, eating, and aesthetics of the table are present throughout the novel and crafted meticulously and never without reason, for, as Gitanjali Shahani cites within her introduction to *Food and Literature*, “literary characters do not need to eat to stay alive” (3). Food within the novel is intentionally placed, providing context through specific alimentary language that allows readers to understand Emma and her ideals in a more complex way as it relates to class, aesthetics, and *le quotidien*.

In a realist novel, accurate portrayal of the given period is a primary goal, and Flaubert was, if anything, dedicated to producing a work that reflected the day-to-day provincial life in France during the tumultuous 19<sup>th</sup> century. With *Madame Bovary*, he wanted to write a “livre sur rien” [a book about nothing] as he wrote in a letter to Louise Colet, that is “held together by the strength of its style” alone (Flaubert 300). “Pas un mot de trop” as Lilian Furst quotes Flaubert saying (qtd. in “The Role of Food” 53). To interpret this, to Flaubert, no word is out of place or unintended within the novel, and to that extent every paragraph is its intended length, and every italicization is made deliberately. In this, he establishes his wish to craft a picture of everyday life that was the



aspect of the realist novel, seen also in the works of Balzac or Stendhal, though Flaubert personally rejected the label of realism. In particular, interpretations of the realist movement read the literature as a means to put society on display and lobby criticisms against it through characters and imagery, which Flaubert, who had a known distaste for bourgeois society, sought to do with *Madame Bovary* (Robinson and Birkett). The citizens of Yonville as well as the titular character serve to fulfill that wish, as well as their interactions with the carefully crafted scenes Flaubert creates based on France at the time.

*Madame Bovary* takes place during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a time of repeated political upheaval and myriad regime changes. Context clues such as the history of the Marquis and certain anecdotes of Homais the pharmacist point to this story taking place directly in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Flaubert 97, 141). At that time, France was moving from the July Monarchy into the Second Republic and then Second Empire. The haute bourgeoisie and the lingering dregs of the aristocracy occupied the top of the social ladder while social mobility amidst the modernization of the economy began to allow growth amongst the lower classes of the bourgeoisie (Ferguson 606). However, class division was still stark, and most of the haute bourgeoisie that came from older money were interested in protecting the higher society from new money and up and comings (Holt 717). Modernization was knocking at the door, particularly under Napoleon III. He ushered in societal, economic, and cultural changes during his time as president of the Second Republic and then emperor of the Second Empire, though much of this reorganization occurred within the cities, and in particular, Paris. The regions and provincial towns of France were slower to change, both with lingering aristocracy but

also in modernization. Landowners still controlled the majority of the wealth, though the middle class did have the chance for upward mobility, but those in the country stayed in the country for the most part and it was primarily young men with funds who were migrating into the city (Ferguson 604). As city populations grew, so too grew the culture within it, particularly as the bourgeoisie rose into power. With the dwindling power of the aristocracy, social settings shifted from private parties to the common spaces of the city and into restaurants and cafés as gastronomy grew in importance in France over the course of the century. Power emerged in a more public space and displays of wealth became a priority for the bourgeoisie and the upper class, not just the aristocracy of before.

“Dis-moi ce que tu manges; je te dirai ce que tu es” is one of the famous aphorisms of the celebrated gastronome Brillat-Savarin: “Tell me what you eat; I will tell you who you are.” During the 19<sup>th</sup> century in France, following the Revolution of 1789, there emerged a culture around food referred to as gastronomy. Forms of it existed prior to this social shift, but in France it was limited to the aristocracy who could afford the finery and personal chefs required by the art of the table. As the socio-political structure in France was being reworked, so too was culture going through a grand shift alongside it. Over the beginning of the 1800s, the art of food became more widely accessible to those in urban environments. In a direct counter to the famines of the preceding centuries, modernization of agriculture led to a surplus of food within Europe at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Despite food shortages during the revolutionary period at the end of the century, France’s “alimentary abundance” endured and contributed heavily to the birth of the gastronomic culture of cities, namely Paris, within the 19<sup>th</sup> century

(Ferguson 604). Situated at the center of the gastronomic boom was the restaurant, where former private chefs ended up as their former employers were exiled or beheaded. Now relegated to a public space where they interacted with others across the social scale, chefs found the need to compete in order to establish themselves as notable. And so, the social sphere became recognized within the scale of types of cuisine available at certain restaurants. The haute cuisine was far more accessible following the assimilation of restaurants into proper society but was still restricted by money. The higher the cuisine, the costlier it was, reinforcing class division while still celebrating the accessibility the bourgeoisie now had.

Chefs of the *haute cuisine*, quintessential of gastronomic trends, were guided by the writings of chef Antonin Carême (1833) and gastronomes Grimod de la Reynière (1806) and Brillat-Savarin (1825). Carême published several cookbooks pushing French cuisine into the modern era, seeking to make the recipes of French cuisine widely available. He even wrote for women, but only for women who were directing their cooks at home as opposed to women cooking themselves (Ferguson 614). This places a very distinct class tag on Carême's audience as it focused on the dominating class at the time: the bourgeoisie. While modern in his cookbooks, though, Carême was opposed to the restaurant and preferred private cooking. He was known as the chef of kings, and enjoyed his work as a private chef, believing that the table should be dressed artfully for private cooking as opposed to enjoyed by individuals in the restaurant. While he championed for recipes known in the household as well as in the kitchen, he stood opposed to the growing restaurant culture in the cities in Paris (Ferguson 613-16). This did not stop

restaurant chefs however from adopting his recipes and techniques to fully cement modern French cuisine amongst the culinary cultural space that was developing.

Following Carême and Grimod’s *Almanach des Gourmands*, Brillat-Savarin took what they had started and created the culinary culture that was gastronomy. He took the practice of gastronomy and turned it into a discussion and an analysis that made it accessible to not only the chef and gastronome, but accessible to the reader as well, allowing gastronomy to become a concept discussed beyond something on the table. His writings mimicked literature and conversations about food, applying anecdotes and aphorisms about the food he discussed. It established that food was an art, an ideal that Grimod had begun and Carême sought to preserve into the hands of anyone who could read. As Ferguson says, thanks to Brillat-Savarin, “never again could food be confused with either a sin or a mere bodily function” (617). Food now meant something, designated something to the reader, and it is precisely this definition that inspired this reading of *Madame Bovary* through the lens of food.

In knowing that Flaubert’s intent was to create a picture of everyday life in *Madame Bovary*, the imagery therein becomes a crucial point to the novel. The clothing worn, the layout of the house, the methodical list of how every morning is spent and what is eaten at every meal is brought together to create the daily life of Emma Bovary. Symbolism and signs point to meaning beneath the surface of the scenes, but these are dependent on the cultural and social contexts in which the realist novel was written. The attention to detail Flaubert gives each scene establishes a narrative of provincial life and what preoccupies a town in Normandy in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. During this time, the space a person occupied said much about the kind of life they were living, whether it be

in the city or the country, amongst the upper classes or the petite bourgeoisie and the working class. *Madame Bovary*, with its distinct realism, uses imagery to establish the space that a character or reader finds themselves in. From methodical descriptions of the setting of a table to the importance of mealtimes and the monotony of dinner, Flaubert focuses his attention on food for establishing his narrative on *le quotidien*.

As an inherent part of life, food plays a pivotal role within the realm of a novel determined to depict the everyday life of Emma Bovary. Yet, through food, the reader is fed a deeper understanding of not only the life of Emma, but also the space she occupies, and that which she wants to occupy. Bakhtinian chronotope seeks to align history with literature in a way that has been difficult to prove due to the separated analysis of time and space. The chronotope takes time and space and brings them together into an image that forms a distinct significance for symbolism within literature. The concept of the chronotope draws substance from the time and space that an object occupies in order to attach meaning to the image being observed (Bakhtin 84). Space and time are dependent on the piece of literature, but in the case of realist literature, the chronotope is precise and lends itself to thorough analysis through historical poetics. Flaubert's dedication to crafting images of real life places imagery and signs into the hands of the reader that allow for an in-depth analysis of the given signs.

In the case of *Madame Bovary*, food is a chronotope within the novel that occupies one period, the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, but two different spaces. One is that of the aristocracy or the upper class and the other is the petite bourgeoisie or Emma's class. At the time, the distinction between the upper classes and the petite bourgeoisie was vast, and wealth varied widely depending on profession and whether one lives an urban life or

a provincial one. This distinction between the two spaces that food occupies helps the reader understand Emma's fraught position within her life. The language surrounding food depicts the monotonous, everyday life of Emma as the wife of a small-town doctor and as a petite bourgeoisie, but it also presents the gastronomic riches of the haute bourgeoisie and the aristocracy that Emma so aspires to. The language of food in *Madame Bovary* is used to depict the dichotomy between Emma's desires and her reality to the extent that it is only her desire that sustains her while her reality as a petite bourgeoisie continually starves her of that which she wants, but eventually the emptiness of both reality and her desires brings about her ruin.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The intent for this essay is to analyze the presence of food within Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* through dialogic exploration of the intersection of alimentary imagery and the time and space this realist novel occupies. The analysis of imagery in *Madame Bovary* is exhaustive, due in part to Flaubert's extensive commentary on the formation of the book through his letters with Louise Colet and other friends, but also because of his incredible attention to detail in creating a story about *le quotidien* or daily life in provincial France. Studies of food in the novel look at varying aspects of its influence on Emma and others: as a means of characterization (Furst 1979), as a repetitive reminder of Emma's dejection for her daily life (Brombert 1966), as the method through which Flaubert employs his realism (Auerbach 1946), or as a vehicle for desire (Richard 1954). Each of these analyses and others come together to present a succinct argument for the semiotics of food as it pertains to the life of Emma Bovary. In order to adequately evaluate and build upon prior studies, this chapter will look at the sources referenced and their importance to the analysis to follow.

Prior to a review of specific studies of *Madame Bovary* and how food ties into the novel, I would first like to discuss theoretics that align the importance of food with the social structure, as well as introduce the concept of the chronotope as discussed by Bakhtin, though the particular alliance of Bakhtin and the chronotope with *Madame Bovary* will be further discussed in Chapter 4. Semiotics, particularly the post-structural

argument for the study of signs that Barthes proposed, was the initial inspiration and driving point of analysis of food. To further centralize the argument of food in the social construct of *Madame Bovary*, an anthropological study by Mary Douglas reinforces the sociocultural differences that isolate the meaning of food in certain contexts across different classes, settings, and cultures. Bakhtin's space-time and his concept of the chronotope helps identify the specific constraints in which I analyze the food in the novel. Together these three theorists make up the driving force behind the analysis in this work allied with prior studies of the importance of food in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*.

Inspired by Ferdinand de Saussure's writings on semiotics in 1916, Barthes took the linguistic concept of the signifier and signified and published his *Mythologies* in an attempt to add another layer of significance to signs and semiotics that removed his theory from the general universality of structuralism. Where Saussure was focused primarily on the intrinsic and universal meaning conveyed through signs, Barthes sought to apply varying definitions of the signified depending on context in which the sign is being observed. *Mythologies* studied objects and items within bourgeois French society in order to assess how bourgeois culture assigned value to these materials. Wine, for example, and the act of drinking it is not just an implication of inebriation but, for the French, a cultural importance that holds significance to those who partake. Not only that, but its meaning changes depending on the status of the person drinking, further denouncing the universality of the signifier wine signifying an alcoholic beverage (Barthes 58-61). The signified is thus ascertained situationally, placing meaning in the hands of context. In literary analysis of food, meaning, much like Barthes discusses, is derived from cultural and social significance. Barthes's semiology is used to analyze



Flaubert's realism and how he depicts food in the novel to determine what is signified by its use in the narrative of *Madame Bovary*.

Barthes's *Mythologies* covered a wide range of cultural concepts of varying importance within France, but analysis of food was limited to wine, steak frites, and ornamental cookery. In a more in-depth analysis of food through a psycho-social lens, Barthes explains how food represents a system of communication and a representation of life and its dreams in his article "Pour une psycho-sociologie de l'alimentation contemporaine," or "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption." Since humanity moved beyond the need to survive off picking berries, he argues that the need for food has become extremely structured. "Substances, techniques of preparation, habits, all become part of a system of differences in signification; and as soon as this happens, we have communication by way of food," Barthes writes ("Toward..." 22). This in turn stands counter to Claude Lévi-Strauss's assertion that there was universality in the language of cooking food, as Mary Douglas highlights in her on anthropological study of food. In "Deciphering a Meal," Douglas decodes the meal structure in a typical American family home and then compares it to several other language structures. She goes in depth about how a meal can be decoded within the sociocultural constructs in which it exists, and draws inspiration from Barthes in that food categories share coded social structures, as he discusses in his article on psychosociology and contemporary food consumption (Douglas 61). Douglas's anthropological analysis of food in the social structure and Barthes's analysis of the social importance and implications of food join together to allow for significance to be drawn from instances of food within literature. I use both of these backgrounds as a means to tie into studies of the particular imagery of

food that exist prior to the following work, and build upon my own assertion as it aligns with Bakhtinian chronotope.

Mikhail Bakhtin begins his essay “Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel” with the problem he hopes to solve, that is, bringing real historical time and space together with literature. The connectedness of time and space is his answer, or rather, chronotope, a study of temporal and spatial relationships that interact within literature to define aspects of the narrative (Bakhtin 86). Time is the period in history that the chronotope occupies, and the space is the genre or place where it is found. Through Greek Romance, folklore, and up through the Rabelaisian novel, Bakhtin explores novelistic chronotopes and historic poetics. One of his major examples is the chronotope of meeting, which relies on both time and space in the narrative to occur. Two characters cannot interact when meeting unless they arrive in the same space-time in order for the meeting to occur, thus allowing the plot to move forward (or not, in the case of one missing the time or the space). Aligned to the chronotope of meeting is the chronotope of the road, though not as broad and strictly placed in space-time as meeting, the road still carries significance within a narrative, as a means of meeting but also adventure and change (Bakhtin 97-8). Both of these examples allow for a clearer view of the importance of the chronotope in literature, from an overarching concept like adventure to minute details of imagery or interaction.

The chronotope exists both as a framework for the narrative and a means of structuring the plot, but chronotope can also be parts of that same structure that contribute to the whole. As Bakhtin emphasizes, “any and every literary image is chronotopic” (251). Establishing the historicity in the narrative attaches deeper meaning and

significance to images and actions, here defined as chronotopes. Anything and everything can be chronotopic, so long as its relevance to the narrative can be established through space-time. This is both the chronotope's greatest strength and biggest weakness: it is undefined and unbound in its definition. It can be many things at once, and everything can take on a chronotopic view so long as it can relate to time and space. In the case of the chronotope of meeting, it is a part of the larger chronotope of chance and the adventure-time within the Greek Romance. Anything can be chronotopic, but this also makes defense for something as being chronotopic as loosely defined. Within the time and space of the narrative, importance is derived from the interaction with the story, but the narratological device also relies on its external historicity. Greek Romance's chronotope of adventure-time became less transferable as literary themes developed, putting it as distinctly within the era of the Greek Romance. Rabelais's chronotope of the natural man was given importance from the fact that it followed a dark and hopeless time period prior to the Renaissance. This relation to external history within the genre as well as the timeline within the narrative develops the chronotope as widely applicable and yet difficult to place.

The major analysis within Bakhtin's essay is that of the Rabelaisian chronotope. Following the fearful and dark times of medieval literature, Rabelais's books *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel* focused on fantastical and grotesque yet scientific celebrations of man and the body. Bakhtin cites the medieval world view as a time that is destructive in nature, that halts creation, and Rabelais created something in that space that drew upon the earthly space. Rabelais's chronotope links real life, or history, to the real earth, which is the space (Bakhtin 205-6). His literature was the introduction of the image and motifs

of the living man with his scientific descriptions of bodily functions, attention to the cycle of life; albeit grotesque, it was also celebratory (Bakhtin 240). In the Rabelaisian chronotope, culture plays great significance, and it is through the aspects of Rabelais's writing that this chronotope defines the culture that it represents, which is the emerging societal growth and movement into the Renaissance during the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Bakhtin 187). Overall, Rabelaisian chronotope sets the stage for more intricate analysis of the chronotope in varying aspects, as Bakhtin does with the bodily series he focuses on to identify the chronotope of man within Rabelais's works. These series were the anatomical body, human clothing, food, drink and drunkenness, sex, death, and defecation (170). Our concern here is with the food and eating series, discussed in tandem with drink and drunkenness, but all of these relate back to mankind and the image of man in literature, prompting a close observation of mankind's standing within the space-time it occupies.

The importance of food and drink in Rabelais's novel is noted from the introduction of the series by Bakhtin, citing it as "an enormous role... almost all the themes of the novel come about through it; hardly an episode could manage without it" (178). Even the names of the characters are related to drinks, such as Gargantua's father Grandgousier which means "Great Gulp" or Pantagruel who Rabelais interprets to mean "he who is always thirsty" (Bakhtin 178). As food names the characters, so too does it usher in the driving plot points of the novel, and through extensively detailed scenes. For Rabelais, as Bakhtin notes, food and drinking carried cultural significance that was held in high regard through the Rabelaisian chronotope. The chronotope of the natural man focused on drawing humanity away from the despondent nature of the late Middle Ages

and instead celebrate his relation to the earth. It was a means through which late medieval concepts of survival were separated from the imagery of eating and drinking, and instead tied “object and phenomena” to create “the new human image, a man who is harmonious and whole” (178, 185-87). This food series within the Rabelaisian chronotope can be attributed to a smaller chronotope of food, as a means through which sociocultural meaning can be derived. Through his focus on the importance in food, Bakhtin has already asserted that it plays an important role within literature according to the space and time that it occupies. In the case of Rabelais, feasting was an important social time akin to the Platonic feast in *Symposium*. I use these identifying factors to structure my argument for food as chronotope that defines both Emma’s desire and her reality. As Bakhtin notes of Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, time is slow and repetitive within the novel, creating the sensation of dragging through the provincial town, and it is interspersed with temporal moments of high action. These two contrasting moments of time also align heavily with different moments of space, speaking to different meanings within the narrative. In these moments of high action, food can be found, and it is through food that I relate it to its time and space to craft an argument that food speaks to Emma’s struggles within the novel and how her desire conflicts with her reality, but neither would truly be able to keep her alive.

Through a phenomenological approach, Jean-Pierre Richard starts his chapter “The Creation of Form in Flaubert” in *Littérature et Sensation* with a memorable and oft quoted line: “on mange beaucoup dans les romans de Flaubert” [One eats copiously in Flaubert’s novels] (1). Food features prominently in major scenes across all of Flaubert’s works, functioning as an almost “religious right of passage,” such as the castle feast

Emma attends. In this scene, she undergoes a transformation she will never recover from, like a baptism or communion, except she is bathed in the aromas of rich delicacies and taking in champagne and not the eucharist. In a similar vein, Barbara Vinken argues in “Loving, Reading, Eating: The Passion of *Madame Bovary*” that Emma spends her time in the novel seeking out material, aesthetic spiritual nourishment as opposed to religious fulfillment. Richard explains how the scene at the castle awakens her desire and fills her with *la verve* or vigor and enthusiasm that excites but does not yet give in to greed (2). Supposedly, after *la verve* comes satisfaction, but that satisfaction is not often seen in Emma, and in fact, she gives into greed far more than she resists. This verve inspires appetite, a hunger for the exciting things, and it makes Emma crazy with desire. With a voracious appetite for more, Emma turns to the love of others, but as Richard explains, “Emma loves like one devours” (4). She consumes others to satiate her appetite for the grand, for brief moments of satisfaction that never truly satisfy. As Richard explains, food in any instance is a form of ceremony and its meaning changes depending on the situation (1). This argument for shifting meaning behind instances of food lie in the identification of a chronotope of food for Emma, as it occupies different spaces within the same mid-19<sup>th</sup> century time.

Erich Auerbach examines Flaubert’s methodical and realistic writing through a dinner scene in which Emma is presented as miserable and Charles is oblivious. His book *Mimesis* is a study on the illustration of reality within literature as given by the books full title, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. This study looks at realism throughout history, from Homer up through Proust, but in particular it is the chapter “In the Hôtel de la Mole” that he discusses Flaubert and 19<sup>th</sup> century realism.

Auerbach's focus lies on a single paragraph in which "all the bitterness of life seemed to be served" on Emma's plate (483). Surrounding this phrase is a description of the steaming boiled beef, the oozing walls and damp tiles of the room, and Charles's slow eating that only contribute to the melancholy of the scene. Auerbach examines the language Flaubert uses within this scene to piece apart the author's methods in establishing a dialogue without imparting his own opinions into the narrative, something Auerbach cites both Balzac and Stendhal as doing within their literature. Pictured in the "most everyday scene imaginable," according to Auerbach, Flaubert shares the tone of despair that hangs from every word without being explicit (488). It is throughout the novel that Flaubert implements this method to craft his realist novel, and it is these precise descriptions using tone in the vocabulary that allows for readers to deduce meaning where there is none overtly stated. Auerbach's evaluation of Flaubert's style establishes the tone in which food is analyzed in correlation to Emma and other characters.

Victor Brombert's book *The Novels of Flaubert* studies the importance of imagery and in particular the monotony of food within the chapter "Madame Bovary: The Tragedy of Dreams." Food, he says, takes on several roles within the novel, such as sensuality, debauchery, and even vulgarity that one could liken to Rabelaisian feasts. But, opposed to that is the castle banquet, an image of "urbane refinement" that Brombert highlights as the introduction to the driving tension of the novel. Emma's insatiable appetite following this comes up against the mundane day to day for her, as she finds herself repeatedly stuck and reminded of the routine of life. For Emma, every step forward is wrenched back into reality with no respite, and even after she is no longer in

the story, life continues on, and people continue to eat and enjoy. This monotony is what contributes to Emma's disdain for her reality and Flaubert continually reminds the reader of such as the same meal shows up repeatedly within the narrative (49-52).

Building upon Brombert's analysis of symbolism and imagery, both Lilian Furst and Julie-Manon Doucet further study food in their articles, using it as an indication of characterization. For Furst, food serves four functions: as an environmental factor, as a social indicator, as a means of characterization, and as a source of imagery. Brombert's focus on cyclical monotony ties into Furst's argument for food as a means of characterization, in which the way a person interacts with food is a means to determine their characteristics. Julie-Manon Doucet also highlights food's importance within her article, citing it as a sign of mediocrity within the bourgeoisie norm, allying it with a structure that allows the reader to deduce meaning through its presence. Like Furst, Doucet argues that it is a means of characterization, but she argues that food is a way in which a character's destiny is revealed. For all three of these authors, Brombert, Furst, and Doucet, the language of food crafted within *Madame Bovary* functions parallel to the story and is a structure in which the story is told. Food here becomes an integral part of narration that, as Doucet says, is not just a part of the story, but makes the story ("Poétique du signe..." 2). Food as a signifier through which desire and characters are conveyed is a primary part of each argument and lends itself to the post-structuralist and semiotic analysis of food within this paper. Though Doucet talks regularly of signs, food cannot attribute itself to universality within the text given the details present that lend themselves to identifying factors and vocabulary that conveys intrinsic meaning, as Auerbach discussed before. Flaubert's distinct realistic style disallows universal



attributes, and rather the imagery in food takes on its significance through its connection to the characters and the narrative.

While the authors discussed previously focus on the imagery and signs through food, there is also the act of consumption or lack thereof that aligns itself with the presence and language of food in the novel. As Anna Igou notes in “Nothing Consumed: The Dangerous Space of Food in *Madame Bovary*,” Emma rarely eats within the novel despite the abundance of food found within (36). She argues that the absence of satisfying food for Emma’s appetite only creates a deeper hunger rather than feeding the desire for the grand, an argument I take up and build upon (37). Emma lives in her ideal world for a night at the Chateau Vaubyessard that actualizes her desire, yet Igou argues that this only creates a larger hole in Emma that she seeks to fill, but food is only an “empty construct” that can never satisfy Emma’s hunger, regardless of the realm it occupies. I would suggest, however, that desire does sustain her for a time as she consumes materials and loves, but it inevitably does starve her and is unable to truly feed her wants.

Patricia McEachern also focuses on the lack of consumption and Emma’s slow ruin, but she takes up the argument that Emma’s lack of eating in the novel is a form of control over herself, one of the only ways she can. In “True Lies: Fasting for Force or Fashion in *Madame Bovary*?” McEachern observes Emma’s anorectic tendencies within the novel and how she uses her self-starvation or strange eating habits to take control of the only aspect she can in her life. According to McEachern, this is one of the only forms of power Emma can take at the time as a woman, and she uses it to her advantage to get what she wants when she can, such as the move from Tostes to Yonville (3-4). The

anorectic qualities of Emma are even highlighted within the novel by Flaubert as Emma becoming thin likens her to taking on more noble qualities. This literal physical starvation in pursuit of her own desires supports my own argument that even the food Emma desires cannot sustain her, because her ideal image is aligned to starvation.

Through the culmination of prior research, the idea of class comparisons presented through food evolved into a chronotopic breakdown of food and its representation in Emma's life where her desire becomes a form of sustenance. Igou's analysis on the emptiness of the food in the novel aligns itself with my argument that while Emma's desire sustains her for a time, it is only superficial. Inevitably, the substitutes for her spiritual awakening at Vaubyessard can no longer satisfy Emma, and she succumbs to the lack of spiritual nourishment that is the emptiness in her aesthetic, material possessions that Vinken highlights.

### Chapter 3: Two Feasts, Two Worlds

Though food is interspersed throughout the novel, there are distinct scenes in which it takes center stage, primarily those where Emma is moving forward into a new period in her life. Emma attributes change to sleeping in a new place, but each of these moments are preceded by instances of food (Flaubert 143). In beginning to spend more time with Charles prior to their marriage, Emma seductively drinks blue curacao with him, and food is the main event at their wedding. The grand banquet at the marquis's chateau sets a standard in Emma's life that she chases for the remainder of the novel, seeking it in both of her paramours through food. The start of the end of her life is denoted by the specific verb choice "elle se mit à *manger*" [she began to eat] when consuming the pharmacist's arsenic (Flaubert 407, emphasis mine). Two scenes in particular are given special attention within the novel, with meticulous lists of the food present and detailed descriptions, down to the amount of time spent at the table and how the food was eaten. It is in these two scenes, the wedding feast and the banquet at the marquis's chateau Vaubyessard, that readers are introduced to two distinct worlds within the class structure of France: that of the lives of the rural, petite bourgeoisie, that is, landowners and other small businessmen, and the dwindling aristocracy and the upper bourgeoisie.

## The Wedding Feast

While spending sixteen long hours at the table, the wedding celebration following the marriage of Emma Rouault to Charles Bovary is denoted by a massive quantity of food for their forty-three guests, but the foods that dress the table are far from the finest.

Il y avait dessus quatre aloyaux, six fricassées de poulets, du veau à la casserole, trois gigots, et, au milieu, un joli cochon de lait rôti, flanqué de quatre andouilles à l'oseille. Aux angles, se dressait l'eau de vie dans des carafes. Le cidre doux en bouteilles poussait sa mousse épaisse autour des bouchons, et tous les verres, d'avance, avaient été remplis de vin jusqu'au bord. De grands plats de crème jaune, qui flottaient d'eux-mêmes au moindre choc de la table, présentaient, dessinés sur leur surface unie, les chiffres des nouveaux époux en arabesques de nonpareille. (Flaubert 77)

[On it were four roasts of beef, six chicken fricassées, stewed veal, three legs of mutton, and in the middle a fine roast sucking-pig, flanked by four pork sausages with sorrel. At the corners were decanters of brandy. Sweet bottled-cider frothed round the corks, and all the glasses had been filled to the brim with wine beforehand. Large dishes of yellow cream, that trembled with the least shake of the table, had designed on their smooth surface the initials of the newly wedded pair in nonpareil arabesques.]

With explicit detail, each part of this feast is noted: the quantity of food and its location on the table are described with deliberate theatricality, as Anna Igou notes in regards to the architecture involved with setting the table (“Nothing Consumed...” 40). This is petite bourgeoisie celebration, this is their extravagance and their finery, at least to them. While

it is still the same foods consumed at regular dinners, the specific quantities indicate a certain richness, and as the reader learns, mutton is delicacy enjoyed on occasion by Monsieur Rouault. With three legs of mutton, this is a special feast (Flaubert 72). For those who could afford it, the dishes served are common, but for working classes and peasantry, meat is for special occasions, particularly celebrations such as the wedding at hand. Class divisions were stark during this time and through the alimentary comparisons, this feast can hardly be deigned as gastronomical but not so common as to not be bourgeois.

Roasted meats served with bandy and wine are the focus of this feast, and while celebratory in massive quantities, as established, all of these are staple dishes common to bourgeois life in rural France. Compared with scenes with higher class foods, this feast could not be designated as haute cuisine or fine dining, and therefore stands just outside the gastronomic designators of urban bourgeoisie life. As Carême noted, beef stew or here, stewed veal, otherwise known as *pot au feu*, is a base meal central to the lower classes diet but it is also essential as the starting point of much of classic French cuisine, particularly the sauces (Ferguson 614). Veal here denotes a pricier meat, and far more delicate in nature, but it is still a common petite bourgeoisie dish, consumed several more times throughout the novel alongside soups. Considering the foods present, this establishes a distinct notation of the petite bourgeoisie palate, but the nature in which it is described also relates this feasting scene to the lower classes

The layout of the table and the quantitative listing of the food is evocative of Rabelais's feasts in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, such as the very feast that Bakhtin cites in his analysis of the Rabelaisian chronotope, the supper in Grandgousier's castle: "16

oxen were roasted, then 3 heifers, 32 calves, 63 suckling kids, 95 sheep, 300 suckling pigs in a marvelous sauce, 220 partridges, 700 woodcock, 400 capons from Lundun and Cornouaille and 1700 juicy varieties of other breeds [etc.]” (Bakhtin 180). For the Rabelaisian chronotope, this feast was a symbol of celebration and quality that aligns with the massive nature of space and time within which the giants of the novel are found. Debauchery and excessiveness were also signs of the grotesque in Rabelais and this debased nature that he focuses on celebrates the very nature of man in his most natural of qualities.

The quantitative list here links the wedding feast to the grotesque gaiety of Rabelais as Victor Brombert likewise notes in his essay on *Madame Bovary* (50). Guests come and go, do as they wish, and generally enjoy the raucous pleasure associated with the celebration of a new marriage. People are, in the eyes of the narrator, unrefined and unbound from social expectations at times, though social distinction still holds importance: what a man is wearing was equated to where he would sit at the table. The closer to the bride and groom he sat indicated a higher social standing while those who “wore their best smocks...would sit at the bottom of the table” (Flaubert 75). Bourgeois obsession with class status comes into play here, seen too when some attendees feel slighted by receiving poorer cuts of meat than others, and curse Old Rouault bitterly. Throughout this scene, the class structure of the petite bourgeoisie is reinforced through action and display as food takes center stage in the marriage of Emma and Charles.

In the two scenes in which Emma becomes closer with and joins to Charles, food plays a primary role. In her small farmhouse, as Charles returns again and again, Emma shares a drink of alcohol with him. “Deux petits verres, emplit l’un jusqu’au bord, versa à

peine dans l'autre" describes the scene (Flaubert 70). One glass full to the brim, in the other, nothing but a drop of liquid. Charles's glass is full of opportunity, but Emma's is nearly empty as she licks at the bottom of the glass to taste even a drop. Here, the liquor mirrors what Emma sees in Charles: she sees an escape from the poverty and working-class status that she has as Emma Rouault, but the novel uses her glass to remind the reader of Emma's status as the daughter of a poor farmer, desperately trying to taste a drop of the riches for which she thirsts. It would seem she has it in her grasp, until the wedding feast comes to pass. Simple, regular, likely the same as many other petite bourgeoisie weddings, this is the furthest thing from change that Emma could hope for. In the first scene, Emma occupies a space of the working class, does her best to act out the ways she should in order to escape it. The chronotope of food here reflects her desire, her consumption as an act of sustenance that would push her forward. During the wedding feast, the food represents the reality in which she is stuck, and the marriage in which she is stuck. These scenes both cement food as a primary image within their marriage, and for the remainder of the novel, scenes involving Emma and Charles will feature and revolve around food.

The wedding feast sets the stage through which I analyze Emma's reality through food and what it means to her. As discussed, the food presented during the wedding feast demonstrates the petite bourgeoisie life that Emma occupies. Though the daughter of a farmer, due to successful harvests and a financially smart father, Emma is provided an education and a well-supplied adolescence, something necessary for success amongst the bourgeoisie at the time (Holt 716). During her education, Emma is drawn to romantic literature and ideals that paint pictures of refinement and class in her head. Romanticism

dominates her adolescence, and she continues to read them throughout the novel, continuing to feed into her desires for a higher status in life. She is drawn to Charles as an escape from the quaint farm life she led. Inspired by her romantic ideals, Emma aspires to more and thinks she finds it in Charles, but the wedding feast is a first look into her reality and her unfulfilled desire. Notably, this isn't even the wedding she wanted, hers was far more romantic in style. She wanted to "se marier à minuit, aux flambeaux" [to marry at midnight, by torchlight], in a romantic idealization of weddings and marriage (Flaubert 74). This feast is the inaugural image of Emma's dissatisfaction with her rural, petite bourgeoisie life. Though not explicit, her absence from the scene implies her separation from the setting at hand. The reader is told of those in attendance and how the day and night pass, but Emma is mentioned only in passing at her own wedding, as she concerns herself with the upkeep of her dress and nothing more (Flaubert 76). Emma's lack of participation removes her from it, and places her outside of what is being described. Though it is a celebration of her and Charles, neither of them truly feature within the scene, speaking at once to the emptiness this reality holds for Emma, but also the emptiness this marriage holds for her.

### **The Vaubyessard Banquet**

The first scene of the elegance and richesse of the haute bourgeoisie and the remaining aristocracy in France is set with the aroma of truffles and cooked meats. Lobsters hang out of dishes and Emma dines on fruit she's never eaten, actually drinking at dinner instead of the ladies putting their gloves in glasses which was something common for petite bourgeoisie wives to do at dinner parties as noted by the translator. They use crystal and silver cutlery, and receive a choice cut of meat, something no one



enjoyed at the conjugal feast. In the pivotal moment in Emma's life, an introduction into the world Emma sought, the first scene of the ball at Vaubyessard is the banquet:

Emma se sentit, en entrant, enveloppée par un air chaud, mélange du parfum des fleurs et du beau linge, du fumet des viandes et de l'odeur des truffes. [...] Les pattes rouges des homards dépassaient les plats; de gros fruits dans des corbeilles à jour s'étagaient sur la mousse; les cailles avaient leurs plumes, des fumées montaient; et, en bas de soie, en culotte courte, en cravate blanche, en jabot, grave comme un juge, le maître d'hôtel, passant entre les épaules des convives les plats tout découpés, faisait d'un coup de sa cuiller sauter pour vous le morceau qu'on choisissait. Sur le grand poêle de porcelaine à baguette de cuivre, une statue de femme drapée jusqu'au menton regardait immobile la salle pleine de monde. (Flaubert 100)

[Emma, on entering, felt herself wrapped round as by a warm breeze, a blending of the perfume of flowers and of the fine linen, of the fumes of the roasts and the odor of the truffles [...] The red claws of lobsters hung over the dishes; rich fruit in woven baskets was piled up on moss; the quails were dressed in their own plumage, smoke was rising; and in silk stockings, knee-breeches, white cravat, and frilled shirt, the steward, grave as a judge, passed between the shoulders of the guests, offering ready-carved dishes and, with the flick of the spoon, landed on one's plate the piece one had chosen. On the large porcelain stove inlaid with copper baguettes the statue of a woman, draped to the chin, gazed motionless on the crowded room]

Once again, the text details the foods that line the table with precision, but this time with a decidedly different tone to the descriptions. Rather than methodical lists detailing how much of what is served where, the scene is set uncounted but still conveying the veiled quantity presented (lobsters hung over dishes, fruit piled on moss). Size is equated to quantity here as opposed to distinct numbers. Care is taken to use decadent descriptions to portray the quality and quantity present in order to put the *richesse* of the event on display, such as how Emma is wrapped in the aromas and the perfectly dressed steward. The tables spill over with colorful food made to perfection, where party goers get their pick of meat, and it is served perfectly and without question. At the wedding feast, choice of meat was denied, and poorer cuts were still served as opposed to good cuts for all. Quality is distinctly different between the two feasts here: the cuisine here is richer, and notably more exotic, feeding into the picturesque aristocratic scene built within this passage.

Taste and scent feature prominently as a means to appreciate Emma's desires, senses notably lacking from the wedding feast. The aroma of roasts and truffles wrapping around Emma create a sensuous environment, only furthered by the champagne and fruits she tries soon after. "On versa du vin de Champagne à la glace. Emma frissonna de toute sa peau en sentant ce froid dans sa bouche. Elle n'avait jamais vu de grenades ni mangé d'ananas. Le sucre en poudre même lui parut plus blanc et plus fin d'ailleurs" [Iced champagne was poured out. Emma shivered all over as she felt its cold in her mouth. She had never seen pomegranates nor tasted pineapples. Even the powdered sugar seemed to her whiter and finer than elsewhere] (Flaubert 101). Champagne, pomegranates, pineapples are all considered aphrodisiacs and are described as considerably sensuous in

Emma's act of consumption. Sweets, fine alcohol, and fruit represent the high-class table Emma is eating at, fruit she tastes and alcohol she drinks. At the wedding feast, the food is only presented visually. As Igou notes, the narrator uses the impersonal subject pronoun *on* to start the scene of the wedding feast, and descriptions are offered but beyond scorned cousins, no one truly eats, it is a visual feast for the reader (Igou 37). At the real manifestation of Emma's romantic desires at Vaubyessard, Emma tastes and she smells, two senses that align closely with consumption. At the wedding feast, the star moment in which Emma's reality cements into place, the reader is only given the removed aspect of visual appreciation.

Vaubuessard's banquet scene is so life-changing for Emma that even the sugar seems better even though the implication is that it is no different than any she'd find at home. This moment gives physical form to what Emma had aspired to prior to this moment, an actualization of the desire that had pushed her to marry Charles. As Barbara Vinken discusses in her essay, this moment allows for a spiritual awakening within Emma, though far from the religious sense of the term ("Loving, Reading, Eating..." 771). Throughout the novel, Emma finds aesthetic, spiritual fulfilment through recognition of her desires, which allows her to persist despite never being truly satisfied.

Following the immediate description of the feast, Emma encounters the Duke de Laverdière, someone who once walked amongst the court and was allegedly a lover of Marie Antoinette. Emma is fascinated with him, unable to tear her eyes away in awe, yet the language to describe him is disgusting: "courbé sur son assiette remplie, et la serviette nouée dans le dos comme un enfant, un vieillard mangeait, laissant tomber de sa bouche des gouttes de sauce" (Flaubert 101). [Bent over his full plate, and his napkin tied round

his neck like a child, an old man sat eating, letting drops of gravy drip from his mouth] Gravy dripping from his jowls, as though a pig dressed for dinner, he points to each dish to eat more. Childlike, deaf, muttering, and slobbering like a dog as he eats without caring for what he is eating, relegated to the room with the women and out of site of the men. Aligned with aristocracy as he is in Emma's eyes, and yet so disgustingly described by the narrator, the duke is put into a position as a portrait of destruction by consumption. The chronotope of food here plays with the onset of time. Still eating the beautiful feast laid out in Vaubyessard, the duke is connected to the space and time period of the upper class, but his negative description and unfortunate current circumstance belies the destination of the aristocracy in France: old and withering noble names that no longer hold power. His gluttonous countenance as he interacts with the chronotope of food that represents the upper class serves as a warning, but Emma is oblivious. For her, the duke is another dream amongst dreams, and she sees nothing wrong, and cannot see any of her future in him. This imagery is repeated in Monsieur Bovary senior, her father-in-law who is crass and vile<sup>1</sup>, yet Emma is enamored with his stories and his life for how richly he lived.

Prior to this, we have seen Emma's aspirations for grander things, such as seducing Charles via liquor, playing at her station for dinner parties with fancy dishes and well-prepared tables, but the Vaubyessard feast scene in particular is an actualization of that which she craves, those upper echelons of society that are so far out of reach for Emma (Flaubert 92-3, 98-107). This scene establishes the lens through which we view

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<sup>1</sup> "M. Bovary, senior... began baptizing [the child] with a glass of champagne that he poured over its head. [Emma] did not at all dislike his company. He had knocked about the world, he talked about Berlin, Vienna, and Strasbourg, of his soldier times, of his mistresses, of the brilliant dinner-parties he had attended" (Flaubert 75-6). M. Bovary lived as he pleased and Emma was enamored by it.

Emma's desires. The feast at Vaubyessard was the moment that everything changed for Emma; from her experiences at the marquis's party, it was no longer a dream to reach, but a dream to return to. Emma is perfectly happy in these moments and cannot sleep for not wanting it all to end. The food presented here is gastronomic in style and dress: imported Spanish and Rhine wines, maraschino ice which was a delicacy even for royalty at the time, all of this points to a place in society that is so far above the station that Emma occupies that she then spends the rest of the novel in relentless pursuit of the exquisite meals, and the people that enjoyed them.

These two feasts, the gastronomic castle banquet, and the wedding celebration, stand in stark contrast with each other and yet both apply wholly to the definition of Emma's life. One stand as the realization of Emma's romantic ideals and the desires that drive her, and the other highlights the reality that Emma inhabits. The wedding feast is a celebration, but not one that Emma actively participates in. This remains true throughout the simple, petite bourgeoisie meals she consumes throughout the rest of the novel, including immediately following the return from Vaubyessard. Back in their country home, "il y avait pour dîner de la soupe à l'oignon, avec un morceau de veau à l'oseille," [for dinner there was onion soup and a piece of veal with sorrel] (Flaubert 108). The stark contrast between the highs of the chateau and the simplicity of home is further quantified through Brombert, who emphasizes the crushing monotony that runs into Emma again and again much like the crashing of waves, "caught again by the sickening routine of life" (52). Even in moments when she grazes against her desire, leading into action and satisfaction, her reality lingers in the form of food as a reminder.

## Chapter 4: The Chronotope of Food

As Flaubert reveals in his letters with Louise Colet, intention lies within every word of *Madame Bovary*. In creating a setting that truly reflected the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and its fraught social climate, each aspect was meticulously placed to create the intricate story that is Emma Bovary's life. But more than a story of Emma Bovary, this book is an examination of the day to day as it continues around her and without her by the end of the novel. Scenes of provincial life and cyclical time are threaded throughout the story, such as market Wednesday or the regular structure of Emma's mornings in saying farewell to Charles from the window and then watching Léon walk to work (Flaubert 68). Flaubert builds the narrative through descriptions of a town and its people that was mostly typical for the time period in France, that is, mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Clothes, the growing importance of routine, material objects, all serve as a means to create the setting of the realist novel and the time and space it fills, but nothing is more indicative of the time and place occupied than that of food. Food occupies an important role in any life, but social and cultural significance adds a layer of distinction that marks the inclusion of food in the novel as something worth looking into. As Igou cites Lawrence Schehr, "food is never there for the sake of food," and Flaubert includes food in both pivotal scenes within the novel as well as the mundane (36). His inclusion of food occupies the narrative and attention is drawn to it in such a way that it must occupy both the time and space it is

found in. Food therefore becomes a chronotope both in the setting of the novel, but also for Emma herself. The chronotope of food plays two roles, one as an indicator of class divide, but also as a lens through which we can view the contrast of Emma's desires with her discontent for her reality.

Class divisions are distinct within France during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the luxury of food reflects that. Truffles, champagne, seasonal game, and sugar for example, are displayed alongside scenes of luxury in the novel (Flaubert 100). On the other side, simple, repetitive meals most commonly of soup and stewed veal feature for the lower classes. These are the two space-times through which food is displayed: one is that which Emma desires which is equated to the higher-class status as established during the party at Vaubyessard, and the other is her reality which is her petite bourgeoisie life as begun during the wedding feast of Charles and Emma. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century when gastronomy was taking hold, higher class society was denoted by haute cuisine. Within cities, *service à la russe*, or courses served individually, were taking precedence over *service à la française*, or courses served all at once on a dressed table, but within the provinces, private banquets and feasts were still predominantly made by private chefs and served *à la française*, as is seen in the three feasts within the novel: the wedding feast, the castle banquet, and the agricultural faire. The wedding feast occupies the petite bourgeoisie space, the castle banquet aligns with the upper class, and the agricultural fair is distinctly plebian. The distinction between the banquet at Vaubyessard and the wedding feast is rather what is served and how they are served. The vocabulary choice is also distinct, as one is Rabelaisian in style, while the other is romantic.

Bakhtin places importance of the chronotope within the narrative of a story, and its significance lies in giving meaning to the narrative. According to Bakhtin, “they are the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel... to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative” (250). As discussed, chronotopes are the means through which significance is derived, and can be pulled from most semiotics within literature. Food features predominantly within *Madame Bovary*, and importantly it stars in the central events of Emma’s story that moves the plot forward. Emma’s seduction of Charles, their marriage, their move from Tostes, her acquaintance with Rodolphe, and then with Léon, and finally, her meeting with death, every one of these scenes is allied in some way with food or eating. This allows analysis to impart meaning on the scene through the language of food as it relates to the chronotope, whether it be within the space of the romantic upper class or the space of Emma’s petite bourgeoisie life.

The chronotope of food for Emma inspires her desires, feeds them, and yet also starves her as she avoids her reality in an anorectic fashion. Like an addiction, the feast at Vaubyessard is something she craves and hunts throughout the rest of the novel, satisfying it for a time with affairs, but like all the rest it is never enough and she continues to waste away beneath the weight of her desire. Her reality on the other hand, as a petite bourgeoisie, can never satisfy that hunger for her because she despises it. To her, it is disgusting, and unfulfilling, and tedious, it is “comme un dessert prévu d’avance, après la monotonie du dîner” [like a familiar desert after the monotony of dinner] (Flaubert 95). Familiarity might indicate comfort in other circumstance, but to Emma it is that “toute l’amertume de l’existence lui semblait servie sur son assiette” [all the



bitterness of life seemed to be served up on her plate] (Flaubert 120). Nothing exists in her reality to sustain her or feed her desires for it was all mundane and uninspiring for her romantic ideals. If Emma were to exist solely within that reality, she would wither away, which is why she turns instead to a ravenous pursuit of her desires.

What defined Emma's desires was her experience at Vaubyessard with a luxurious feast enjoyed amongst aristocracy and the upper bourgeoisie. Emma was able to peak behind the curtain into an actualization of her desires and enjoy and savor the taste of it all and how it satisfied her cravings. She had dreamed of loftier class status prior, it was why she married Charles, but after disappointment there, Vaubyessard was a moment in which she was able to truly experience higher society, but it was only because the Marquis thought she was pretty and had better manners than peasant (Flaubert 97). The space that this scene occupies, however, is not as picturesque as Emma would imagine it. Reflecting on the Duke of Laverdière that Emma was so fascinated with despite his grotesque appearance recalls the space that the aristocracy occupies at this time. The remainders and final dregs of the aristocracy under the restoration are filtered throughout the upper bourgeoisie. The aristocracy during that time was on its way out, and the romanticism that glorified the aristocracy and nobility that Emma so valued was quickly becoming outdated and irrelevant to genuine aspirations should one hope to reach that echelon of nobility. Considering the time and space that make up the chronotope of food within the higher classes, this image of the dwindling aristocracy coupled with the food results in empty satisfaction. Emma is able to reach those heights once but it was never going to persist, and left the chronotope of food that defines her desires as something devoid of true sustenance.

Emma was never destined to have that which she wants. As learned throughout the novel, even the satisfaction of her desires is inevitably not enough. Both Rodolphe and Léon, lovers who feed her hunger, eventually fail to meet her insatiable appetite. Her desires cannot maintain her or satisfy that hunger she has for a finer life. As Igou suggests, “the more Emma consumes, the emptier she becomes” (46). Yet, Emma’s desire is a force within the novel that pushes the narrative forward, starved or not. Despite not eating, Emma continues on, and persists because of her ravenous desire. At times, she is happy, but it never truly lasts, and the lack of longevity in her contentment is because she hungered for something empty, a realm that was disappearing. In a word, she was doomed, for neither her desires nor her reality can satisfy her.

Was Emma truly doomed? She was not the only bourgeois with aspirations in the story, but no one else suffered quite like Emma. In reality, bourgeois life could have sustained her if only she came to appreciate its potential. Historically, the bourgeois were becoming the power within France and their potential for upward mobility was substantial. Signs of this exist within the reality the reader is presented with, thanks to the third person narration. Though Emma viewed it with disdain, the wedding feast was not that destitute. This was the common food for those who could afford it – meat was not easy to acquire for lower classes so the fact that it was attainable for every meal and in this quantity speaks to the monetary presence available. Emma had a maidservant and only ever cooked if it was something gastronomic she wanted to try, otherwise meals were made by Félicité. Monsieur Guillaumin, the clerk of Yonville, tells Emma that he could have helped her in a myriad of ways to make money without digging the hole of

debt that she has. There were many ways for Emma to find sustenance and satisfaction in the reality she occupied.

Homais, the pharmacist, is a rising bourgeois citizen of Yonville who thrives and celebrates the “bourgeois innovation” of food. Upon their arrival and settling into the town, Homais made himself readily available in aiding the young couple, particularly at dinnertime:

Parfois même, se levant à demi, il indiquait délicatement à Madame le morceau le plus tendre, ou, se tournant vers la bonne, lui adressait des conseils pour la manipulation des ragoûts et l’hygiène des assaisonnements; il parlait arôme, ozmazôme, sucs et gélatine d’une façon à éblouir. La tête d’ailleurs plus remplie de recettes que sa pharmacie ne l’était de bocaux, Homais excellait à faire quantité de confitures, vinaigres et liqueurs douces, et il connaissait aussi toutes les inventions Nouvelles de caléfacteurs économiques, avec l’art de conserver les fromages et de soigner les vins malades. (Flaubert 157)

[Sometimes even, half-rising, he delicately pointed out to madame the tenderest morsel, or turning to the maid, gave her some advice on the manipulation of stews and hygiene of the seasoning. He talked aroma, osmazonne, juices, and gelatine in a bewildering manner. Moreover, Homais, with his head fuller of recipes than his shop of jars, excelled in making all kinds of preserves, vinegars, and sweet liqueurs; he knew also all the latest inventions in economic stoves, together with the art of preserving cheeses and of curing sick wines]

Here Homais is putting on display every bit of his gastronomic knowledge and evidence of his reading of Brillat-Savarin. Osmazonne was a component of animal flesh believed

at the time to give game animals their distinct flavor, which was discussed in Brillat-Savarin's *The Physiology of Taste*. His bourgeois competency aligns with the gastronomic fascination coupled with the chemistry involved with preserves, vinegars, and alcohol making. Homais is innovative and knowledgeable, and the novel ends with his success, as Emma is six feet underground. Though Flaubert historically had a great distaste for the bourgeoisie, in making a novel of the day-to-day life it was inevitable that he had to acknowledge the rise of the middle class. But, Homais is a rather detestable character, even going so far as to invite the doctors to lunch as Emma lay dying next door, gasping like a carp for what she wants as Rodolphe so cleverly put it when he saw her for the first time. As a foil to Emma, the reader is given Homais, with aspirations similar to her, but who is able to attain and achieve the upward mobility that Emma cannot. Two components limit and stagnate Emma. One is Charles because he has little aspiration for growth, and in turn this never allows her to see the potential in bourgeois life. The other is her own lack of ability to be mobile on the bourgeoisie ladder because she is a woman.

Women at the time were still bound by their marriages for how successful they could be. Emma starts her story by marrying Charles in order to escape her father's farm in hopes that marrying a doctor would lead to higher heights. Unfortunately, Charles is not that aspirational and instead he traps Emma in a position not much better than the one she was in before. Stuck in a marriage she does not care for, Emma is thus confined to adultery and money spending in order to satisfy her desire for more. She even acknowledges her position, and wishes for a son, for "a man, at least, is free; he can explore all passions and all countries, overcome obstacles, taste of the most distant

pleasures” (Flaubert 146). And men do have the opportunity for distant pleasures. Her father, Monsieur Rouault, is noted to appreciate the finer things that money could afford such as raw mutton and old cider. Monsieur Bovary senior also enjoyed decadence following his forced retirement and when his wife’s dowry ran out, he tried to run a farm but enjoyed its produce himself as opposed to making a profit. This still did not render him destitute though, and he was able to continue and make money and thrive. Charles, despite his lazy nature and lack of awareness, was still able become a doctor, and Homais, despite being told he cannot run his shop without licensure continues to do so without issue. Léon is able to move to Paris to study law as many young men like him did at the time. The bourgeois men of the novel struggle little, while Emma is stuck, starving under the weight of both her reality and her desires.

## Chapter 5: Desires and Reality

The chronotope of food exists within two spaces during the time period of the novel. Based on the food being described and its relation back to the party at Vaubyessard or lack thereof, we can determine whether Emma is interacting with food through the lens of her reality, the chronotope of food designated by petite bourgeoisie cuisine, or the lens of her desire, the chronotope of food designated by haute cuisine and the upper classes. Food, however, as Igou discusses in her essay, does not play a role of consumption often, but rather as imagery to highlight Emma's emptiness and starvation. Her reality does not nourish her, nor do her desires (Igou 46). I build on this argument to observe that Emma's desires do sustain her for a time, and they are the driving force in the novel. Her interactions with her lovers are interspersed with memories of Vaubyessard and elegant food that satisfies a taste for what she wants but, in the end, it is never enough to nourish her and help her persist.

Emma's first satisfaction of desire comes in the form of Rodolphe. A well-off young man who makes an allowance of fifteen thousand francs per year encounters Emma when he brings a worker for bloodletting, noting her immediately as someone unhappy in her marriage: "comme une carpe après l'eau sur une table de cuisine" [She is gaping after love like a carp on the kitchen table after water] (Flaubert 195). Rodolphe, immediately upon meeting Emma, recognizes in her the very thing she suffers from: what

we deem starvation in this analysis Rodolphe sees as thirst: a fish out of water. With Charles, Emma is slowly dying of *ennui* or tedium, starved and unsatisfied with her reality, and Rodolphe resolves to be that satisfaction. In Rodolphe, someone who occupies the higher levels of the bourgeoisie, Emma abandons her morals to satisfy this hunger, or as Rodolphe notes, this thirst.

Rodolphe provides fruit and game regularly to the Bovary's, as a guise for hiding love letters to Emma, but the very act of sending fruit and seasonal game is characteristic of the upper bourgeoisie who can afford fruit and have the time to hunt game. Rodolphe, as a landowner, is decidedly bourgeois as defined by Marxism: he controls the means of production but he himself does not work. And he describes himself as bourgeois in passing, a "bourgeois common sense [that] disapproved" of Emma's romantic ideals, and yet, he is charmed by them nonetheless (Flaubert 139). Since Vaubyessard, Rodolphe is the closest Emma gets to something satisfactory to her desires since Léon does not pan out the first time and leaves her as dejected and empty as leaving Vaubyessard did.

Rodolphe also evokes memories of Vaubyessard as she catches his scent, a rare occurrence amongst the senses within the novel, but she recalls the smell of lemon and vanilla that she smelt on the viscount, that she also smells on Rodolphe, once again calling forth the images of fruit and sweets, both expensive food items to procure (#). These memories of Vaubyessard feed her desire and push her forward into accepting the adultery with Rodolphe in hopes of tasting that higher echelon with him. She does, for a time, and her happiness bleeds into her reality and sustains her: she becomes the picture-perfect wife and even returns to her old habits of being the gastronomic host by asking for a pickle recipe of Madame Bovary senior. Sustained by this satisfaction, Emma

continues to draw on the relationship and its benefits until it no longer satisfies her, and the durability of her desire fractures. Here the inevitable downfall of the inaccessible upper classes rears its head and Emma finds that what was feeding her, was nothing, it was empty of true fulfilment or anything that could nourish her. And, following Rodolphe's departure, Emma nearly dies. This sudden void in her life of the one thing that had been sustaining her meant that all nourishment disappeared completely: she had returned to reality, and it would never satisfy her, so she began to wither away.

Counter to Rodolphe's manipulative position as a similarly desirous individual whose bourgeois sensibility pushes him ever onward, Léon, Emma's former love, accepts and feeds Emma's romantic ideals, being a romantic himself. The two had loved each other when Emma first moved to Yonville, and he had made her time there bearable, but upon his departure he left a void in her much the same as when she left Vaubyessard. For Emma, Léon's romantic character satisfied her wishes, and in him she found a kindred spirit that nourished her own soul as it favors aestheticism. When they re-encountered each other in Rouen, it was as though nothing changed. Quickly and with fervor, a desperate and starving Emma who had suffered through her convalescence leapt into the adulterous relationship with only slight hesitation that was ripped to shreds in her hunger for something more. Together, they acted out their romantic fantasy, sharing champagne and cherry ice within their hotel, two things directly connected to Vaubyessard, where Emma enjoyed both amidst the finery (Flaubert 104, 339). Léon and Emma enjoy their fantasy for a time, but it is unsustainable. As before, Emma's satisfaction with the relationship wanes and the little things they do lose their meaning. Emma, in a very common bourgeoisie mindset, wants more and is still yet not satisfied with what she has.



In her last desperate act to see out her life as she wishes, Emma eats. Haunted by a life starved of pleasure, Emma tries one last time to feed the desires that eat at her. She acquires the arsenic from the stores of the pharmacist, and she consumes “la poudre blanche” [the white powder] (Flaubert 407). In noting the arsenic as a white powder, this evokes the sugar seen at Vaubyessard, and noted by Ferguson to be a delicacy at the time (Vinken 771). As precious as the sugar, this white powder, arsenic, is Emma’s last attempt at gaining what she wants, to die how she pleases and without consequence. She cannot face the ruin within her reality, and does the sole thing she can do, and that is consume, as she has consumed her relationships, material, and her life in search of more.

Contrary to these scenes of fed desire lie Emma’s reality, the day-to-day that starves her of gratification and devalues her desire once it is achieved and settles into monotony, such as her relationships with Rodolphe and Léon. Charles was an escape from the routine of the farm, sickness was her escape from the routine in Tostes, Rodolphe offered an escape from boredom for a time but eventually the relationship devolved into monotony once more, as did her relationship with Léon. A lack of movement and mobility in her life disappointed and ate away at Emma, and this is repeated regularly in Flaubert’s scenes of reality, a life that goes on regardless of the people within it, as pointed out by Brombert (51).

The agricultural faire, like the wedding feast, is a festival set to celebrate the lower classes for their achievements and provide a feast for the hard workers of the region. Homais, bourgeois and proud of it, celebrates the agricultural faire and the science that lies beneath a long history of food management and innovation within the last century as modernization come to farms. Yet for Emma and Rodolphe, it is beneath

them, to the point that, watching the award ceremony from a second-floor window, they are positioned above it when Rodolphe is trying to tempt Emma into adultery to satisfy her thirst, creating a stark contrast between reality and desire. Homais, on the other hand, profits off the upward mobility of bourgeois innovation by celebrating and positioning himself as a proponent of the agricultural faire, though he separates himself just as Emma and Rodolphe do. By participating from the raised platform of the stage, he is still above the agricultural workers being rewarded, solidifying the distinct divide even between the petite bourgeoisie and the working class. In a description akin to agricultural slop, Flaubert describes the agricultural faire with less care than the other two main feasts, but with enough attention to get his point across. Their feast,

“fut long, bruyant, mal servi; l’on était si tassé, que l’on avait peine à remuer les coudes, et les planches étroites qui servaient de bancs faillirent se rompre sous le poids des convives. Ils mangeaient abondamment. Chacun s’en donnait pour sa quote-part. La sueur coulait sur tous les fronts ; et une vapeur blanchâtre, comme la buée d’un fleuve par un matin d’automne, flottait au-dessus de la table, entre les quinquets suspendus. [...] Des domestiques empilaient des assiettes sales” (Flaubert 220).

[long, noisy, ill served; the guests were so crowded that they could hardly move their elbows; and the narrow planks that served as benches almost broke under their weight. They ate huge amounts. Each one stuffed himself with all he could lay hands on. Sweat stood on every brow, and a whitish steam, like the vapour of a stream on an autumn morning, floated above the table between the hanging lamps. [...] The servants were piling up the dirty plates]

Here is depicted the true image of a lower-class feast. Ravenously eating without abandon, so voraciously that they sweat, and steam rises from the table, it is at once bestial and grotesque. Though the actual food remains unsaid, the image here harkens to the very agriculture being celebrated, of troughs full of food and slop. Dirty plates are tossed aside into piles to deal with later. Emma and Rodolphe stand far removed, and most of the bourgeoisie of the town are not present at this feast, or at least adjacent, but this is the reality, this the realm Emma is just outside of.

Following the introduction of Rodolphe in Emma's story, the presence of food within the novel becomes greatly reduced. Rodolphe is someone who can fill the hole in her life left behind upon leaving Vaubyessard, and Emma finds herself satisfied and no longer starving for that which she wants. Satisfied by lovers that fill the empty space (temporarily), she no longer focuses on the food but rather the other physical satisfactions. When she does focus on food while content and sustained by actualized desire, it is meals that align with gastronomy or her bourgeois sensibility such as the aforementioned pickles or pistachio creams. Food only returns to the forefront in the absence of satisfied desire, such as when Rodolphe leaves Emma. She receives a basket of apricots with the letter from Rodolphe and flees to the attic where she approaches the window, contemplating suicide. The void left by Rodolphe is too vast for her to continue, but, moments before she can, Félicité pulls her to come to dinner, of soup and veal. Brombert highlights how Emma, distraught with emotions, is forced to come down from above and return to her reality, a simple dinner with her oblivious husband. And again, even after her death, reality continues on around her as the curé and the pharmacist share a meal at her deathbed, and Old Rouault promises to continue to send a turkey to his son

in law every year, until Charles dies (Flaubert 435). Never once is Emma supported or nourished by the reality around her, it is always a point of contention and a reminder of how much she hungers for more to the point that she starves.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

Emma's reality as a petite bourgeoisie wife was in constant conflict with her desire for a more noble, romantic lifestyle, but neither were enough for Emma to survive the effects of her ravenous consumption. The two worlds that made up Emma's life were determined through food, and specifically the semiotics behind the imagery of food that Flaubert so carefully crafted. His realism depicted the world of the provincial bourgeoisie, situated during a time when the bourgeoisie were in power and growing more powerful. Provincial bourgeoisie during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century places this imagery in a very distinct time and space. Repeatedly throughout the novel, there are scenes of food that occupy two distinct spaces: in preparation and with differing cuisines, there is the haute bourgeoisie and aristocratic gastronomy and the petite bourgeoisie common meals. As food appears repeatedly and with direct focus, participating in two different spaces, I argue this establishes the chronotope of food, through which we analyze Emma and the story at hand. The chronotope of food helps establish the contrast between Emma's desires and her reality, and how those interplay to create a story in which Emma was never destined to survive no matter how hard she tried.

At Vaubyessard, Emma was introduced to the wonders of high society that she had poured over in her romantic novels. A feast of lobster, un-plucked birds, gastronomic wonders, jellies, champagne, truffles, all of these graced the Marquis's table with elegance and refinery. Through these and viewing it within the space that high society

occupied in this moment, food to this caliber was determined to be a chronotope of food that shared Emma's desires. Her desires that were largely superficial and mostly unsustainable both in that the aristocracy that this feast represented was a dying class, but also because it simply wasn't an attainable reality for Emma, and was thus empty and out of reach. After returning home from the banquet that changed her life, "il y avait pour dîner de la soupe à l'oignon, avec un morceau de veau à l'oseille" [For dinner there was onion soup and a piece of veal with sorrel] (Flaubert 109). Following a banquet dressed for nobility, their homely table was set late with onion soup and a slice of veal, noted before for being distinctly provincial and petite bourgeoisie in nature. The difference between the feast and the simple dinner puts on display the vast difference between Emma's desires and her reality. The chronotope of food that represents Emma's reality is defined by her petite bourgeoisie menu, and its monotony that starves of her of any satisfaction.

The defining piece of food that conveys the struggle Emma faces with her empty desire and starving reality is the celebrated "pièce montée" given to Charles and Emma at their wedding. As Igou puts it, "the pièce montée is a crowning symbol of the emptiness of food in *Madame Bovary*" (Igou 40). A cake that was as inedible as it was fantastical, the pièce montée presented to the newlyweds was not entirely typical of the architectural majesty invented by Carême. A celebrated centerpiece that was championed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century's devotion to gastronomy, it combined art, architecture, and food together to create a towering appreciation of food and aesthetic. In the text, this pièce montée aligns the closest with Emma's desires, but also mirrors the emptiness she finds in her pursuit of romanticism. In a description just as long as that of the entire wedding feast, the text

builds up the *pièce montée* as it is: the centerpiece of a feast that sets the stage for a relationship between Emma and food that is fraught with unattained desire.

Il apporta, lui-même, au dessert, une *pièce montée* qui fit pousser des cris. À la base, d'abord, c'était un carré de carton bleu figurant un temple avec portiques, colonnades et statuettes de stuc tout autour, dans des niches constellées d'étoiles en papier doré ; puis se tenait au second étage un donjon en gâteau de Savoie, entouré de menues fortifications en angélique, amandes, raisins secs, quartiers d'oranges ; et enfin, sur la plate-forme supérieure, qui était une prairie verte où il y avait des rochers avec des lacs de confitures et des bateaux en écales de noisettes, on voyait un petit Amour, se balançant à une escarpolette de chocolat, dont les deux poteaux étaient terminés par deux boutons de rose naturels, en guise de boules, au sommet. (Flaubert 77)

[He himself brought in a wedding cake that provoked loud cries of wonderment. At its base there was a square of blue cardboard, presenting a temple with porticoes, colonnades, and stucco statuettes all round, and in the niches constellations of gilt paper stars; then on the second level was a dungeon of Savoy cake, surrounded by many fortifications in candied angelica, almonds, raisins, and quarters of oranges; and finally, on the upper platform a green field with rocks set in lakes of jam, nutshell boats, and a small Cupid balancing himself in a chocolate swing whose two uprights ended in real roses for balls at the top]

A castle made of *pâtisserie*, the only edible part of it is the dungeon made of Savoy cake. Built on a cardboard foundation, the wedding cake, as it were, creates the image of a grand castle, while its edibility is limited. So pleasing to the eye that it elicits cries of

astonishment from the wedding guests, the cake is only edible in a visual capacity: it can be devoured by the eyes, but it could not nourish a person. As Igou discusses in her essay on the emptiness of food within *Madame Bovary*, “the pièce montée resonates with Emma’s interest in the surface of things” (Igou 42). The image of the castle represents Emma’s devotion to her ideals, her love for the romantic and the class she aspires to, but its inedibility speaks to how unfulfilling this aspiration is, and how unattainable it will be. The reader is thus presented with a paradox: Emma’s reality starves her, and she hungers for more, but her desires are just as empty. In a world where the upper society she craves is dying or on the way out, the image she aspires to is as fake as her wedding cake.

To ask Emma what she eats in order to tell her who she is, Brillat-Savarin would not have an easy answer. To judge her of the finer things she eats, she does appear to occupy that upper echelon she so craves. To analyze the simple, provincial meals interspersed with gastronomic fancies, she appears as she is: a petite bourgeois wife. But perhaps she is in a way her pièce montée: an image of a higher born bourgeoisie woman devoid of anything appetizing, pretty on the outside and seemingly of good quality, but within she is unsustainable and disappointed by everything she consumes.



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