

Extract from Gustave Flaubert., *Madame Bovary*.<sup>1</sup>

... Monsieur Lieuvain sat down.

Monsieur Derozerays rose and began his speech. This was far less ornate than the official's, and recommended itself by a more positive flavour – a matter of more specialised knowledge and more exalted reflections. Eulogistic reference to the Government had less place in it, farming and religion had more. The bond that existed between the two was made clear – they had always worked together for civilisation ... While Rodolphe was talking to Madame Bovary about dreams, presentiments and magnetic attraction, the speaker went back to the infancy of society, to those savage times when men lived on acorns in the heart of great forests; from which he passed on to the period at which they had given up animals' skins for a covering of cloth, had ploughed the land and planted the vine. Now was this an improvement? Were there not perhaps more disadvantages than advantages in these discoveries? Monsieur Derozerays asked himself the question. Rodolphe had led on gradually from magnetism to affinities; and while the Chairman alluded to Cincinnatus at his plough, to Diocletian among his cabbages, to the Chinese emperors ushering in the new year with the sowing of seed, the young man was explaining to the young woman that the cause of these irresistible attractions lay in some previous existence.

'We, now, why did we meet? What turn of fate decreed it? Was it not that, like two rivers gradually converging across the intervening distance, our own natures propelled us towards one another?'

He took her hand, and she did not withdraw it. 'General Prize!' cried the Chairman.

'Just now, for instance, when I came to call on you .. .' 'Monsieur Bizet of Quincampoix.'

'... how could I know that I should escort you here?'

'Seventy francs!'

'And I've stayed with you, because I couldn't tear myself away, though I've tried a hundred times.'

'Manure!'

:And so I'd stay tonight and tomorrow and every day for all the rest of my life.'

'To Monsieur Caron of Argueil, a Gold Medal!'

'For I have never been so utterly charmed with anyone before.'

'To Monsieur Bain of Givry St Martin.'

'And so I shall cherish the memory of you.'

'For a merino ram ...'

'But you'll forget me. I shall have passed like a shadow ...'

'To Monsieur Belot of Notre-Dame .. .'

'No, say I shan't! Tell me I shall count for something in your thoughts, in your life?'

'Pigs: Prize divided! Monsieur Leherisse and Monsieur Cullembourg, sixty francs each!'

Rodolphe squeezed her hand. He felt it warm and vibrant in his, like a captive turtle-dove trying to take wing. Whether she was trying to withdraw it, or responding to his pressure, her fingers made a movement.

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<sup>1</sup> Gustave Flaubert. *Madame Bovary, A Story of Provincial Life*, translated by Alan Russell, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1950, pp. 161-162.

'Oh, thank you, you do not repulse me!' he said. 'How sweet you are ! You know that I am yours! Only let me look at you, let me gaze upon you!'

A breeze from the window ruffled the cloth on the table, and down in the square the peasant women's big bonnets lifted up, fluttering like white butterflies' wings.

'Oil-cake,' the Chairman continued. He began to go faster: 'Flemish fertiliser – Flax – Drainage – Long Leases – Domestic Service.'

Rodolphe had stopped speaking. They looked at one another, and their dry lips quivered in a supreme desire. Gently, effortlessly, their fingers intertwined.

'Catherine Nicaise Elisabeth Leroux of Sassetot la Guerriere: For fifty-four years' service at the same farm: Silver Medal, value twenty-five francs!'

'Where is she? Catherine Leroux!' the official repeated. There was no sign of her. Voices could be heard whispering:

'Go on!'

'No.'

'Over there on the left!'

'Don't be afraid!'

'Stupid creature!'

'Well, is she there or not?' cried Tuvache.

'Yes, here she is!'

'Then let her come up!'

Thereupon a timorous-looking little old woman was seen to step up on to the platform, wizened and shrunken in her tattered garments ....