

A Madame Bovary for a New Millennium: Leïla Slimani's Dans le jardin de l'ogre (2014)

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Résumé de l'article

Surtout connue pour *Chanson douce*, son roman à suspense publié en 2016, Leïla Slimani s'est fait d'abord remarquer pour *Dans le jardin de l'ogre*, roman dont la protagoniste souffre d'addiction sexuelle. S'étant rendu compte que les femmes ne figurent jamais dans les histoires de dépendance sexuelle dans les médias, elle s'est imprégnée de romans tels que *Anna Karenina* de Leo Tolstoy, *Thérèse Desqueyroux* de François Mauriac, *Belle de jour* de Joseph Kessel et *Madame Bovary* de Gustave Flaubert. Les critiques littéraires de *Dans le jardin de l'ogre* ont tendance à mentionner *Madame Bovary* en passant—sans doute parce que Slimani elle-même a identifié Emma comme une de ses héroïnes favorites—mais jusqu'ici il n'y a que deux études érudites qui traitent de parallèles spécifiques entre les deux romans. Une curieuse association à première vue—le texte de Flaubert est pour la plupart un roman typique du dix-neuvième siècle qui se déroule d'une façon linéaire, tandis que celui de Slimani est décidément moderne étant donné son sujet et ses glissements temporels—une lecture attentive révèle de nombreux points de ressemblance (technique narrative, caractérisation, thèmes, motifs). Selon Julia Kristeva, "tout texte se construit comme mosaïque de citations, tout texte est absorption et transformation d'un autre texte." Cet article constate que *Dans le jardin de l'ogre* est une de ces mosaïques qui a "absorbé" bien des traits saillants de *Madame Bovary* et les a "transformés" en quelque chose d'assez moderne et de distinctif.

A *Madame Bovary* for a New Millennium: Leïla Slimani's *Dans le jardin de l'ogre* (2014)

Hope Christiansen

Best known for her 2016 Prix Goncourt-winning suspense novel, *Chanson douce*, Franco-Moroccan author and journalist Leïla Slimani first made her mark on the literary scene two years earlier with a novel about a female sex addict, *Dans le jardin de l'ogre*, awarded the prestigious La Mamounia prize for Moroccan fiction in the French language. According to Alexandra Schwartzbrod, Slimani was breastfeeding her son while watching television coverage of the Dominique Strauss-Kahn scandal¹ when it occurred to her that women never figure in media accounts of sexual addiction. Having always wanted to write about female sexuality, she immersed herself in Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1878), François Mauriac's *Thérèse Desqueyroux* (1927), Joseph Kessel's *Belle de jour* (1928), and Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857). Reviewers of Slimani's novel frequently mention *Madame Bovary* in passing—perhaps because Slimani herself has called Emma one of her favorite heroines (“By the Book” 6)—but thus far there have been only two scholarly studies that discuss specific connections between the two novels.² While they seem unlikely bedfellows on the surface—Flaubert's text is for the most part a traditional nineteenth-century novel that unfolds in linear fashion, while Slimani's is decidedly modern in subject and in its slippage back and forth in time—a close reading reveals numerous uncanny similarities in narrative technique, characterization, themes, and motifs.

In a perceptive study of time and temporality in *Madame Bovary* and Philippe Doumenc's *Contre-enquête sur la mort d'Emma Bovary* (2007), Andrew Watts surveys the literary critics (such as Harold Bloom³) who have paved the way for a study such as this by demonstrating that writing is “an adaptive act which requires authors to contend with the work of their predecessors, and to situate themselves in relation to their literary inheritance” (16). The twist here is that for Slimani, there was no “contending” involved: she openly and enthusiastically grafted *Dans le jardin de l'ogre* onto her predecessors' work, and, as this analysis will demonstrate, in particular onto *Madame Bovary*. It is hard to imagine a more promising pairing to test Julia Kristeva's theory that “tout texte se construit comme mosaïque de citations, tout texte est absorption et transformation d'un autre texte” (85). *Dans le jardin de l'ogre* is without question one of those mosaics that has “absorbed” many of *Madame Bovary*'s salient features and “transformed” them into something quite modern and distinctive.

- 1 Strauss-Kahn, head of the International Monetary Fund from 2007–2011, was arrested and charged with sexually assaulting a maid in a New York hotel. Charges were eventually dropped. He later settled a civil suit with the accuser.
- 2 Gabrielle Parker's excellent article mentions a few of the similarities I pinpoint here, but in less detail, and as part of a much broader study that examines, among other things, Adèle's self-objectification and the novel's ambivalence (48). In her article on Slimani's *Dans le jardin de l'ogre*, Caroline Lamarche's *La Mémoire de l'air*, and Nina Léger's *Mise en pièces*, Lori Saint-Martin devotes a paragraph to similarities between Slimani's novel and *Madame Bovary*. In this study, I adopt a close reading approach that focuses, at the microtextual level, exclusively on the two novels.
- 3 Bloom's 1973 *The Anxiety of Influence* posits that in their efforts to create something original, poets suffer from the anxiety of their predecessors' influence.

Unlike *Madame Bovary*, which is famously framed by Charles, first as the new boy at school, then as a widowed father after Emma's suicide, *Dans le jardin de l'ogre* opens with the heroine herself, though, like Flaubert, Slimani suppresses Adèle's voice in favor of that of her husband, Richard, in the novel's conclusion. In the first, rather startling scene, the thirty-five-year-old Parisian journalist, wife, and mother of a two-year-old son has for an entire week been fighting the temptation to give in to her sexual cravings, and now lies awake in bed, unable to think of anything else. Her thoughts as she stands under the shower reveal in stark detail the toll that withdrawal from her habit has taken on her:

elle a envie de se griffer, de se déchirer le corps en deux. Elle cogne son front contre le mur. Elle veut qu'on la saisisse, qu'on lui brise le crâne contre la vitre. Dès qu'elle ferme les yeux, elle entend les bruits, les soupirs, les hurlements, les coups. Un homme nu qui halète, une femme qui jouit. Elle voudrait n'être qu'un objet au milieu d'une horde, être dévorée, sucée, avalée tout entière. Qu'on lui pince les seins, qu'on lui morde le ventre. Elle veut être une poupée dans le jardin d'un ogre. (13–14)

Leaving behind her sleeping husband, she goes in search of a partner with whom she hopes to revel in sensations, empty her mind, and "arriver quelque part" (16). Her lovers run the gamut from complete strangers to Richard's colleague to the doctor in charge of her husband's care after a serious scooter accident to, in a strange dream/fantasy, her own father's corpse. *Madame Bovary* likewise features a frustrated wife and mother who seeks to fill a void and "arrive somewhere," in her case via extramarital affairs and extravagant purchases. Both heroines' lives inevitably collapse under their own weight, that of Emma culminating in suicide and that of Adèle, a kind of death through confinement by a husband intent on curing her—at least until a solo trip to her father's funeral gives her an opening to reclaim her freedom.⁴

On a smaller scale, both narrators share a gift for communicating a point of view while maintaining the appearance of neutrality. Flaubert's *culte de l'impersonnalité* is as legendary as the ways he works around it with *le style indirect libre* and especially irony, such as when his narrator says, about young Charles, that "A force de s'appliquer, il se maintint toujours vers le milieu de la classe ..." (42). Victor Brombert speaks perceptively of Flaubert's use of irony "*at the expense of his characters*," one so ubiquitous that its overall effect is that of "a built-in commentary" (73–74; emphasis his). Slimani's narrator adopts a similar approach in fleshing out her protagonist, making observations at once starkly neutral and highly critical about Adèle's attitude or behaviour: the heroine, who "hait l'idée de devoir travailler pour vivre," enrolls in acting courses, fails to distinguish herself, then waits at home until "le destin se réalise. Rien ne s'est passé comme elle l'avait prévu" (19).⁵ Such observations certainly qualify for what Lilian R. Furst has labeled, in the case of Flaubert, a "latent satirical approach" (58), one which manifests itself, to cite just one example, in his use of the word "Madame" to poke fun at Emma's pretensions ("Quand ils arrivèrent chez eux, le dîner n'était point prêt. Madame s'emporta" [89]; "Madame était dans sa chambre" [310]).⁶ Slimani likewise invokes

4 The general plot line resembles that of François Mauriac's 1927 novel, *Thérèse Desqueyroux*, whose eponymous heroine tries to poison her husband, Bernard. After the case is dropped, Bernard confines his wife to the family house in Argelouse, where she lives on wine and cigarettes until he takes her to Paris to "disappear."

5 Lori Saint-Martin identifies, as one of the parallels between *Madame Bovary* and *Dans le jardin de l'ogre*, the play between neutrality and the lack thereof when she cites first "la froideur clinique avec laquelle la protagoniste est vue, comme si c'était le regard d'un médecin ou d'un psychiatre qui pesait sur elle depuis le début" and then "les fréquentes moqueries de l'instance narrative à son sujet ..." (40).

6 Exclamation points serve a similar purpose for Flaubert, allowing him to undercut, for example, Léon's fantasies about life in Paris: "Il y mènera une vie d'artiste ! Il y prendrait des leçons de guitare ! Il aurait une

Richard's title ("le docteur Robinson ne laisse rien au hasard" [33]) to mock his typical overbearing behaviour while subtly communicating a point of view that coincides with that of Adèle. According to Schwartzbrod, when Slimani asked a Gallimard editor to read the first few chapters of *Dans le jardin de l'ogre*, he told her to say as little as possible about what Adèle thinks and as much as possible about what she does. This may explain the "style sec, sans affect, qui donne son charme au roman," a style that Grégoire Leménager finds devoid of "la moindre leçon de psychologie ... ni surtout de morale." There is no question that the sex scenes in *Dans le jardin de l'ogre* are presented in an unsettlingly clinical way that harkens back to Flaubert's descriptions of Hippolyte's and the blind beggar's afflictions (not to mention Emma's agonizing death). But more often than not, Slimani's purportedly dry, affectless style, like that of Flaubert, is not exactly as it seems.⁷

As far as the heroines themselves are concerned, the most obvious similarity is a rebellious spirit that dates from a young age. Emma chafes against any attempt to squeeze her into a mold, if the convent nuns' belief that they need to give her advice "pour la modestie du corps et le salut de son âme" (74) is any indication; Flaubert compares her to a horse "que l'on tire par la bride: elle s'arrêta court et le mors lui sortit des dents" (74). Her father is not unhappy to hand her over to Charles, since "Elle avait trop d'esprit pour la culture..." (57). That Emma has certain qualities traditionally gendered as male is evident in some of her wardrobe choices as well as when, the morning after her wedding, she "ne laissait rien découvrir où l'on peut deviner quelque chose," whereas Charles behaves like "la vierge de la veille" (64); and when, much later in the novel, Léon "devenait sa maîtresse plutôt qu'elle n'était la sienne" (300). The way she expresses her sexuality is, for the time period, quite risqué, considering her shameless *regard* (49), her tongue lapping up drops of liqueur (56), her arched neck "qui se gonflait d'un soupir" (189) when she finally surrenders to Rodolphe—the very pose chosen for the woman gracing the cover of the Folio edition of *Dans le jardin de l'ogre*, as it happens—, and especially her confusion of sensuality and religion. As for Adèle, her mother—surely one of the nastier maternal figures in French literature—remembers her as a stubborn child who, instead of staying invisible as girls should, "affolai[t] les hommes" at the tender age of eight: "Tu étais ce genre d'enfant que les adultes n'aiment pas," she seethes; "Déjà, tu avais le vice en toi. Une sainte-nitouche, une hypocrite de première" (216).⁸ The young Adèle clearly rejects the gender norms espoused by her mother, embracing eroticism to "masqu[er] la platitude, la vanité des choses. [L'érotisme] donnait du relief à ses après-midi de lycéenne, aux goûters d'anniversaire et même aux réunions de famille, où il se trouve toujours un vieil oncle pour vous reluquer les seins" (135).

The heroines' mutual resistance to efforts to define and limit them⁹ is nourished by readings that set them up to have certain expectations for their lives. At the convent, Emma delights in sensory stimuli, "s'assoupi[ssant] doucement à la langueur mystique qui s'exhale des parfums de l'autel, de la fraîcheur des bénitiers et du rayonnement des

robe de chambre, un béret basque, des pantoufles de velours bleu !" (150). In one particularly effective passage, Flaubert pulls together exclamation points, irony, and *style indirect libre*, plus an expressive "on" to pillory Emma's campaign for "piano lessons" in Rouen: "Et quand on venait la voir, elle ne manquait pas de vous apprendre qu'elle avait abandonné la musique et ne pouvait maintenant s'y remettre, pour des raisons majeures. Alors on la plaignait. C'était dommage ! elle qui avait un si beau talent ! On en parla même à Bovary. On lui faisait honte ..." (285).

7 In his review of the novel, Boyd Tonkin refers to Slimani's "prose of elegant but never bloodless neutrality."

8 One cannot help but think of Zola's Nana (*L'Assommoir*, 1877), described even as a child as *vicieuse*.

9 Julia Kristeva's *Pouvoirs de l'horreur : essai sur l'abjection* (Seuil, 1980) seems à propos here. In the entry on Psychoanalytic Feminism in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Emily Zakin writes that Kristeva's analysis of abjection "exposes the ways in which social life is dependent on jettisoning or containing disorder and disruption, and managing the fear of contamination." There is no question that the behaviour of Emma and Adèle qualifies as a disturbance of order social norms.

cierges. Au lieu de suivre la messe, elle regardait dans son livre les vignettes pieuses bordées d'azur ..." (71). Her other readings include the works of classic Romantic writers such as Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Chateaubriand, Walter Scott, and the romances passed on by the convent laundry woman in which

Ce n'étaient qu'amours, amants, amantes, dames persécutées s'évanouissant dans des pavillons solitaires, postillons qu'on tue à tous les relais, chevaux qu'on crève à toutes les pages, forêts sombres, troubles du cœur, serments, sanglots, larmes et baisers, nacelles au clair de lune, rossignols dans les bosquets, *messieurs* braves comme des lions, doux comme des agneaux, vertueux comme on ne l'est pas, toujours bien mis, et qui pleurent comme des urnes. (71–72)

Later, desperate to recapture the magic of the ball at La Vaubyessard—the defining experience in her life—she turns to Balzac and Sand, in whose fiction she seeks “des assouvissements imaginaires pour ses convoitises personnelles,” Eugène Sue, and women’s magazines (92). Jacques Rancière argues that Emma wants literature and life to “merge into one another. What defines her,” he explains, “is that she refuses the separation between two kinds of enjoyment: the material enjoyment of material goods and the spiritual enjoyment of art, literature, and ideals” (235). Toward the end of the novel, her readings—“des livres extravagants où il y avait des tableaux orgiaques avec des situations sanglantes” (310)—take a dark turn, in tandem with her own escalating compulsions, lending credence to Rancière’s provocative view that Emma dies because she has read too many books (234).

Though only one reading is specified for Adèle, Milan Kundera’s 1984 novel *L’insoutenable légèreté de l’être*, it is pivotal in awakening the intense sexual feelings that eventually take over her life. The sentences in one scene in particular become her mantra, resonating “jusque dans son ventre” (133) and compelling her to touch herself sexually for the first time. It is fitting that Adèle’s life-changing reading should be a novel whose author aims to counter Nietzsche’s concept of eternal recurrence with the notion that whatever happens in life occurs only once (“Friedrich Nietzsche”), an ethos that Adèle puts into practice by way of one-night stands after which she remembers, according to the narrator, neither her lovers’ names¹⁰ nor the situations that brought them together: “Elle ne se souvient de rien de précis mais les hommes sont les uniques repères de son existence. A chaque saison, à chaque anniversaire, à chaque événement de sa vie, correspond un amant au visage flou” (136). Like Emma, who has to “retirer des choses une sorte de profit personnel ; et elle rejetait comme inutile tout ce qui ne contribuait pas à la consommation immédiate de son cœur ..." (71), Adèle requires instant gratification.

With such a disconnect between what the two women have and what they want, it is logical that role-playing should provide an outlet for their frustration. To prepare for the ball at La Vaubyessard, an aristocratic world completely different from her own, Emma “fit sa toilette avec la conscience méticuleuse d’une actrice à son début” (83). Her need for an audience is apparent at every turn, such as when she abandons music because, “Qui l’entendrait ?” (96) and when, faced with Charles’s obliviousness to her plight, she wonders “Pour qui donc était-elle sage[?]” (141). At the opera in Rouen, she becomes so entangled in the plot that she cries out when the lovers “parlaient des fleurs de leur tombe, de serments, d’exil, de fatalité, d’espérances ..." (249), the very subjects that have long figured in her own Romantic fantasies and conversations. Adèle, for her part, lacks the initiative to devote herself to the one profession that interests her, acting, seemingly content to be the object of others’ gaze: “elle n’a jamais eu d’autre ambition que d’être regardée” (19). In fact, her goals—to be the wife of “un homme riche et absent,” to

10 A puzzling statement since Adèle has contacts in a secret flip phone that eventually proves her guilt.

“traîner dans une grande maison, sans autre souci que d’être belle au retour de son mari” (20)—are more consistent with the mindset of a nineteenth-century woman with few opportunities to be anything more than a wife and mother than a twenty-first-century one. At a key moment toward the end of the novel, she realises that what she fears most is being “inconnue, anonyme, ... un pion dans la foule” (205). Such examples lend support to Lori Saint-Martin’s argument that Adèle lacks agency because of her need to be seen and desired (40).

Where Adèle excels at roleplay is in her sexual relationships. With her boss, “Elle a fait semblant d’être à la fois terriblement impressionnée et terriblement attirée par lui” (23–24), and with another lover, “[elle] mim[ait] la pudeur et singe[ait] l’émotion” (151). The verb *mimer* appears as well in the passage about Kundera, where the narrator comments on Adèle’s awareness that her obsession with men has nothing to do with desire: “Ce n’était pas à la chair qu’elle aspirait, mais à la situation. Etre prise. Observer le masque des hommes qui jouissent... . Mimer l’orgasme épileptique, la jouissance lascive, le plaisir animal” (135). At a party, she makes a spectacle of herself in part because no one is looking at or listening to her, leading her to question whether she even exists (66). Her behaviour infuriates the normally agreeable Richard, who tells her that if she could only accept that she is as ordinary as everyone else, she would be much happier (69), a statement that gets to the very heart of the central problem for both Emma and Adèle.

The roles that the two women play most often are those of good wife and mother. Though disillusioned almost immediately after marrying, Emma still ensures that Charles comes home to a fire, dinner, and an elegantly attired woman. The fact that “Les bourgeoises [de Yonville] enviaient son économie, les clients sa politesse, les pauvres sa charité” (140) testifies to her talent for roleplaying, as does Léon’s decision to depart for Rouen because she *appears* so unattainable even while she is consumed by desire for him. However strong her hatred for Charles, “il fallait continuer à sourire, s’entendre répéter qu’elle était heureuse, faire semblant de l’être, le laisser croire” (141). The same *être/paraître* dichotomy underpins Adèle’s behaviour. A male colleague marvels at the contrast between her everyday demeanour as “une petite princesse pincée, avec sa vie bien rangée” and the one she displays when partying, “une sacrée fêtarde” (30). After discovering her secret life, Richard is in equal measure fascinated and revolted¹¹ by the ease with which she has led her double life; “Sa femme était un imposteur magnifique” (185). To be sure, she is, like Emma, capable of devoting herself—or at least of *planning* to do so—to housewifely behavior: “Demain, elle préparera à dîner. Elle rangera la maison, elle achètera des fleurs. Elle boira du vin avec [son mari], elle lui racontera sa journée. Elle fera des projets pour le week-end. Elle sera conciliante, douce, servile. Elle dira oui à tout” (55–56). Inspired one morning by her son’s display of affection, she makes breakfast, changes the long-stained tablecloth, and makes a to-do list, eager to “nettoyer le quotidien, se débarrasser, une à une, de ses angoisses. Elle va remplir son devoir” (59). But such behaviour is the exception, not the rule; Adèle’s primary duty, like that of Emma before her, is always to herself.

The heroines’ desire for an audience explains the mirror motif in both novels. In the post- La Vaubessard period, Emma expresses her boredom with a sequence of gestures: dusting her bookshelf, picking up a book, putting it down, then looking in her mirror as if to touch base with herself while straining to fill the hours of her day. When her

11 Kristeva’s concept of the abject—something “horrifying, repellent, but also fascinating: it is strange but familiar” (Zakin)—applies here: Richard is in equal measure “repelled” and “fascinated” by his wife’s ability to lead a double life, just as some readers no doubt find themselves “repelled” and “fascinated” by the intense rawness of desires and actions whose “strangeness” may well have to do with the fact that they are attributed to a female character (not to mention one brought to fictional life by a female writer).

relationship with Léon stalls, a mirror provides comfort in what she considers a martyrdom: "Puis l'orgueil, la joie de se dire: 'Je suis vertueuse,' et de se regarder dans la glace en prenant des poses résignées, la consolait un peu du sacrifice qu'elle croyait faire" (140). The evening after her fateful horseback ride with Rodolphe, a mirror reveals her new "look" as mistress: huge black eyes and "quelque chose de subtil épandu sur sa personne [qui] la transfigurait" (191). During one of her daring early-morning visits to Rodolphe's chateau, she plays at playing the man, so to speak, observing herself, pipe in her mouth, in his shaving mirror. And after swallowing the arsenic, "Elle s'épi[ait] curieusement"—a sort of self-scrutiny, no mirror required—"pour discerner si elle ne souffrait pas" (335). Adèle consults her mirror frequently, including during her pregnancy: "Elle baissait les yeux vers son ventre, revenait vers son visage. 'Redeviendrai-je un jour celle que j'étais avant ?' Elle avait la sensation aiguë de sa propre métamorphose. Elle n'aurait pas pu dire si cela la réjouissait ou si elle en concevait de la nostalgie. Mais elle savait que quelque chose mourait en elle" (40). Each woman bears witness to her own metamorphosis, for Emma, a transfiguration and for Adèle, the death of some part of herself.

On other occasions, Adèle watches herself lie to Richard about where she was all night (29), and, at the aforementioned party, goes into the bathroom, "reste debout devant la glace et bouge les lèvres en souriant, mimant"—there is that key verb again—"une conversation polie avec elle-même" (66). A social recluse (her only friend is a woman named Lauren whom she exploits when in need of an alibi, a babysitter, money, even a sex partner in the form of Lauren's boyfriend), Adèle is far more comfortable interacting with herself than with others; she is, like Emma—also friendless—her own best audience. As Adèle's addiction intensifies, a mirror confirms the effects of a drug-fueled encounter with two strangers that leaves her "blanche et vieille" (130), foreshadowing the moment in her final scene where, in a bar after her father's funeral, she sees in her reflection "une noyée, le teint livide, les yeux exorbités, les lèvres exsangues" (220). That description, in fact, bears a striking resemblance to that of a dying Emma who, after consulting her mirror a final time, "se renversa la tête en poussant un soupir. Sa poitrine se mit aussitôt à haleter rapidement. La langue tout entière lui sortit hors de la bouche ; ses yeux, en roulant, pâlisssaient comme deux globes de lampe qui s'éteignent, à la croire déjà morte ..." (343).

Given the heroines' need to be seen, whether by others or themselves, there could be no better recipe for disaster than to pair them with husbands who are completely *bien dans leurs peaux*. Charles and Richard have more in common than the *char* syllable in their given names; both are medical professionals devoted to the care of others but incapable of healing what ails their wives. Charles never evolves beyond the little boy "de tempérament modéré, qui jouait aux récréations, travaillait à l'étude, écoutant en classe, dormant bien au dortoir, mangeant bien au réfectoire" (42). Interestingly, Flaubert compares him, too, to a horse—not the un-breakable type, like Emma, but "un cheval de manège qui tourne en place les yeux bandés, ignorant de la besogne qu'il broie" (43). In short, "il n'enseignait rien, ne savait rien, ne souhaitait rien" (76). A worthy successor, Richard, a gastroenterologist, is even-tempered and good-natured; he delights in simple, everyday pleasures and is devoted to his wife, "sa névrose, sa folie, son rêve d'idéal" (186), as central to his happiness as Emma is to that of Charles, whose universe "n'excédait pas le tour soyeux de son jupon" (68). It is ironic that Richard has little interest in sex ("il trouvait ça long" [199]) and is so out of touch with Adèle that he believes that his indifference must be a relief to her. When, late in the novel, he indulges in a sort of revenge-tryst with a young pharmacy intern, he is more frightened than excited and is unable to climax. Both men value marriage and fatherhood above all else. Charles revels in "L'idée d'avoir engendré Rien ne lui manquait à présent. Il

connaissait l'existence humaine tout du long ..." (122), setting the stage for Richard, who "avait désiré Lucien plus qu'eux" (199) and who pressures Adèle for more children.

In short, Richard is no more capable of offering his wife anything other than stasis and convention than his counterpart from the nineteenth century. It is telling that when Lauren asks Adèle why she married Richard—"Tu aurais pu garder ta liberté, vivre ta vie comme tu l'entends, sans tous ces mensonges. Ça me paraît... aberrant"—, Adèle replies, "parce qu'il me l'a demandé," the first man to do so; also, as a doctor, he had things to offer her (56). It could certainly be said that Emma agrees to marry Charles simply because he asks (if he *had* in fact asked; Emma's father had to do it for him), and because he, too, has things to offer her, or so she thinks. Exposure to life at La Vaubyessard makes Emma realise just how wide the gulf is between her desires and Charles's capacity to fulfill her: "Tout ce qui l'entourait immédiatement, campagne ennuyeuse, petits bourgeois imbéciles, médiocrité de l'existence, lui semblait une exception dans le monde, tandis qu'au delà [*sic*] s'étendait à perte de vue l'immense pays des félicités et des passions" (93). Adèle views life with Richard similarly, as "petite, minable, sans aucune envergure. Leur argent a l'odeur du travail, de la sueur et des longues nuits passées à l'hôpital... Il ne lui autorise ni oisiveté ni décadence" (20). Both women feel entitled to exchange their "vie de bourgeoise merdique" (*Jardin* 164) for the kind enjoyed by the upper class.

It should come as no surprise, given these basic parallels, that Flaubert, then Slimani, use similar images and motifs to portray their heroines' feelings of entrapment and their desire for freedom. A case in point is the metaphor of the dark tunnel/corridor: Emma's entire future is equated with "un corridor tout noir, et qui avait au fond sa porte bien fermée" (96), and holidays with family are, for Adèle, akin to "un tunnel sombre et froid, une punition" (74). She texts one lover, "J'ai tellement hâte de m'échapper" (154), seemingly inspired by Emma's wish to "s'enfuir avec Léon quelque part, bien loin, pour essayer une destinée nouvelle ..." (141).¹² As the novel comes to a close, Emma again yearns to flee, but without Léon: "Elle aurait voulu, s'échappant *comme un oiseau*, aller se rejoindre quelque part, bien loin, dans les espaces immaculés" (313; my emphasis). The trope of the bird to signify escape is hardly new, but Flaubert and Slimani tweak it in a strikingly analogous way to highlight their heroines' impotence. When Charles fails to make a name for himself, Emma remembers "toutes les privations de son âme, les bassesses du mariage, du ménage, ses rêves tombant dans la boue comme des hirondelles blessées ..." (213). What better way could there be to emphasise the impossibility of Emma's dreams than to align them with wounded, grounded, and muddled birds, not to mention the kind of bird known for its flying prowess. Slimani goes further, comparing not her dreams, but Adèle herself, to a wounded (and crazed) bird after Richard sequesters her: "Parfois, elle a l'air d'un oiseau affolé, cognant son bec contre les baies vitrées, brisant ses ailes sur les poignées de porte" (195), much like the bat, as a matter of fact, "qui se cogn[e] la tête à des plafonds pourris" in Baudelaire's fourth spleen poem (80–81).

While the "quelque part" to which the heroines wish to escape remains unspecified, there is no question that Paris represents a tangible ideal for both. After La Vaubyessard, Emma, finger on a map, "faisait des courses dans la capitale" (92); "Elle souhaitait à la fois mourir et habiter Paris" (94). In the Rouen cathedral, all it takes for Emma to stop resisting Léon's seduction efforts is for him to announce, about hiring a carriage, that

12 The closest she gets to realizing that lofty goal is a "lune de miel" (featured, ironically, in the novel's shortest chapter) on an island near the Rouen hotel, where "ils auraient voulu, comme deux Robinsons, vivre perpétuellement dans ce petit endroit, qui leur semblait, en leur béatitude, le plus magnifique de la terre" (280). The Robinson reference recalls Johann David Wyss's *Der Schweizerische Robinson* (1812) and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), both set in exotic locales. It is interesting that Slimani chose that particular surname for her main characters. See Parker for an analysis of the names Robinson and Adèle (48–49).

“Cela se fait à Paris” (268). Adèle likewise considers Paris “un terrain de rêverie idéale” (111) where she feels free and empowered, while Lisieux—her version of Tostes/Yonville—represents imprisonment and subservience. It bears mentioning that she has long rebuffed Richard’s attempts to convince her to move because “Loin de Paris, dans la petite maison de province, elle renoncerait à ce qui selon elle la définit vraiment, à son être vrai. Celui-là même qui, parce qu’il est ignoré de tous, est son plus grand défi. En abandonnant cette partie d’elle-même, elle ne sera plus que ce qu’ils voient. Une surface sans fond et sans revers. Un corps sans ombre” (137). She would be forced to “se cogn[er]”—clearly an important verb for Slimani—contre elle-même” (137–38).¹³

Playing off Slimani’s terms, one might say that although both Emma and Adèle aspire to be seen, to have substance, to be “un corps *avec* ombre,” neither wants a shadow in the form of a child. Despite some early enthusiasm for motherhood, it turns out to be just as disappointing as marriage. Newly pregnant, Emma is curious about it but quickly loses interest when the budget does not allow for the luxurious accoutrements she desires for her baby. Flaubert shows her to be atypical in her indifference to “ces préparatifs où la tendresse des mères se met en appétit, et son affection, dès l’origine, en fut peut-être atténuée de quelque chose” (122). One of the novel’s best-known passages is that describing Emma’s dream of having a son who, free to love and live as he pleases, would be her revenge against all the obstacles set in the path of a woman who wants the same (122). When Emma turns her head and faints at the sight of her newborn daughter, the child’s fate is sealed. To be sure, it is when mothering that Emma’s mood swings play out most dramatically. At times, she dotes on Berthe, bringing her home from the wet nurse’s, examining her body as if for the first time, claiming that children are “sa consolation, sa joie, sa folie” (139). But far more often, she is neglectful, even violent. After her fruitless visit to the curé, she knocks Berthe down, gashing her cheek, then lies to Charles about what happened. As if to underscore her maternal unfitness, Flaubert showcases the Homais, helicopter parents *avant la lettre*:

Les couteaux jamais n’étaient affilés, ni les appartements cirés. Il y avait aux fenêtres des grilles en fer et aux chambranles de fortes barres. Les petits Homais, malgré leur indépendance, ne pouvaient remuer sans un surveillant derrière eux ; au moindre rhume, leur père les bourrait de pectoraux, et jusqu’à plus de quatre ans ils portaient tous, impitoyablement, des bourrelets matelassés. (149)

Berthe, in contrast, does not study, is undisciplined and wears holey tights, to the consternation of Mme Homais, “la meilleure épouse de Normandie, douce comme un mouton, chérissant ses enfants ...” (129). In a poignant passage near the end of the novel, Charles tells Berthe, who has asked for her mother, to call for her maid since “Tu sais bien, ma petite, que ta maman ne veut pas qu’on la dérange” (310). Indeed, the only person that Emma truly “mothers” is Léon: when he professes his love to her in Rouen, she plays hard to get by emphasising her age and status as mother: “Enfant que vous êtes ! Allons, soyons sage ! je le veux” (262); “‘Enfant, m’aimes-tu ?’” (290). Appropriately, the bed in their hotel room is “en forme de nacelle” with “[d]es rideaux de levantine rouge” (288), a subtle, but heavily ironic response to “[le] berceau en nacelle avec des rideaux de soie rose” that Emma fantasised about for her baby (122). By way of seemingly insignificant details (*nacelle*, *rideaux*), Flaubert cleverly connects aspects of

13 In the opening scene, Adèle “cogne son front contre le mur” (13); after the sexual encounter that ends her sexual fast, “Son cœur cogne dans sa poitrine, elle étouffe” (14), and when in her parents’ apartment after her father’s death, “elle vacille et se cogne contre les murs” (217). In the conclusion, Richard muses that among other positive changes in Adèle, “[elle] ne se cogne plus aux rambardes des lits” (226).

his heroine's life—motherhood and sexuality—that do not belong together any more than do religion and sexuality.

If Adèle is open to having a child, it is also for selfish reasons, albeit less material ones: Richard and her son, Lucien, represent an antidote of sorts, “un refuge pour les soirs d’angoisse et un repli confortable pour les jours de débauche” (39). She believes motherhood will cure her, fulfill her, and bring her acceptance and respect: “Adèle a fait un enfant pour la même raison qu’elle s’est mariée. Pour appartenir au monde et se protéger de toute différence avec les autres. En devenant épouse et mère, elle s’est nimbée d’une aura de respectabilité que personne ne peut lui enlever” (39). The reality is, however, that she is nothing like other mothers. Slimani seems to be modeling Flaubert’s juxtaposition of Emma and Mme Homais by putting Adèle in the company of mothers who seem obsessed with keeping their children safe and happy. Her disengagement from motherhood is evident from the outset, with Lucien’s conception described as something done *to* her (“cet enfant lui avait été fait sans qu’elle s’y oppose de résistance” [41]). While she, like Emma, occasionally expresses a fierce affection for her child, motherhood hardly comes naturally to her, a fact that is apparent to Richard’s mother, who “s’inquiétait de sa froideur, de son absence d’instinct maternel” (187), a concern akin to that expressed by Madame Bovary *mère* to her son about Emma. There is no question that Adèle’s sex life takes priority over Lucien; she misses a pediatrician appointment “pour un baiser qui dure trop longtemps” (102) and is furious when Lucien sits in a puddle, because if he catches cold, she will have to take care of him.¹⁴ While Emma finds her daughter physically unattractive—after Berthe’s “accident,” she exclaims at the child’s ugliness—, Adèle is repulsed by her son’s personality—“Elle lui en veut d’être aussi stupide, aussi inconscient, aussi égoïste” (37). Lucien represents for his mother what Berthe does for hers: “un poids, une contrainte dont elle a du mal à s’accommoder” (*Jardin* 39). The burden is all the heavier when Richard is released from the hospital and Adèle is saddled with a second dependent, one whom she must pajama and feed before being free to go about her sexual business.¹⁵ Adèle, like Emma, lashes out physically at her child, on one occasion pinching his back so hard that she feels “la chair tendre plier sous ses doigts” (105).¹⁶ In no context does Adèle’s behaviour more clearly qualify as “exécrable,” the adjective used by Nessrine Naccach to describe Adèle in general, than in motherhood.

One would not automatically think of anger as intrinsic to Emma’s character, yet the term is a prominent motif in *Madame Bovary*, one that Slimani seemingly borrows for *Dans le jardin de l’ogre*. While waiting for Léon to make advances, Emma is “pleine de convoitises, de rage, de haine” (140); when Charles asks for a hug after failing to fix Hippolyte’s *pied bot*, she screams and slams the door, “toute rouge de colère” (214). On three occasions Emma feels compelled to strike someone: Charles, after a doctor from Yvetot humiliates him (“elle était exaspérée de honte; elle avait envie de le battre ...” [95]); Lheureux, when he begins to pressure her for payment (“Emma se retenait pour ne pas le battre” [307]); and men in general, after the notary, Guillaumin, tries to seduce her (“Elle aurait voulu battre les hommes, leur cracher au visage, les broyer tous ...” [324]). Adèle’s anger at her child, while shocking, is but an extension of her violent thoughts and actions in other contexts. Her rage is described as “infernale,” for instance, when one

14 For Saint-Martin, the fact that Adèle is “mère et femme désirante à la fois” is unusual (36).

15 Richard eventually turns the tables on his wife when he teaches her to drive and treats her like a stupid, disobedient child. He also calls several times a day to check on her, comes home without warning, and limits her access to money. In this regard he is quite different from Charles, who never tries to change Emma’s behaviour or even seems to recognise it as bad.

16 Coincidentally, Richard pinches *her* back after discovering her betrayal (190). He also wants to hit her (181, 187).

partner is not rough enough (16);¹⁷ she realises when another kisses her that he will be unable to “la remplir” (27), after which she goes through the motions (literally) to finish the act, “ferm[ant] les yeux *avec rage*, comme si le voir la dégoûtait, comme si elle pensait déjà aux prochains hommes, les vrais, les bons, ceux d’ailleurs, ceux qui auraient enfin prise sur son corps” (28; my emphasis). A mere glimpse of her sleeping husband provokes a rage that is described in very similar terms to that in the final example from *Madame Bovary* above: “[elle] lui en voulait de sa naïveté, qui la persécute ... Elle voudrait griffer ce visage lisse et tendre, éventrer ce sommier rassurant” (57).

Both heroines often turn their rage against themselves as well, blurring the line between pain and pleasure. Consumed with “les appétits de la chair, les convoitises d’argent et les mélancolies de la passion,” Emma, “au lieu d’en détourner sa pensée, elle l’y attachait davantage, s’excitant à la douleur et en cherchant partout les occasions” (140), her irritation with Charles becoming “une sorte de volupté dépravée” (135). She even wishes he would hit her “pour pouvoir plus justement le détester, s’en venger” (141);¹⁸ she, and Adèle after her, would feel better were her husband as “bad” as she. Adèle acts on her own masochistic fantasies in the more graphic way that we have come to expect. Desperate for release as she awaits a lover, “Elle serre son sexe dans son poing, referme violemment la main. Elle se griffe de l’anus jusqu’au clitoris... Une fois, un homme a craché sur son sexe. Elle a aimé ça” (108). In spite of the pain she incorporates into the act—or because of it—she fails to have an orgasm. During a sexual encounter in an alley, she grabs her lover’s fist and shoves it into her vagina, a seeming rehearsal for the most graphic scene in the novel, involving Adèle and the aforementioned strangers:

C’est elle qui a demandé à Mehdi, au bout d’une heure d’ébats, au bout d’une heure de lui en elle, d’Antoine en elle, de jeux, d’échanges, c’est elle qui n’y a plus tenu. Qui a dit : ‘ça ne suffit pas,’ qui a voulu sentir, qui a cru supporter. Cinq fois, peut-être dix, il a relevé la jambe et son genou pointu, osseux, lui a éclaté le sexe... Il ne comprenait pas. Et puis, il y a pris goût, en la voyant se tortre, en entendant ses cris qui n’étaient plus humains. (130)

As Grégoire Leménager puts it, “C’est une Madame Bovary trash prête à se faire violer l’entrejambe à coups de genou par deux inconnus, une Catherine M.¹⁹ qui serait condamnée à détester ce qu’elle aime, et à souffrir en silence de ce qu’elle est.” Finally, in her last scene, her outward demeanour as she converses with a young stranger belies more self-destructive fantasies:

Elle imagine que les hommes se succèdent, poussant leur verge à l’intérieur de son ventre, la tournant d’avant et en arrière, jusqu’à déloger le chagrin, jusqu’à faire taire la peur tapie au fond d’elle... Elle voudrait que la salle entière boive sur elle, qu’ils crachent sur elle, qu’ils atteignent jusqu’à ses entrailles et qu’ils les arrachent, jusqu’à n’être plus rien qu’un lambeau de chair morte. (218–19)

Like Camus’s Meursault, who wishes for cries of hatred at his execution, Adèle still, even after subjected to Richard’s “cure,” would rather feel pain than nothing at all.

For all her aggressiveness when it comes to satisfying her appetites, Adèle owes a debt to Emma as well in her reliance on displays of passivity. Emma often expects to be rescued, imploring Rodolphe, for example, “Sauve-moi !,” then “Emmène-moi ! ...

17 The devil is in the details: Flaubert describes Emma’s *regard* as “infernal” when she tries to persuade Léon to steal from his practice (318).

18 Emma is not the first heroine to prefer her husband’s anger to his kindness: the eponymous heroine of George Sand’s 1832 novel says of her husband, Delmare, “j’aime mieux sa colère que sa passion” (230), followed shortly thereafter by the narrator’s assertion that Indiana “aimait mieux ce courroux qui la réconciliait avec elle-même, qu’une générosité qui eût excité ses remords” (231).

19 A reference to Catherine Millet’s explicit 2002 memoir, *La Vie sexuelle de Catherine M.*

Enlève-moi !... Oh! je t'en supplie !" (221), the very commands, in reverse, that she later imagines herself addressing, more futilely, to an actor on stage at the opera ("Enlève-moi, emmène-moi, partons !" [251]). After Rodolphe leaves her, she waits for her fate to change, just as she once did in Tostes, "quotidiennement attend[ant]"—the adverb's length and unusual position accentuating her lethargy—"l'infaillible retour d'événements minimes, qui pourtant ne lui importaient guère" (238). Adèle's passivity is especially striking because it is so at odds with her typically antagonistic behavior. When her destiny as an actress "ne se réalise pas" (to return to the quote above), it is Richard who finds her a job, one for which she exerts herself just enough to get by because the required travel means a bigger pool of potential sex partners. In fact, once she succeeds in bedding her boss, any interest she had in her work vanishes. Missing deadlines, inventing sources, and lifting material from the internet become her norm. Richard's brush with death is a turning point because she realises for the first time how dependent she is on her husband, without whom "Elle serait complètement démunie, obligée d'affronter la vie, la vraie, l'affreuse, la concrète. Il faudrait tout réapprendre, tout faire et, partant, perdre en paperasseries le temps qu'elle consacre à l'amour" (116). Remarkably, this quintessential danger-seeker is afraid to walk home alone at night—she might get raped, after all—and even to go for a run in the country. In the Schwartzbrod interview, Slimani affirmed that what is subversive about Adèle, "ce n'est pas le sexe, c'est sa passivité, sa paresse. Elle ne veut pas correspondre aux rôles qu'on lui propose."²⁰ Ironically, whether consciously or not, Slimani puts Emma's signature "Emmène-moi" in the mouth of her heroine, who tells a partner she loves him, then whispers "Une autre vie est possible. Emmène-moi" (151). The difference is that Emma really means it, while Adèle is merely saying it to get her lover to give in to her sexual advances, "comme un rat étourdi par le son de la flûte, ... prêt à la suivre jusqu'au bout du monde" (151).

For both women, then, *not* taking action, paradoxically, can be seen as a pro-active move, even if, in Emma's case, it does not always garner results. The same can be said about the way Emma and Adèle approach essential bodily functions like sleeping and eating. *Not* sleeping obviously allows them time for their other life, especially since their husbands sleep so well. At La Vaubyessard, Charles is so bored by the very activities and sensations that enthrall Emma that he falls half asleep standing up while she waltzes with a vicomte; he goes to bed while she stays awake "afin de prolonger l'illusion de cette vie luxueuse qu'il lui faudrait tout à l'heure abandonner" (87). Later, Emma waits impatiently for Charles to fall asleep so that she can escape to the garden to meet Rodolphe (197). Eventually, sharing a bed with her sleeping husband becomes so intolerable that she relegates him to a different floor of the house. It goes without saying that Adèle has a whole other existence after dark, at least until Richard exiles her to the country, where staying awake while he sleeps affords her a modicum of autonomy:

La nuit, Adèle écoute son souffle, ses ronflements, tous ces bruits rauques qui font la vie à deux... . Le visage au bord du lit, la main dans le vide, elle n'ose pas se retourner... . Quand elle est sûre qu'il dort, Adèle se tourne. Elle regarde, dans le lit qui tremble, dans cette chambre où tout lui paraît fragile. Plus aucun geste, jamais, ne sera innocent. Elle en conçoit une terreur et une joie immense. (176)

Predictably, Richard is convinced that Adèle sleeps peacefully in his care, "D'un sommeil sans histoires et sans secrets" (226). But of course he is notoriously out of touch

20 Then again, as Parker notes, reacting to another interview, Slimani has been vocal about wanting to oppose "a current feminist trend that disapproves of 'passivity' and claims the right for women to crave objectification if they so choose" (51). "Aujourd'hui, le féminisme considère la passivité comme quelque chose de totalement négatif. Or, moi je considère que dans notre sexualité, dans notre vie, *on a le droit de vouloir être un objet*" (Ravix quoting Slimani, Parker's emphasis, 47)

with her and has everything to gain by believing that the measures he has taken to “fix” her have worked.

The urge to sleep as a coping mechanism stands as further evidence, like the aggressivity/passivity analysed above, of the heroines’ contradictory impulses. When Emma begins to tire of Léon, she wishes she could “ne plus vivre, ou continuellement dormir” (312), a definite sign of decline given her desire, while in Tostes, to die *and* live in Paris. After consuming the arsenic, the “or” drops out of the equation: she believes death *is* sleep; “Ah ! c’est bien peu de chose, la mort ... je vais dormir, et tout sera fini !” (335). Adèle’s sleep is also described as something akin to death when she is stuck with relatives during the holidays: “Elle sombre dans un sommeil morbide. Au cours de la nuit, elle a parfois l’impression de reprendre mollement conscience. Son esprit est en veille mais son corps a la rigidité d’un cadavre... Elle a l’angoissante sensation qu’elle ne pourra jamais s’extirper de cette léthargie. Qu’elle ne se réveillera pas de ces rêves trop profonds” (77–78). Sleep is also a convenient way to shirk responsibility: at work, she feels like rolling up in a ball in the restroom and going to sleep; while caring for her son, she twice has the urge to lie down, cover her face, and sleep. Her reaction, after a tense encounter with her mother at her father’s funeral, is to wish she could go to sleep in order to quell her rage, but instead, she enters that final bar, where, in mid-conversation with the young man, she retreats to the restroom to lie down while reflecting on whether to catch the train back to Lisieux or to throw herself under it (Slimani’s apparent nod to *Anna Karenina*) (220). This is not the first time Adèle has contemplated suicide: just after Richard discovers her double life, the prospect of having to return to her childhood room is so repugnant that she imagines herself hanging from the ceiling: “les lèvres violettes, légère comme une plume, elle se balancerait au-dessus du petit lit, sa honte enfin étranglée” (219–20).

Of course the impulse to commit suicide—sleep taken to its absolute extreme—is not unanticipated in novels whose protagonists’ intensifying addictions have to end somehow. In his study of literary suicide, Norman N. Holland submits that suicide is “the best possible adaptation under the circumstances to the demands of inner and outer reality” (300), a view shared by Edwin S. Shneidman, the father of modern suicidology, for whom “The common purpose of suicide is to seek a solution” (qtd. in Berman 54). Emma’s completion of the act and Adèle’s suicidal ideation should not therefore be viewed as a capitulation, but rather as a step forward, a notion that Flaubert seems to advance in his treatment of Emma’s own “test run” of suicide in the attic, where he cannily links self-immolation in his heroine’s mind to free will and agency: “Pourquoi n’en pas finir ? Qui la retenait donc ? *Elle était libre*” (232; my emphasis).²¹ Fittingly, given Flaubert’s propensity for dark irony, it is the most banal of events, a call to dinner, that prevents Emma from acting on her impulse to find a definitive solution to her problem.

If the simple act of sharing a meal with family were not enough of an indignity to Emma at this point in her struggle, there is the eating itself; both she and her twenty-first-century counterpart share a fraught relationship with food. In contrast to Charles, who eats often and well, Emma dabbles in food restriction as early as her convent years, when she tried, “par mortification,” to go a whole day without eating (70). Patricia A. McEachern notes that after partaking of the exotic dishes at La Vaubyessard, Emma reduces her intake of more normal fare; she drinks vinegar to lose weight and “se commandait des plats pour elle, n’y touchait point, un jour ne buvait que du lait pur, et, le lendemain, des tasses de thé à la douzaine” (99). Such practices are, for McEachern, “a

21 Saint-Martin identifies as one of the elements that *Dans le jardin de l’ogre* shares with *Madame Bovary* “le fatalisme qui la prive de toute possibilité de trouver une voie de sortie” (40). I contend that both Emma and Adèle find that “voie de sortie.”

symbolic means of repudiating her station and role in life, a very effective means of controlling Charles ... and a means of appearing to conform to societal expectations ...” (29).²² It would not be a stretch to say that Charles moves to Yonville, to the detriment of his medical practice, in part because of his wife’s unorthodox eating habits. Adèle, for her part, takes food restriction to an extreme in her bid for autonomy. While Richard’s family members comment on how skinny she is, she grumbles internally about their obsession with food. Starving herself is empowering, setting her apart from—and above—everyone else: “Elle a toujours aimé avoir faim. Se sentir fléchir, chavirer, entendre son ventre se creuser et puis vaincre, ne plus avoir envie, être au-dessus de ça. Elle a cultivé la maigreur comme un art de vivre” (77).²³ Eventually her behaviour depletes her body, leaving her “d’une maigreur effroyable, la peau littéralement étirée sur les os” (148). Richard nags her about her weight (and constant smoking) and finds himself unable to focus on the shapely pharmacy intern because “le squelette d’Adèle revenait le hanter” (202). After Adèle fails to return as scheduled from her father’s funeral, he sits in his car contemplating the life he has given her, gratified that she is now free of bumps and bruises and no longer wasting away: “Sous ses robes d’été, il devine que ses fesses ont gagné en rondeur, que son ventre est plus lourd, sa peau moins ferme, plus saisissable” (226). She is as he has always wanted her, less in control of her body (heavier of belly, looser of skin), more “seizable,” like prey.

In order to fully appreciate the extent to which *Madame Bovary* is infused into *Dans le jardin de l’ogre*, it is worth examining one final motif that both Flaubert and Slimani use to good advantage, the verb *hurler* and its derivatives, a testament to the profound despair woven into both texts. The term occurs ten times in Flaubert’s novel, beginning with the opening scene when Charles’s classmates taunt him by howling “Charbovari” (38), setting him up for a lifetime of silent mockery by his wife. The day after Léon’s departure for Rouen, Emma’s suffering is said to “s’engouffr[er] dans son âme avec des hurlements doux comme fait le vent d’hiver dans les châteaux abandonnés” (155). Dogs howl twice, the second time as accompaniment to Emma’s wake (97, 350), and Hippolyte’s screams of pain are compared to “le hurlement lointain de quelque bête qu’on égorge” (213). After swallowing the arsenic, Emma utters “un hurlement sourd” (336) that links her to the blind beggar, who howls when the coachman whips him (292) and later emits “une sorte de hurlement sourd, comme un chien affamé” (320) when asked to *faire sa comédie*. The normally inexpressive Charles howls, “éperdu, fou” (365), after finding Léon’s letters to Emma; even little Napoléon Homais howls when reprimanded (135).

The term is even more pervasive in Slimani’s modern take on *Madame Bovary*, occurring a total of twenty-one times in a much shorter text. The couple in Adèle’s opening shower fantasy howl (13), as do Adèle’s boss when she is late for work (18); the mother of a boy whose sand pies Adèle childishly destroys (144); Lucien (43, 157); Adèle’s mother (213, 217); and her father (206). Not surprisingly, the verb is not linked to Richard until he becomes aware of his wife’s deception, after which he overcomes the impulse to scream at Lucien (180), but does not manage to do so at Adèle, the second time right before hitting her with his crutches (163, 181). Adèle screams twice at Lucien (37, 38), once at Richard about Lucien (35), and twice when in excruciating pain from the

22 According to McEachern, Emma “reasons that with her slender waist and her appreciation for refinement, she merits a better social position than she has thus far been able to attain” (36).

23 Saint-Martin views Adèle’s food restriction as a means of self-punishment: “les relations sexuelles ... sont un rempart contre le vide, un refuge passif; les qualificatifs qui décrivent l’orgasme féminin—feint, par ailleurs, dans son cas—semblent railler les films pornographiques ... et le plaisir en général à partir d’une perspective moralisatrice, voire imbuée de valeurs religieuses ... De la même façon, Adèle refuse de manger, aime ‘ne plus avoir envie, être au-dessus de ça’ ... comme si tout plaisir corporel, voire toute présence d’un corps qui désire, quoi que ce soit, était suspect” (38).

kneeing of her genitals (126, 129). Richard is confident that he will know what to do “si elle se rouait de coups, si elle se mettait à *hurler* la nuit. Si elle se scarifiait, qu’elle s’enfonçait un couteau sous les ongles. Il réagirait en scientifique, lui prescrirait des médicaments. Il la sauverait” (179; emphasis mine). Ironically, Adèle’s psychiatrist encourages her to *hurler*, to her amusement, since “même seule, même au milieu de nulle part, elle n’a pas réussi à extirper sa rage. A pousser un cri” (193). Nothing has changed, then, since she was ten years old, left by her mother in a hotel room for three days during which “Elle a songé à appeler la police, à crier au secours, à *hurler* jusqu’à ce qu’on lui vienne en aide. Mais elle était incapable de bouger, à moitié évanouie, confite de terreur” (71; my emphasis). Interestingly, once Richard has Adèle to himself, he begins to feel intense desire for her but is just as powerless to act as that abandoned child, managing only to put his hand on her sex “comme on met sa paume sur la bouche d’un enfant qui s’apprête à hurler” (226), as if to silence its screams.

The final instance of the verb *hurler* occurs in Adèle’s last scene, where it reads positively for the first time. When a group of drunk adolescents yell the words to a song she likes, Adèle allows herself to fall into the arms of the young man with whom she has been conversing, “s’abandonnant au rythme de la musique” (221).

Throughout Adèle’s life, dancing has represented freedom; as a girl, she would dance for hours, alone in the family’s apartment or on a dance floor.²⁴ Here, as then, she feels neither embarrassment nor fear; eyes closed and hands caressing her body, she is “tout entière à ce qu’elle faisait” (221–22), one in which Richard and Lucien are but “souvenirs flous, des souvenirs impossibles qu’elle voit lentement se dissoudre puis disparaître” (222), just as Charles dissolves away as Emma gives herself “tout entière [à la danse]” at La Vaubyessard, a waltz that exudes sensuality, what with the vicomte’s tight vest, the couple’s entwined legs, and Emma’s panting. Key elements in that passage—turning, dizziness, and an accelerating rhythm—have found their way into the description of Adèle’s last dance as well. In *Madame Bovary*, Emma and her partner “commencèrent lentement, puis allèrent plus vite (86); Adèle’s feet move slowly at first, but soon she is “envahie par la cadence de plus en plus rapide de la musique” (221). The verb *tourner* appears three times in the Flaubert passage (86) and twice in that of Slimani (221, 222). After her waltz, a swooning Emma opens her eyes to a woman asking the vicomte to dance (87); Adèle’s eyes are half-closed, and when she opens them, “le gentil garçon a disparu” (222). Flaubert gives Emma a final turn (pun intended) on a dance floor when she attends a *bal masqué* that clearly parodies the one at La Vaubyessard, where, instead of dancing, she jumps all night, not in a ball gown, but in velvet pants, red stockings, and with a paper lantern hanging from her ear, encircled by a group of unsavory characters who might be said to prefigure the men who pass Adèle back and forth as she bumps and grinds.

Although it is Richard whose perspective prevails as *Dans le jardin* comes to a close (the final sentence is “Nous n’avons pas fini” [227]), certain that he and Adèle will grow old together, that “Il lui enfonceira le visage dans le quotidien. Il la traînera, dans la poussière de ses pas, ne la lâchera jamais, quand elle aura peur du vide et envie de tomber. Et un jour, sur sa peau de parchemin, sur sa joue fendillée, il posera un baiser. Il la mettra nue. Il n’entendra plus dans le sexe de sa femme d’autres échos que celui du sang qui pulse” (228), it is of the utmost importance that Slimani leaves her heroine on the dance floor, so optimistic about her future that it takes four adjectives to describe how she envisions it: “superbe, plus haut, plus grand, plus exaltant” (222). Adèle’s

24 In an earlier passage that sets up this one, Adèle takes refuge in Lucien’s room where she listens to music from the Lido: “Elle remue doucement les bras, s’accroche aux épaules nues des danseuses. Elle danse, elle aussi, langoureuse, belle et ridicule dans un accoutrement d’animal de cirque. Elle n’a plus peur. Elle n’est plus qu’un corps offert pour le bonheur de touristes et des retraités” (95).

decision to dance rather than return to her family or commit suicide leaves no doubt that she will never accept “le quotidien” or let Richard “drag” (*traîner*) her anywhere. Whether or not her addiction will ultimately be her downfall is hardly the point. In her review of the English translation of the novel, Molly Young points out that Slimani resists pathologising Adèle’s behavior until the very end, instead approaching it “as a study in the art of tending a secret... . Adèle has glanced at the covenant of modern womanhood—the idea that you can have it all or should at least die trying—and detonated it.” She, like Emma before her, takes her fate into her own hands,²⁵ something that the translator of the English version must have understood since he eschewed a direct translation of Slimani’s original title in favor of, simply, *Adèle*, a title like *Madame Robinson*, à la Flaubert, clearly being out of the question.

Emile Zola famously asserted that

Le personnage de Madame Bovary est passé dans ce monde particulier où s’agitent les grandes figures de création humaine. On dit : ‘C’est une Bovary’ comme on a dû commencer à dire au dix-septième siècle : ‘C’est un Tartuffe.’ Cela vient de ce que Madame Bovary si individuelle, pourtant, vivant si ardemment de sa vie propre, est un type général. On la trouve partout en France, dans toutes les classes, dans tous les milieux.

One could certainly add “à toutes les époques,” as Slimani herself seemed to suggest in a recent *New York Times Book Review* interview. When asked what moves her most in a literary work, she replied, “What I find magical about literature is when the voice of the writer is unique but you feel at the same time that he or she has managed to express universality” (“By the Book” 6). With *Dans le jardin de l’ogre*, Slimani offers as much of that magic for twenty-first century readers as Flaubert has for those of the nineteenth century and beyond.

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25 Not according to Saint-Martin, who views Adèle’s situation at the end of the novel much less optimistically: “Malade, punie, détériorée, Adèle est ‘sauvée’ par l’amour d’un homme bon en principe mais hautement conventionnel et en même temps cruel et punitif ... Pour survivre, Adèle a dû troquer le plaisir sexuel, du moins espéré, contre la sécurité à vie, un peu comme on dit : prison à vie” (39); then “[Adèle] devient le pantin de son mari, sombrant dans une souffrance voisine de la mort” (40). This interpretation fails to take into account, however, the fact that Adèle is free and envisioning a bright future the last time we see her. What is more, there is no indication that she will continue to tolerate Richard’s “régime de surveillance et de punition où [elle] perd ... toute autonomie” (39).

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