Revolutionising the Environment: Geological Theories and Emma Bovary’s Isolation

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Perhaps the two most eminent French novelists of the mid to late nineteenth century, Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) and Emile Zola (1840-1902) specifically mention the palaeontologist Georges Cuvier in their works. Balzac in *Le peau de chagrin* writes, ‘Cuvier n’est-il pas le plus grand poète de notre siècle?’¹ and Zola in *Le Roman Expérimental* states: ‘Cuvier, pour ne citer que ce savant, prétendait que l’expérimentation, applicable aux corps bruts, ne l’était pas aux corps vivants.’² Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) comes between Balzac and Zola and yet there has been a relative void in considering the connections between Cuvier and Flaubert. This seems odd considering there is some evidence of Flaubert being aware of the geologist’s ideas.³

Cuvier, along with many of his contemporaries proposed the theory which later became known as ‘catastrophism’ to explain the origins of the world. In a catastrophist reading of geological history, the world has been punctuated by a series of vast catastrophes or cataclysmic events which have destroyed the inhabitants of an area. He states, ‘every part of the globe bears the impress of these great and terrible events so distinctly, that they must be visible to all who are qualified to read their history in the remains which they have left behind.’⁴ These ‘revolutions’ as Cuvier referred to them, have a number of implications. They connote disconnections between individual organisms and their

environment as the ‘revolutions’ sever any bonds which existed. Indeed the separation of man from nature was identified by Foucault as Cuvier’s basic achievement in science. Madame Bovary can be read as representing this severance.

Emma Bovary seems to signify the entire landscape of the text because most of the action revolves around her. Emma has been described as ‘one of the greatest individuals of fiction. Self-centred, self dramatising […] sensitive in the egoistic sense’ which evokes this notion of her being separated, and a world apart from the other characters. Margaret Tillett has commented how ‘the secondary characters emphasise the isolation and superiority of the main one’ whilst some French criticism focuses upon more stylistic methods which separate Emma. Barbey D’Aureililly writes ‘she alone earns for her author the title of novelist. We say ‘she alone’; for the rest of the book we have our reservations. The provincial society with which M. Gustave Flaubert has surrounded his Madame Bovary is not the same sort of bold and learned creation.’ Stylistically and structurally, Emma therefore seems to be isolated.

The narration makes abundant reference to her isolation. There are very few bonds of connection between Emma and the wider Yonville community. Her exclusion is demonstrated in the comment: ‘peut-être aurait-elle souhaité faire à quelqu’un la confidence de toutes les choses les mots lui manquaient donc, l’occasion, la hardiesse’ (p. 106) as she is one person alone. This is subtly reinforced later: ‘elle n’eût personne à qui écrire’ (p. 131) and the suggestion that ‘elle en eût fait aux bûches de la cheminée et au balancier de la pendule’ (p. 134). Her distancing from the other characters embodies her feelings of alienation. Emma seems reluctant to engage with either other characters or

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9 All references are from Gustave Flaubert, Madame Bovary; moeurs de province, préface, notes et dossier par Jacques Neefs, (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1999).
The 2001 Group Postgraduate Study Day, 19th May 2009: Environnement

indeed the world which they inhabit. Emma does not seem to even recognise the very existence of this ‘world’ because she seeks sensory desensitisation against it. The narrative states, ‘elle aurait voulu ne rien entendre, ne rien voir’ (p. 381) and ‘elle n’y prenait garde, au contraire; elle vivait comme perdue dans la dégustation anticipée de son bonheur prochaine’ (p. 304). The notion of her being in some way blind to everything around her emblematises this sense of her being detached which is more forcefully expressed through the sentiment: ‘Emma vivait tout occupée des siennes’ (p. 421). Again her seeming disconnection from other characters and the general community accentuates more of a Cuverian reading.

Emma frequently appears in the narrative by herself and whether this solitude is self-imposed or not, the very act of isolation speaks towards a Cuverian reading. It is evident from her earliest girlhood. Old Rouault states, ‘il n’avait avec lui que sa demoiselle, qui l’aidait à tenir la maison’ (p. 70) which demonstrates this detachment from other characters. Indeed this isolation is emphasised: ‘surtout qu’elle était chargée presque à elle seule des soins la ferme’ (p. 73). The sense of running the farm essentially single-handedly denotes both her topographical isolation due to the relatively distant location of the farm and her consequent solitude from other characters. This continues throughout the novel as she is often alone. As Rodolphe comes to see her after his protracted absence, Emma ‘était seule. Le jour tombait’ (p. 256). On her return home after visiting Léon, ‘elle restait seule dans la voiture’ (p. 399) and after the masked ball, she ‘enfin resta seule à l’hôtel de Boulogne’ (p. 431). It is these repeated references to her solitude that encourage Emma to be read as essentially a world apart due to her lack of interaction with other characters.

Emma too continues this sense of isolation as her attitude is suggestive of her being a world apart. For example she feels ‘un détachement intérieur’ (p. 106) which demonstrates a lack of engagement with other characters and so although she may be physically present, her thoughts and emotions are displaced elsewhere. Similarly her perceptions of the world at large and her own place
within it demonstrate a separation. Her reveries of Paris show this. She can only imagine two or three scenes ‘qui lui cachaient tous les autres, et représentaient à eux seuls l’humanité complète’ (p. 129). This connotes how she is unable to conceive of a larger world with inhabitants connected to each other and can only understand the world as a series of disjointed discrete entities. Emma’s relationship with this ‘world’ is also demonstrative. Her descriptions: ‘au reste du monde, il était perdu, sans place precise, et comme n’existant pas’ (p. 129) and ‘échos du monde qui arrivaient jusqu’à Emma’ (p. 137), denote how Emma has no place or role to fulfil in this distant ‘world.’ It is furthered by the comment that ‘tout passa pour elle dans l’éloignement’ (p. 347) as well as Léon’s comments that Yonville itself is isolated as it is ‘loin du monde’ (p. 165) because both Emma as a single character as well as the wider Yonville community in general are both distanced from what is perceived as the ‘world’ in its totality.

Emma’s isolation is expounded through the relatively scarce references she makes to wanting to engage with other characters. On one of the few occasions that this desire is invoked, the possibility of such an interaction is denied. At the ball, Emma states ‘elle aurait voulu savoir leurs existences, y pénétrer, s’y confondre’ (p. 123) but the differences in social status between the doctor’s wife and the other guests negate any possibility of this happening. This, coupled with the much more frequent mentions of her solitude again engenders more of a Cuverian reading. She seems to seek refuge for the majority of the novel in her bedroom. For example after she returns home from meeting Rodolphe, ‘dès qu’elle fut débarrassée de Charles, elle monta s’enfermer dans sa chambre’ (p. 265), after arguing with her mother-in-law, ‘puis remontée chez elle, Emma se jeta tout à plat ventre sur son lit’ (p. 303), and ‘Emma se fit servir à dîner dans sa chambre’ (p. 192).10 Other characters seem to respect this privacy too. During her illness, the narrative details, ‘Madame était dans sa chambre. On n’y montait pas’ (p.

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10 Old Rouault too does this: ‘il prenait ses repas dans la cuisine, seul’ (p. 83) which is again suggestive of ‘negative’ inheritance in that Emma has picked up the trait of isolating herself from the rest of the community.
She spends so much time in her bedroom that as Léon leaves ‘il crut voir une ombre derrière la fenêtre, dans la chambre’ (p. 211). It also takes on a shrine like status following her death which again compounds the importance invested in this room: ‘tous les appartements se dégarnirent; mais la chambre, sa chambre à elle, était restée comme autrefois’ (p. 493).

The lack of society in this particular locus is further emphasised by her expelling Charles from the room: ‘pour ne pas avoir la nuit auprès d’elle, cet homme étendu qui dormait, elle finit à force de grimaces, par le reléguer au second étage’ (p. 427). Emma’s isolation however extends itself beyond the walls of this room as the house in general becomes a locus of solitude. During her convalescence for example, Emma ‘se dégagea de la famille Homais, congédia successivement toutes les autres visites et même fréquenta l’église avec moins d’assiduité’ (p. 334). In this way the home becomes Emma’s entire world which speaks of both the narrowness, or the claustrophobia, of the narrative as well as her yearning to isolate herself from other characters.

Emma’s desire for solitude naturally manifests itself through her actions. Continuing the topos of the bedroom as a locus for self imposed isolation, the narration describes, ‘il y’avait même des jours où, à peine rentrée, elle montait dans sa chambre’ (p. 401) which engenders this sense of isolation. Similarly she makes excuses to avoid the society of others. In her contemplations of Léon, ‘elle recherchait la solitude, afin de pouvoir plus à l’aise se délecter en son image’ (p. 196) and after the death of Charles’ father, ‘Emma, sous prétexte d’ordres à donner, disparut’ (p. 381). These behaviours seem to embody Emma’s anxiety that she will not be able to gain solitude. In the aftermath of her first illness, Emma ‘redoutait qu’on fût à la questionner, à la soigner, qu’on ne la quittât pas’ (p. 321). The yearning for isolation through both her general attitude and consequently her behaviour denies strong interconnection between inhabitants and their environment.

Although Emma is the key focus of this study it seems significant that other characters isolate themselves too and again this is suggestive of Cuverian detachment. Homais, Charles and Binet in
particular all seem to deliberately segregate themselves. Homais creates his own private sanctum in the chemist. He ensures ‘personne au monde n’y mettait les pieds’ (p. 375) as ‘le capharnaüm était le refuge où se concentraient egoïstement’ (p. 375). This sense of cutting himself off from the rest of the world by purposely making this locus private, speaks of isolation. Indeed it is furthered by his exclamatory remark: ‘Non, laissez-moi! […] laissez-moi! fichtre!’ (p. 375) as again there is a strong suggestion of distance from other characters. He states as much at the Agricultural Show: ‘Moi qui reste toujours plus confiné dans mon laboratoire que le rat du bonhomme dans son fromage’ (p. 229).

After Emma’s death, Charles too emblematises this desire for solitude. When making plans for the funeral: ‘il s’enfermait dans son cabinet’ (p. 475) and to remember her he keeps her dresses ‘dans son cabinet de toilette, où il s’enfermait’ (p. 491). These all show physical isolation by retreating to a particular locus but the same is shown in the weakening of other relationships. Once the initial wave of well-wishers have dispersed, Charles ‘se resserrait plus étroitement à l’amour de son enfant’ (p. 497) which only happens once other ‘affections disparaissaient’ (p. 497). His searching for isolation manifests itself in his behaviours too: ‘il ne sortait plus, ne recevait personne, refusait même d’aller voir ses malades’ (p. 499). Again the lack of society accentuates this self-imposed isolation.

Perhaps most significant is his divorce from the one relationship which had remained constant and quite strong throughout the narrative, that with his mother. After an argument about the giving of one of Emma’s scarves: ‘ce fut une rupture définitive, complète’ (p. 497).

Binet is often described by himself, or more accurately with only his lathe as his companion. The narration describes: ‘on voyait à la lucarne d’un grenier le profil maigre de M. Binet penché sur son tour’ (p. 186), after the Agricultural Show he ‘rentrait à sa maison. Il allait revoir son tour’ (p. 254), and when Emma goes to him for money, he ‘était seul, dans sa mansarde’ (p. 447). This isolation

11 This is by no means the first example of Charles finding isolation. As a student he liked ‘s’enfermer chaque soir dans un sale appartement sale’ (p. 65) and after the death of his first wife, the narration states: ‘l’agrément nouveau de l’indépendance lui rendit bientôt la solitude plus supportable’ (p. 79) which suggests he enjoys his isolation.
extends itself to most of his actions. When dining, he is described thus: ‘il lui faut toujours sa place dans la petite salle!’ (p. 153) which suggests a deliberate cutting off from society, and when shooting ducks he is ‘tout seul dans son tonneau’ (p. 269). Each of these shows that Binet has no desire to enter into the wider Yonville community.¹²

Emma’s own strong desire for isolation also extends to other characters. Relatively early in their rekindled relationship, ‘Léon, bientôt, prit devant ses camarades un air de supériorité, s’abstint de leur compagnie’ (p. 388), which again is suggestive of a yearning for solitude. The description of many of the characters as distinct and separate entities prevents any sense of a strongly interconnected network of relationships connotes more of a Cuverian reading.

Emma’s detachment is evident from her very first arrival as the doctor’s wife. The narration states: ‘les plus malins ne savaient que répondre, et ils la considéraient, quand elle passait près d’eux, avec des tensions d’esprit démesurées’ (p. 90) which demonstrates how the other residents do not actually communicate with Emma but instead survey her from a distance. This is continued by the sentiment, ‘les voisins se mirent aux fenêtres pour voir la nouvelle femme de leur médecin’ (p. 92) as again there is the notion of a barrier, in this case physical, between herself and the rest of the community. The same motif recurs at the denouement. After Emma’s death, ‘on se tenait aux fenêtres pour voir passer le cortège’ (p. 486). The detachment caused by the presence of a barrier, or a literal division, between Emma and the other characters emphasises her distance from the rest of the world.¹³

¹² More subtle examples of characters not fitting in with the wider community also permeate the narrative. The motif of ‘les ongles’ demonstrates this. Fingernails seem to be of great importance in the narrative. Rodolphe notices that Charles ‘porte des ongles sales’ (p. 225) and Emma states that it is for Rodolphe ‘qu’elle se limitait les ongles avec un soin de ciseleur’ (p. 296). Léon is set apart in Emma’s observations of his fingernails: ‘Elle regardait ses ongles, qui étaient plus longs qu’on ne les portait à Yonville’ (p. 179) and Charles repeats the same motif. He ‘fut surprise de la blancheur de ses ongles’ (p. 72). Fingernails therefore serve to set certain characters apart from the rest of the community. Indeed as Emma is hastening towards her suicide, she breaks her fingernails which is perhaps symbolic of her impending death: ‘elle se cassa ses ongles contre la serrure, tout elle se dépêchait pour l’ouvrir’ (p. 456).

¹³ Jean Rousset’s ‘Madame Bovary: Flaubert’s Anti-Novel’ contains a short chapter entitled ‘Windows and Panoramic Vision’ which explores some of the numerous connotations that the window combines. For my purposes, the window as ‘divider’ is the most salient. Jean Rousset, ‘Madame Bovary: Flaubert’s Anti-Novel’ in Critical Essays on Gustave Flaubert ed. by Laurence M. Porter (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall, c1986), pp. 67-75.
Indeed this distancing is perhaps accentuated by the numerous references to the remaining characters forming a strong network or community. They act en masse to persuade Hippolyte: ‘Binet, qui ne se mêlait jamais des affaires d’autrui, madame Lefrançois, Artémise, les voisins, et jusqu’au maire, M. Tuvache, tout le monde l’engagea, le sermonna, lui faisait honte’ (p. 281). After Emma’s suicide ‘quelques-uns se levèrent pour l’apprendre à leurs voisins, et toute la nuit le village fut en éveil’ (p. 461) and at the news of her death, there are ‘les personnes qui l’attendaient [Homais], afin d’avoir les informations’ (p. 473). It seems significant that in each of these examples, it is the Yonville community acting together with Emma as an isolated and separate body. This suggests again that Emma is not considered as part of this network of relations. To a lesser extent this sense of isolation is also subtly evoked at Berthe’s birth. The narration details how ‘presque aussitôt, madame Homais accourut et l’embrassa, ainsi que la mère Lefrançois, du Lion d’Or’ (p. 172). Although on the surface this may seem like an act of community spirit which is inclusive of Emma, it should be noted that it is Berthe they come to see. Consequently, once again there is the covert idea of all the other characters being in some way unified against Emma who is a distinct and separate entity.

The great amount of gossiping by the Yonville community also isolates Emma. Gossiping can be read as a kind of communication network as it necessitates social interaction and so the creation of bonds. However because Emma is excluded from the gossiping, and indeed because much of the gossip is about her, Emma’s overwhelming isolation is more prominent. This emphasises the invisible ‘barrier’ which seems to be ever-present between her and the other women because instead of talking to Emma, they talk about Emma to further distance her from the rest of society.14 After Léon has accompanied Emma on a stroll, ‘dès le soir, cela fut connu dans Yonville, et madame Tuvache, la femme du maire, déclara devant sa servante que madame Bovary se compromettait’ (p. 176). This not

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only shows the speed at which news travels in Yonville but the italicised comment also emphasises the judgemental manner in which the inhabitants view her. The same sense of judgement is engendered a few pages later, ‘on pensa définitivement qu’elle devait être *sa bonne amie*’ (p. 186). This notion of Emma being talked about and not to, is accentuated perhaps most forcefully in the parenthetical reference, ‘Malgré ses airs évaporés (c’était le mot des bourgeoises d’Yonville)’ (p. 218). By the Yonville community at large adopting a special and exclusive term for Emma’s behaviours, there is a clear sense that Emma is not regarded as one of the society.

The expectation that characters will gossip permeates the entire narrative. This emphasises how important gossiping is in the community and so accentuates Emma’s distance by being excluded from its practice. After Emma fears she has been discovered by Binet, her anxiety lies in the anticipation, ‘il ne tairait pas, il bavarderait, c’était certain!’ (p. 270), and when she is seen by Lheureux on Léon’s arm, ‘elle eut peur, s’imaginait qu’il bavarderait’ (p. 405). The narration too states the practice of gossiping more explicitly. By speaking of ‘des cancans que l’on débitait sur sa voisine’ (p. 332), both the reality of gossiping and its importance is accentuated. This is reinforced by Peter Cortland’s comment about Emma’s search for money. He writes ‘the two women, Madame Tuvache and Madame Caron, are the eyes of the town looking, scandalised, on her behaviour from a distance without being immediately affected by it.’¹⁵ By being posited as judges and maintaining their distance from Emma her isolation is demonstrated two-fold.

Although I have sought to emphasise how Emma seems in many ways a world apart from the rest of the characters, it is also important to consider that in some senses Yonville more generally offers a fragmented and disjointed community. This speaks towards the Cuverian notion of severance between inhabitants and their environment. It can be read in the novel through both secrecy and malice.

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which seem to be engendered by some of the residents. Secrecy covertly embodies a fragmentation in the community because it connotes weaker bonds between residents. The doctor’s practice has ‘une porte sur l’Allée, qui permet d’entrer et de sortir sans être vu’ (p. 164). By not wanting to be seen, again the importance of gossip is brought to the fore. When Charles suggests returning to old Rouault’s house to propose to Emma, her father is anxious: ‘vous n’aurez pas besoin de revenir, à cause du monde’ (p. 84). This suggests that old Rouault does not want to be subject to the same gossiping which later befalls his daughter. Indeed he also constructs a code to send word to Charles. A positive response is indicated by pushing ‘l’auvent de la fenêtre contre le mur’ (p. 84). Emma too constructs a series of signs with Rodolphe. To announce his midnight arrivals, Rodolphe ‘jetait contre les persiennes une poignée de sable’ (p. 273) and the narration later states how they had arranged a code in case of emergency: ‘elle attacherait à la persienne un petit chiffon de papier blanc’ (p. 303). A code, by its very nature, is exclusive of some people and so connotes a more fragmented community.\(^\text{16}\)

Secrecy also pervades relationships which suggest a certain level of disengagement between characters. Emma’s sale of property is a ‘négociation bien conduite par le marchard, et qui ne fut effectivement connue que plus tard’ (p. 409) embodying disconnection from both Charles and Lheureux. Similarly Maître Guillaumin is aware of her husband’s dealings ‘étant lié secrètement avec le marchand d’étoffes, chez lequel il trouvait toujours des capitaux pour les prêts hypothécaires qu’on lui demandait à contacter’ (p. 443). Secrecy is clear in many of Emma’s relationships. At the convent, the woman who visits, ‘prêtait aux grandes, en cachette, quelque roman’ (p. 100) which shows a secrecy that is exclusive of the nuns. For personal gain, Homais ‘rendit secrètement à M. le préfet de grands services dans les élections’ (p. 498) and towards the Blind Man: ‘dans l’intérêt de sa propre réputation, voulant s’en débarrasser à toute force, il dressa contre lui une batterie cachée (p. 494). The

\(^{16}\) Rodolphe and Emma have other carefully worked out modes of secret communication: ‘Il se servait de ce moyen pour correspondre avec elle, lui envoyant, selon la saison, des fruits ou du gibier’ (p. 317)
The fact that this is done in secret shows the vindictive nature of Homais. He is only interested in personal gain, regardless of the ramifications upon other residents.

Malicious acts suggest a much more disconnected community. For example at the wedding feast, the narrative states, ‘les autres gens de la noce causaient de leurs affaires ou se faisaient des niches dans les dos’ (p. 88) which engenders a disengagement twofold. The notion that the guests are talking business as opposed to congratulating the bride and groom connotes a disconnection from the supposed focal point of the ceremony. Additionally playing tricks behind each other’s backs is suggestive of a certain level of fragmentation against the remaining community and guests at large. The seeming resentment that the guests feel towards the bride and groom is also evident. They ‘chuchotaient sue le compte de leur hôte et souhaitaient sa ruine à mots couverts’ (p. 90). Wishing harm on somebody else is emblematic of this deep disconnection. Charles’s first wife expresses this too. When she learns about Emma, ‘elle la détesta, d’instinct’ (p. 76). Through actions too, the intense negativity of some behaviours engenders a deep fragmentation in the community. Lheureux is especially representative of this. His secret ambition to underbid the delivery service offered by Hivert in order to gain a monopoly on Yonville’s transport is demonstrative of this self-interest: ‘il rêvait d’établir un nouveau service de diligences entre Arceuil et Rouen, qui ne tarderait pas, sans doute, à ruiner la guimbarde du Lion d’or […] lui mettrait ainsi dans les mains tout le commerce d’Yonville’ (p. 327). Lheureux who ‘doublait sa faconde mérionale de cautèle cauchoise’ (p. 190) is only interested in what he can get. The narration describes him ‘voulant par cet aveu de conquinerie envers les autres la convaincre, tout à fait de sa probité’ (p. 424). His confession of swindling other people connotes an awareness of his behaviour and yet his unwillingness to change it emphasises this fragmentation in the community. Indeed he does ruin a number of businesses: ‘c’est Lheureux qui le fait vendre. Il l’a assassiné de billets’ (p. 213). In business, Yonville seems to adopt a ruthless attitude. Lestiboudois is ‘plein d’imagination pour tout ce qui concernait ses intérêts, il avait découvert ce moyen de tirer parti
The 2001 Group Postgraduate Study Day, 19th May 2009: Environnement

des comices’ (p. 236) and Homais too pressures Hippolyte to have the operation as it would reflect well upon the chemist. His protestation, ‘c’est pour toi! [Hippolyte]’ (p. 281) is shown to be false as the real reason was ‘pour éblouir la multitude que pour s’illusioner lui-même’ (p. 283).

After Emma’s death the malicious acts become more frequent because ‘chacun se mit à profiter.’ (p. 491). The actions of others accentuates how they take advantage of Charles when he is mourning and at his most vulnerable: ‘Mademoiselle Lempereur réclama six mois de leçons; bien qu’Emma n’en eût jamais pris une seule…le loeuer de livres réclama trois ans d’abonnement; la mère Rollet réclama le port d’une vingtaine de lettres’ (p. 491). This disconnection and disengagement between inhabitants expresses more of a Cuverian notion of severance and is not the first time is appears in the narrative. Mère Rollet badgers Emma for as much as she can obtain when Emma comes to visit Berthe. She asks for ‘un peu de savon’ (p. 178), ‘une petite livre de café moulu’ (p. 178) and ‘un cruchon d’eau-de-vie’ (p. 179) all within a very short amount of time. She also takes advantage when Emma is recovering and therefore of a weaker constitution: She ‘avait pris l’habitude, pendant sa convalescence, de venir trop souvent à la cuisine avec ses deux nourrissons et son pensionnaire, plus endenté qu’un cannibale’ (p. 333). Lheureux also waits until ‘au plus fort de la maladie d’Emma’ and profits from the circumstances ‘pour exagérer sa facture, avait vite apporté le manteau, le sac de nuit, deux caisses au lieu d’une, quantité d’autres choses encore’ (p. 222). In each of these examples the characters wait until Emma is either in a very vulnerable physical state or until Charles is in a very fragile emotional state after his wife’s death to make the maximum profit they can for themselves.

Characters are also quite ruthless in their personal relationships too. When Madame Bovary Senior is looking for a wife for Charles, the narration states: ‘certes madame Dubuc ne manquait pas de partis à choisir à ses fins, la mère Bovary fut obligée de les évincer tous, et elle déjoua même fort habilement les intrigues d’un charcutier qui était soutenu par les prêtres’ (p. 67). By deliberately severing bonds of connection for her own advantage and sabotaging other suitors, her malicious and
The ruthless nature is evident. When passing judgement, the characters are also extremely harsh. In his consideration of the Blind Man, Homais says ‘on devrait enfermer ces malheureux, que l’on forcerait à quelque travail’ (p. 440) which shows a lack of compassion. In her search for money Emma is also harshly judged. When she visits Binet, ‘On devrait fouetter ces femmes-là! Dit madame Tuvache’ (p. 448). This again speaks of a fragmented community.

As perhaps one of the most opinionated and self-assured characters, Homais’ malice is particularly evident. He speaks behind the curé’s back: ‘quand le pharmacien n’entendit plus sur la place le bruit de ses [curé’s] souliers, il trouva fort inconvenante sa conduite de tout à l’heure’ (p. 155), he dismisses people who disagree with his views: ‘sa médisance et ses opinions politiques ayant écarté de lui successivement différentes personnes respectables’ (p. 184) and he is kind to Charles only for his own gain: ‘en s’attachant M. Bovary par des politesses, c’était gagner sa gratitude, et empêcher qu’il parlât plus tard, s’il s’apercevait de quelque chose’ (p. 170). Indeed the duplicity in the friendship comes to the fore in the aftermath of Hippolyte’s failed operation: ‘aussi ne prit-il pas la défense de Bovary, ne fit-il même aucune observation, et, abandonnant ses principes, il sacrifia sa dignité aux intérêts plus sérieux de son négoce’ (p. 290). Homais sacrifices the relationship for his own reputation. Lheureux too displays duplicity: ‘C’était un billet de sept francs, souscrit pas elle, et que Lheureux, malgré toutes ses protestations, avait passé à l’ordre de Vinçart’ (p. 422). He does not keep his word in his business dealings and in fact uses his secret financial arrangements with Emma to threaten her as shown in the declaratives: ‘Ah! Je lui montrerai bien…je lui montrerai bien…’ (p. 433). Going against Emma by showing Charles the debts speaks towards this malice and it is by no means confined just to Yonville. Paris has a similar description. Homais comments ‘ce n’est que pour flibuster votre bourse ou vous entraîner en des démarches pernicieuses’ (p. 214) which suggests a similar expectation of malice.
Conclusion

This paper has attempted to briefly consider how one aspect of Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* can be read in terms of the dominant geological theories at the time he was writing the novel. Cuvier’s key imaginings about the relationship between the environment and its inhabitants was one of severance. This can be read by Emma’s isolation, the fragmented community of Yonville l-Abbaye, as well as the gossiping, secrecy and malice which disjoint relationships between characters. Flaubert’s rather encyclopaedic research style as well as references to Cuvier in *Bouvard et Pécuchet* suggest Flaubert had an awareness of the geologist’s ideas which makes it possible to apply a Cuverian reading to Flaubert’s work.
Bibliography


