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On 4 September 1852, thirty-year-old Gustave Flaubert wrote to novelist and poet Louise Colet with an update about the manuscript of *Madame Bovary*: ‘j’ai fait huit pages de ma 2e partie: la description topographique d’un village’.¹ The specified portrayal of Yonville-L’Abbaye, which occupies fifteen paragraphs at the beginning of the first chapter of the second part of the novel,² is rich in environmental details that provide an insight into the geographical and sociocultural identity of the fictional town. On 6 April 1853, Flaubert wrote to Colet that ‘il faut faire des tableaux, montrer la nature telle qu’elle est’.³ This insistence on the importance of realistically representing nature amplifies the significance of Flaubert’s scaping of the locale (i.e. his crafting of the scene). The evocation of the northern surroundings of Yonville, which encompasses plentiful details of the environmental conditions framing the dealings of the small-scale populace, is ripe for analysis based on a theoretical framework that emblemizes the *spatial turn*⁴ of recent decades – geocriticism. Bertrand Westphal offers a definition of geocritical precepts: ‘la géocritique [entreprind] de sonder les espaces humains que les arts mimétiques agencent par et dans le texte, par et dans l’image, ainsi que les interactions culturelles qui se nouent sous leur patronage’.⁵ Flaubert’s evocation of factors contributing to a *sense of place*⁶ indicates his uncommon awareness of environmental dynamics in the region that encompassed his growth as a Norman novelist. For Anne Green, Mary Orr and Timothy Unwin, ‘Flaubert’s aesthetics are [...] linked to his intrinsically modern sense of places and spaces’.⁷ The topological account of Yonville, which conveys Flaubert’s *attunement*⁸ to the nature of human-modified landscapes, highlights the economic and sociocultural circumstances of the town before the key protagonists appear. Éric Le Calvez proposes that ‘la description d’Yonville-L’Abbaye [...] est initialement déterminée par le fait que tout [...] tend à transformer le paysage en un *tableau écrit*’.⁹ Flaubert’s extensive account of the alluvial plain occupied by the town is analogous to landscape art favoured in the Salons of the Académie des beaux-arts in Paris, yet the scaping of Yonville has added depth in terms of ecological markers that give a flavour of environmental conditions in rural Normandy during the first half of the nineteenth century. This article will geocritically focus on three types of human and non-human features that are key to Flaubert’s representation of the fictional town (roads; waterways; flora), with the aim of foregrounding the extent to which the narrative enriches our understanding of the non-human elements of an ecoregion in which the author was deeply *enmeshed*¹⁰ throughout a period during which the culture and the landscape of northern France began to feel the effects of industrial forces.

The opening sentence of the depiction of Yonville topographically portrays the fictional town in relation to roads: ‘Yonville-l’Abbaye [...] est un bourg à huit lieues de Rouen, entre la route d’Abbeville et celle de Beauvais’.¹¹ The walking distance of eight hours between Yonville and the urban centre of Rouen situates the town as a backwater that is approximately thirty-two kilometres from the bustling heart of Normandy. The interstitial nature of Yonville with regard to the moderately sized conglomerations served by the *route départementale* is accentuated by the conveyance-based directions that refer to the point at which travellers leave the main road well beyond the town: ‘on quitte la grande route à la Boissière et l’on continue à plat jusqu’au haut de la côte des Leux, d’où l’on découvre la vallée’ (p. 124). The threefold alliteration in [k] (‘quitte [...] continue [...] côte’), the fourfold alliteration in [t] (‘quitte [...] route [...] continue [...] côte’), and the sevenfold assonance in [a] (‘à la Boissière [...] à plat [...] la vallée’) linked to the flat terrain surrounding the river valley amplify the visual monotony of the ‘paysage sans caractère’ (p.

125) that is traversed by the planar byway towards Yonville. The location of the town at a lower level than the road network for light traffic is suggestive of a sense of place defined by topographical depression. The relatively recent construction of a passable road to Yonville signals the isolated character of the town until a point just over half a decade before the transfer of Charles and Emma from Tostes in early 1841: 'jusqu'en 1835, il n'y avait point de route praticable pour arriver à Yonville; mais on a établi vers cette époque un chemin *de grande vicinalité* qui relie la route d'Abbeville à celle d'Amiens, et sert quelquefois aux rouliers allant de Rouen dans les Flandres' (p. 125). The twelvefold alliteration in [R] ('route praticable pour arriver [...] vers [...] *grande* [...] relie [...] route [...] sert [...] rouliers [...] Rouen [...] Flandres') and the ninefold assonance in [a] ('praticable [...] arriver à [...] *vicinalité* [...] d'Abbeville à [...] d'Amiens [...] allant') associated with the imagery of a paucity of traffic on the byway constructed during the early years of the reign of Louis-Philippe underscore the status of Yonville as the poor relative of nearby conglomerations. The access route offers a rather unassuming prospect: 'au bas de la côte, après le pont, commence une chaussée plantée de jeunes trembles, qui vous mène en droite ligne jusqu'aux premières maisons du pays' (p. 125). The nascent aspens lining the way herald the underdeveloped nature of the sleepy town alongside the placid waters of the Rieule.

The second half of the (seventy-three-word) opening sentence foregrounds waterways in the vicinity of Yonville: 'une vallée qu'arrose la Rieule, petite rivière qui se jette dans l'Andelle, après avoir fait tourner trois moulins vers son embouchure' (p. 124). The fourfold alliteration in [R] linked to the Rieule ('arrose [...] Rieule [...] rivière'), echoed by the fivefold alliteration in [R] related to the river's effect on the windmills ('après avoir [...] tourner trois [...] embouchure'), highlight a hydrational outcome for the pastures of the valley, and a propulsive outcome for sustenance-generating machinery. The fluvial element is a determinative feature of the territory insofar as 'la rivière qui [...] traverse [la vallée] en fait comme deux régions de physionomie distincte: tout ce qui est à gauche est en herbage, tout ce qui est à droite est en labour' (p. 124). The divided nature of the ecoregion is graphically defined by the flow of water that irrigates the pasture and the ploughland on its banks. The designation of each riverside as suitable for crops or grazing animals symbolizes a manmade identity revolving around food production. The tranquil waters separating the fields from the furrows display a pure hue: 'l'eau qui court au bord de l'herbe sépare d'une raie blanche la couleur des prés et celle des sillons' (p. 124). The limpidity of the river, emphasized by the fourfold alliteration in [R] ('court [...] bord [...] sépare [...] raie'), contrasts with the nearby escarpment bearing 'longues traînées rouges' (p. 125) due to 'traces de pluies' (p. 125) imbued with metallic particles arising from 'la quantité de sources ferrugineuses qui coulent au-delà, dans le pays d'alentour' (p. 125). The iron residue is suggestive of alloyed forms of the element constituting human structures and tools used to manipulate nature with a view to increased productivity, though the sleepy habitations of the backwater show little evidence of the mechanized advancements of the Industrial Revolution: 'le bourg paresseux, s'écartant de la plaine, a continué naturellement à s'agrandir vers la rivière. On l'aperçoit de loin, tout couché en long sur la rive, comme un gardeur de vaches qui fait la sieste au bord de l'eau' (p. 125). The sedateness of the settlement on the alluvial plain, accentuated by the sevenfold assonance in [a] ('paresseux, s'écartant [...] naturellement à s'agrandir [...] gardeur [...] vaches') and the fivefold sibilance ('paresseux, s'écartant [...] s'agrandir [...] sieste'), is proportional to the unhurried pace of the small river. The picturesque comparison of the conglomeration to a dozing cowherd underscores the languid nature of the place in which the development of fauna and flora is substantially determined by agricultural practices.

The fourth sentence of the chapter draws the mind's eye to the vegetation of the ecoregion in which Yonville is positioned: 'la prairie s'allonge sous un bourrelet de collines

basses pour se rattacher par-derrrière aux pâturages du pays de Bray, tandis que, du côté de l'est, la plaine, montant doucement, va s'élargissant et étale à perte de vue ses blondes pièces de blé' (p. 124). The fivefold alliteration in [p] ('prairie [...] pâturages [...] pays [...] plaine [...] pièces'), the eightfold alliteration in [r] ('prairie [...] rattacher par-derrrière [...] pâturages [...] s'élargissant'), and the fivefold assonance in [e] ('rattacher [...] s'élargissant et étale [...] blé') foreground the contrasting terrains of the wheat-filled plain and the temperate grassland of the meadow stretching towards the pastures of the area known for its clay deposits. The agriculturally oriented nature of the landscape divided by the river indicates the influence of the human community in fashioning an area that is somewhat unfavourable for such pursuits because of the ecology of the soil: 'il faut beaucoup de fumier pour engraisser ces terres friables pleines de sable et de cailloux' (p. 125). The crumbly earth requiring copious manure as a source of nutrients points to the harshness of the edaphic¹² (i.e. soil-influenced) characteristics of the terrain that is forbiddingly inundated with sand and pebbles.¹³ The difficulty of encouraging the land to nurture vegetation for the sake of the townsfolk is indicative of tensions between human pursuits and non-human attributes in the extensively farmed area. On the outskirts of the settlement, the closely spaced shrubs surrounding the houses visually symbolize growth management through topiary that demarcates the anthropocentric enclave: '[les] premières maisons du pays [...] sont encloses de haies, au milieu de cours pleines de bâtiments épars, [...] disséminés sous les arbres touffus portant des échelles, des gaules ou des faux accrochées dans leur branchage' (p. 125). The fourfold alliteration in [r] ('arbres [...] leur branchage') accentuates the dense foliage of the trees providing a canopy for the scattered buildings pertaining to the owners of the hanging ladders, scythes and fishing rods. The tripartite imagery of instruments designed to enhance the productivity of manual labour emphasizes the extent to which the ecoregion is moulded by its human residents.

In conclusion, Flaubert's scaping of Yonville at the beginning of the second part of *Madame Bovary* offers a detailed account of roads, waterways and flora that constitutes fruitful ground for analysis from the perspective of geocriticism because the distinctive qualities of the Norman countryside are ecosensitively translated into an innovative type of modernist world endowed with a strong sense of place. The agrarian environment of the fictional town provides a conspicuously anti-bucolic frame for the rural community in which the tribulations of Charles and Emma occur: a complicated relationship between humans and nature is intimated in the graphic representation of an area defined by access routes of low quality, by a small river with a sluggish flow, and by difficult soil that is unsuited to agricultural activities. The ecological markers in the fifteen-paragraph account ultimately serve to enhance our awareness of the rural culture and landscape of Flaubert's native habitat on the cusp of the advent of industrial forces in northern France.

¹ Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance*, ed. by J. Bruneau, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), p. 150 [letter to Louise Colet of 4 September 1852].

² Gustave Flaubert, 'Madame Bovary (mœurs de province): suite', *Revue de Paris*, 39.2 (15 October 1856), 200-03. In the sexpartite serialization of *Madame Bovary* at the heart of the fortnightly issues of the *Revue de Paris* between 1 October 1856 and 15 December 1856, the overview of Yonville constituted the initial four pages of the second instalment (pp. 200-48).

³ Flaubert, *Correspondance*, p. 298 [letter to Louise Colet of 6 April 1853].

⁴ Nigel Thrift, 'Space', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23.2-3 (2006), 139-46 (p. 139).

⁵ Bertrand Westphal, *La Géocritique: réel, fiction, espace* (Paris: Minuit, 2007), p. 17.

⁶ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), p. 3.

⁷ Anne Green, Mary Orr and Timothy Unwin, 'Introduction', *Dix-Neuf*, 15.1 (2011), 1-14 (p. 3).

⁸ Daniel M. Grimley, 'Music, Landscape, Attunement: Listening to Sibelius' *Tapiola*, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 64.2 (2011), 394-98 (p. 397).

⁹ Éric Le Calvez, 'Flaubert et le "tremplin" réaliste', *Romance Studies*, 30.3-4 (2012), 229-37 (p. 229).

¹⁰ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), p. 13.

¹¹ Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, ed. by T. Laget (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), p. 124 [Part II, Chapter II].

¹² Andreas F. W. Schimper, *Pflanzen-geographie auf physiologische Grundlage* (Jena: Fischer, 1898), p. 5; *Plant-Geography upon a Physiological Basis*, trans. by W. R. Fisher (Oxford: Clarendon, 1903), p. 3.

¹³ Part II contains three more allusions to the nutritive qualities of manure: in Chapter III, the route to the Rolet residence, at which Berthe is being nursed, offers an opportunity to glimpse 'par le trou des haies, [...] dans les *asures*, quelque pourceau sur un fumier' (p. 150); in Chapter VIII, the prize-giving ceremony at the agricultural fair has a section for *fumiers* (p. 217); in Chapter XII, which contains the most striking instance of the fertilizational motif, Emma's affair with Rodolphe gives rise to the impression that 'jamais madame Bovary ne fut aussi belle qu'à cette époque; [...] l'expérience du plaisir et ses illusions toujours jeunes, comme font aux fleurs le fumier, la pluie, les vents et le soleil, l'avaient par gradations développée, et elle s'épanouissait enfin dans la plénitude de sa nature' (p. 269).