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Helge Vidar Holm, *Moeurs de province: Essai d'analyse bakhtinienne de Madame Bovary*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2011. xvi + 256 pp. Figures and bibliography. \$72.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-3-0343-0453-5.

Review by Joseph Acquisto, University of Vermont.

This study is an effort by the author to restore to prominence the subtitle of Gustave Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary*. The subtitle *Moeurs de province* was added by Flaubert in parentheses to the copyist's manuscript of the novel, but since Flaubert's day most editions simply eliminate the subtitle altogether, to the detriment of a thorough understanding of the novel according to Holm, who always refers to it by its full title *Madame Bovary (Moeurs de province)*. As his own book's title suggests, he applies categories borrowed from Mikhail Bakhtin, most notably dialogism, to a study of Flaubert's novel that seeks to demonstrate that the *moeurs* evoked in the subtitle are, above all, linguistic ones. Holm's title, however, is slightly misleading because it is both too rich and too poor. On one hand, although the author states repeatedly that the *moeurs* Flaubert had in mind are predominantly linguistic (see, for instance, pp. 41, 89, 94, 118, 204), he does not offer conclusive proof of or convincing arguments for why we should concentrate on linguistic habits above and beyond the many other kinds that manifest themselves in the novel. In that sense, the thesis driving the analysis is not sufficiently demonstrated. But on the other hand, the essay in fact covers far more territory than its title and main argument would imply, and in that sense the study provides a multifaceted analysis of Flaubert's novel which is not limited to the narrow focus that seems implied by Holm's subtitle. Rather, perhaps in the dialogical spirit of Bakhtin, he brings together over the course of the analysis several important critical voices, including Roland Barthes, Peter Brooks, Gérard Genette, and Jean-Paul Sartre.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part lays the foundation for the Bakhtinian analysis that is at the heart of the argument, with a clear exposition of fundamental concepts including dialogism, polyphony, and heteroglossia, demonstrated with ample examples of stylistic analysis of passages from *Madame Bovary*. For Holm, "le personnage romanesque d'Emma, c'est tout d'abord la 'mise en écriture' d'une certaine forme de langage, d'une manière de parler et de penser créée par les *Mœurs de province*" (p. 7). This emphasis on language leads Holm to detailed stylistic analysis of Flaubert's celebrated technique of free indirect discourse, which Holm traces via close readings of, for instance, Flaubert's use of the conjunction "mais," and which he links, as many before him have done, to larger questions of empathy and irony in the novel. Language is such an important category for Holm because it is inseparably linked to thought. The language of the characters "les empêche de penser, voilà le problème de fond des personnages de *Madame Bovary*, et, selon moi, un élément essentiel du grand tableau critique flaubertien des mœurs provinciales" (p. 42). Since this is such an important point for Holm, it is regrettable that he does not provide much detailed explanation of exactly how the clichéd language of Flaubert's provincial characters limits their conceptual realm. One can easily imagine that this would be the case, but Holm leaves it to the reader to flesh out the way Flaubert links thought to stereotyped language in the novel, asserting rather than demonstrating the point.

Part two of the book is structured around the Bakhtinian concepts of axiology, chronotopy, and carnivalism but, as in the first part, the most interesting insights here do not depend on the Bakhtinian frame. Holm's arguments throughout the book are developed more in a circular than a linear way, returning several times to key themes. In Part two he elaborates on the idea, first presented in the first part, that Flaubert's characters often say more than he might have wanted them to say, taking on a life

independent of the one that Flaubert's authorial intention may have indicated. Drawing a parallel to Georg Lukács' analysis of Balzac's novels which, in spite of the actual political convictions of the author, can easily be read as presenting an anticapitalist stance, Holm suggests that Emma's independence as a voice and a character in the novel paves the way for ideological critique, especially along feminist lines. "Emma devient ainsi, au travers de ces paroles partiellement banales mais tout de même vraies pour elle, une véritable 'voix à part entière,' indépendante et libérée de la voix de l'auteur, à l'instar des personnages de Dostoïevski vus par Michail Bakhtine. Elle le devient par ce que j'appellerais *la récupération axiologique des paroles de l'Autre*" (author's italics, p. 112).

Paradoxically, even through Emma's clichéd language, there emerges a space of critique, which Holm analyzes in part through a consideration of Flaubert's obscenity trial. Arguing against Hans Robert Jauss' assertion that Flaubert's prosecutor, Ernest Pinard, was a bad reader, Holm demonstrates that Pinard in fact understood the technique of free indirect discourse, since he attributes the glorification of adultery and other remarks in the novel to Emma rather than to Flaubert himself, another example of a potential feminist critique of the limitations of provincial marriage. Holm develops this line of argument through close readings of several key scenes from the novel, including Emma's thoughts about the impending birth of her daughter Berthe and the aftermath of Vaubyessard ball. His considerations of free indirect discourse and interior monologue demonstrate what he calls, after Peter Brooks, Flaubert's "technique of irresponsibility," an intentional blurring of the narratorial voice and transmission of the thoughts of the characters which invites a more active participation of the readers in reconstructing the voices in the text (p.102).

Part three continues to explore the reception history of *Madame Bovary*, extending Holm's consideration of Pinard's reading of the novel to include contemporary reactions by Charles Baudelaire and Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, in light of twentieth-century reception theorists such as Hans Robert Jauss (mistakenly referred to as Hans Jakob Jauss on page 165, one of more than a dozen typographical errors in the book), Wolfgang Iser, and Umberto Eco. Holm also discusses the important work of Jules de Gaultier's turn-of-the-century essays defining *le bovarysme* and identifies the ways in which those reflections open up philosophical concerns that get beyond the questions of style, irony, or empathy that had dominated the reception of Flaubert's novel until the twentieth century. Holm provides a helpful survey of these moments in reception history, but there is little that Flaubert experts will find new or original in these sections.

The last chapter of part three returns to an approach which is the book's stronger one, even though it is the one which has the least to do with the question of *moeurs de province*, namely, putting several important critics in dialogue with one another about the novel. In this case the central figure is Jean-Paul Sartre, whose analysis of *Madame Bovary* is examined in light of remarks by critics including Bakhtin and Pierre Bourdieu. Holm's conclusion is that while Bourdieu attacks Sartre's position, Bourdieu's own is closer to Sartre's than he was willing to acknowledge.

The many pertinent remarks to be found throughout the book do not ultimately add up to a convincing global thesis about *moeurs de province*. At times Holm does attempt to sew the various aspects of his arguments together: "Dans une perspective de critique de civilisation impliquée concrètement par ce rajout du sous-titre, la faiblesse morale et les mauvais choix d'Emma s'expliquent en effet autrement que par une personnalité chimérique, voire 'bovaryque'" (p. 194). But these intriguing claims about the way in which Flaubert's critique of provincial *moeurs* can open up onto much larger philosophical claims about civilization more broadly, and the way in which this critique relates to the author's constantly restated thesis that the *moeurs* in question are above all linguistic ones, remain for the most part overly general and underdeveloped. There is plenty of attentive close reading at times, but these readings are not often in the service of demonstrating what Holm identifies as his central thesis. When he asserts that linguistic *moeurs* are the most important ones in the novel because "la langue est à la fois la matière et le moyen d'expression: l'idéologie d'une société, les frustrations, les plaisirs, les illusions et les

déceptions, les confrontations entre personnalités diverses—tout se fait par la langue ou plutôt par les langues, notamment par les *confrontations de voix*” (p. 239), it is hard to disagree, but then again the same could be said of any novel whatsoever, and one is left wondering about the specificity of Flaubert’s own project here. If some of the close readings had been devoted to showing precisely what aspects of the characters’ language are opened up for critique, perhaps the thesis would have become more convincing.

The format of the book is not particularly user-friendly. With so many references to various critics throughout the book, an index would have been a helpful addition. At the back of the book, in the place where one would expect to find the works cited or index, is an appendix that contains six color illustrations of the title page of various editions of *Madame Bovary*, including the copyist’s manuscript that includes Flaubert’s addition of the subtitle in his own hand, along with examples of other editions that either do or do not include the subtitle on the title page. In order to trace bibliographic references, which is often necessary since the footnotes indicate only the author’s name and date of the work rather than also including the title, one must turn back through these illustration pages and their own table of contents to find the works cited list, which is, frustratingly, divided into categories such as “Sur *Madame Bovary*” and “Sur Flaubert,” which makes it difficult to find the reference one is seeking if there is no title to hint at whether the work in question might be in the “Flaubert” list or the more specific “*Madame Bovary*” list.

While Flaubert specialists might not find many particularly ground-breaking insights here, the author’s rehabilitation of the often-forgotten subtitle of Flaubert’s novel is a point well-taken, and those less familiar with the reception history of the book, both in Flaubert’s time and throughout the last sixty years or so, will find a helpful guide to many important critics of Flaubert, intelligently summarized and put into intriguing dialogue by Helge Vidar Holm.

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