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Noble Passions: Aristocracy and the Novel

IN AN EPISODE OF Tomasi di Lampedusa's *The Leopard*, the newly betrothed Tancredi and Angelica are exploring the endless rooms of the labyrinthine palace of the Dukes of Salina at Donnafugata, a palace so extensive that even the present prince Don Fabrizio has not set foot in all of its apartments and corners—"il che di resto, gli era cagione di non piccolo compiacimento perché soleva dire che un palazzo del quale si conoscessero tutte le stanze non era degno di essere abitato" (*Il gattopardo* 145; "a cause of great satisfaction to him, for he used to say that a palace of which one knew every room wasn't worth living in," *The Leopard* 181). One day they come to a set of rooms, with unusual—and now fortunately undecipherable—stucco reliefs, low-lying mirrors, sofas that are too wide, and shining white marble floors that slope down to a lateral gutter. Here Tancredi discovers, but refuses to show Angelica, a cupboard containing

un fascio di piccole fruste, di scudisci in nervo di bue, alcuni con manici in argento, altri rivestiti sino a metà da una graziosa seta molto vecchia, bianca a righine azzurre, sulla quale si scorgevano tre file di macchie nerastre; attrezzini metallici inspiegabili. Tancredi ebbe paura, anche di sé stesso. . . . "Andiamo via, cara, qui non c'è niente di interessante". . . tutto il giorno poi i baci di Tancredi furono lievi, come dati in sogno e in espiazione. (*Il gattopardo* 148)

a bundle of small whips, switches of bull's muscle, some with silver handles, others wrapped halfway up in a charming old silk, white with little blue stripes, on which could be seen three rows of blackish marks; and metal instruments for inexplicable purposes. Tancredi was afraid of himself too. "Let's go, my dear, there's nothing interesting here" . . . and all the rest of that day Tancredi's kisses were very light, as if given in a dream and in expiation. (*The Leopard* 185–86)

The couple beat a hasty retreat from this pornographic enclave, which seems as if it were made to fulfill the cruel erotic fantasies of the Marquis de Sade. But they soon discover that, aside from the family emblem of the Leopard, "la frusta sembrava essere l'oggetto piú frequente" (*Il gattopardo* 148; "the whip seemed the most frequent object," *The Leopard* 186) to be found at Donnafugata. In the apartments of the seventeenth-century Saint-Duke of Salina, which overlooked his lands, they encounter hanging next to a giant crucifix "una frusta col manico corto dal quale si dipartivano sei strisce di cuoio ormai indurito, terminanti in sei palle di piombo grosse come nocciole" (148; "a lash with a short handle, from which dangled six strips of now hardened leather ending in six lumps of lead as big as walnuts," 186). When the Duke scourged himself with this penitential whip, the narrator comments, "doveva sembrargli che le gocce del sangue suo andassero a

piovere sulle terre per redimerle . . . che solo mediante questo battesimo espiatorio esse divenissero realmente sue, sangue del suo sangue, carne della sua carne, come si dice" (149; "it must have seemed to him that the drops of his own blood were about to rain down on the land and redeem it . . . that only through this expiatory baptism could these estates really become his, blood of his blood, flesh of his flesh, as the saying is," 186–87). These two blocks of rooms in the palace thus offer opposing tales about its aristocratic possessors (cf. Orlando 138–41): on the one hand, the aristocrat as an erotic libertine whose power allows him a sexual freedom that can degenerate into cruelty; on the other, the self-flagellating nobleman who seeks expiation precisely for the guilt instilled in him by his privileged social power and possessions—a mortification that has in it the seeds of a death-wish.

In a novel so knowing about the European novel itself, Lampedusa here reveals the double view that a genre attached to a world of money and a bourgeois reading public has taken across its history toward the nobility and the ancien régime. In *The Leopard*, the marriage of the aristocrat Tancredi to the rich moneylender's daughter Angelica replicates, of course, a classic plot of the novel, and the clever choice of the characters' names reinforces the class themes: Tancredi, named for a hero from Tasso's epic, the *Jerusalem Delivered*, weds Angelica, who bears the name of the heroine of the *Orlando furioso*, Ariosto's romance of more middling values. These sixteenth-century literary names in turn suggest the backwardness of Sicily: as Prince Don Fabrizio explains to the Piedmontese Chevalley, there is "il famoso ritardo di un secolo delle manifestazioni artistiche ed intellettuali siciliane: le novità ci attraggono soltanto quando le sentiamo defunte" (*Il gattopardo* 162; "the well-known time lag of a century in our artistic and intellectual life; novelties attract us only when they are dead," *The Leopard* 206). This belatedness allows the timeworn love story of the impoverished nobleman and rich commoner to be still fresh in the fictional setting of the 1860s; by the same token, Lampedusa, the Sicilian writer of the 1950s, can still write an old-fashioned novel after the age of the novel is over.

For the historical novel *The Leopard* is perhaps less about the history of Sicily than the history of the novel, looked back upon and anatomized by the literary mandarin author. Lampedusa suggests the love-hate relationship that the European novel expresses towards an aristocracy that a moneyed bourgeoisie is in the process of dislodging from power. It is a relationship particularly focused on the aristocratic male as libertine rake—that is, as the enemy of the bond of marriage that is the aim of the comic novel—who seduces indiscriminately and who—in his greatest novelistic embodiment, Lovelace in Richardson's *Clarissa*—resorts to power and rape.¹ Lampedusa's Tancredi becomes afraid of himself when he sees the little cupboard of whips—as if he might revert to a novelistic type—and the novel, in fact, pivots around an off-color story that Tancredi tells at dinner recounting an episode during the so-called glorious battle of Palermo when he and some companions invaded a convent and made a humorous sexual threat at the frightened nuns, a story that is all the more important because, as we learn at the end of the novel, it never took place. Tancredi is in essence only playing the libertine role

¹ McKeon (255–65) discusses some pre-Lovelace versions of the rake in seventeenth-century English literature; Watt (158) briefly remarks on how middle-class belief has attributed sexual prowess and sexual license to the aristocracy and the gentry.

scripted for him by the history of the novel in general and by Manzoni's *I promessi sposi* in particular, in which the rather inept nobleman-rake Don Rodrigo instigates the kidnapping of Lucia from her protection in the convent at Monza. (Manzoni's novelistic prototype, in turn, is Lovelace's invading Harlowe Place to carry off Clarissa.) Although by the time of *The Leopard*—that is, by both 1860 and 1958—such melodramatics have been reduced to risqué dinner party jokes and make-believe, they momentarily cloak Tancredi with a kind of sexual glamour and worldliness that is his residual class attribute. (In fact, we are told that his confessor knows that Tancredi's failings in this line are guaranteed to produce marital infidelity, but they are apparently so banal and tame as to be not worth the novel's taking the trouble to narrate them.)

At the same time, both Lampedusa's novel and the history of the novel that it looks back upon as something over and done with suggest another story about the aristocracy, one that is summed up in the image of the self-lacerating Saint-Duke of Salina. The cruelty that is the potential expression of aristocratic power turns in upon itself. This pious nobleman, who is not as opposed to the freethinking libertine as he may at first appear, turns to God less out of devotion than pride, convinced that God is the only being to whom he is answerable and even, in the messianic delusions attributed to the Saint-Duke, one with whom he claims a kind of equal footing. Thus he insulates himself from the lower orders and from a history in which the middle classes are always rising. This version of aristocracy is frozen in a past for whose sins it seeks, however unconsciously, to atone—Sir Leicester Dedlock in Dickens's *Bleak House* is another example, as is the haunted Marquis who burns down and perishes in his own unsellable castle in Kleist's story *The Beggarwoman of Locarno*. It is an aristocracy that destroys itself from within rather than succumb to outside historical forces, or even adapt to them as Lampedusa's Tancredi advises in the novel's famous formula: "Se vogliamo che tutto rimanga come è, bisogna che tutto cambi" (*Il gattopardo* 41; "If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change," *The Leopard* 40).

Two novelistic stories, then, about the aristocracy: one of a dominant class and the expression of its power in erotic domination; one of a class complicit in its decline and extinction. *The Leopard* simultaneously announces the end of the novel and the death of the ancien régime, a régime whose demise or decline was supposed to have coincided with the *rise* of the novel but which had a surprisingly long survival (see Mayer; Beckett; Cannadine). The rest of this essay, like Lampedusa's novel, will try to tell this twofold story, and, by considering some landmark cases, to chart something of the European novel's history and its function in the social imaginary. It is perhaps necessary to acknowledge at the outset that this is the charting of a literary representation, phantasmatic and motivated. Not every aristocratic man was the Lord Merton of Frances Burney's *Evelina*, a confirmed libertine who leers, "twisting his whip with his fingers," at the scarcely less licentious Lady Louisa (411), but the social power of his class might cause him to be imagined so. Nor was every aristocratic man the Brian de Bois-Guilbert of Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, enough of a sexual predator to corner Rebecca on the castle turret but whose heart, torn by love, pride, and guilt, literally fails him when he must exercise his power in judicial combat. Such self-destructive inner weakness might, however, be ascribed to him in order to account for his caste's perceived loss of ground in the face of revolution and a rival commercial class. In these stories of

aristocracy, the novel gives a partial, distorted account of European social history, but we should not, for all that, discount novels as attempts to come to grips with real historical forces and change, nor should we discount their historical influence. What people imagined—through novels, poems, and plays—about class relations is as much a part, and a shaping part, of social history as their daily negotiation of those relations. Moreover, these novelistic stories cannot simply be reduced to bourgeois ideology, as if the historical function of the novel had been to chart and contribute to the fall of aristocratic power. The very imagined attributes of that power that scandalized—sexual license, cruelty, an almost defiant indifference to history and changing moral norms—might also entice: “I have met more admirers of Lovelace than of Clarissa,” Richardson complained (Watt 212). In fact, the investment of the novel and its culture in the dissolute nobleman as an object of erotic fascination as well as repulsion, as we shall see Proust suggest, may paradoxically have shored up, as much as it undermined, the prestige and sway of the aristocracy.

Approximately three and a half centuries before *The Leopard* appeared, the modern novel begins with *Don Quixote* in a society still firmly under the rule of the nobility. Cervantes’s novel thus tells only the first of these stories, the tale of erotic domination, and it divides this story between its two installments. In Part One (1605), the highest ranking character is Don Fernando, the younger son of a Duke, who first seduces Dorotea, a rich farmer’s daughter to whom he makes a vow of marriage, and then throws her over to pursue Luscinda, the beloved of his best friend, Cardenio. When Luscinda at her wedding declares that she is already betrothed to Cardenio, Don Fernando can barely be restrained from killing her, and when she later takes refuge in a convent, he abducts her by force from the cloister. By novelistic coincidence, or, as Luscinda puts it, the mysterious and unaccountable ways of Heaven, he and his hirelings carry her off to the inn where so much of the action of the first part of *Don Quixote* takes place and where they encounter none other than the wronged Dorotea and Cardenio. His villainy exposed, Don Fernando relents, releases Luscinda, and agrees to fulfill his vows to Dorotea, who reminds him that “la verdadera nobleza consiste en la virtud” (1.36, 428; true nobility consists in virtue).² Nevertheless, Don Fernando’s impulse is to take revenge on Cardenio when the latter comes forward to claim Luscinda, and he must once again be restrained from pursuing the dictates of honor. The episode ends with the victimized Luscinda and Cardenio actually kneeling to thank their social superior for the kindness he has done to them, and for the rest of Part One the converted Don Fernando assumes the leadership of the little community at the inn: among other things, he pays Don Quixote’s bill.

If Don Fernando is capable of reform, the representatives of the aristocracy in Part Two of *Don Quixote* (1615) seem beyond redemption. They have also received a promotion; if Don Fernando is the younger son of a Duke, here we meet a full-fledged Duke and Duchess. And whereas Don Fernando presided over the action of the first part, the Duke and the Duchess virtually kidnap Don Quixote and Sancho Panza—and Cervantes’s novel with them—for long stretches of its second installment by offering hospitality to the knight and squire in order to play a series of practical jokes on them. Foremost among their pranks is to bring for-

² The translations of *Don Quixote* are my own. I list both chapter and page numbers.

ward a disguised figure of Death who explains that Don Quixote's lady-love Dulcinea will escape her present enchantment into the shape of an ugly peasant wench only when Sancho Panza has given himself three thousand, three hundred lashes on his bare buttocks—a whipping that is repeatedly likened to penitential discipline. When Sancho protests, the Duke makes it clear that this whipping is also the precondition of the Duke's favor by which Sancho will obtain the governorship of the island long promised to him by his master.

The Duke and the Duchess have read the first part of *Don Quixote*, and they are evidently Cervantes's satirical portrait of those readers who responded to the slapstick elements of his book—and to little else. Such reading comes naturally to members of a noble caste that takes pleasure in exercising its power on the bodies of its subjects and social inferiors. The noble couple wants to turn both Sancho Panza and Don Quixote himself into court jesters so as to have the gratification of beating them. Don Quixote—saying more, perhaps, than he knows—even tells Sancho that he is becoming a “truhán,” a court buffoon, shortly after they arrive inside the Duke's household (2.31, 883). But the pleasure of the Duke and the Duchess has a clear sexual component as well: at its basis, as the proposed whipping of Sancho's buttocks suggests, is a streak of infantile sadism. (Shortly thereafter the Duchess will order the slipping of the bottom of Doña Rodríguez after this sorrowful dueña has disclosed the secret of the drains in the Duchess's legs through which she discharges her body's ill humors [2.48, 1022]). The Duchess, who may be the crueler of the pair, also discusses the kinds of whips Sancho should use on himself with the air of a connoisseur (2.36, 930). Indeed, she may or may not be—it hardly matters for Cervantes's savage view of the aristocracy—the same Duchess who stabbed her servant, Doña Rodríguez's husband, when he yielded the right of way on a street in Madrid to a mere judge. Her pride offended, and using a pin or little dagger (an “alfiler”), this Duchess stuck the poor man from behind in his loins (the “lomos”); he cried out that he had been run through the bowels (his “entrañas”) in what seems to be a kind of sadistic anal penetration (2.48, 1020). Later, during the second stay of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza at the palace of the Duke and Duchess, Sancho is similarly commanded (but refuses) to endure six such pinpricks (“seis alfilerazos”) to his own “lomos” in order to resuscitate the supposedly “dead” maidservant Altisidora (2.69, 1187). The Duke later completes the flagellation motif in this extended episode by ordering that a hundred lashes be given to his servant Tosilos, who has disobeyed him by not putting up any resistance to Don Quixote in the tournament fought for the sake of the daughter of Doña Rodríguez, dishonored by one of the Duke's clients. In a final act of tyranny, the Duke blocks Tosilos's marriage to the daughter; the episode in essence rewrites Don Fernando's seduction of Dorotea, but without the happy ending (2.66, 1172).

Together with the seducer Don Fernando, the kinky Duke and Duchess are Cervantes's representatives of aristocratic oppression. The modern novel thus begins with a concerted attack on noble power and privilege, which *Don Quixote* equates with sexual exploitation and cruelty. In the Don Fernando story Cervantes recounts a tale that the novel will tell over and over again: the proud, sexually predatory aristocrat reformed by the love of a good, socially inferior woman. In the later variants of this plot, aristocratic reformation may not be complete: Richardson's Mr. B is followed by his Lovelace, by Valmont, by Steerforth, by Vronsky. The last of these, it is true, thinks better of using a riding whip of his own on his

prize mare Frou-Frou during the steeplechase race in *Anna Karenina* (2.25, 218), but an inadvertent move causes him to break the horse's back. So, this somewhat obvious symbolic scene predicts, Vronsky will, without quite knowing how, destroy Anna, who is herself noble, but the wife of the bourgeois Karenin. Vronsky finds his parodic counterpart in the mediocre would-be seducer Vasenka Veslovsky, whose name begins with the same letter and whom Levin sends packing from his Kitty, who earlier also had been dazzled by Vronsky. Veslovsky likes to drive too fast and hard, and he wears out Levin's chestnut coach horse (6.9, 611; 6.13, 626). These retold stories—pitting the sexual libertinism of the noble against middle and even lower-class virtue—may have contributed to the discrediting of ideas of inherited noble privilege as much as the real sexual scandals that Sarah Maza has documented in her study of the *causes celebres* of the eighteenth century. The theatrical manifesto of the French revolution, Beaumarchais's *The Marriage of Figaro*, revolves around thwarting a lecherous Count who officially renounces his *droit de seigneur* on the wedding night only to try to enforce that right by other underhanded means.

But if throughout its history the novel is palpably hostile to aristocracy—and particularly to the aristocratic libertine—it is also fascinated by the very sexual freedom in which the aristocrat indulges. Moreover, that fascination may only have grown after the French revolution and the definitive ascendancy of the bourgeoisie. A mere decade after *Don Quixote*, Charles Sorel would depict an aristocratic orgy in the Chateau of Count Raymond in the seventh book of his *Histoire Comique de Francion* (1623). “Hô bien! dit Raymond, chacun est libre icy: suivez la volupté qui vous est la plus agreeable” (318; “Well, then,” Raymond says, “everyone is free here: follow the pleasure that is most agreeable to you,” my translation). The scene culminates in the hero Francion's argument that noblemen, when they wish to demonstrate their gallantry, should not stoop to the language of their lackeys.³

Je desirerois que des hommes comme nous, parlissent d'une autre façon, pour se rendre differents du vulgaire, et qu'ils inventassent quelques noms mignards pour donner aux choses dont il se plaisent si souvent a discourir. Ma foy vous avez bonne raison, dit Raymond, ne le faisons nous pas tout de mesme que les Païsans? pourquoy aurons-nous d'autres termes qu'eux? Vous vous trompez, Raymond, reprit Francion; nous le faisons bien en autre maniere, nous usons bien plus de caresses qu'eux, qui n'ont point d'autre envie que de saouler leur appetit stupide, qui ne differe en rien de celui des brutes, ils ne le font que du corps, et nous le faisons du corps et de l'ame tout ensemble . . . ils n'apportent pas neantmoins les mesmes mignardises et les mesmes transports d'esprit . . . et nous faut avoir des termes autres que les leurs: de cela l'on peut apprendre aussi que nous avons quelque chose de divin et de celeste, mais que quant a eux il sont tout terrestres et brutaux. (321–22)

“I would wish,” he says, “that men like us should speak in another fashion, to make themselves different from the vulgar crowd, and that they should invent some delicate enticing names to give to those things about which they take pleasure so often to talk.” “By my faith,” said Raymond, “don't we do it in the same way as the Peasants? Why should we have other terms than they have?” “You are wrong, Raymond,” Francion answered, “We do it in a very different way, we use many more caresses than they do, who have no other desire than to satisfy their stupid appetite, which is not different from that of brute animals; they do it with nothing but the body, we do it with the body and the soul all together . . . they do not bring to the act the same delicacies and the same transports of the mind . . . and we need other terms than theirs; from such words we could also learn that we have something divine and heavenly in us, but as for them they are all earthly and bestial.” (my translation)

³ Stanton offers a reading that complicates the class implications of this episode and of Sorel's larger novel.

Francion may have already provided an example of this new vocabulary describing sexual parts and acts in his encomium to a mystery lady's naked backside a few pages earlier: "O cul qui n'as point ton pareil, soit pour l'embonpoint, soit pour ton teint de lys et blanc, reçois favorablement les honneurs que nous te rendons, et exauce les prières qu'un chacun te fait, de luy estre secourable lors qu'il frappera a ta porte de devant, et de te remuer avec tant de souplesse que tu luy causes un plaisir des plus parfaits. Ainsi puisses tu estre appelé le Prince des culs" (310–11; O bottom without parallel, whether for its plumpness, whether for its color of lily and white, receive favorably the honors that we offer up to you, and carry out the prayers that every man makes to you, to be favorable to him when he will knock at your front door, and to shake with such suppleness that you cause him the most perfect of pleasures. Thus may you be called the Prince of backsides.) Here is noble gallantry indeed, and perhaps a suggestion of the refinement and variety that only the aristocrat knows. But the conviction that aristocrats make the best lovers would nonetheless persist—that they cloak the physical act with imaginative language, that they are imaginative in their foreplay, "les postures et les caresses . . . les mignardises" (321; the positions and the caresses . . . the delicacies) that Francion describes. And it is the aristocrat who is capable of grand passions, unlike the bourgeois whose tireless pursuit of self-interest takes the form of calm and reasonable calculation.

As Albert Hirschman has described in *The Passions and the Interests*, this taming of the passions, particularly the violent passions of honor and anger, was a mark in favor of mercantile capitalism according to Adam Smith and its other early defenders. But it also robbed the bourgeois of romance. Alexis de Tocqueville carries this idea into the nineteenth century when he notes that the citizens of the United States are too busy to make love:

Cette vie tumultueuse et sans cesse tracassée, que l'égalité donne aux hommes, ne les détourne pas seulement de l'amour en leur ôtant le loisir de s'y livrer; elle les en écarte encore par un chemin plus secret, mais plus sûr.

Tous les hommes qui vivent dans les temps démocratiques contractent plus ou moins les habitudes intellectuelles des classes industrielles et commerçantes; leur esprit prend un tour sérieux, calculateur et positif; il se détourne volontiers de l'idéal pour se diriger vers quelque but visible et prochain qui se présente comme le naturel et nécessaire objet des désirs. L'égalité ne détruit pas ainsi l'imagination; mais elle la limite et ne lui permet de voler qu'en rasant la terre.

Il n'y a rien de moins rêveur que les citoyens d'une démocratie, et l'on n'en voit guère qui veulent s'abandonner à ces contemplations oisives et solitaires qui précèdent d'ordinaire et qui produisent les grandes agitations du cœur.

Ils mettent, il est vrai, beaucoup de prix à se procurer cette sorte d'affection profonde, régulière et paisible, qui fait le charme et la sécurité de la vie; mais ils ne courent pas volontiers après des émotions violentes et capricieuses qui la troublent et l'abrègent. (2.3.11, 2.259–60)⁴

The tumultuous and constantly harassed life which equality makes men lead not only distracts them from the passion of love by denying them time to indulge it, but it diverts them from it by another more secret but more certain road. All men who live in democratic times more or less contract the ways of thinking of the manufacturing and trading classes: their minds take a serious, deliberate, and positive turn; they are apt to relinquish the ideal, in order to pursue some visible and proximate object, which appears to be the necessary and natural object of their desires. Thus the principle of equality does not destroy the imagination, but lowers its flight to the level of the earth.

⁴ I cite part, book, and chapter, then volume and page number for the French edition; volume and page number for the English translation.

No men are less addicted to reverie than the citizens of a democracy, and few of them are ever known to give way to the idle and solitary meditations which commonly precede and produce the great emotions of the heart. It is true they attach great importance to procuring for themselves that sort of deep, regular, and quiet affection which constitutes the charm and safeguard of life, but they are not apt to run after those violent and capricious sources of excitement which disturb and abridge it. (2.219)

All work and no play make the middle classes dull and unimaginative lovers.⁵ It is no wonder that the novel, which from *Don Quixote* onward had sought to find a place for the imagination in the world of the everyday, should, when it came to matters of the heart, turn to aristocratic lovers. It might seek to reform them and bring them to some compromise with more mediocre social conventions—notably monogamy—but it still needed them—and especially the nobleman—to provide an element of erotic charisma and grand passion to its plots. The aristocrat carried the aura of sentimental and sensual delicacy that his very leisure and idleness allowed him to refine, although in his flouting of social mores and lawlessness he also bore the potential for sexual brutality and danger.

Tocqueville also suggests, however, that the licentious European aristocrat may be a thing of the past: “Personne ne conteste que l’aristocratie française du dernier siècle ne fût très dissolue; tandis que d’anciennes habitudes et de vieilles croyances maintenaient encore le respect des moeurs dans les autres classes” (2.3.11, 2.261; “No one denies that the French aristocracy of the last century was extremely dissolute, yet established habits and ancient belief still preserved some respect for morality among the other classes of society,” 2.220). But he asserts that in the wake of the revolution the nobility had reformed itself: “De telle sorte que les mêmes familles qui se montraient, il ya cinquante ans, les plus relâchées, se montrent aujourd’hui les plus exemplaires, et que la démocratie semble n’avoir moralisé que les classes aristocratiques” (2.3.11, 2.261; “Thus the same families which were most profligate fifty years ago are nowadays the most exemplary, and democracy seems to have strengthened the morality only of the aristocratic classes,” 2.220–21). The historical irony that Tocqueville seeks to drive home is that the Revolution and an incipient democratization have both shaken the old moral bonds of the bourgeoisie and the lower orders and driven the nobility to assume new standards of sexual restraint and domesticity. The Revolution imparted to the nobles, “sans qu’ils s’en aperçoivent eux-mêmes, le respect des croyances religieuses, l’amour de l’ordre, des plaisirs paisibles, des joies domestiques et du bien être Il est donc permis de dire, quoique la chose au premier abord paraisse surprenante, que, de nos jours, ce sont les classes les plus antidémocratiques de la nation qui font le mieux voir l’espèce de moralité qu’il est raisonnable d’attendre de la démocratie” (2.3.11, 2.261; “almost without their being aware of it, a reverence for religious belief, a love of order, of tranquil pleasures, of domestic endearments and of comfort It may therefore be said, though at first it seems paradoxical, that, at the present day, the most anti-democratic classes of the nation principally exhibit the kind of morality which may reasonably be anticipated from democ-

⁵ Although de Tocqueville’s picture of the nineteenth-century bourgeois in love is greatly complicated by Gay (*Education* and *Tender Passion*), who documents changing mores through the course of the century, de Tocqueville’s account also seems to be confirmed by Gay’s discussion of bourgeois repression, cases of ignorance about the facts of life, and attitudes towards women. For Gay’s discussion of the nineteenth-century novel, see *Tender Passion* 135–97.

racy," 2.221). By the nineteenth century, then, a novel that turns to the aristocrat for its model lover may already be engaging in nostalgia. The actual nobility of the time is as boringly middle-class, perhaps more so, than the middle class itself.

It may be for this reason that Emma Bovary is not seduced by an aristocrat by birth, but by Monsieur Rodolphe Boulanger de la Huchette, a man who merely plays the rich aristocratic libertine and who, according to Flaubert's scenario, is ruining himself bit by bit with horses and trips to Paris. As his name suggests, Rodolphe comes from a common bourgeois background; his wealth has allowed him recently to buy a country estate and its chateau: "Ce n'était point par vanité territoriale que le nouvel arrivant avait ajouté à son nom la particule, mais afin de se faire mieux connaître" (2.7, 119; "It was not out of any territorial vanity that the newcomer had added *de la Huchette* to his name, but merely to make himself known," 102).⁶ The estate name suggests "bread-box" and the origins from which this Boulanger has risen. Flaubert's irony could not be broader: in Monsieur Rodolphe we are dealing with an imitation, not the real thing.

Yet the real thing, *Madame Bovary* attempts to show us early on in the episode of the ball at Vaubyessard, may no longer exist. Charles and Emma are invited to mix among the aristocracy as part of the Marquis's attempts to re-enter politics in the new republican chamber of deputies. His chateau is of recent vintage with the exception of the stables; the old chateau has been demolished—whether by the Revolution or by the family seeking to re-invent itself for the new society of the nineteenth century we are not told. The implication, carefully developed in the episode, is that the love of horses—used for racing rather than for waging war—is all that is left of the ancien regime. Inside the chateau, portraits of family ancestors, members of a soldier-aristocracy that fought and died in the nation's battles, are consigned to the billiard-room, where men wearing medals that presumably were not won in combat engage in the only kind of conflict that they know.

One living remnant, however, persists from the bad old days of the nobility. In the room where Emma and the ladies dine separately from the men,

courbé sur son assiette remplie et la serviette nouée dans le dos comme un enfant, un vieillard mangeait, laissant tomber de sa bouche des gouttes de sauce. Il avait les yeux éraillés et portait une petite queue enroulée d'un ruban noir. C'était le beau-père du marquis, le vieux duc de Laverdière, l'ancien favori du comte d'Artois, dans le temps des parties de chasse au Vaudreuil chez le marquis de Conflans, et qui avait été, disait-on, l'amant de la reine Marie-Antoinette entre MM. de Coigny et de Lauzun. Il avait mené une vie bruyante de débauches, pleine de duels, de paris, de femmes enlevées, avait dévoré sa fortune et effrayé toute sa famille . . . et sans cesse les yeux d'Emma revenaient d'eux-mêmes sur ce vieil homme à lèvres pendantes, comme sur quelque chose d'extraordinaire et d'auguste. Il avait vécu à la Cour et couché dans le lit des reines! (1.8, 46)

stooped over his ample plateful, with his napkin tied around his neck like a child, an old man sat eating, drops of gravy dribbling from his lips. His eyes were bloodshot and he had a little pigtail tied up with a black ribbon. This was the Marquis's father-in-law, the old Duc de Laverdière, once the favorite of the Comte d'Artois, in the days of the Marquis de Conflans's hunting parties at Vautreuil, and he, so they said, had been the lover of Marie Antoinette, in between Monsieurs de Coigny and de Lauzun. He had led a tumultuous life of debauchery, full of duels, of wagers made, of women abducted, had squandered his fortune and frightened his whole family . . . Emma's eyes kept coming back to this old man with the sagging lips, as though to something quite wonderfully majestic. He had lived at court and slept in the bed of a queen! (38)

⁶ I cite part and chapter, then page number for the French edition of *Madame Bovary*; page number only for the English translation.

The old Duke, now a ruin like the old chateau, had lived the scandalous excesses of the final years of the old regime. His rumored liaison with Marie-Antoinette, precisely located in a series of royal adulteries, links him to the slanderous, pornographic literature of the 1780s that Lynn Hunt and Robert Darnton have studied in detail, a literature that defamed the queen and helped to fuel revolutionary convictions. He is also a character out of the eighteenth-century novel: duelist, gambler, and rapist. Yes, de Tocqueville acknowledges, the French aristocracy before the Revolution was very dissolute. But the new aristocracy of the Restoration is different. Flaubert's syntax at the end of this description slyly suggests that what frightened the Duke's family were not his violent vices, but the fact that he had committed the ultimate bourgeois crime of devouring his fortune. The nobility of the nineteenth century knows the value of money, and the implication of the entire episode at Vaubyessard is that this nobility has become part of the bourgeoisie—much as de Tocqueville argued that this nobility had undergone a reformation of its morals.

Flaubert suggests that some older aristocratic viciousness may persist beneath the surface of this reformation, but even these class traits have become attenuated and mediocre. Of the gentlemen at the ball his narrator comments:

Dans leurs regard indifférents flottait la quiétude de passions journallement assouviés; et, à travers leur manières douces, perceait cette brutalité particulière que communique la domination des choses à demi faciles, dans lesquelles la force s'exerce et où la vanité s'amuse, le maniement de chevaux de race et la société des femmes perdues. (1.8, 48)

In their coolly glancing eyes lingered the calm of passions habitually appeased; and from beneath their polished ways they exuded that peculiar brutality which comes from a too casual supremacy in everything that demands strength and amuses one's vanity, the handling of thoroughbred horses and the company of fallen women. (40)

Like de Tocqueville's democratic bourgeois, this nobility has learned to give up difficult or ideal objects of desire for those more at hand, and their passions, satisfied daily—Flaubert's adverb is “journallement”—have become everyday ones. The brutality peculiar to a dominant class used to exerting its power physically on others has been reduced to riding and whoring—“choses à demi faciles”—and here Tolstoy's Vronsky and Veslovsky conform to a type.⁷ Brute horses and harlots

⁷ Here are a few other examples from the history of the novel of the aristocrat horseman, lover, and wielder of a riding whip—a man who would treat women as he would treat horses. The whip-twisting Lord Merton in Burney's *Evelina*, mentioned above, likes, as does Tolstoy's Veslovsky, to drive his carriage too fast. The coach of the wicked Marquis in *The Tale of Two Cities* runs over a child pedestrian, and his coachman's whip resembles that of the Furies; the Marquis is also the rapist of Mme. de Farge's sister, for whose death he and his brother wait impatiently, “striking their boots with their riding whips and loitering up and down” (341). The father at the end of Turgenev's *First Love* rides his English mare, Electric, whom no one else could handle, and takes his riding crop to his mistress Zinaida, the object of desire for every man in the novella, including his son: “Zinaida quivered—looked silently at my father—and, raising her arms slowly to her lips, kissed the scar that glowed crimson upon it” (116). In a somewhat similar scene, Arkady, the hero of Dostoevsky's *A Raw Youth*, is traumatized when his older schoolmate Lambert whips the back of a naked prostitute with his riding crop, but the Frenchman adventurer Lambert may in fact only be a sham nobleman. So may be Bentley Drummler, the rich swell, who, like Pip, is educated to be a gentleman in *Great Expectations*; he marries and, we presume, beats Pip's beloved Estella, and he dies in an accident stemming from his similar mistreatment of his horse. In a Dickensian variation, Henry Gowan in *Little Dorrit* takes his stick to his noble dog Lion, and here, too, we assume that he similarly treats his other “Pet,” his bourgeois wife Meagles. In a more pathological case, Stavrogin's debauching a twelve-year-old girl in Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* seems to have been caused by his arousal at seeing her whipped by her mother. Duncan Cass, the villainous younger son of a country “squire,” is literally identified by his riding whip

are easily domesticated, and so, it seems, are these aristocrats themselves; they are no longer the terrors of their families, nor of anyone else.

These horsy gentlemen already turning into creatures of bourgeois habit prepare the way in Flaubert's novel for Rodolphe, the bourgeois who acts the nobleman of Emma's dreams. Her fantasies were first stimulated by her reading of Sir Walter Scott, whose historical novels depict an already outdated and endangered version of nobility and, no less than the wicked old Duke dribbling gravy at Vaubyessard, evoke romantic nostalgia for an aristocracy that no longer exists. Reading Scott, Emma imagines herself as the chatelaine of a manor house, looking out in the fields for "un cavalier à plume blanche qui galope sur un cheval noir" (1.6, 35; "the white-plumed cavalier galloping towards her on his black horse," 29)—a figure who is reproduced when the so-called vicomte with whom she dances at the ball gallops by her the next day and drops his cigar case, which is picked up by Charles and cherished as a relic by his wife. And after Vaubyessard, Emma feeds her reveries by avidly perusing gossip magazines about Parisian high society. Rodolphe enters the novel to incarnate these dreams of the noble life. Like the gentlemen at the ball, he is introduced as having a "tempérament brutal" (2.7, 122; "his temperament was brutal," 104). He seduces Emma by taking her horseback riding, and she rewards him with "une fort belle cravache" (2.12, 176; "a rather fine riding whip," 152), which recalls an earlier "cravache" that Charles misplaces at Roualt's farm when he first meets Emma, and which had occasioned the collision of their two bodies as they reached for it behind the wheat sacks (1.2, 16; 12). We understand in retrospect that Charles was the first version of the romance hero riding in to rescue Emma from her mediocre existence—a version in whom she was sadly mistaken and disappointed.

Given its red pommel, the whip Emma gives Rodolphe is obviously phallic, and, in bestowing it upon her new lover, Emma is clearly emasculating Charles. It is the counterpart as well of the cigar case that Emma also gives Rodolphe, a replica of the cigar case dropped by the vicomte (2.12, 178; 153). Rodolphe thus inherits the mantle, as it were, of both the real husband and the fantasy-lover. After his seduction of Emma in the forest, Rodolphe himself lights up a postcoital cigar. The symbolism is heavy-handed, but then so is Rodolphe, and the whip further suggests the same element of facile domination in his relationship with Emma that the noblemen of Vaubyessard enjoy with their horses and mistresses. "Il la subjugait. Elle en avait presque peur" (2.10, 159; "He was subjugating her. She was almost afraid of him," 137), the novel tells us a few chapters earlier, but the gift hints at her own complicity in her subjugation. Earlier Emma had wished that Charles would beat her so that she would have a reason to leave him; the very beautiful whip suggests a different kind of masochism in her relationship with Rodolphe.

Like the moneyed arriviste Rodolphe, like the docile restored nobility in the stage set chateau at Vaubyessard, the celebrity tenor Lagardy merely playacts the

when his body is discovered in *Silas Marner*; he has both ridden his brother Godfrey's horse to its death and stolen Marner's gold. But the whip in question actually belonged to Godfrey. If Duncan is the evil genius behind the liaison between Godfrey and Molly Farren, it is nonetheless Godfrey who has married Molly, then abandoned her to die of her addiction. And it is Godfrey, as revealed on the last page of the novel, who is Marner's landlord, still taking his money. The brothers together suggest the predatory nature of their landowning class.

part of a nobleman; he literally does so in the opera house, where he dons the trappings of one of Scott's characters from the aristocratic past in *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Flaubert uses Lagardy not only to mediate the transfer of Emma's affections in the novel from the faux-noble Rodolphe to the clearly bourgeois Léon, but also to chart how the aristocracy has begun to lose its aura of erotic fascination, an aura that now shifts to the theatrical star. It is the quintessential bourgeois, the pharmacist Hommais, who speaks in admiration of the tenor and his entourage:

C'est, à ce qu'on assure, un fameux lapin! Il roule sur l'or! il mène avec lui trois maîtresses et son cuisinier! Tous ces grands artistes brûlent la chandelle par les deux bouts; il leur faut une existence dévergondée qui excite un peu l'imagination. Mais ils meurent à l'hôpital, parce qu'ils n'ont pas eu l'esprit, étant jeunes, de faire des économies. (2.14, 205)

From what they tell me, he's a real lad! He's rolling in money! Takes three mistresses and his chef around with him! Those great artists they burn the candle at both ends; they need a life of debauchery to excite a bit the old imagination. But they die in the workhouse, because they don't have the sense, when they're young, to put a bit away. (177)

True to his class, Hommais is both impressed by the money that Lagardy commands and horrified by his lack of economy. This nonchalance about expenditure—the prime violation against bourgeois social convention—seems inseparable, however, from the tenor's sexual profligacy, which excites, if only just a little bit, the pharmacist's own imagination.

In fact, Lagardy has made his scandalous love life into a selling point that attracts customers to the opera house. The novel informs us:

On disait qu'une princesse polonaise, l'écoulant un soir chanter sur la plage de Biarritz, où il radoubaient des chaloupes, en était devenue amoureuse. Elle s'était ruinée à cause de lui. Il l'avait plantée là pour d'autres femmes, et cette célébrité sentimentale ne laissait pas que de servir à sa réputation artistique. Le cabotin diplomate avait même soin de faire toujours glisser dans les réclames une phrase poétique sur la fascination de sa personne et la sensibilité de son âme. (2.15, 208)

It was said that a Polish princess had fallen in love with him, listening to him sing, one evening on the beach at Biarritz, where he worked mending boats. She had thrown away everything for him. He had cast her off for other women, and his renown as a lover had infallibly enhanced his reputation as an artist. This artful ham even saw to it that some poetic phrase about the fascination of his person and the sensibility of his soul was slipped into the playbills. (180)

Like the movie star—or indeed one of the tenors frequently featured on our own television screens (all of whom Flaubert's description uncannily anticipates)—Lagardy is selling himself as much as his performances, and what he is selling is a sex appeal attested to by a series of adventures and conquests. The playbills that advertise his appearances are the ancestors of the fanzine that will replace or meld with the society gossip journals that Emma has earlier been seen reading. Moreover, Lagardy replaces the nobleman as seducer in the social imagination by seducing an aristocratic woman, the unfortunate countess. We might recall in this regard the actress Virginie, a mistress whom Rodolphe, in imitation of a time-honored aristocratic fashion, had kept in Rouen before he met Emma (2.7, 122; 104). Now—with the sexes reversed—it is the stage performer who declares his independence of noble patronage. Flaubert thus intimates that, through the stage, bourgeois culture has found a means to make a sellable commodity out of the sexual allure that had once belonged to the aristocracy. Lagardy may still exploit that residual allure with his lace ruff, his soft boots that flare at the ankles—and Emma is drawn to him as if he were the romantic, aristocratic character that he plays—but it is nevertheless the opera singer about whom Emma fantasizes: “Avec lui, par

tous les royaumes de l'Europe, elle aurait voyagé de capitale en capitale, partageant ses fatigues et son orgueil, ramassant les fleurs qu'on lui jetait, brodant elle-même ses costumes" (2.15, 210; "With him, through all the kingdoms of Europe, she would have journeyed from capital to capital, sharing his weariness and his triumph, gathering the flowers thrown for him, embroidering his costumes herself," 182). Emma fantasizes the life of a groupie.

It is at this moment that Léon the law clerk reappears in her life and inaugurates Emma's second love affair. This relationship is clearly a bourgeois one, first consummated not in an aristocratic forest, but in the city streets, not on horseback, but inside a closed cab. And the relationship of domination has been reversed: this rather pathetic male lover, the novel later comments, "devenait sa maîtresse plutôt qu'elle n'était la sienne" (3.5, 258; "became her mistress, rather than she becoming his," 226). It is Emma who is described as being brutal at the moment she undresses, and it is Léon who is frightened and resents her victory over him (3.6, 262–63; 229–30). The novel signals the final abandonment of the aristocratic object of desire in the highly comic scene in which Léon attempts to seduce Emma in the cathedral at Rouen, only to be deterred by the beadle who insists on giving them an exhaustive tour of the church. He leads them to the tombs of the aristocracy, including that of Louis de Brézé, next to whom, the guide tells them, "cette femme à genoux qui pleure, est son épouse Diane de Poitiers, comtesse de Brézé, duchesse de Valentinois, née en 1499, morte en 1566, et à gauche celle qui porte un enfant, la sainte Vierge" (3.1, 225; "that woman on her knees weeping is his wife Diane de Poitiers, Countess of Brézé, Duchess of Valentinois, born in 1499, died in 1566; and on the left, with a child in her arms, the Blessed Virgin," 196). The pious guide understandably does not tell us more about this grieving widow, since Diane de Poitiers went on to become the mistress of King Henri II, a world-class paramour whom Flaubert ironically juxtaposes to the Virgin Mary and to Emma, both of whom have some explaining to do to their husbands. But the irony of the scene goes deeper: neither Léon nor Emma register any interest in what they are looking at. This kind of scandalous aristocracy is effectively dead and buried, and with them their erotic allure. Flaubert adds two telling details to these last two episodes: in the opera's forest scene, Lucia di Lammermoor tosses a purse to a squire dressed in green [this is *not* in the opera libretto] (2.15, 208; 180); in the church, the beadle recounts that the Cardinal d'Amboise bequeathed thirty thousand gold crowns to the poor (3.1, 225; 196). Even in these vestiges of aristocratic splendor, now the museum pieces of the stage and the funereal church, money invades the picture, the very money that bourgeois society holds up as the measure of all things and that reduces to a mediocre sameness all products of the imagination, including the erotic; and it is money and financial embarrassment, the worst kind of bourgeois shame, that will bring about Emma's desperate death. The novel itself is the genre of this society, the realist genre of money and the everyday. *Madame Bovary* tells both a social and a literary history by tracing a trajectory in which the aristocratic lover—and the dominant class that he stands for—has become a part of a past that at the end of the novel is not even looked back upon with nostalgia. That lover has been superseded by a bourgeois heroine who finally meets her like in the equally bourgeois Léon: this, Flaubert asserts, is the love story—the literature—for our times, sordid and petty as it may be.

Nonetheless, all may not be over for aristocracy in the novel. Just how far the class has fallen in the course of the genre's history can be measured by the distance between Cervantes's Duke and Duchess, nobles who have the whip hand and like to use it, and the Baron de Charlus, who is whipped and in chains in *Le Temps Retrouvé*, the final volume of Proust's *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. The narrator, escaping from an air raid during World War I, stumbles into Jupien's homosexual bordello and glimpses the Baron, confined in chains and being flogged by lower-class young men who, he is assured by the proprietor, are the roughest trade to be found. Here again, the aristocrat is the figure of an exotic, outlaw sexuality that involves violence and domination; but, in this case, the nobleman seeks not to beat his social inferiors, but to be beaten by them. By 1916 history has turned the tables on the aristocracy, and in Charlus's pursuit of sexual degradation his class seems to have reached the end of the line, colluding in its own supersession and extinction. (In his abasement Charlus seems to be the inspiration for both the Sadean chambers of erotic pain and the chapel of the penitent, self-flagellating Saint-Duke in Lampedusa's *The Leopard*.) His masochism represents the death-wish of an ancient aristocracy that seems to have outlived its history—a death-wish apparently shared by his nephew Saint-Loup, who is another patron of Jupien's bordello, who declares himself “un homme condamné d'avance” (*À la recherche* 3.850; “a doomed man already,” *Remembrance* 2.979) because of his homosexuality, and who dies at the front in the parallel story in this section of the novel. Yet if Saint-Loup succeeds in getting himself killed, the Baron cannot obtain similar satisfaction from his lower-class tormentors, and in this failure the novel suggests that French society is not yet ready to administer the coup de grace that its nobility craves. This emblematic scene of the sexual abasement of the blue-blooded Charlus should be understood as a carefully constructed political allegory.

The episode at Jupien's bordello is richly comic, in spite of the welts and wounds on the Baron's body and the lack of pity shown by the Baron's torturers—“‘Ayez pitié.’ ‘Non, crapule . . . pas de pitié’” (*À la recherche* 3.815; “‘Have pity on me,’ he cries and is answered, ‘No, you worthless trash . . . No pity,’” *Remembrance* 2.955). For the men are play-acting, and Charlus in fact owns the brothel in which he stages his scenes of punishment. It not only contrasts with the true horror of the war that is taking place outside; its scenario of a working class turning upon the ruling elite is belied by the unwillingness of Jupien's employees to treat Charlus as roughly as he wants—it's hot work, too, one of them complains—or to be the murderous bunch that Jupien paints them to be. Saint-Loup's death has elements of tragedy about it, but the Baron's abasement tells the larger social history of *À la recherche de temps perdu* as comedy: as far as French politics go, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.

The episode begins with overtones of revolution. The narrator visits the haute bourgeoisie hostess Madame Verdurin, “car elle était, avec Mme Bontemps, une des Reines de ce Paris de la guerre qui faisait penser au Directoire. Comme par l'ensemencement d'une petite quantité de levure, en apparence de génération spontanée, des jeune femmes allaient tout le jour coiffées de haut turbans cylindriques comme aurait pu l'être une contemporaine de Mme Tallien” (3.723; “for, together with Mme. Bontemps, she was one of the queens of that wartime Paris which reminded one of the Directoire. As if by the scattering of a small amount of

yeast of apparently spontaneous generation, young women were going about all day long in high, cylindrical turbans, such as a contemporary of Mme. Tallien might have worn," 2.893). The Louvre has been closed due to the war, but "l'élégance, à défaut des arts, cherchant à s'excuser comme ceux-ci en 1793" (3.724; "in the absence of arts, elegance in dress sought to justify itself as the arts did in 1793," 2.893). This bitingly funny passage raises the possibility that the war could bring about revolutionary change only to dismiss it: it is the ladies of high society who are wearing, and setting the style for, the garb of an earlier revolution, and it is only a matter of fashion. On this high society the war itself will have no more effect than a style that will be replaced with next year's line: and even here it seems to have little impact as the ladies decide that it is more patriotic not to dress in mourning for their male relatives killed in battle. The mention of Mme. Tallien, the style-setter known as Our Lady of Thermidor, suggests not so much revolution as reaction.⁸

Reactionaries flock to Jupien's bordello. First there is the deputy of the Action Libérale, the Catholic, center-right party of the very rich. There is the Vicomte de Courvoisier, the cousin of the Baron de Charlus—neither is aware that the other is a habitué of the establishment. Two very fashionably attired Russians in evening dress and white ties wander in; first-timers, they hesitate at the doorway, say, "Après tout on s'en fiche?" (3.822; "After all, what the devil do we care?" 2.960), and then come in. Also present, the narrator says with a straight face, is "cette chose si rare et en France absolument exceptionnelle, qu'est un mauvais prêtre" (3.829; "that thing so rare and in France absolutely exceptional, a priest of evil character," 2.964), an *abbé*. Another young man in a dinner jacket arrives: he wants an appointment with the same young man who is the priest's regular. And the boys of the establishment mourn the death of the Prince de Foix, who was one of their regular customers. The rich politician, the aristocracy, the church, the *jeunesse dorée*—in short the ruling class, and in Jupien's words, "hommes marquants dans tous les genres" (3.832; "outstanding men of every kind," 2.966).

If Charlus is any indicator, this elite clientele comes to Jupien's establishment for the excitement of sex with the lower—and presumably dangerous—classes, to indulge in the fantasy of being dominated: this is the literary model from which Genet derived the plot of *The Balcony*. But the young toughs of the bordello don't want to hurt them and have, if anything, a sentimental view of their social superiors. Charlus complains that his torturer Maurice is not brutal enough.

Sa figure me plait, mais il m'appelle crapule comme si c'était une leçon apprise.—Oh! non, personne ne lui a rien dit, répondit Jupien sans s'apercevoir de l'in vraisemblance de cette assertion. Il a du reste été compromis dans le meurtre d'une concierge de la Villette.—Ah! cela c'est assez intéressant, dit le baron avec un sourire. (3.817)

"I like his looks, but he calls me 'worthless trash' as if it was a lesson he had learned by heart." "Oh no, no one has taught him anything," replied Jupien, without realising the improbability of this assertion. "Moreover, he was mixed up in the murder of a janitor's wife in La Villette." "Ah, that's rather interesting," remarked the Baron, with a smile. (2.956)

Charlus, doubly outside the laws of bourgeois society as a homosexual aristocrat, wants to indulge his vice with another outlaw, in this case a real criminal. But when the story is repeated to Maurice himself, the boy's professed horror at the very

⁸ For a different reading of this section of the novel along political lines see Sprinker 160–68.

thought of killing another human being is like a cold shower for the Baron, and Maurice makes the situation even worse when he tells Charlus that he is going to send his earnings home to his dear old father and mother and to his brother at the front. Charlus is both discouraged and exasperated in his search for satisfaction: he cannot find enough villainy or malice in the working classes—they have, in fact, become too law-abiding, too petty bourgeois—to provide the frisson of erotic violence and danger that he craves.

By the same token, this proletariat has no desire to throw off its chains even if the aristocracy wants to put them on. Notwithstanding the scenarios of masochism enacted in the bordello, we should not forget that its workers are the ones actually being dominated and prostituted by their ruling class clientele. While Maurice takes a break in the lobby with other young men of the house, they discuss the case of a captain who has died at the front while trying to save his orderly.

«Il y a tout de même du bon monde chez les riches. Moi je me ferais tuer avec plaisir pour un type comme ça», dit Maurice . . . Il avait presque les larmes aux yeux en parlant de la mort de cet officier et le jeune home de vingt-deux ans n'était pas moins ému. «Ah! oui, ce sont de chic types. Des malheureux comme nous encore, ça n'a pas grand'chose à perdre, mais un monsieur qui a des tas de larbins, qui peut aller prendre son apéro tous les jours à 6 heures, c'est vraiment chouette! On peut charrier tant qu'on veut, mais quand on voit des types comme ça mourir, ça fait vraiment quelque chose. Le bon Dieu ne devrait pas permettre que des riches comme ça, ça meure; d'abord ils sont trop utiles à l'ouvrier.» (3.820–21)

“Just the same, there are some fine people among the rich. I'd be glad to get shot for a guy like that,” said Maurice . . . He almost had tears in his eyes in speaking of the death of that officer, and the twenty-two-year-old was not less moved. “Ah yes, they're swell guys! Poor devils like us haven't much to lose, but for a gentleman who has a lot of flunkys and can go drink his *apéritif* at six o'clock every day, that's really very fine. You can laugh all you want to, but when you see guys like that die, it gets under your hide. The good Lord ought not let rich men like that get killed; in the first place they're too useful to the workingman.” (2.959)

Given the context in which it is spoken, the last phrase is hilarious: the bordello, after all, needs its paying clients. But the exchange between these two workingmen also suggests a lack of class resentment, the product in part of a war effort that has seen the common sacrifice of poor and rich alike—and the death of Saint Loup is prefigured at this moment. They regard Charlus as one of the boys: “Comme il est simple! jamais on ne dirait un baron” (3.828; “How unpretentious he is! You'd never take him for a prince,” 2.963). Yet, at the same time, the young men of the bordello are charmed by an aristocratic wealth of which they can only dream: the twenty-two-year-old firmly believes that Charlus has a million francs a day to throw away.

If the French, as this episode suggests, do not resent but become sentimental about their aristocrats, whose lives are worth more than those of the common man, there are, however, countries other than France. This section of the novel ends with the post-war political triumph of the Bloc National trotting out “les vieilles canailles de la politique, qui sont toujours réélues” (3.854; “the old dregs of political life, who are always reelected,” 2.982), including the deputy of the Action Libérale who is a habitué of Jupien. *Plus ça change* . . .

Tant de niaiserie agaçait un peu, mais on en voulut moins au Bloc national quand on vit tout d'un coup les victimes du bolchevisme, des grandes-duchesses en haillons, dont on avait assassiné les maris dans une brouette, les fils en jetant des pierres dessus après les avoir laissés sans manger, fait travailler au milieu des huées, jetés dans des puits parce qu'on croyait qu'ils avaient la peste et pouvaient la communiquer. Ceux qui étaient arrivés à s'enfuir reparurent tout à coup . . . (3.854)

All this stupidity was somewhat exasperating, but one was less vexed with the *Bloc National* when one suddenly saw the victims of bolshevism, Grand Duchesses in rags and tatters, whose husbands and then their sons had been assassinated, the husbands in wheelbarrows and the sons stoned to death, after first having been left without food, then forced to work amid hoots and jeers and finally thrown into wells and stoned because it was believed they had the plague and might infect others. Those who succeeded in escaping turned up in Paris all of a sudden . . . (2.982)

The section then breaks off. We recall and now understand the reason for Proust's inclusion of the two well-dressed Russians who had hesitated and then plunged into Jupien's bordello. In their case, the hesitation may have been justified, since their fellow aristocrats would soon get more than they bargained for.

While both *Madame Bovary* and *À la recherche du temps perdu* thus chart the novelistic fortunes of the aristocracy between two revolutions, they have quite different views on the ambivalent relationship of bourgeois society and culture toward the old nobility. In Flaubert's novel, the aristocracy of the Restoration is merely an empty copy of its prerevolutionary self, and it is dead and buried by the novel's end. But Proust tells a story of aristocratic survival. In his self-degradation, Charlus may suggest that his aristocratic class subconsciously wishes for its own overthrow and extinction, but French society has lost the revolutionary energy of a century earlier—an energy that has migrated to Russia. There will always be an aristocracy, at least in France, even if the real bluebloods like Charlus and Saint-Loup seek their own demise. If Proust's novel unmasks the social illusions of snobbery and discloses the shallowness of some aristocratic lives, it nonetheless concedes that snobbery is a permanent part of the social condition. Thus, in spite of the dead end for the old nobility that is signaled in this penultimate section of the novel, we are treated in its final scene to one more aristocratic *matinée*. The hostess is the social climbing Mme. Verdurin, who has become the Princess of Guermantes, thereby finding a place in that most traditional novelistic plot involving bourgeois money marrying noble rank and style. The narrator's final vision of the daughter of Saint-Loup, who brings together the two ways of Swann and Guermantes, is another version of this plot. The bourgeoisie does not, as Flaubert would have it, absorb the aristocracy, but rather finds accommodation with it.

The novel as genre finds a similar compromise. Bourgeois society, perhaps any society, appears to need an elite to feed its fantasies of consumption—including those of erotic consumption—and the novel trades in these same fantasies.⁹ The sexual aura surrounding the aristocracy seduces Emma Bovary, and that aura still clings, even if in a decadent, inverted form, to the Baron de Charlus. Flaubert wanted to suggest that turning aristocratic style and tradition into one more disposable commodity of bourgeois culture would cheapen and ultimately destroy them—they had already been debased in the *feuilleton* novels and gossip magazines that Emma consumes. In Lagardy he uncannily predicted the replacement of the aristocrat as erotic icon by the scandalous and vulgar theatrical star. Flaubert's

⁹ This is a different sort of compromise than, but may be a corollary of, the literary compromise—namely, a disavowal of the French Revolution—that Franco Moretti describes in his study of the nineteenth-century European *bildungsroman* (64–73). Moretti goes on (159–79) to discuss the novel and literary experience itself as a formation that both comforts and also at some point reveals its emptiness as a form of consumption in an ever-changing capitalist culture.

vision thus seems to point to the destruction of the imagination itself by bourgeois mediocrity and hence to his own complicity, as the writer of a realist novel, in this death of the imagination. From this perspective, the novel becomes the end of literature itself (see Donato 859–61). But for Proust this vision is too drastic and apocalyptic; the novelistic imagination and the aristocracy are both survivors within bourgeois society, survivors even of an actual apocalypse: the Great War. Proust gives more credit to the bourgeois culture than does Flaubert; for all her vulgarity and downright stupidity, Mme. Verdurin manages to sponsor and fill her salon with men and women of talent, and as the product of this culture, the novel can still—as it had done from *Don Quixote* onward—negotiate a place for the imagination within its realist fictions. Proust, moreover, suggests that it is precisely because the aristocracy has become identified with a special erotic freedom and aesthetic glamour that was the product of an earlier period of social domination that it is able to survive, even after having lost much of its power and privilege, in twentieth-century capitalist democracies.

This last point can be taken outside of the history of the novel. In an age of mass media that neither Flaubert nor Proust could have fully anticipated, we are regularly sold the lifestyles of the rich and famous, and particularly those of the bedroom. The sexual adventures of the aristocracy—and in America this must be dynastic families like the Kennedys or the Rockefellers—have not been displaced by the lurid romances of movie and television stars, and continue to jostle for space alongside them in the tabloids. The glamour of fame, money, and power is most fully distilled and realized in sexual notoriety: it sells. Recently, the royal family of Great Britain has taken center stage and seemed to act out the aristocracy's historical destiny. We know even the most intimate erotic fantasies of the adulterous heir to the throne. It has been suggested that this exposure weakens his hold on his subjects, but the opposite may be true. The aristocracy justifies its continuing existence by being an object of fantasy and consumption in the social imagination. The male prostitute in Jupien's bordello, then, speaks for a larger cultural consensus: such people are too useful to do without.

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