

What Lies Beneath: Motivations for Emma Bovary's Suicide?

Senior Paper

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For a Degree Bachelor of Arts with
A Major in Literature at
The University of North Carolina at Asheville
Spring 2007

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Upon reading Gustave Flaubert's novel Madame Bovary, published in 1857, one is left with a very critical perception of Emma Bovary's motives for suicide. What was Emma Bovary's purpose as the protagonist of the novel? Should one feel sympathy for a character that is so limited by societal conventions? Emma Bovary is the epitome of nineteenth century culture; she embodies the superficiality and shallowness of the romanticized bourgeois that was, in Flaubert's opinion, founded by romantic literature. Emma only lives through her desires and passions because her perception of reality becomes deluded by the romantic literature she reads. However, how does Emma become so influenced by fiction that her reality is altered eventually causing her to become disillusioned and take her own life? Critics of *Madame Bovary* hold contrasting interpretations of the motivations behind Emma's suicide. From a Marxist standpoint, Emma becomes influenced by the bourgeois and becomes immersed in the materialistic whims of the nineteenth century, which causes her to incur so much debt that she faces legal charges. From a feminist standpoint, Emma is seen as a victim of the nineteenth century patriarchal society; in which she is very limited, and her suicide is seen as an escape. Furthermore, from an essentialist reading, Emma is a villain because she is just a self-centered, corrupt person and commits suicide for completely narcissistic, irrational reasons. As a clever woman who has had the privilege of education, Emma is neither a

complete victim of her society, nor is she a completely selfish, bad person. However, as a literary heroine who selfishly commits suicide, critics try to make meaning of her suicide to make the character whole, give closure to Emma, but literally, Emma is such an instable character and suicide is such an ambiguous act, it is impossible to assign any definite meaning to her suicide.

Although it is impossible to completely understand Emma's motives behind her suicide, it is important to understand the context in which Flaubert was writing Madame Bovary. Since Emma does not fit into the real world due to her romanticized nature and sensibilities, she is a failure at life, which projects Flaubert's critique of romance novels, romantic ideals, and their effect upon the materialistic bourgeois.

In his work, Madame Bovary: The End of Romance, Eric Gans clearly presents the relationship between Flaubert's perception of romance and society:

In Flaubert's universe, the world is not a very noble place, but [Emma's] desires would be unrealistic in any possible world [...] the lover Emma yearns for never existed anywhere but romantic fiction. Realism in this sense portrays the world as real in opposition to a set of ideal expectations; result to devalue both halves of the opposition Emma's ideal is not justified yearning for something higher, but a romantic cliché. (44)

During the mid-nineteenth century when Flaubert wrote Madame Bovary, Emma's bold behaviors elicited quite a reaction. The novel was the object of an obscenity trial in 1857 because Madame Bovary was said to "offend public and religious morality" (Gans 52). A woman in nineteenth century society should not act as Emma and not suffer major consequences deemed appropriate by society. Theorist Jacqueline Merriam Paskow in

her article "Rethinking Madame Bovary's Motives for Committing Suicide" states that throughout the novel Emma is neither "repudiated by her husband. Nor is she ostracized as a fallen woman by those citizens of Yonville who know of her affairs [...]. If Emma ever feels regret for her marital infidelity, it is only momentarily and as a tactical mistake when her love affairs are languishing" (2). Although Emma is never punished by society or her husband, the trial ended with the prosecution recognizing that Emma does, in fact, punish herself at the end of the novel by committing suicide and "the young woman who reads this novel will presumably hesitate before following her example" (Gans 55).

Emma's actions are not to be admired. This misconception of the world Emma holds represents the romantic thought at the time that held that "individual desire was the only guide to understanding the world[. . .]which is conditioned by the values that others attach to its objects" (Gans 49). Flaubert was anti-romantic and although he created the character of Emma Bovary, he did not condone her actions.

Also, during the nineteenth century women began to become more educated which caused them to question and become bored with their place in the home. Women were expected to remain in the home and take care of children and live privately; however they began to want more out of life, such as experience. Women started acting in ways that were not previously accepted and men criticized this behavior. For example in Henrik Ibsen's infamous play Hedda Gabler, the protagonist suffers from the same fate of limitations as Emma; but is much more deliberately vile, lashing out at the people around her. Elise M. Wiedner in her article "Emma Bovary and Hedda Gabler: A Comparative Study" discusses the similarities and differences in the characters of Emma and Hedda:

Analysis of the hitherto unexamined parallels between Emma Bovary and Hedda Gabler reveals complementary insights into the interactions between society and the self, and although the individual is responsible for the self she becomes, the society is exposed as mediocre and hypocritical.(56)

The restrictions placed on Emma are also brought to the surface in other works of the nineteenth century through the protagonists of Miss Julie in Strindberg's play, Miss Julie, and Anna Karenina in Tolstoy's novel, Anna Karenina. Each protagonist seeks more than what is available to her as a woman, they are all adulteresses, and all end their lives in suicide. It is also worth noting that all the novels are named after the female protagonist which suggests that the roles and nature of women were definitely being questioned and explored during this period. These literary women wanted more out of life than was possible, and instead of giving into the accepted societal conventions, which confined them to the sphere of wife and household, they sought an escape. However, they are also at fault, because they refused to accept, and rebelled against, the standards that society set forth for women, and therefore chose not to be content with the reality of their situations.

In her essay "Suicide Representations of the Feminine in Nineteenth Century," Margaret Higgonet further develops the relationship between male writer and female suicide arguing that from the male perspective of the nineteenth century female suicides are seen as a weak escape:

Yet to the nineteenth-century male writers most sympathetic to women's plight in bourgeois life subvert the heroism of women's voluntary deaths in their focus on social and masculine victimization; the reliance on social explanation which

climaxes in the realistic novel—and in Durkheim underplays the heroine's choice—at the same time that its social determinism exculpates us of our complicity in the functioning social institutions.(112)

Given women's very limited experience with reality, when forced into a society that is so materialistic, and morally corrupt, their already skewed and idealistic views of reality cause them to be vulnerable to moral bankruptcy as well. Women simply cannot live their lives in action as men do, as these male-authored novels demonstrate. With such limited outlets for experience and failure to accept their roles as women living within the social conventions, female protagonists cannot live to their full potential. Like Emma is portrayed by Flaubert, women became rebellious and corrupt. In general, most humans recognize some rules that govern their behavior and decisions; these women do not. These male authors, instead of being sympathetic towards their female protagonists, hold a more essentialist, objective view which, as Dacia Maraini, in her book Searching for Emma, suggests "[condemns] the one who is incapable of turning that life to good account [...]" (25).

From the essentialist perspective, Emma is a selfish, neglectful being that brings her fate upon herself. Throughout the novel she becomes a less sympathetic character and more corrupted and villainous near the end of her life and is described as "becoming irritable, greedy, voluptuous; and she walked about the streets with him carrying her head high, without fear, so she said, of compromising herself (293). Although Charles is less-than-desirable compared to Emma's ideologically constructed "prince charming," adultery and promiscuity are not excusable in any case; they were especially not matters taken lightly in the nineteenth century. Other women of the nineteenth century read

romantic literature and did not neglect their children, have affairs, and smoke cigars. Many women at this time probably had to settle for less when they got married; however they took the situations they were given and they accepted and lived in, at least, superficial contentment. If other people are expected to deal with what life they are given, why can Emma not? Suicide is considered one of the most selfish acts a human can commit because it leaves people behind that may need taking care of like children, and it leaves loved ones without a sense of closure and understanding for why that person committed suicide. On top of being an already selfish act, Emma's motives for committing suicide can be interpreted, by essentialists, as completely narcissistic. Emma had incurred so much at the point in the novel before she commits the act of suicide, she does not want to face losing what material possessions she has or suffer a blow to her ego.

Even though Charles is described as an incompetent simpleton throughout the novel, he is still not malicious or neglectful husband. Therefore he remains sympathetic, and sometimes completely pathetic, because of his complete blindness to Emma's infidelity. Charles, only after her death, learns of his wife's affairs upon discovering letters from Rodolphe and Leon in her rosewood desk. However, he does not erupt into fury due to her betrayal, but is so infatuated with Emma that he thinks what it would have been like to be one of her lovers. He remains so devoted to, and in adoration of, Emma throughout the novel and would give Emma anything within his capabilities. He does not have as much money and prestige as Emma would like, but he does make a mediocre income as a town doctor, which is more than Emma was accustomed to when she lived on the farm with her father, Old Rouault.

Essentialists would say that Emma's situation was not the most desirable, but it could have been worse, and she should have made the best of it. Many times people did not marry for love, and Emma should have made the best of her situation. She realizes that Charles is not a bad person; however she does not feel regret for her infidelity: "Domestic mediocrity drove her to lewd fancies, marriage tenderness to adulterous desires. She would have liked Charles to beat her, that she might have a better right to hate him, to revenge upon him" (116). Emma did have some choices as a woman in her society and in her marriage, essentialists would offer; however, she just makes self-indulgent decisions. For example, in the last part of the novel Emma uses Charles's trusting nature to her advantage and gains power of attorney. The "responsibility" of power of attorney not only allows Emma access to all the money and estate so that she can indulge in her materialistic whims, but it also gives her an excuse to go "consult" with Leon, her lover, in Paris. When Charles and Emma first discuss this trip to see Leon, Charles just thinks that Emma is being considerate and helpful. In actuality, her motives are completely selfish for she goes for "three full, exquisite days—a true honeymoon" with Leon (272).

Charles's devotion to Emma is also evident when Emma becomes deeply depressed and ill after Rodolphe decides not to run away with her and then he leaves town. "For forty-three days Charles did not leave her. He gave up all his patients; he no longer went to bed; he was constantly feeling her pulse, putting on sinapisms and cold-water compresses"(221). Then once she begins to recover, Homais convinces Charles to take Emma to the theater to help restore her health. Even though Charles is already in debt from giving up his patients so he could stay by Emma's bedside, he decides to take

her: "The idea of the theatre quickly germinated in Bovary's head, for he at once communicated it to his wife, who at first refused, alleging the fatigue, the worry, the expense; but for wonder, Charles did not give in, so sure he that this recreation would be good for her" (232). Charles's selfless devotion to Emma makes him sympathetic and Emma a villain because none of her decisions concern anyone but herself and her desires.

Any time throughout the novel when Emma shows an interest in Charles or decides that she wants to be a good wife, it is for herself, not Charles. For example, when the passion between Rodolphe and Emma begins to fade, and Emma begins to get bored, she decides she is going to try to love Charles. However, in trying to love Charles, she feels that he has no attractive qualities to love, which by her standards, are qualities that men in romance novels possess. Then, as if by chance, Homais, the druggist comes into town and informs the Bovary's of a new clubfoot operation that has just been discovered (184). Emma thinks if Charles can perform this surgery and be successful, his reputation and fortune would be increased. Since Emma, as a woman, can only be known through her husband's successes, she would gain more prestige as well; her motives are purely selfish.

Not only is Emma an unfaithful, manipulative wife, but she is also a neglectful mother. Berthe, Emma's daughter, comes into the world unwanted, because "[Emma] hoped for a son..." (95). From there on out, Emma uses Berthe as a convenience, only visiting and tending to her when the desire strikes: "One day Emma was suddenly seized with the desire to see her little girl, who had been put to nurse with the carpenter's wife.."(97). When Emma is sick and depressed after Rodolphe leaves, Emma who, as a mother should be selfless and exhibit unconditional love for her child, refuses to see

Berthe: "The child stretched out her arms to her mother to cling to her neck. But turning away her head, Emma said in a broken voice—'No, no! no one!'" (219-220). Near the beginning of the novel, she also pushes Berthe down in a moment of frustration after visiting a priest that does not offer her the salvation she desires: "Berthe fell at the foot of the drawers against the brass handle, cutting her cheek, which began to bleed, against it" (123). She then lies to Charles and says that Berthe fell. As she watches Berthe sleep, tired from the trauma of the fall, Emma does not feel guilty about pushing Berthe down, but thinks, "It is very strangef...] how ugly this child is!" (123). Critics who take the stance that Emma is a bad person would use Emma's lack of compassion towards her child and complete neglect of her education as a prime examples of her narcissistic behaviors. A mother who cannot love her child is viewed as emotionally frigid and void of compassion.

Emma's varying bouts with religion throughout Madame Bovary can also be interpreted as self-indulgent ploys. Many times throughout the novel Emma is suddenly stricken with the desire to become religious; not because she feels like becoming a better person, but simply because she feels like the ideal of being religious will give her something to do and extinguish the guilt she only temporarily feels for her corrupt behaviors. Essentially, Emma can be viewed as always wanting personal gain from any decision she makes. The same premise holds true for Emma's indulgences in religion. For example, when Emma first goes to the convent, as a young woman, the narrator clearly states Emma's intentions: "She wanted to get some personal profit out of things, and she rejected as useless all that did not contribute to the immediate desires of her heart, being of a temperament more sentimental than artistic, looking for emotions, not

landscapes" (38). From this passage it can be concluded that Emma does not practice religion for the right reasons, such as moral guidance and strength, but rather she practices religion only to fulfill a desire and when she becomes bored, her desire turns to something else. Another example of Emma's self-indulgent religious practices takes place as she is recovering from her depression after Rodolphe leaves. She has an ineffable experience and feels that her soul has been tortured by pride and she needs to change (226). However, instead of actually putting forth the effort to turn her life around, she just buys material possessions that make her appear to be changed and devoted: "She bought chaplets and wore amulets; she wished to have in her room, by the side of her bed, a reliquary set of emeralds that she might kiss it every evening"(226). Emma's religious whims are completely superficial; she indulges in them to fulfill her own desires and project herself as a saintly, admirable person, although her ulterior motives are solely for personal satisfaction.

Finally, Emma's inadequacy as a wife and mother are portrayed through Madame Bovary senior's opinion of Emma. Although Madame Bovary senior is portrayed as a dull, oppressive character in the novel, she also possesses practicality, which Emma lacks. Through Madame Bovary senior the reader gains an understanding of the responsibilities Emma shuns. To further support this claim, Wiedner offers "There is a touch of truth to the senior Mme. Bovary's sour observation that Emma's 'vapors' would be dissipated by vigorous work, which would take the place of aimless dreaming" (60). Of her daughter-in-law Madame Bovary senior says the following to Charles:

She wants to be forced to occupy herself with some manual labor. If she were obliged, like so many others, to earn her living, she wouldn't have these vapors,

that come from a lot of the ideas she stuffs into her head, and from the idleness in which she lives. (134)

Madame Bovary senior perceives Emma's performance as a wife and mother unsatisfactory because she is spoiled, lazy, and lives above her means.

Arguably, Emma is a deeply flawed person that neither has regard for the morals and values her society set forth, nor does she have a moral gage within herself to make her feel sincerely guilty about her deceitful and neglectful actions. Emma's behaviors can be interpreted as superficial, selfish and being incapable of sincere concern and consideration for other human beings.

While it can be argued that Emma's suicide happens because she does not want to risk her pride, feminist critics believe that Emma is more a victim of her society. These theorists argue that Emma's tragic act of taking her life is a statement against the oppressive patriarchal society of the nineteenth century. As a woman in nineteenth century society, Emma is not able to experience life. Instead, she vicariously lives through romance novels which cause her to develop idealized perceptions of reality and be susceptible to the materialistic bourgeois. To better understand Emma's mindset throughout Madame Bovary, it is important to understand the very limited life experiences Emma has before marriage.

As a young girl, Emma lost her mother. Her father, Old Rouault, the country farmer that he is, did not know how to raise a daughter so he placed her in a convent to be educated. While at the convent, Emma develops a love for romance novels and as Elise Marder in her article "Trauma, Addiction, and Temporal Bulimia in Madame Bovary" states, "substitutes literature for life" (53). At the convent, Emma reads works about Joan

of Arc, Heloise, Agnes Sorel, the beautiful Ferroniere, and Clemence Isaure, all "illustrious or unhappy women" (39). From these women, Emma may have gained her tendency to never be satisfied with life and always live to push through the gender boundaries. Flaubert also offers a description of other romantic literature Emma indulged in at the age of fifteen:

For six months, then, Emma, at fifteen years of age, made her hands dirty with books from old lending libraries. With Walter Scott, later on, she fell in love with historical eventsf.. .]She would have liked to live in some old manor-house[. . .]At this time she had a cult for Mary Stuart[. . .]She let herself glide along with Lamartine meanderings, listened to harps on lakes, to all the songs of dying swans, to the falling of the leaves, the pure virgins ascending to heaven, and the voice of the Eternal discoursing down the valleys (39-41).

From these romances, Emma is introduced to a world that is filled with symbols and formulas for desire and love. With perceptions founded in fiction, Emma is able to live without any consequences, or without feeling guilty for her actions because every object, emotion, and even abstract thought is reduced to an artificial cliché, which discloses how Flaubert felt about the romanticized bourgeoisie. Emma views the world as a romance novel, where every action is symbolic, every relationship romanticized, and every emotion dramatized. Marder asserts that "Emma's misfortunes and suffering can in large part be attributed to her unhealthy and ultimately misguided dependency on works of fiction" (52). Perhaps had Emma's mother not passed away when she was so young, her mother could have offered Emma more guidance as to what to expect from the world and how she needs to act. Instead, much of how Emma perceives herself and the world is

based on heroines in romance novels and she continually finds herself disappointed to the point of ennui and depression when her life does not meet the unrealistic expectations she has established for herself.

Once Emma comes back from the convent, she has gained knowledge, but not been able to experience and travel as men do, therefore she does not become grounded in reality. With all the fictional experience she has gained from romances, she wants something more than a country life for herself; she longs to be married and live in the city. Emma Rouault (Emma's maiden name), is first introduced through the character of Charles Bovary, a country doctor that fixes her father's broken leg. At first, to Emma, Charles is what she has been waiting for; he is her means out of the country and to a higher society. It is appropriate that the reader is first introduced to Emma through Charles because in the nineteenth-century, as scholar Elizabeth Jean Sabiston argues Emma can only experience life and be identified through her husband Charles (43). Much like the title of the novel (Madame Bovary) suggests, Emma can never be anything more than Emma Bovary, wife of Charles Bovary. She cannot break out of that role no matter how much she strives to be more than a woman and more like a man. To be the wife of Charles Bovary soon becomes boring to Emma. Marriage, what she thought would bring her joy, soon becomes a role that she would like to move beyond and as she later expresses and spends the rest of the novel trying to overcome:

Before marriage she thought herself in love; but the happiness that should have followed this love not having come, she must, she thought, have been mistaken. And Emma tried to find out what one meant exactly in life by the *words felicity, passion, rapture*, that had seemed so beautiful to her in books. (36)

Shortly after Emma realizes that her marriage to Charles is not at all what she had hoped for and finds herself bored, fate intervenes and Emma and Charles are invited to attend a ball at la Vaubyessard, where her childlike desires and romanticized perceptions are for one evening realized. This event gives her hope and encourages her in her attempt to recreate the ideal life, like those heroines experience in romances, for herself and, as scholar Elizabeth J. Sabiston argues, "completes [her] disenchantment with domestic life at Tostes" (55). Upon first entering the chateau of the Marquis d'Andervilliers, Emma is overwhelmed by the extravagant decorations and the high society that bring her fictionalized perception of the world to something tangible and real: "Emma, on entering, felt herself wrapped round by warm air, a blending of the perfume of flowers and of fine linen, of the fumes of the viands, and the odour of the truffles..." (50). Then, at dinner, sitting at the upper end of the table was the old Duke of Laverdie, "[who] had been it was said, the lover of Queen Marie Antoinettef..." He had lived in the court and slept in the bed of queens!" (51) which, according to Sabiston is an "extreme example of the glamorized decadence Flaubert mocks" (54). Emma, just being surrounded with the extravagance, associates herself with people of high rank and drives her to conclude that her ideals are possible. Then, later in the evening, after she refuses to dance with Charles because she is terribly embarrassed even to be seen with him, "she went downstairs restraining herself from running" and agrees to waltz with the Viscount (52). At first she is not confident in her ability to waltz, but the Viscount assures her that he will guide her and as they danced "a torpor seized her[...]Everyone looked at them[...]her chin bent down, and he always in the same pose[... .]That woman knew how to waltz!" (56). To Emma this way of life comes natural because she has grown so accustomed to it through

her reading. She is living her dreams and life at this point is all that she imagined. However, after the ball when her life returns back to normal and she realizes how incredibly dissatisfied with life she actually is, her desires for a frivolous life increase even more.

After the ball at la Vaubyessard, Emma seeks to make her life mean more than it does; like a person who is worthy enough to attend exquisite balls and sleep in the beds of royalty: "Her journey to Vaubyessard had made a hole in her life, like one of those great crevices that a storm will sometimes make in one night in mountains" (59). To identify herself once again with this glamorous lifestyle that she so desires, Emma lives vicariously through literature as she did at the convent. She read ladies journals that she "devoured, without skipping a word, all the accounts of first nights, races, and soirees" (61). As she read these journals, she is constantly reminded of Paris, the ball at la Vaubyessard and the Viscount, who "between him and the imaginary personages [in the journals] she made comparisons" (61). Emma waits impatiently for a hypothetical event that would perhaps give her life the experience she so craves: "But each morning, as she awoke, she hoped it would come that day[. .]she counted how many weeks there were to October, thinking that perhaps the Marquis d'Andervilliers would give another ball[. .]But all September passed without letters of visits" (66). Emma does not realize that her presence at the ball was mere chance as Marder suggests:

[. .]the marquis happened to develop an abscess in his mouth just prior to the ball; the cherries happened to be bad at Vaubyessard and good at the Bovary's farm that year, and when the marquis wants some cherries, he catches sight of Emma and decides to invite the couple to the ball. (59)

Nevertheless, due to Emma's self delusions, she must go in search of the experience to reawaken her passions because she thinks she deserves it, and thus engages in frivolous affairs.

According to feminist critics, Emma's lack of life experience has caused her to depend on vicarious experiences through literature. However, she takes these fictional experiences and applies them to the real world, which makes life nothing but a search for constant desire, sensation, and romance. Not only is the reader able to gain a sense of Emma's faulty behaviors due to her complete lack of care for her child, and her lack of consideration for others that makes her less than an admirable heroine, but the reader is also made aware of Emma's flaws through other characters' perceptions of Emma and by comparing her own behaviors to those of other characters; especially to the male characters' behaviors.

Much of the feminist analyses of Emma's suicide are based on the fact that as a woman Emma was oppressed; she was not able to experience life as fully and freely as a man and was therefore unfulfilled. Leon not only functions as Emma's lover, but also as a foil for Emma. By comparison the reader is able to see Emma's motives behind her behaviors as naive and unworldly. She wants to be free to experience life as a man, but that is not possible. Leon is able to experience things and go places Emma would like to go, but is unable to because she is a woman, and is not allowed to travel about freely due to propriety and financial dependence upon her husband. However, Emma actions do get increasingly masculine throughout the novel as she strays further and further from reality. An example of her defiant behavior occurs after Emma has grown bored with her affair with Leon and wants to go to Paris. She does not seek permission from Charles, or

explain where she is going, she just leaves. In Paris she goes to a masked ball and stays out all night. Over the course of the night, she callously compromises her reputation: she dresses like a man, in "velvet breeches[. . .]and a three-cornered hat cocked up on one side"; she dances all night to "wild tunes"; and wakes up in the morning on the steps of the theatre with men she does not know (309). Unlike Emma, once Leon becomes bored with his life, he is able to pack up and leave for Paris to pursue his passions. He feels his life is limited in Yonville, and wants to go to Paris and study law and the arts. There are many new opportunities available to him, as he thinks about his life in Paris, he thinks of all he would like to do, which in the sphere of a male of the bourgeois, the opportunities are endless: "He would lead an artists life there! He would take lessons on guitar! He would have a dressing-gown, a Basque cap, blue velvet slippers!" (125). He is able to make his own decisions and remove himself from a situation in which he is unhappy, whereas Emma, as a woman, is not free to make the decision to leave because of the society in which she exists does not afford her that opportunity.

Like Emma, Leon reads romance novels; however, he is able to separate reality from fiction, does not live with delusions and can therefore handle his responsibilities. Leon, as a man, is able to hold a job outside of the home which keeps him grounded in reality and helps him to realize that life is not to be completely led by passion; adults have to satisfy needs before wants and desires. He understands that there is a time and a place for passion and desire, however, his romantic nature surfaces during his liaison with Emma: "They were so completely lost in the possession of each other that they thought themselves in their own house, and that they would live there till death, like two spouses eternally young" (282). Although he has romantic moments during the affair

with Emma, he is practical, able to step back from the situation and able to put it in the context of reality. For example, after Emma has dug herself deep into debt she asks Leon to steal money for her from the bank he works at. Leon refuses to steal the money because he knows that realistically, there are consequences for his actions. Emma on the other hand, imagines a cliched plot sequence in a novel and thinks of Leon as her gallant lover (327). Later in their affair, Leon becomes frightened by Emma's obsessive, controlling behavior, and "what had once charmed now frightened him a little" and he begins to feel like the mistress in the relationship (300). Leon also realizes when the affair is only an affair and begins to turn lackluster as he starts to become bored. At this point he reasonably concludes that he and Emma will never have anything real and that he is getting older and time is wasting; he is "ruining himself with a married woman" (308). Instead of continuing the affair, he decides to concentrate on settling down, developing a family, and living the life that is expected of him which is the reasonable, adult decision: "Besides, he was soon to be head clerk; it was time to settle down. So he gave up his flute, exalted sentiments, and poetry; for every bourgeois in the flush of his youth, were it but for a day, a moment, has believed himself capable of immense passions, of lofty enterprises" (308), Leon has become exhausted by the romanticized lifestyle and is ready to take life seriously, an option that never crosses Emma's mind.

Emma's romanticized, distorted perception of reality also causes her to fall susceptible to Rodolphe's womanizing schemes. Had Emma had experiences with real men, other than her father and Charles, and then the Viscount, she would not be seeking a fictionalized lover. Nevertheless, Rodolphe plays right into Emma's ideologies and takes

advantage of her. William A. Johnsen in his essay "Madame Bovary: Romanticism, Modernism, and Bourgeois Style," suggests the following:

Rodolphe knows *ihfantaisies etfolies* of the women he seduces, but he also knows the structure of romantic desire. He paints her past disappointment and hopes for future bliss[...] He knows that romantics derive their dreams from books, then attempt to fulfill them in action. (847)

Rodolphe, unlike Leon, does not appreciate romance fiction, but he has read enough of it to be knowledgeable about how to use romantic ideals and language against Emma. Through Rodolphe's knowledge of romance and his insincere use of the conventions Flaubert provides even further insight into Emma's susceptibility and naivety because she is a woman with limited experience. His intentions are not to be romantic, but to manipulate Emma into having an affair with him; his interest is simply sexual. Rodolphe knows that Emma, as a woman who is married to a dull man and lives in the country, wants more and probably is influenced by the romantic ideals found in fiction; she dreams and strives for more than she has with Charles. Emma is unhappy with her current situation, longs for more, and Roldophe uses his experience with women to his advantage. Upon first meeting Emma he says, "Poor little woman! She is gaping for love like a carp after water on a kitchen table. With three words of gallantry she'd adore me, I'm sure of it" (138). After meeting Emma, as he is leaving the Bovarys', Rodolphe's first thought is how, once he has had his fun with her, will he get rid of her. At the agricultural show he then says everything Emma wants to hear in the formulaic language of romance novels and she thinks she has the ideal love with him, as those do in fiction. He tells her that fate has brought them together and with this romantic gesture "a

faintness came over her, for she recalled the Viscount who had waltzed with her at Vabyessard.. .and it seemed to her that she was again turning in the waltz under the light of the lustres on the arm of the Viscount" (156). Emma, thinking this love possible, dramatizes the moment and the passions that she has been searching for; the feelings she experienced at the ball, overtake her. However, she never realizes Rodophe's ulterior motives; therefore she is unable to realize the artificiality of the love she at first feels with Rodolphe. Rodolphe uses his experience with women, because contrary to Emma's belief, she is just like all the other women he has been with, and as Sabiston suggests, he "takes complete possession of her" (50). Nevertheless, the affair to her, at first, is everything she dreamed, much like the fairy tale night of the ball at la Vaubyessard and her waltz with the Viscount.

From a feminist perspective, Emma's limited experience results in her misconception and therefore, the events leading up to Emma's suicide can be said to be caused by an oppressive patriarchal society. Emma is not so much a weak protagonist but one who commits suicide to escape or rebel against patriarchal oppression and societal constraints. Opposed to the male perspective of the corrupted, vindictive literary women, Kate Chopin, in her nineteenth century novel The Awakening, portrays the female protagonist as sympathetic and a victim of society. Instead of being expected to settle for the life she has been given, Edna, the protagonist, needs to "free herself and exhibits "feminine regression against others that mark the possibility of independence, artistic and personal" (Higonnet 14). From a feminist perspective, Emma's rebellion against society, and her final act of rebellion in the end (her suicide) are attempts at freedom; something, that as a woman she is not able to obtain.

Marxist critics look to the materialistic bourgeois society for Emma's corruption and superficiality. Flaubert felt that one of the main catalysts of a materialistic bourgeois was romantic literature due to the fact that people felt they needed to purchase objects that symbolized and realized their ideals and emotions that they derived from books. To support this claim Eric Gans offers:

Instead of being carried along in the romantic vision of the infinite productivity of desire, Flaubert was the first writer to become aware of its poverty. Emma's world is already a consumer society where the marketplace has captured the language and the attitudes of romantic desire for its own purposes. Although Emma yearns for love more than wealth, it is her failure to resist the blandishments of the sinister merchant Lheureux that precipitates the crisis that drives her to suicide. (49)

One of the elements that perpetuates Emma downward spiral is her dependency on material wealth, like her affairs, to extinguish her passions and desires. Another male in the novel that knows of Emma's romanticized, naive nature is Lheureux, the merchant, who uses Emma's romantic disposition against her. Lheureux influences Emma to borrow money and buy stuff that he convinces her she needs, and Emma never realizes that he is not concerned with her well-being. Emma always shows her love through the giving of material possessions, that she buys with money that she does not have. She also purchases objects that realize her romantic perceptions of how situations should play out. For example, when she and Rodolphe speak of running away, she purchases a traveling cloak, trunk and bag so that it would all seem more real (208). During her liaison with Rodolphe she also buys him many silly gifts that represent her fictionalized, naive love,

in concrete substance, and thus in her mind, makes her romantic perceptions more realized:

Besides the riding-whip with its silver gilt handle, Rodolphe received a seal with the motto *Amore nel cor*, furthermore, a scarf for a muffler, and finally, a cigar case exactly like the Viscount's, that Charles had formerly picked up in the road, and that Emma had kept. These presents, however, humiliated him; he refused several; she insisted, and he ended by obeying, thinking her tyrannical and over exacting. (201)

In this passage, there is evidence that even Rodolphe, who is a very materialistic, arrogant character, thinks Emma's gifts silly and impractical. Also, near the end of the novel, when Emma becomes more desperate to bring her romantic expectations to existence, Lheureux backs Emma into a corner with all the debt that she has acquired. Lheureux has taken advantage of Emma's romantic whims up until this point when he knows that she has incurred so much debt, he cannot loan her anymore money because she has no way of repaying him. Lheureux holds the loans that Charles does not know about over Emma's head, he says, "All right! I too, I'll show your husband something" and then he "draws from his strong box the receipt for eighteen hundred francs" (312). This debt Emma has incurred is the product of her romanticized affairs and ideals, and can be interpreted by sociological critics to serve as the disillusionment that drives her to suicide.

As is made obvious by the multiple interpretations of Emma's suicide, Emma is a very controversial female heroine whose suicide can stand for any number of reasons. However, who is to say which interpretation is correct? Perhaps, Emma's suicide really

means nothing at all and she is just the victim of her author's ink; that is the way her life had to end. Or, maybe Emma's suicide is a culmination of all the previous arguments. Emma is a very complex character, who is ever changing, and can be analyzed on different levels, ranging from superficial to mentally disturbed. However, it is important to keep in mind that Emma is a literary heroine and that her suicide does not have to make sense; she is not real. As impossible as it is to truly know Flaubert's intentions for writing Madame Bovary, it is important that his opinion of the romanticized bourgeois be considered. While Emma is portrayed as a rather corrupt, narcissistic character who is not afforded the freedom of men, which leaves her very susceptible to romantic ideals and materialism, the individual interpretations for Emma's suicide do not do justice to the complex character that is Emma Bovary. Instead, the interwoven interpretations help create a more encompassing, umbrella idea, that Emma Bovary stands for everything that is wrong, in Flaubert's opinion, with society. Therefore, she should die because, as Johnsen suggests "Romanticism was by now out-of-date; thousands of bourgeois were bored with emotions they had never felt" (843). Her death was a way to end the cliché of romantic ideas and give birth to something new. What better way to end a clichéd, over-used system of symbols and desire than with a very clichéd over-used act of suicide? In lieu of Emma and other literary women's suicide of the nineteenth century Higgonet offers the following:

The difficulty or even impossibility of reaching a "correct" reading has led some to consider suicide a random phenomenon that corresponds to an infinite variety of human motivations. Women's voluntary deaths are even more difficult to read

then men's because women's autonomy is always in question and their motives always opaque (103).

As Emma's suicide was a very selfish act, not only did she leave 'loved ones' behind, it also leaves the reader feeling uneasy, without a sense of closure. It is impossible to assign meaning to a fictional character who is so very complex, yet does not declare her motives before her final act of suicide. From Emma's whims of domesticity, to her passionate affairs, to her pathetic bouts of depression, she is constantly on a pendulum; her character is inconsistent through the entire novel. However, essentialist, feminist, and sociological arguments for Emma's suicide can be supported by the novel, not one of the arguments is comprehensive of her motives.

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