The Multifaceted Construct of a Married Woman in Flaubert's Masterpiece

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the construct of a married woman in Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary in relation to her position in society, relationship with her husband, family and children, the nature of her sexual freedom, and her relationships with other men and women. It explores the feminine condition and her choice amidst issues of disempowerment in relation to patriarchal operations where the married woman links self-fulfillment to romantic ideals and passions. It attempts to re-conceptualize the context of woman and victimhood towards a re-imaging of the "female" with choice and agency despite the presence of societal "forces". By exploring the heroine's interplay with these "forces" and its relation to her choice and fate, I demonstrate that the concept of determinism is less applicable in Flaubert's masterpiece.

***Keywords**:* woman, naturalism, literature, novel, marriage, sentimentality, radicalism, gender stereotyping

1. Introduction

There is clear juxtaposition between the physical and spiritual human dimensions in Flaubert's representation of Emma as a married woman. The spiritual human facetis shown through her purity of intentions despite the sexual commoditization she experiences and her desire to make real her idealism derived from her exposure to romantic literature. The physical dimensions, on the other hand, are linked to her desire for economic comforts. The tension between the two human dimensions illustrates the complex female construct in Emma's society. The notion of female victimhood complicates Emma's case because although she exercises control and dominance in her role as a wife, she is likewise a victim of deception in her romantic and business relationships within "the masculine code, the society developed by males and in their interests, that has defined the feminine condition in a form that is now for both sexes a source of distress" (Beauvoir 2010, p.535). And although Flaubert's masterpiece, Madame Bovary, is categorized with the naturalistic genre, the concept of free will is portrayed as inherent not just among the male characters, but in Emma as well, being the radical protagonist in the narrative, demonstrating female status quo in society that goes beyond determinism within the patriarchal consciousness.

The novel's representation of the female construct as multifaceted is shown in the creation of the three characters referred to as Madame Bovary. It delineates the character of Emma as a woman different from society's expectations of the female construct. The portrayal of the three Madame Bovary characters shows that each of them has distinct experiences and roles in society. The construct of "female" in society shows how a young married woman (as portrayed by Emma, the youngest Madame Bovary) revolutionizes or transforms the outmoded female paradigm. All three women experience domestic containment with varying degrees of agency in relation to expected female roles in marriage. The three kinds of Madame Bovary characters show how the nineteenth century married women depicted in Flaubert's fiction differ from the "modern" married woman bound by conventions represented by the heroine.

2. Three Madame Bovary Characters: The Female Construct in Society and her Role in Marriage and Family

Flaubert must have a good reason for his presentation of three Madame Bovary characters. His novel suggests that within a patriarchal society, there exists an "unusual" woman like Emma, the youngest Madame Bovary, who knows her desires, owns them, and intends to act on them. It portrays her as a radical woman with unequivocal feminine desires that make her stand out as exceptionally different from the other Madame Bovary characters of the nineteenth century France. Such blatant difference is the impetus behind literary critics' attack on her "unique" characterization from the time Flaubert's fiction became available to the public and beyond.

Percy Lubbock, for instance, describes Emma a "foolish woman" who "is not much of a force" because her "impulses are wild, her emotions are thin and poor" and "she has no power of passion with which to fight the world" (2006, p.15). Mario Vargas Llosa describes her "a basically ambiguous character, in whom contrary sentiments and appetites coexist" and he cites Flaubert who writes that in Emma "one could no longer distinguish selfishness from charity, or corruption from virtue" (1994, p. 44). Leo Bersani suggests Emma's sometimes trivial behavior has led critics to underestimate her intelligence and her significance as a fictional character:

The profundity of Emma Bovary as a figure in literature has been obscured by her intellectual and psychological triviality as a "character". I would associate that profundity first of all with what may seem like a sign of her imaginative indifference to, and curious irritability over occasions which seem to realize her dreams. (1994, p. 43)

Vladimir Nabokov, on the other hand, describes Emma as "false" and "deceitful by nature" because she "deceives Charles from the very start before actually committing adultery". Nabokov suggests that Emma as a woman is vulgar because she "lives among the philistines, and she is a philistine herself" (1982, p.50). These are just some of the criticisms generated from Flaubert's novel as regards Emma's "unique" characterization. Most of the male literary critics have fixed orientations in relation to expected gender roles and relations. As a character, Emma is beyond the formula of the male code in society because she represents a betrayal of the "masculine ideal" concept of a woman. However, she is just one of the "many women [who] do not let themselves 'be themselves' except in their husbands' absence" (Beauvoir 2010, p. 525). The criticisms generated that foreground Emma's character as a married woman forthright with her romantic desires make the novel exceptional because it is able to penetrate the deepest longings of a married woman immersed in her search for fulfilment within the confines of her environment. Michael Tilby comments that Emile Zola acknowledged Madame Bovary as "the quintessential Naturalist novel" because it exhibits "three defining characteristics: the exact reproduction of life; the abolition of the conventional hero; and the concealment of the author" to suggest "Flaubert's commitment to documentation" although "Zola's descriptions are much more straightforwardly pictorial" according to Tilby(2004, p.30).

2.1 The Eldest Madame Bovary

Among the three Madame Bovary characters, the eldest Madame Bovary, Charles' mother, exemplifies the patriarchal woman serious with motherhood role and the call of martyrdom as a wife to an unloving and hostile husband. She is a wife-mother committed to female subservience and resignation to expected gender roles. Her unhappiness as a wife shifts her focus onto motherhood. It is common knowledge that through motherhood, a "woman fully achieves her physiological destiny" (Beauvoir 2010, p.337). However, when her son is of a certain age already, she still positions herself as fixated on his welfare by being unusually nurturing of him while at the same time dominating him. Her over protectiveness of Charles drives her to impose her will on him unconsciously. For instance, she forces Charles "to acquire a bookish education" at the "Lycee" and at "medical school" because she is perceived "an embittered woman who projects all her frustrated ambitions onto her son" (Peterson 1994, p.123). She also chooses a wife for Charles before he practices his profession as a country doctor, and even when Charles is already married, she is still the dominant figure in his household that upsets his wife. From the traditional male lens, the eldest Madame Bovary acquires the virtues associated with domesticity and societal feminine construct as self-sacrificing, nurturing, and anxious wife-mother to compensate for the inner vacuum and grief she feels in her own marriage. Her condition as a woman echoes Beauvoir's thoughts on how some wife-mothers play the dominant role in relation to their children:

Some mothers make themselves slaves of their offspring to compensate for the emptiness in their hearts and to punish themselves for the hostility they do not want to admit; they endlessly cultivate a morbid anxiety, they cannot bear to let their child do anything on his own; they give up all pleasure, all personal life, enabling them to assume the role of a victim; and from these sacrifices they derive the right to deny the child all independence; this renunciation is easily reconciled with a tyrannical will to domination. (2010, p.527)

Her husband, an "assistant army surgeon" (Flaubert 2009, p.3), is initially an image of authority until he is forced to leave the service due to a "conscription scandal". The hierarchical structure therefore in patriarchal relationships determines the dominant status in genders. For instance, between the mother and son, the eldest Madame Bovary is an image of a powerful female figure. However, in her relationship with her husband, the latter is the dominant partner because of his alcoholism and infidelities. He marries her and squanders the dowry he receives from her family.

"He cares nothing for his wife and is annoyed by her servile adoration" (Paris 1997, p.8). The eldest Madame Bovary is portrayed as a long suffering wife resigned in silence to her domestic role exacerbated by her dysfunctional marriage:

She had suffered so much, without complaint at first, when she saw him chasing after every slut in the village and when a score of bawdy houses had sent him back to her late at night, worn out and smelling of drink. . . Then her pride had revolted. She felt silent, swallowing down her rage in a mute stoicism that she kept up until her death. (Flaubert 2009, p.4)

There is a reversal of marital roles in the Bovary household to suggest that in real life, there are men who challenge life's problems (i.e. his dismissal from service due to corruption charges) through vices (i.e. alcoholism and marital infidelity). The novel presents the husband's flaws to suggest that although he possesses a strong personality and physical appearance with "macho" features (i.e. handsome, tall, and "a big talker" who sports a moustache and wears colorful garments), these assets are not guarantees that he live up to society's expectations as a powerful figure. There is inversion of the dominant image of men in the Bovary household. The gender role reversal puts Madame Bovary in a male position where she takes care of the family business for their survival. The result of her husband's ineptness and rejection of the expected "masculine" role in society transforms her into a "difficult whining neurotic" (2009, p.4). Her confinement to domestic role has not "guaranteed" her feminine "dignity" (Beauvoir 2010). She is perceived burdened in her assumption of the role of family breadwinner her husband is supposed to take responsibility in a patriarchal social structure. Despite her pain and stoical submission to her household situation, she emerges a woman with agency and resolve for continuity.

2.2 The Second Madame Bovary

The second Madame Bovary is Charles' first wife, forty five year old Heloise Dubuc. The eldest Madame Bovary chooses Heloise as Charles' wife because she calculates that Heloise is immensely rich and can offer her family sufficient dowry. However, Heloise is not what Madame Bovary thinks she is in relation to her "wealth". Heloise has pretended to be wealthy, ensuring her entrance into marriage even if the process involves deception. The discovery of Heloise's real economic status disappoints the eldest Madame Bovary and her husband, prompting them to confront her. Despite her shortcomings, Heloise represents the patriarchal female ideal not only because she is portrayed dependent on a man's protection, devotion, and love, but also because as a wife, she serves her husband to a point where she dominates Charles. Flaubert comments: "But his wife is master; he had to say this and not to say that in company, to fast every Friday, dress as she liked, harass at her bidding those patients who did not pay" (Flaubert 2009, p.8). She is perceived an insecure wife who nags about being neglected by Charles, a suggestion that she requires his attention. The novel implies that perhaps her insecurity is due to her unappealing beauty i.e. lots of pimples and "dry as a bone" (2009, p.8). She would imagine Charles' infidelity when he is out in his patient's house and assumes he is in love with "someone else" (2009, p.8). Heloise's need of male assurance points to her emotional dependence on Charles, but perhaps she wants him to live for her, too, as she does for him. Her need for a husband who can understand or consider her desires in her relationship with him echoes Sophia Tolstoy's deepest yearnings in her own marriage: "I live through him and for him, I demand the same thing for me" (qtd. in Beauvoir 2010, p.532). Heloise's character as the second Madame Bovary is important when juxtaposed with Emma, the third Madame Bovary, because of the clear character delineation in her image as a woman who receives, as Heloise reckons, "a good education" in the convent (Flaubert 2009, p.12) as well as her eventual transgression of boundaries in a male-centered society. The sudden death of Heloise facilitates Charles' marriage to Emma, the third Madame Bovary.

2.3 The Third Madame Bovary

The most controversial female character in the novel is Emma Rouault, the youngest among the three Madame Bovary characters. Although earlier critics consider Emma's character "foolish" (Lubbock 2006, p.15), "ambiguous" (Llosa 1994, p.44), or trivial (Bersani 1994, p43), Jonathan Culler claims that "modern feminist criticism" declines to treat Emma as "small and futile" because "the historical condition of women of her day" has shown that her problems "come less from some innate foolishness than from her situation as an imaginative woman in the province, with no occupation, deprived of the city that would give her more scope" (2002, p. 688). Her intrusion into the male sphere, however, suggests female agency and individuality.

While the first two Madame Bovary characters adhere to society's expectations of feminine roles, Emma, on the other hand, is identified for her defiance of social conventions as I will discuss in detail below.

The slant towards the physical highlights her propensity for materialism after an experience of "domestic drudgery", "fallen hopes" and "sterile virtue" that define her marriage and situation in the countryside. She longs to live in a city, like romantic Paris, and she "suffers" from her physical displacement. Bernard J. Paris comments that "there must be something in Emma's character that makes her so responsive to romantic elements in her culture" (1997, p.6). The sense of displacement paves the way for her to indulge in a shopping splurge which suggests that her materialism is an upshot of her romantic orientation i.e. her love of beautiful material goods. She reasons that the act is acceptable because she suffers from the "irregularities of the nervous system" (Flaubert 2009, p.169).

Any woman who had imposed such sacrifices on herself could be permitted a few fancies. She bought a Gothic prie-dieu, and in one month she spent fourteen francs on lemons for cleaning her nails; she wrote off to Rouen, to order a blue cashmere dress; she chose the very best scarf from Lheureux; she tied it around her waist over her dressing gown; then, with the shutters closed, and a book in her hand, she would recline on a sofa in her accoutrements. (2009, pp.99-100)

If Emma loves fancy accoutrements and indulges in extravagance beyond her financial means, it is because of her romantic ideals as suggested in the novel. The influence of romantic literature on a woman makes her less practical about living life because it blocks her impressions of the actual situation she is in. One of the "rhetorical devices" Flaubert uses in the novel suggests that he intends "to mock Emma's dreams by showing the contrast between the truth and her illusions" (Paris 1997, p.8). Paris comments that Flaubert "often lets us know in advance that Emma is out of touch with reality and is bound to be disappointed" (1997, p.8).

Flaubert shows that a woman is capable of challenging the traditional idea of marriage where a wife's "renunciation and devotion have been extolled" (Beauvoir 2010, p.532). However, in Emma's pursuit of the ideal, she chases the adventure of romance as alternative to her unhappy marriage with Charles, who ironically "idolizes her with boundless and heartwrenching tenderness" (Birken 2013, p.615). She finds her husband dull, unkempt, and unattractive, suggesting that she does not find in him an image of male power, which indicates further that she is not proud of the disposition and physical attributes of her husband. She increasingly gets "irritated with him" because he lacks table manners i.e. "after eating he cleaned his teeth with his tongue" and "in taking soup he made gurgling noise with every spoonful" (Flaubert 2009, p.37). He is also "getting fatter, the puffed out cheeks seemed to push the eyes, always small, up to the temples" (2009, p.37). Paris comments that "he is a pathetic figure who could never satisfy Emma's craving for a gallant lover, or at least a distinguished husband" (1997, p.8). Perhaps Emma is too sophisticated for Charles in that she wants a husband who is her equal, or a husband she doesn't have to develop to be her equal in intelligence and personality. The novel therefore presents a "mismatched" couple bound to clash in their perceptions on the role of husband and wife, and about marriage, as a whole. Their differences and incompatibility have already been hinted even before they get married by Emma's father as suggested in the narrative. Monsieur Rouault observes that Charles is "not quite the son-in-law he would have liked" (Flaubert 2009, p.15).

The criticisms of Emma's character by the critics quoted above can be construed as a response to a female threat to middle class male society values. Emma's character promotes individuality and is perceived as a threat to the stability of the patriarchal family structure within the society, in which in de Beauvoir's words a man "imposes his presence on woman as her supreme, one justification; by marrying her he obliges her to give herself to him completely; he does not accept the reciprocal obligation, which is to accept this gift" (2010, p.532). Her behavior with the men in her life is still, in the twenty-first century, an alien conception in society and perhaps the reason for the criticisms of her uniqueness that borders on radicalism as regards characterization. However, what the novel attempts to show literary critics is that Emma's spirituality refers to her being animated by romantic ideals for her to experience life's meaning felt through elevated moments of inner aliveness.

In comparison to the other two Madame Bovary characters, Flaubert shows that Emma is different from the patriarchal image of feminine in regard to her roles in the domestic arena and romantic relationships. For instance, as she gets gradually disappointed with Charles' lack of culture due to her passion with romantic ideals, she is also "growing difficult, capricious" (2009, p.39) so that when Charles' mother visits the couple in their house and makes a comment about keeping an eye "on the religion of their servants", Emma responds "with so angry a look and so cold a smile" (2009, p.39) that her mother-in-law stops interfering in Emma's household again. This attitude, which gets more pronounced due to her increasing frustrations about how life must be lived, is a reversal of the female image society expects from a woman:

Moreover she no longer concealed her contempt for anything or anybody, and at times she set herself to express singular opinions, finding fault with that which others approved, and approving things perverse and immoral, all of which made her husband open his eyes widely. (Flaubert 2009, pp.38-39)

Because of Emma's discontent with domestic life in the farm, she grows pale and suffers from the "palpitations of the heart". Charles decides they leave Tostes for a "change of air" (2009, p.40) in consideration of her health. With Emma's gradual transformation and agency, the novel shows that the female character contributes actively to plot structure in her interplay with the forces in society. However, from the prevailing nineteenth century construct of a woman defined within patriarchal paradigms, the concept of female as a passive entity and a "stumbling block" for male agency in the narrative extends to the early twentieth century mainstream fiction where women are reduced to "little manikin figures who never contributed actively to the plot" (Asimov 2009, p.75). Emma's character as an assertive wife is the antidote to the prevailing passive female prototype in the male-centered 19th century society.

One factor that contributes to the differences in attitude and disposition between Emma and the other Madame Bovary characters is her youth which influences the way she perceives her role in society. Flaubert's choice of a heroine in her youth signifies that she has not been burdened with experience. Young Emma is a big contrast to the nurturing eldest Madame Bovary who represents the extreme form of motherhood that extinguishes elevated emotions and the life of passion. This is perhaps the reason Emma is portrayed by Flaubert as not very fond of her daughter. She is a woman-mother unusual in her approach to parenting. Self-sacrifice is anathema to a passionate life, and Flaubert suggests that the self-sacrificing eldest Madame Bovary is a reversal to Emma's characterization. In portraying the two kinds of women-mothers, the novel shows contradictory images of womanhood: the eldest Madame Bovary with her lackluster personality, and therefore, an example of a woman who lives for others (i.e. for Charles). The other image is the youngest Madame Bovary, the woman Flaubert seems to favor because she is the embodiment of life with her focus on passion and romance.

Motherhood entails living for the family. It is a form of female servitude that demands self-sacrifice. Emma is the opposite of a nurturing mother as shown by her unique treatment of Berthé, her daughter. She is unconventional in her approach to parenting because she is detached to some extent from her daughter. For instance, when Berthé tries to reach her apron strings, Emma yells that she be left alone (Flaubert 2009, p.71). She declares though that she adores children, the source of "her consolation, her joy, her passion" (2009, p.65). Her attitude towards Berthé is perhaps a reflection of romantic disillusionment (2009, p.71) triggered by Léon's (her lover) departure to Paris or perhaps, her non-preference for a female child has not extinguished in her heart yet. She expected a boy because to her, the "idea of having a male child was like an anticipated revenge for the powerlessness of her past" (2009, p.70), which means that as a woman, she feels the parameters of patriarchal structures. Her anticipation of a baby boy makes her reflect on her retribution in society:

A man at least is free; he can explore each passion and every kingdom, conquer obstacles, feast upon the most other exotic pleasures. But a woman is continually thwarted. Both inert and yielding, against her are ranged the weakness of the flesh and the inequity of the law. Her will, like the veil strung to her bonnet, flutters in every breeze, always there is the desire urging, always the convention restraining. (Flaubert 2009, p70)

Emma recognizes the importance of a person's gender in society. To have a baby boy implies she envies the male social position because she desires what men can do in society. For her, they represent power. Society's gender stereotyping requires a woman to be "modest, unassuming, self-sacrificing, and nurturing", virtues "associated with patriarchal femininity and domesticity" (Tyson 2006, p90). Emma resists these disempowering qualities because they entail the passive confinement to domestic servitude and constraints on female agency. The choice is her exposure to romances where she determines to realize their content. Her spirituality is in her being animated with romantic idealism for a sense of meaning in her life. Flaubert comments that Emma "rejected as useless all that did not contribute to the immediate desires of her heart, being of temperament more sentimental than artistic, looking for emotions, not landscapes" (2009, 22). Flaubert shows that motherhood is not the only recourse for married women even in nineteenth century patriarchal societies. However, there are times Emma would ask the nurse to bring her daughter to her and embrace her while she declares: "I do love you, my poor little thing! I do love you!" (2009, p.139) Flaubert shows that Emma acknowledges she has a daughter who needs a mother's love, although she refuses the role of a woman mother who lives solely for her children and family, which means that although she loves her daughter, her parenting role cannot dissuade her from her other desires for self-actualization such as the experience of romantic passions to suggest spiritual expression.

In her society, motherhood is understood as a full-time concern. In her case, full time motherhood is unnecessary that is why, she employs a nurse who helps her take care of her daughter. Emma's seeming lack of idea about full-time motherhood suggests she does not have a model of a full-time mother within patriarchal patterns because her own mother died when Emma was still in the convent.

3. Emma's Childhood and Readings

Flaubert traces the formation of Emma as a young woman in the convent to her life in the farm with her father. She is released from the convent owing to her boredom with the routine of religious life so that her father takes her back to their farm at Les Bertaux. In the beginning, she enjoys managing their servants, but after a while, boredom with farm life sets in again. The monotony of farm living works as a corrosion to her imagination. The expression of her spirituality extends to her love of the humanities and arts: "dancing, geography, drawing, embroidery and playing the piano" (2009, p.13). Creative activities ignite the spark of her fertile imagination that makes her feel alive. Her interest in geography connects with her love for travel because within her is an adventurous woman who loves to explore kingdoms. Farm living implies entrapment in a fixed space and restrictions on female advancement. Also, she has no female friends she can exchange confidences with or broaden her social interaction with to escape the monotony of pastoral experience.

Emma's early education with the Catholic nuns shows that her experience with "prayers, retreats, novenas, sermons" (2009, p.30) in the convent is supposed to make her religious through the knowledge of the doctrines of the church. Instead, she fulfils her hunger for romances which appeal to her more than the doctrines. Thus, the portrayal of a woman in convent learning about romances is Flaubert's criticism of the effects of romantic literature on the imagination. In the convent, Emma is more drawn to reading romance novels or listening to an old maid who reads romantic stories and sings love songs to her and the other girls (i.e. stories about "love, lovers, sweethearts, persecuted ladies fainting in lonely pavilions… sombre forests, heartaches, vows, sobs, tears and kisses, little skiffs by moonlight, nightingales in shady grooves, 'gentlemen' brave as lions, gentle as lambs, virtuous… weeping like fountains" (2009, p. 22). The novel seems to portray a parody of female sentimentalism and nostalgia. For instance, when Emma's mother dies, she obtains a "funeral picture" that is "made with the hair of the deceased" and writes her father in Bertaux a "letter full of sad reflections on life" (after her mother's death) asking that she "be buried later on in the same grave" (2009, p.23). When the "goodman" thinks she is ill, Emma is glad to have displayed an appearance of being "pale" (200, p.23) just like the women in the romance novels. Flaubert explains:

Emma was secretly pleased that she had reached at a first attempt the rare ideal of pale lives, never attained by mediocre heart. She let herself glide along Lamartine meanderings, listened to harps on lakes, to all the songs of dying swans. The pure virgins ascending to heaven, and the voice of the Eternal discoursing down the valleys. (2009, p.23)

Her sentimentality does not stop in the convent. It extends in her marriage to Charles, discussed below, when she wants, for instance, to have "a midnight wedding with torches" (2009, p.16). The novel shows that the romantic life is her ideal life. Paskow implies that Emma's choice of readings is on romance, religion, and fashion:

Her reading, which supplies most of the reference points for her relationship to the world, comprises manuals on religious piety, classical Romantic literature, popular romantic fiction, keepsakes with engraved illustrations, and later, after marriage, the fashion magazines already mentioned (2005, p.328).

Romances highlight happy endings, but Flaubert portrays the contradictions in Emma's characterization because she is also drawn to "ill-fated women" (Flaubert 2009, p.29) with sad endings, shown in her library book subscription at age 15. The novel shows there is beauty in tragic endings that is why, Emma sees female death as romantic. It projects an image of a woman who reads to indulge in sentimental education in order to quench her heart's thirst for stereotypically romantic ideals that awake her passion for living. Leedy shares one compelling reason young women, like Emma, read romances voraciously:

[R]omance novels are read for their entertainment qualities, in and of themselves. It is fascinating to read about faraway places and high adventure. One enjoys the mystery and suspense of the novel, and the dangerous villains trying to destroy and deflower the innocent heroine. By reading the novels, one can experience exotic lands without ever leaving home. One can have different lovers, have money, sail across the ocean, and be raped by a slave, all in one adventurous sitting. It gives one the chance to do things one would never be able to do otherwise. (1985, p.69)

Men (like Monsieur Homais) dabble in intellectual activities (i.e. reading scientific journals) as suggested in Emma's male-centered society. However, Emma's interest in reading implies she is different from the other women of her time who are content merely with domestic education (i.e. housekeeping, child-rearing). The novel shows that reading is a complex activity critical to the formation of one's intelligence and perceptions of the world; therefore, a woman choose carefully what she reads because its influence may have damaging effects on her actual world, her reality. This makes the novel a reaction against romanticism and at the same time, a celebration of the human thirst for idealism amidst harsh social realities. Vinken suggests that Madame Bovary is a comment on the "false reading" of novels that results to "a false relation to the world" (2007, p.763). However, the reading of romantic novels seems for Emma a spiritual expression that enlivens her passion for the ideal experience.

Emma's early education is less effective for practical realities. Drawn to romantic books more than the Christian doctrines, Flaubert suggests she sees her importance as a woman in the world of these books. These novels have become a vehicle for her interest in objects of luxuries. For instance, despite her limited funds, she buys an expensive gift, "a rug of velvet and wool with leaves on a pale ground" (2009, p.60) for Leon. Her propensity for beautiful things is her spiritual expression for romantic ideals. So although her spirituality means being animated by romantic ideals, she acknowledges the importance of religion when she seeks the advice of a priest about her problem, a manifestation of her Christian spirituality having received her education from the Catholic nunnery. Therefore, although she is drawn to romances rather than the literature of the church, she exhibits a longing for something more to fill the void within her. Vinken writes that "Emma regularly turns to religion for what she cannot find in earthly love" (2007, p.766) suggesting the tension between the material and spiritual dimensions within her. Her attraction to romances indicates that despite her religious education she is still driven by romantic ideals.

4. Emma's Marriage and Relationship with Charles

When Charles visits Emma's house to treat her father's leg fractures, he is still married to Madame Heloise Dubuc (the second Madame Bovary). However, when the latter has died suddenly, Charles asks Emma's hand in marriage. Emma's marriage to Charles seems the answer for her release from a mundane reality in the farm. Marriage is perceived, in the nineteenth century as in the twentieth, as the "destiny that society traditionally offers women" (Beauvoir 2010, p.451). In nineteenth century France, a woman considers marriage "her only means of survival and the only justification of her existence" (2010, p. 452) perhaps because "an unmarried woman is a pariah" (2010, p. 455) in her society. Since marriage is a woman's destiny in society, Flaubert shows that Emma has to marry. Her father, too, desires her marriage to a good man. In regard to Emma's marriage to Charles, her father does not feel "sorry to be rid of his daughter" because she is "of no use to him in the house", justifying she is "too clever for farming" (2009, p.15). However, she marries Charles primarily to escape farm life, and not because he is her ideal man, but perhaps more on her idea of finally realizing in marriage her romantic desires. Her father though is unsure of Charles as a son-in law to some extent: "He did find him rather weedy and this was not exactly the son-in-law he might have wished for; but he was said to be steady. Careful with money, a clever chap, and most likely he wouldn't make too much fuss over the dowry." (2009, p. 18)

Charles has a modest income as a country doctor, but the novel's description of him as a person is one who is no match for Emma's intelligence, creativity, and energy. So between Charles and Emma, the latter has a more dominant personality. She dominates him in the area of house management. She writes letters to his patients for payments of their unpaid bills and later on secures the power of attorney to manage Charles' financial affairs. The novel shows that in a male-centered society, female agency is prominent in the household to confirm the idea of a woman's proper place in the home. However, despite a man's inferior mind as portrayed by Charles' mediocre intelligence, he is still perceived as a superior entity in society because he has a career outside the home, and he provides for the needs of his wife and daughter to suggest economic power. Charles earns his medical license only after retaking his written examinations, but his career as a country doctor is assured in his society, and it is a respectable male social position. His edge in society is also seen in his decision where to settle with his wife because he has the material means. For instance, after an elaborate wedding in Tostes, Charles observes that Emma's ennui makes her physically sick so that, in consideration of her health, Charles decides they leave for Yonville.

Charles' intellectual inadequacies, however, have become clearer to Emma when they start living together as a married couple. She finds him stupid, unromantic, and "increasingly irritating". She is disappointed with her honeymoon because she expects that they would visit "places with marvellous names", hold hands "on the terrace of a villa", or "gaze at the stars" and "talk of the future" (2009, p. 31). Her romantic expectations in marriage are not met. However, for Letwin, Emma's happiness "depends on her being able to sustain her illusions" because she "knows only her desire to 'feel love', and regards her husband" as a mechanism for "inducing this pleasure" (1997, p. 142). Letwin adds that Emma, as a "recipient of sensations" (1997, p. 142), suggests she is the kind of woman who depends on sense impressions for her to be able to feel a "kind of ecstasy that she craves" (1997, p.142). For instance, she realizes she cannot confide her innermost desires to Charles because her impression of his conversation is "as flat as any pavement" and he lacks the sensitivity and intellectual refinement she yearns in a man:

A man surely ought to know everything, ought to excel in a host of activities, ought to initiate you into the energies of passion, the refinements of life, all its mysteries. But this man knew nothing, taught nothing, desired nothing. He thought her happy; and she resented his so-solid calm, his ponderous serenity, the very happiness that she brought him. (Flaubert 2009, p. 32)

Emma's impressions of Charles suggest she compares him to a fictional romance hero: dark, strong, rich, refined in manners, intelligent, passionate, and adventurous. To her dismay, these qualities are absent in Charles. Her present reality as a married woman conflicts with her romantic aspirations. As a result, she feels an "inward detachment" in her relationship with him so that she devotes most of her time drawing, playing the piano, sewing, and writing letters to Charles' patients. Her romantic illusions blind her to Charles' devotion as a husband who loves her "immensely" (Flaubert 2009, p.33) and works hard for his family where "he showers her with all the material goods and benefits his hard-earned income can provide" (Birken 2013, p.615). However, it is clear that his love is not the kind of love Emma desires. She wants passion and the exact meaning of "the words bliss, passion, ecstasy, that had seemed to her so beautiful in the books" (Flaubert 2009, p. 24). For her, a man must excite her romantic passions. Flaubert, however, presents the parody of female romanticism when he portrays Emma struggling to recite "all the passionate verses" she knows and sing "with a sigh many a melancholy adagio" (2009, p.33) just to excite the romantic passions in Charles. She observes, however, that Charles is still neither "amorous" nor "excited", and she has not experienced the "spark" she longs to feel in her heart. So she convinces herself that "there was nothing startling about Charles's passion" (2009, p.34). This realization makes her blurt out to herself: "Oh, why, dear God, did I marry him?" (2009, p. 34). Now, she understands they are incompatible as a couple. Charles, however, takes a patriarchal view and expects his wife to be happy in fulfilling her role in the house, along the lines of his image of what their daughter will do when she grows up: "He pictured her to himself, working in the evening by their side, in the lamplight; she would be embroidering slippers for him; she would look after the house; she would fill every room with her charm and her gaiety. (2009, p.158)

Emma's question about why she married him implies that although Charles seems the answer for her boredom in Tostes, her marriage to him becomes an extension of the monotony she felt back then in the farm. Her marriage with Charles is a wrong decision because it lacks the recipe she yearns in romance novels where heroines reel with "bliss" in the "kingdom of pleasure and passion" (2009, p.46). The physical yearning for a passionate life is a manifestation of her youth, energy, and spirituality. Her frustrations grow into a "hatred" for Charles, and she "directed at him all the manifold hatred that sprung from ennui…" (2009, p. 86). Her inner turmoil indicates unmet marital expectations. Flaubert suggests that romanticism as represented by Emma cannot mix with the objective reality of Charles. A country doctor and an "artist" can't simply blend in together. Objective Charles represents Science (medicine) while subjective Emma represents romance, passion, and creative arts. A clash exists between practical realism and impractical romanticism. The two is an antithesis that cannot blend or marry in harmony. For Letwin, however, Charles's love for his wife is a "kind of illusion" for the following reasons: It is not founded on even a shred of understanding of Emma. His love lasts as long as she lives not because he has so great an insight into the uniqueness of her personality, but because his very limited imagination is easily satisfied with the stimulus provided by Emma. (1997, p. 143)

So in Emma's attempts to realize her romantic ideals, she gets only so disappointed that she turns pale, thin, and ill. A life without passion for Emma is actually a life that resembles death where all emotions are extinguished. The novel's representation of the heroine as someone who gets physically sick with her marital frustrations and situation in the countryside reveals the heroine's continued lack of fulfilment from her romantic desires.

5. Emma's Involvement with other Men

To compensate for her marital frustrations, she turns to the first man she sees in the person of Léon Dupuis whom she refers as "the only light of her life, her only hope for happiness!" (Flaubert 2009, p.99). As discussed earlier, Emma's spirituality means being animated by her romantic ideals. "When she thinks she is in love with Léon, she imagines him to be something quite different from what he is" (Letwin 1997, p. 143). Her passion for romance and the beautiful are awakened by Leon. However, her romantic expectations have been quelled yet again because Léon leaves Tostes for better opportunities:

But she was filled with lust, with rage, with hatred. That elegantly pleated dress concealed a heart in turmoil, and those lips so chaste told nothing of her torment. She was in love with Léon, and she sought her solitude, the better to take her pleasure, undistracted, in images of him. (Flaubert 2009, p.85)

The novel is a commentary of one traditional institution, marriage, through the portrayal of the heroine's receptiveness to a man other than her husband. Marriage as a church tradition expects wives to remain devoted to their husbands despite unfavorable odds. However, Flaubert seems to suggest that marriage blocks the free expression of human passions. He also shows that the religious education Emma receives in the convent is not a guarantee of a life of commitment in marriage. He suggests that resistance to permanence i.e. tradition occurs if the natural desires of man's inner self conflict with external realities. His heroine knows about marital commitment as reflected by her readings, but her fascination with romantic ideals makes her reckless in her actions. For her, life is not life at all with the absence of passion, which is perhaps Flaubert's message for humanity. Emma's search for a passionate life is also reflected in Flaubert's passionate life. Unwin claims that Flaubert as a "writer of legendary finesse could also be a man of staggering vulgarity" with his extensive "hedonistic travels" that "give a picture of an early practitioner of sexual tourism" (2004, p. 11). Unwin insists we need "to modify the view of Flaubert as the uniformly reclusive artist who spent his life in solitary aesthetic contemplation" (2004, p. 12) because "his view of life is also shot through with a sense of the grotesque, the carnal, and the physical" (2004, p. 11).

Material considerations and human passions go together. This is shown through the portrayal of the heroine who sees the importance of money to realize the passionate kind of life she longs for, and the reason she feels tormented in her struggle to make real this vision of her ideal life: "The cravings of the flesh, the yearning for money and the melancholia for passion, all were confounded in a simple sorrow" (2009, p. 86). Her inability to see her ideals in reality results in hysteria (discussed below) when she starts feeling the "nerves". And although the creation of a heroine with characteristics that symbolize the previous literary mode borders on ridicule, the novel suggests that her condition is serious. Her maid sees her sobbing to suggest her emotional woes. Emma dismisses the maid's comment by saying that it is just "nerves" where "there's no cure" (2009, p. 87). However, she thinks "she had to carry on smiling, had to hear herself always saying she was happy, had to try to look happy, let them think her happy!" (2009, p.87). The word "them" refers to her husband, her father, her mother-in-law, and the people in Tostes. The novel suggests that since society has expectations for a married woman, she has to conform somehow to how she should look on the outside despite her inner reality so as not to upset them. She is portrayed as an unhappy wife who keeps up appearances, so that her family and her society will not be distraught. Flaubert hints that society's influence can be profound sometimes because a woman, for instance, has to conform to its dictates that affect her inner self i.e. pretending to have a happy appearance. However, these social dictates seem to backfire because they lead the heroine instead to focus more on her desires and passions. She keeps quiet while still feeling the "nerves", but she seems more resolved to indulge in fantasies and desires in the name of passion: "Domestic mediocrity drove her to sumptuous fantasies, marital caresses to adulterous desires" (2009, p.86).

A middle class woman, Emma yearns for something more than her present marital reality. Her "life-pursuit" is "love" (Paskow 2005, p.328). However, "as the intimacy of their life became deeper, the greater became the gulf that separated her from him" (Flaubert 2009, p.24) to suggest her disillusionment in marriage. She keeps her thoughts to herself because she finds that her husband's "conversation" does not excite "emotion, laughter, or thought" (2009, p. 24). Paskow comments that "authentic love requires dialogue" (2005, p. 329), but Emma and Charles seldom indulge in a dialogue. Flaubert shows there is communication barrier between the couple. Emma's conversations with him do not reflect what she truly feels, that is why, she regrets her marriage to him (2009, p.26).

Her silence about her longing for a passionate marriage echoes the silence of the eldest Madame Bovary who is unwilling to disturb the family structure in society, suggesting that language from the feminist lens "is a decidedly male realm" (Murfin 1993, p. 159) in patriarchal societies.

The hierarchical binary oppositions at work in 19th century France presents the heroine as emotional or irrational. Her being emotional borders on the "hysterical" (2009, p. 168) as Flaubert describes Emma when she suffers from "cerebral fever" (2009, p. 169) that results from a rejection letter. According to Schmid, the word, "hysteria" (the noun form for "hysterical") is associated with female "madness" (1997, p. 1). Female "hysteria" is "an Irigarayan hyper-mimesis of a male economy of desire in which woman serves as the sign of difference and lack" (1997, p. 2). Hysteria is therefore related to a female frame of mind, the binary opposite of masculine mental state. To be hysterical signifies female display of emotional weakness. It is a patriarchal assumption resulting from gender stereotyping that echoes Cixous' dichotomies of language i.e. mind/heart or rational/irrational. A society where dichotomies or binary oppositions exist suggests the presence of dominance. The novel's depiction of the female protagonist shows that a woman is more predisposed to irrationality because of her passions. From feminism's binary dialectics, she is the antithesis of male rationality. An example is when Rodolphe launches his initial seduction of Emma, his calculated language puts emphasis on feelings and passions that appeal to Edna's sentimentality:

To feel what is great, to cherish what is beautiful, that is what duty is. Not to accept every one of society's conventions, with all the ignominy they inflict upon us.

So why castigate the passions? Are they not the only beautiful things there is on earth, the source of heroism, enthusiasm, poetry, music, art, of everything? (Flaubert 2009, p.115)

Aside from Rodolphe's way with words, Emma gets drawn to him because he represents the man with all the romantic frills in her readings. For instance, he owns an estate and wears garments similar to the gentlemen in her romance books. Paskow details the romantic trappings that are associated with Rodolphe: "The trappings include a chateau and certain possessions that for Emma are the signs of privileged male power: horses, carriages, whips, hunting-guns inlaid with silver, and cigars" (2005, p. 330). With him, Emma's romantic "illusions" take another form because for her, he is "a gallant cavalier who will carry her off to distant glories – to cities resplendent with domes and bridges, lemon trees and white marble cathedrals…" (Letwin 1997, 143). When Rodolphe succeeds in his attempt to seduce her, Emma is portrayed as ecstatic because she keeps saying to herself that she has acquired a lover:

'I have a lover! A lover!' savouring this idea just as if a second puberty had come upon her. At last she was to know the pleasures of love, that fever of happiness which she had despaired of. She was entering something marvellous where everything would be passion, ecstasy, delirium… (Flaubert 2009, p. 131)

Her efforts at realizing her passion and going through "delirium" and "ecstasy" signify female hysteria. Emma is subject to her romantic imagination while her lover perceives her as an object of sexual gratification. The more Emma obsesses about securing her man's love, the more her lover is turned off by her "irrationality". This female irrationality is made clear during the course of their tryst when Flaubert describes Emma as extremely sentimental towards Rodolphe because she demands that they exchange miniatures, cut off their hair for keepsakes, and give each other rings, "an actual wedding ring as a symbol of their eternal alliance" (2009, p. 137). Emma's sentimentality leads her lover to get rid of her (after he uses her) when he writes her a rejection letter telling her that he is "going away" (2009, p. 133). Her romantic escapade suggests for her a loving expression, a fascination with men of power and her dissatisfaction with Charles. Her transgression is her refusal of society's confinement of married women to mundane reality with their expected roles, and her "choice of lovers" hints of her "appropriation of the rights of the masculine sphere" (Birken 2013, p. 618) to claim power in a male-centered society.

Emma has difficulty separating her real self, the present self, from the imaginary self she is implied to have internalized from her readings. The romance novels she reads avidly have shown their influence on her behavior when she acts out their contents as demonstrated by her romantic liaisons with other men. One critic points to Emma's "inability to incorporate time into experience" or her "failure to live in time" (Marder 1997, p. 49) which suggests that her imagination is focused elsewhere instead of in reality. And when Emma feels that he starts to display signs of indifference, she becomes particularly sentimental, intensifying her expressions of tenderness towards her lover, making her feel his subjugation of her:

The humiliation of feeling her own weakness was turning into a rancour dulled by the pleasures of the flesh. It was not affection, it was like a perpetual seduction. He was subjugating her. She was almost afraid of him. (2009, p 137)

6. Reversal of Roles in Emma's Relationships with Men

The image of Emma with her sentimentality that borders on the hysterical is combined with suggestions that she possesses the traits of an assertive man. This depiction is somehow contradictory because when a woman is sentimental, we get the picture of her as passive, meaning, she waits for her man's initiative as suggested in the genre of novels Emma reads. Leedy confirms the superior status of men in romance novels: "The man is the aggressor in all matters, including sexuality. He makes the first contact with the woman, although she may be attracted to him in the first place. He can start and end a relationship and may determine the 'rules of the game'." (1985, p.43)

In romance novels, the wealthy but passive heroine lives happily in châteaux with her adventurous and strong-willed man, and they profess to each other their "undying love and life-long commitment" (Leedy 1985, p.62). Flaubert's novel, presents an image of a woman with agency and choice. This is illustrated in the heroine's offbeat rendezvous with Rodolphe, when she stealthily meets him in his chateau by trailing through the copious bushes in the garden often during the night after her husband is already asleep in bed. It is Emma who looks for ways to be with her lover, the same approach she applies to Léon whom she meets on a regular basis by travelling to Rouen. There is role reversal of a pursuer and being pursued. The actions of Emma "do get increasingly masculine throughout the novel as she strays further and further from reality" (Plemmons 2007, p. 16). Instead of being pursued by men, the heroine pursues them in the name of passion. Instead of receiving romantic declarations from her lover, it is Emma who declares that she "can't live without him", telling him that she is a "better lover" and she is his "slave" and his "concubine" as she exclaims: "You're my king, my idol! You are good! Beautiful! Intelligent! Strong!" (Flaubert 2009, p. 114) Emma's passion for romance is perhaps the reason Percy Lubbock describes her "a foolish woman, romantically inclined, in small and prosaic conditions" (qtd. in Bloom 1994, p. 14). Her sentimentalism, however, mimics the heroine in romance novels described as "nonrational, flighty, and emotional" who sheds tears at the "drop of a hat." (Leedy 1985, p. 63). As Vinken explains, Flaubert's novel highlights "the dangers of false reading, about a false relation to the world, which it illustrates by the examples of novels, among others" (2007, p. 763). Flaubert suggests that a woman is capable of ignoring society's patriarchal ideology in her active pursuit of partners, but she is captive to another false ideology, one that comes from her reading. There is tension between literary illusion, as shown by Emma's imagination, and reality, as shown by her condition in a male-centered society.

Emma's assertiveness, therefore, poses as a challenge to the ideal female construct in a patriarchal society. However, she can only be assertive because she is married and not cut out for marital love and commitment. Her assertiveness is portrayed yet again when she proposes elopement to Rodolphe. Thus, the dynamism she extends for sentimental pursuits makes her the dominant figure in her relationships with men. This echoes yet again the reversal of gender roles. Although male exploitation is involved, Emma's demands for actions that are "romantic" makes her stand out in comparison to the fictional life of passive women in the romance fiction she reads. A good example is her affair with Leon who thinks that he has become "her mistress rather than she becoming his" (Flaubert 2009, p. 226) when she goes to his hotel weekly, buys him gifts, gives him half the expense of his hotel rent, and demands that he write her poems. While Emma's demands are geared towards fulfilling her quest for romantic ideals, Paskow describes Emma's attitude towards her lovers as dictatorial: "Both Rodolphe and Léon come to feel the despotic element of her "love" and seek to distance themselves from her" (2005, p. 337). So although she is perceived as a weak female entity in society, in her romantic relationships, she is a dominant figure because she takes the role of man in her pursuit of passion. Flaubertsuggests that a woman like Emma can only be demanding in the field of romance and consumption which are somehow expressions of her individuality. Therefore, while Emma's society restricts female movement, her efforts at romance suggest the presence of female agency and autonomy.

Emma's quest for happiness also blinds her to her actual position with men who see her as merely a sex object as I will show below. Her interest in the physical and mental attributes of men is compared with the narcissism of beautiful women who "have the greatest fascination for men" because they show indifference to them (Freud qtd. in Birken 2013, p. 615). In her desperate need for self-fulfillment, she becomes blind to the real motives of the men she is involved with.

Therefore, the tension in Emma's characterization represents her refusal of society's female stereotyping while at the same time acknowledging male power in society so that she wants to be like men, indicating a woman's low status in nineteenth century France. Her desire for a male child also suggests she wants the superior position of men. In her society, it is always the men who are privileged economically and socially. If a woman is married, she depends on the income her husband receives. Emma is classified within the middle class range. However, her indulgence in conspicuous consumption and crass materialism incurs her huge debts because she splurges on luxuries for herself and her lover. Her extravagance, in particular, signifies her assumption into the male sphere because the men in her society are always perceived to have the financial capacity for material acquisition. Her huge debts, however, result from the exploitation of her limited financial understanding by the unscrupulous male merchant. She lacks knowledge in managing her husband's finances wisely because in the first place, she does not know how to control her expenses that are linked with her romantic longings. A good example is when she prepares for her supposed elopement with Rodolphe, and she orders a number of overpriced luxury items from Lheureux at inflated interest rates until her debts pile up and become too difficult for her to hide from Charles, leading their properties being sequestered by the court. The novel suggests that Emma thinks she deserves a life similar to that of the royal characters in chateaux found in her books. Leedy claims that a young woman longs for "relationships similar to those described in the [romance] novels" (1985, p. 66). Emma "takes these fictional experiences and applies them to the real world, which makes life nothing but a search for constant desire, sensation, and romance" (Plemmons 2007, p. 16).

7. The Other Powerful Male Figures in Emma's Society

Men possess economic power in Emma's society, and there are men who somehow contribute to Emma's fate. These are Lheureux, Guillaumin, Homais, and Bournisien. Lheureux represents the shrewd capitalist who knows how to manipulate his female patrons. He is the reason Emma gets deeper into debt because he introduces her to luxurious items and lures her into buying them on credit. Men like Lheureux know how to handle female weaknesses for romance and material acquisition. Paskow comments that he is "a master at exploiting the consumer potential provoked by romantic publications of his time, instructs Emma on the Parisian and upper-class connotations of his wares, while supplying her with easy credit for their purchase" (2005, p. 326). He succeeds in having Emma obtain the power of attorney over Charles's financial affairs. Lleureux uses his knowledge of Emma's affair with Léon to blackmail her. And when Emma sees him to ask for help with regard to her debts and impending court property sequestration, he refuses to listen to her pleas and slams his door in her face. Although Lleureux helps her with her material needs, he does so only for personal interest. He represents the oppressive capitalism and corruption in Emma's society.

The other man that Emma approaches is Guillaumin, the Yonville lawyer. Emma is desperate to pay off her huge debts to Lleureux because she does not want her house and other possessions sequestered by the court. Since Charles is unaware of Emma's debts, she approaches Guillaumin in an attempt to borrow money from him. However, Guillaumin takes advantage of the situation by trying to seduce Emma sexually: "He put his hand, took hers, covered it in greedy kisses, held it on his knees; and he played with his fingers very delicately, coaxing her on with many an elegant phrase" (Flaubert, 2009, p. 247). Her need for funds is sexually exploited by Guillaumin through his consideration of her exchange value as a woman. Therefore, he perceives Emma as a commodity who can offer him sexual pleasure in return for the funds she needs. But Emma uses her free will not to give in to his sexual advances. Emma's act suggests that despite her need for funds, she will not succumb to external pressures such as the sexual abuse (attempted rape) of men like Guillaumin. This also suggests that her sexuality is not for sale. As a result of this experience with men, Emma feels she wants "to do battle with them, spit in their faces, crush them all" (2009, p. 248). Despite her desperate need for money, the novel shows that Emma will not trade financial freedom for sexual manipulation which indicates further that she will not stoop too low for materialism at the expense of feminine dignity. This gesture shows that her spirituality is also in her courage to uphold her dignity and self-respect as a human being.

The third powerful man in Emma's society is Homais, the apothecary. He is a successful figure in Yonville because people rely on the medicines that he produces exclusively at his laboratory. He attracts more patients than a doctor in his area, and he considers himself an intellectual who intervenes in the activities of other people. For instance, he persuades Charles to perform an operation on Hippolyte's clubfoot for publicity. When the operation fails, he refuses to take responsibility.

Flaubert portrays Homais as a successful middle class charlatan who pursues material wealth while pretending to be interested in scientific knowledge. On the other hand, Flaubert paints a comic picture of Bournisien as a priest who advises Hippolyte to be happy in his suffering because what happens to him is God's will: "He began by pitying him for his sufferings, while exhorting him to rejoice in them, since it was the will of the Lord, and to grasp this opportunity to reconcile himself with heaven" (2009, 141). The novel makes a mockery of the church's representative through his advice – that Hippolyte reflect and beg for God's mercy and recite various prayers (2009, p. 146). This also shows Flaubert's criticism on the doctrine and tradition of the church. Bournisien implies that Hippolyte deserves his suffering because he has been neglecting his duties in the church. The priest's misreading of the church doctrine suggests the corruption of the values of the church in society, and he is portrayed satirically in the novel to show that man's suffering has nothing to do with religion but is the outcome of his choice. Flaubert presents not just the corrupt practices of capitalism in society, but also the corruption of the church through her trusted representatives.

This novel's representation of the religious suggests they are entrusted with the spiritual health of their parishioners, but they are prone to human flaws as reflected in Bournisien's inattention to Emma who approaches him in hopes of being enlightened about her problems. So although she needs guidance for her worldly passions as a result of her dissatisfaction with her marriage, her act of seeking spiritual advice from a priest as God's representative suggests a female clamor for spiritual guidance to placate an inner turmoil. The novel hints that a woman's fulfilment in life is achieved if there is less attachment to life's material dimensions and a consideration of the spiritual element to nourish and pacify the female soul. Charles's mother represents the church's voice when she advises Charles that Emma earn a living because she leads an idle life by stuffing her head with "wicked books" written against religion (2009, pp. 100-101). Through Charles's mother, Flaubert suggests that the church is against the reading of romance fiction because of the perception that it may have a role in the corruption of the soul. Charles' mother is juxtaposed with his father, who represents a detractor of the church when he hurls "insults at religious processions" (2009, 4).

Flaubert shows the disadvantages of a woman's position in her interactions with the powerful men in her society. There is irony in the presentation of these men because of the image they project to society. They are successful, recognized, and respected in society, and yet, they are greedy, selfish and corrupt. Society is blind to their falsehood. There is more emphasis on the physical, material world where men resort to deception for vested interests (particularly in the case of Lheureux, Guillaumin, and Homais). Flaubert also shows that worldly success is not always achieved through hard work and sincere efforts as has been demonstrated by male oppression in the persons of Lleureux, Guillaumin, and Homais.

Conclusion

Flaubert's Emma is a radical woman with unusual intelligence. The women in her society are destined for domestic education only, while Emma explores literature and the arts through her readings and artistic or domestic endeavors like playing the piano and managing her husband's finances. Somehow her spirituality is found in her pure intentions and expectations as a woman distracted in a materialistic western culture. Her spirituality also means being animated by her romantic ideals for a passionate life. Her quest for spiritual satisfaction, however, suggests that it is not found in the physical-material realities alone, but also in a non-physical creative fulfilment which simply does not seem to be available in her society, and certainly not available to a woman of Emma's social position.

Emma's role as a woman-mother serves asa challenge to the institution of marriage as evidenced by her impatience with domestic confinements and frustrations with marital realities. She feels being restrained in herconfined space in marriage. Her transgressions show that she has free choice and agency because she acts beyond the social mores of her society. She does not communicate her innermost feelings with her husband who considers her his property. Her husband though lives up to society's expectations of the male role as good providers that is why, Emma enjoys middle class luxuries although her financial irresponsibility and pursuit of the romantic ideals have caused her downfall. Her non-traditional approach to child-rearing i.e. hiring a nurse or sitter hints of her being a radical woman-mother in the 19th century society. This approach to child-rearing, however, implies she requires time for artistic pursuits or creative expressions such as playing the piano and reading romantic literature. She, however, professes her love for her child although she will not sacrifice her individuality for her child in her quests for self-fulfillment. Her husband, engrossed in his profession, expects her to be happy in her submission to domesticity.

To sum up, Flaubert's work conveys the reality of a disturbed human soul with its incessant quest for something more, for the spiritual. In her need for spiritual regeneration, the privileged married woman resists societal conformity in her desire for love, self-actualization, and equal opportunity with men beyond the borders of conservatism and presumptions.

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