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Francesca Montalti

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Serial Killer: Gustave Flaubert's Pro-Woman, Woman-Killing

*Madame Bovary*

by

Francesca Montalti

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2021

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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## ABSTRACT

Serial Killer: Gustave Flaubert's Pro-Woman, Woman-Killing

*Madame Bovary*

by

Francesca Montalti

Advisor: Caroline Reitz

This thesis will argue that Gustave Flaubert kills the women in *Madame Bovary*, all of whom are married and/ or mothers in the novel, in order to overtly represent the impossible conditions of womanhood and domestic life in nineteenth century France. Further, I will expose the ways in which Flaubert, through these killings, aims to release his woman characters from their lives of oppression and imprisonment, detailing their increasingly limited options in life and their lack of agency. Although Flaubert does attempt to give his women, in particular Emma Bovary, limited agency in the work, this agency is always met with scandal, suppression, and it is eventually revealed that the only alternative to this unhappy life is death. While it is easy to misunderstand Flaubert as punishing Emma throughout the work for her sexual deviance and various wrongdoings, as there is no shortage of consequences in her life, Flaubert's ultimate murder of Emma at the novel's end is quite literally her only chance at escaping her abysmal existence. This is similarly the case for the other Madame Bovarys of the work, who are equally discontented in their marriages and as mothers, and who are easily and mercifully eliminated or dismissed by Flaubert throughout the work. While I acknowledge the many interpretations of Flaubert's work, for this thesis I will be discussing Flaubert's specific treatment of women as a means of constructing a pro-woman novel.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to my dear friend Yocheved Gourarie, who always believed in me and supported me throughout my academic career and in life. Thank you for your love and encouragement.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1856, Gustave Flaubert's widely well-received *Madame Bovary*, a realistic depiction of French bourgeois life, is serialized in the *Revue de Paris* and is later recognized by literary critics as one of the first great Realist novels of French literature. Flaubert's third published work, *Madame Bovary*, is undoubtedly his most well-known, thanks in part to the controversy which surrounded its release. In a rather famous public trial, Flaubert and his publishers were tried for immorality, specifically, the offense to public morality and the offense to religious morality. In the transcripts from the trial<sup>1</sup> the charges are defined as follows, "The offense to public morality is in the lascivious paintings that I shall place before your eyes, the offense to religious morality resides in voluptuous images mingled with sacred things." (Hartendorf-Wallach 318). The paintings and images, which the prosecution references, are found throughout the text, capturing various moments in which Flaubert appears to dismiss or subvert the French nineteenth century standards by which literature, as well as life, were bound. More specifically, these scenes have to do with Flaubert's unabridged and free discussions of sex and infidelity, as well as rejections of marriage and motherhood, and the effects which these images have or could have on French society.

The Ministry of Justice's claims are predicated on the popular idea that art influences life to the same extent as life influences art. Therefore, Flaubert's novel posed a real threat to the status quo, particularly in regards to the status and treatment of women in mid-century France. Women had limited options in regards to their agency, movement in the social strata, and of course in the domestic sphere. It is easy to understand why *Madame Bovary* was flagged as a

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<sup>1</sup> Transcribed in the Second Norton Critical Edition of the text, edited by Margaret Cohen, from which I will be working for the duration of this thesis.



text which sought to undermine 'morality'. Flaubert writes Emma Bovary as a woman who rejects motherhood and her husband, and who engages in sexual behaviors and adultery as a means of acknowledging women as fundamentally oppressed. However, it is in the defense of both the work and the author that this text's true purpose, and the purpose of my own writing, reveals itself.

While arguing against these claims, Flaubert's counsel clearly defies the allegations put forth by the prosecution, not regarding the influences of life and art, but in addressing the treatment of women in the novel. Flaubert's counsel, Marie- Antoinette- Jules Sénard, Esq., states plainly:

Now, what did Mr. Gustave Flaubert mean to paint? First, an education given to a woman above the station in which she was born, as happens with us, it must be said, too often; next, the mixture of disparate elements that as a result occurs in the woman's mind, and then, when a marriage comes about that corresponds not to the education, but to the station in which the woman is born, that the author explained all the facts that occur in the situation created for her.

He shows a woman going to vice through misalliance, and from vice to the final degree of degradation and unhappiness.

Mr. Flaubert meant to paint a woman who, instead of seeking to manage in the station that is given to her by her situation and her birth; who instead of seeking to get used to the life that belonged to her, remains preoccupied with a thousand foreign ambitions drawn from an education that was too lofty for her... (Hartendorf-Wallach 339).

This argument placated the prosecutors, as the purpose of the novel is stated plainly and simply, and Flaubert and his novel won the case against them. The above excerpt allows us to understand *Madame Bovary* as a portrait of a woman for whom desiring education and betterment inevitably leads to her demise, as a direct result of the limitations of her womanhood. Flaubert's counsel states clearly that the female protagonist is discontented in her marriage, as it binds her to her station and does not allow for freedom of choice or any advancement. It is precisely her inability to accept this immobility and imprisonment that causes her downfall, a fact which allows the reader to see the limitations and injustices faced by women in nineteenth century France, as was Flaubert's ultimate goal. Flaubert's aim was not to deter women from having ambitions and recognizing their own oppression. However, he does have a very complicated relationship with the women of his novel; he serially murders his Madame Bovarys and condemns the Bovary girl child, Berthe, to misfortune and ruin. Further, he allows Emma to explore her sexuality and pursue a limited education, seemingly to condemn her for it at the novel's end. This begs the question, and introduces the purpose of this investigation, how can Madame Bovary be a pro-woman novel that kills so many of its women?

I will argue that Flaubert kills his women, all of whom are married and/ or mothers in the novel, in order to overtly represent the impossible conditions of womanhood and domestic life in nineteenth century France. Further, I will expose the ways in which Flaubert, through these killings, aims to release his woman characters from their lives of oppression and imprisonment, detailing their increasingly limited options in life and their lack of agency. Although Flaubert does attempt to give his women, in particular Emma Bovary, limited agency in the work, this agency is always met with scandal, suppression, and it is eventually revealed that the only alternative to this unhappy life is death. While it is easy to misunderstand Flaubert as punishing

Emma throughout the work for her sexual deviance and various wrongdoings, as there are no shortage of consequences in her life, Flaubert's ultimate murder of Emma at the novel's end is quite literally her only chance at escaping her abysmal existence. All of her options exhausted and backed into a corner, Emma makes one final choice in her life, which is to commit suicide by poison. It is through this choice, which also happens to be the only possible course of action left for Emma in the work, that Emma is able to truly be free from womanhood and motherhood. This is similarly the case for the other Madame Bovarys of the work, who are equally discontented in their marriages and as mothers, and who are easily and mercifully eliminated or dismissed by Flaubert throughout the work<sup>2</sup>.

While I acknowledge the many interpretations of Flaubert's work, for this thesis I will be discussing Flaubert's specific treatment of women as a means of constructing a pro-woman novel. It is first necessary to briefly discuss the conditions of women in nineteenth century France, about which Flaubert is writing and aiming to accurately represent in his work. Marriage in nineteenth century France can be understood as a system of oppression for women when looking at the Napoleonic Code, which was enacted in 1804 and reinforced many laws and restrictions for women in marriage. Although the Napoleonic code is viewed as a stepping stone for women's liberation, merging strict, old marital laws with new customs, it is clear that wives maintained limited agency and rights compared to those of their husbands. Functioning similarly to Coverture laws in England, which borrowed French verbiage to outline rules for marriage (femme covert), the Napoleonic Code ensured that women in marriages relinquished control and management of property and money to their husbands, providing very limited access for women

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that Charles' mother, the first Madame Bovary, is not killed by Flaubert in the beginning of the work, but is effectively replaced in Charles' life by Emma and only reappears to reinforce 'traditional' nineteenth century values for women and to exemplify the undesirable and limited options for women at this time.

to these assets without their husbands' consent.

Although the Napoleonic code did allow women full access to their 'movable property', this was not clearly defined and definitely did not include items of high monetary value. Interestingly, divorce was not illegal under the Napoleonic Code, although the terms for men and women varied greatly. While adultery was not grounds for divorce when committed by a man, unless the woman was brought to the house, adultery committed by a woman meant jail time and was considered a divorceable offense. Other grounds for divorce included mutual consent (but with many age stipulations and the woman's parental consent), personal injury, and either party being condemned to a severe punishment (Hicks). These main facets of the Code concerning marriage help to position the context of the novel when it comes to women, unhappy marriages, and death.

Childbirth and rearing present another significant point of the novel in Flaubert's condemnation of the conditions of and options for women. In the nineteenth century, there were many anxieties in both medical texts and popular culture surrounding mortality rates in childbirth. Childbirth was believed to be significantly more deadly for mothers than was actually the case. It was in fact not the childbirth itself but the treatment of women after birth which led to such high mortality rates, as doctors and medical professionals displayed a contempt for women's care which led to post-birth complications. This fact, coupled with unhygienic practices and a general lack of knowledge and interest in women's biology at the time, led medical professionals to often dismiss complaints by women after birth and, as a result, increased the number of deaths after childbirth due to infection or other complication (Dever). Regarding child-rearing, it was customary in nineteenth century France to send newborn children off to wet-nurses after birth, only to be returned to the home some weeks later. Flaubert exploits these

customs and anxieties in his work when detailing Emma's relationship, or lack thereof, to her own daughter and to the anxieties regarding sex for women which underscore Emma's affairs.

Related to Flaubert's dedication to an accurate representation of the conditions of women, specifically to marriage and childbirth, is Flaubert's outspoken commitment to Realism in his work; Realist literature strives to represent 'real life' as it actually occurs. Flaubert's literary Realism was also coupled with his own disillusionment and discontentment with his life. Flaubert's contentious relationship with the novel and society is detailed extensively in his letters to friends and family, particularly in correspondence with Louise Colet and his uncle Parrain. Although it is impossible to dissect each letter in this thesis, these correspondences denote the painstaking process through which Flaubert wrote *Madame Bovary*, his careful construction of character, and his tortured nature in regards to the writing process and life. Richard Terdiman cites one of Flaubert's letters when writing of the rise of symbolic resistance<sup>3</sup> in nineteenth century discourse and literature, in the wake of the French Revolution, and notes Flaubert's involvement in the movement toward social change and his use of the novel as a mode of communication. Terdiman denotes Flaubert's specific move toward irony (in *Madame Bovary*) or resigned sarcasm as evidence of the outspoken critical nature of the work and Flaubert's clear misalignment with the old form, Romanticism, and allegiance to social change in the new Realist mode. Terdiman also refers to Flaubert as being part of a new class of intellectuals, "the 'organic intellectuals', whose function was to articulate the interests and perspectives of a rising dominant class" (Terdiman 498). Expanding on Terdiman, I argue that *Madame Bovary* intends to

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<sup>3</sup> Terdiman denotes this symbolic resistance as a phenomenon in literature that occurred out of the twin revolutions of the nineteenth century, in which prominent social figures and authors opposed previously prominent modes and clung to the new, i.e. realism in place of romanticism. This new realist mode was therefore a product of this opposition and often deliberately critical of the status quo. (1985)

provoke, or at the very least promote, social change, and therefore Flaubert is an active actor in the text and in the mercifully murderous treatment of his woman characters.

The first chapter of this thesis will look at the work of prominent scholars and literary critics who contend that *Madame Bovary* aims to liberate its women and critique the oppressive norms of nineteenth century France. In doing so, I will expand upon Flaubert's outspoken commitment to a Realist narrative as well as the factors in his own life that influenced both his intentions within the work and the critical message he is conveying, I will also defend a reading of *Madame Bovary* as a pro-woman work and contend that Flaubert acts as an agent of merciful death in order to underscore his claims. Additionally, I will expand upon Flaubert's integration of psychology into his creation of character, as this allows the reader to appreciate the gravity of Emma's (and women's) suffering in nineteenth century France. Flaubert's creation of full-bodied and psychologically complex characters also functions as a key component of the Realist novel that is defined in this chapter. The second chapter of this thesis will function as a close reading of the text to evidence the claims made in the previous chapter. This section will dissect the lives and deaths of Charles' mother (Madame Bovary the first), Charles' first wife (Madame Bovary the second), Emma Bovary, and briefly look at the treatment of Berthe Bovary, Emma and Charles' daughter. I will also suggest a pattern of killing women in this section and the function of this pattern in the work, to create a murderous, pro-woman novel aiming to affect social change in post-revolution, nineteenth century France.

## Chapter 2: A Critical Review of Flaubert's Literary and Authorial Style

“Madame Bovary c’est moi.” Flaubert famously claimed, identifying with his highly controversial and revolutionary female protagonist, Emma Bovary. This statement has been long debated by literary critics, as Flaubert also proclaimed his desire to write a novel about nothing and which was completely devoid of his presence. Flaubert’s own proclamations raise many questions concerning the implications of male authorship, of female characters, and even about Flaubert’s intentions and whether or not they are significant in this work. For the purposes of this investigation, I argue that we should accept Flaubert’s invitation to view this work as a pro-woman story through an obviously murderous lens—Flaubert kills the women of the novel in order to expose the limited options for women in nineteenth century France and to ultimately free them from their oppression. It is necessary to contextualize Flaubert’s attitudes concerning Madame Bovary, as well as situate the novel and its intentions within a cultural framework in order to fully grasp Flaubert’s nuanced criticism of the conditions of womanhood in the nineteenth century.

Flaubert’s somewhat contentious and complicated relationship with his text reveals itself most clearly in his other writings, namely the letters he wrote to his colleagues and within his intimate relationships. These letters offer a window into the painstaking process by which Flaubert constructed the realistic world of his novel and the complex argument against nineteenth century norms for women. In a letter addressed to Louise Colet, in January 1852, Flaubert writes, “I am hideously worried, mortally depressed. My accursed Bovary is harrying me and driving me mad... There are moments when all this makes me wish I were dead.” (Steegmuller 300). It is precisely the use of the terminology of psychosis and death which helps to explain the homicidal quality of Flaubert’s novel while also acknowledging his identification

with the plight of its women. Flaubert's awareness of both the tragic quality of women's life, which is 'maddening', and the realization that the novel's aim, from the perspective of male author, may be a 'lethal' undertaking, allows the reader to consider and accept Flaubert as both the agent in the matricides of the novel and the importance of Flaubert's intentionality.

Before looking further into Flaubert's letters, it is first important to expand upon the implications of the male author in a pro-woman story, or any story about women. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's book, *Madwoman in the Attic*, investigates the role of male authorship and the authorship of female characters in male-dominated spheres. The chapter, "The Queen's Looking Glass: Female Creativity, Male Images of Women, and the Metaphor of Literary Paternity", specifically discusses the nature of the nineteenth century Novel as both influencing and reflecting popular culture and social mores. Further, this chapter exposes the ways in which the constraints and inaccuracies of the male gaze give birth to the unfavorable and unnatural literary woman. Gubar and Gilbert write on these phenomena, reflecting upon Anne Finch's protests against male-dominated authorship, "For it is as much from literature as from "life" that literate women learn they are 'to be dull, expected and designed...as we have seen, that the pen has been in male hands'" (80). The authors' claim here places the burden of female oppression on both society and upon popular culture (novels), which perpetuate unrealistic and limited expectations for women, but have the potential to affect change in these norms. This awareness of the power of literature, and Flaubert's involvement in the Realism movement (Terdiman), supports a reading of *Madame Bovary* as a text which, although entrenched in the trappings of male authorship, aims to, and is successful in, affecting change and challenging nineteenth century standards for women, speaking to the importance of Flaubert's intentional crafting of Emma and her supporting women. It can further be argued that Flaubert's awareness of his male



privilege underscores his desire to promote a realistic account of the oppressive existence of nineteenth century women, a breaking away from the prominent, male-crafted, and notably unrealistic literary women.

Gilbert and Gubar go on to draw the parallel between male authorship and paternity, stating, "...precisely because a writer 'fathers' his text, his literary creations (as we pointed out earlier), are his possessions, his property. Having penned them in language and thus generated them, he owns them, controls them, and encloses them on the printed page" (81). Simply, the nature of male authorship is such that any female character is necessarily robbed of her own agency, which offers some explanation of Flaubert's desire to give Emma Bovary every freedom, despite the consequences which, in his quest for a truly detached and Realist novel, Flaubert must also indulge. Flaubert therefore doubles down on his efforts to give each female character in his work a fair representation and also every allowance possible, including death. In terms of a fair representation, of course I am referring to the very real anxieties and injustices attached to being a nineteenth century wife and mother. Flaubert necessarily tracks the many pitfalls of womanhood through his Madame Bovary characters, insisting on their cyclical nature and the near impossibility of change or escape. Accepting that although Flaubert intended, and executed, a complex critique of womanhood, he did not propose a solution or resolution to the "woman problem", is crucial in accepting the murders of the women in this work as still part of their liberation. Flaubert's commitment to Realism demands the killing of his woman characters, as there is simply no alternative for Emma, after her many transgressions and social ruin, and for the other women in the work, to being oppressed and in need of liberation.

In fact, death proves to be the "saving grace" for most all of the women of this novel, especially the Madame Bovarys, as their limited options paint them into a corner from which

they can only be freed through death. It is also necessary, in accepting Flaubert's murderous tendencies as party to his sympathies, to view Flaubert's aforementioned difficulty in writing the novel as the struggle to navigate past and against his complete control over his characters and his agency as author and man. On this Gilbert and Gubar write, "A final paradox of the metaphor of literary paternity is the fact that in the same way an author both generates and imprisons his fictive creatures, he silences them by depriving them of autonomy (that is, of the power of independent speech) even as he gives them life" (26). Flaubert, in killing his women characters, literally takes away all of their agency and especially their life. However, it is in his killing that Flaubert aims to free the novel's women from their tortured existence, both in their creation (as characters) and as a result of their womanhood. Further, the killing plays out as a necessary and realistic consequence of the novel's women, as they would have no alternative means of recovering from their many transgressions.

It is also necessary to investigate the common place killing of women and mothers in nineteenth century literature in order to understand Flaubert's manipulation of this phenomenon. Ruth Bienstock Anolik discusses the necessity of matricide in nineteenth century texts, as it aids in the novel's progression and launches key themes in a given work. In her essay, *The Missing Mother: The Meanings of Maternal Absence in the Gothic Mode*, Anolik writes on the dangers of coverture and the necessary absence of the mother:

By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection, and cover she performs everything; and is therefore called in our law-French, a *feme-covert*, *foemina viro co-operta*;

...the figure of the mother exerts social control and order, providing resistance to deviance that is beneficial to society but detrimental to narrative. (26-27).

Anolik is not alone in her claims regarding nineteenth century literary women, as a number of critics situate the literary mother as a necessarily oppressive force, to other characters and to plot<sup>4</sup>. Anolik's assertions here dictate several reasons for the authorial murder of the mother in literature, not specific to *Madame Bovary*, but which can be used to aid in an understanding of Flaubert's serial killing of the wives and mothers in this work.

According to Anolik, maternal absence can free the plot of a work from many limitations. Flaubert employs this plot tactic, maternal imposition, through the constant and contentious inclusions of Charles' mother, Madame Bovary the first, in the work. This Madame Bovary inhibits Emma's actions, as Charles' mother asserts her motherly wisdom and reinstates standards of domesticity in French society, including house-keeping and dressing, out of concern for Charles' welfare. His mother is also able to influence Charles' actions, and therefore prevent him from indulging Emma's whims. In these many instances, Emma is hindered by another mother, which is particularly disturbing to her as her own mother died early in her life.

According to Anolik, Emma's own maternal absence explains her erratic behaviors while allowing for her freedom of movement. Further, citing coverture laws, the Napoleonic Code, and an analysis of *Madame Bovary* as a pro-woman story, it is possible to view Emma's murder, at the hands of Flaubert, as a kind of mercy-killing. Acknowledging all of Emma's frustrations and

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<sup>4</sup> Anolik cites the following literary critics in support of her argument, writing "In *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Nancy Armstrong suggests that the mother's surveillance within the family exerts a form of social control: to reframe this in Foucauldian terms, the mother plays the role of panopticon within the family. Carolyn Dever notes that narrative implications of this, stating that "the mother is constructed as an emblem of the safety, unity, and order that existed before the very dangerous chaos of the child's gothic plot." (27).

limitations in life, as a result of her woman and wifeness, Flaubert's killing of Emma offers the only, necessary escape from her tortured existence, apart from being outcast, a fate which would be far worse for Emma's ego. Therefore, Flaubert's killing of Emma does not stem from his own judgement of her actions, but rather his acknowledgement of her womanly imprisonment and her inability to fulfill her desires.

Flaubert's matricidal intentions can be better understood by exploring his commitment to Realism. As I have stated, Flaubert kills his literary women only after exposing the harsh realities which they must face, the unjust oppression of their whims and agencies, and the lack of alternative options in their lives. Flaubert writes in another letter to Louise Colet, "What seems beautiful to me, what I should like to write, is a book about nothing, a book dependent on nothing external, which would be held together by the strength of its style, just as the earth... a book which would have almost no subject..." (Steegmuller 300). Flaubert clearly outlines the ideal aims of his writing, and also Realism, which include an absence of authorial influence and emotion, and an accurate portrayal of real life, both of which explain the laborious process of writing the novel. As Terdiman helps explain, Flaubert is only partially successful in writing a truly Realist novel, as he also intends to represent a symbolic exposé in the writing of this work. Despite Flaubert's own admissions, *Madame Bovary* has been generally acclaimed as one of the first true Realist novels and praised for its meticulous attention to detail, as well as Flaubert's attempts to remain a detached narrator. Peter Brooks writes in his chapter "Flaubert and Madame Bovary", "This claim for Flaubert's Realism is grounded in three qualities of Madame Bovary: the novelist's choice of impersonality and impassivity, that is, his refusal to announce a position or pass a judgment in his own voice; the patient accumulation of detail that largely constitutes the narrative; and the very thematics of the novel, which show Emma Bovary's dreams in their

conflict with the real, and their defeat by it” (451). Brooks’ claims, coupled with Flaubert’s established critique of the status of women, support a reading of Flaubert as sympathetic to his characters, despite his pronounced aims to remain impersonal and absent from the work, which would be contradictory to Flaubert’s outspoken identification with the characters’ plight.

Brooks goes on to reference Flaubert’s treatment of Emma, and its effect on his readership, writing, “The absence of authorial censure of Emma, the studied refusal to make normative judgments, was deeply disturbing [to the reader]. It also explains the apparent contradiction of the exclamation by this exponent of authorial impersonality, “Madame Bovary, c’est moi!”: she is me, I am her, because he has sunk himself into her experience of the world.” (452). Simply, it is necessary to read Flaubert’s writing of Emma Bovary into many unfortunate circumstances and personal misgivings as an effort to expose the injustice done to her as a woman and to free her from that reality. In regards to Flaubert’s readership, and the previously established effect of literature and popular culture on nineteenth century life, Flaubert’s deliberate writing of Emma’s scandalous nature, for which he does not seek to punish her, proved jarring to the nineteenth century reader, as Emma’s transgressions could not be punished by the author or reader after considering her tortured existence as a woman. This sets a potentially dangerous precedent, outlined by the trial against Flaubert and his work.

Brooks also aims to soften the blow of Flaubert’s contradictions by analyzing Flaubert’s treatment of Emma through the male gaze, previously defined by Gilbert and Gubar. Despite his intention to give his characters some autonomy and freedom, Flaubert is careful not to write Emma as a full-bodied character, acknowledging the male gaze of the characters, and therefore allows her to be somewhat mysterious to both the reader and other characters in the work; freeing her to move about more with more agency and somewhat free from judgement within the

confines of the work. Brooks writes, “Emma is not wholly known, not a fully upholstered character of the sort we associate with nineteenth-century fiction. She is a bundle of details, perceptions, feelings barely held together, not so much a self as someone in search of what a self might be” (455). Brooks is of course referring to Flaubert’s detailed descriptions of Emma which are entirely written from the perspective of male characters and very limited to specific physical attributes. Further, Emma’s lovers end up deserting her when they discover her wants and wishes; the illusion of feminine imbecility is broken and they are unable to accept her for the attributes which Flaubert has ascribed to her. Acknowledging Flaubert as a male author, it becomes clear that Emma cannot ever be viewed by anything other than the male gaze. However, Flaubert’s writing of Emma through this lens is not incidental but rather a deliberate illustration of the reality of women in the patriarchal nineteenth century.

It is necessary to further explore Flaubert’s murderous treatment of his women, coupled with his revolutionary aspirations for the work by looking at his literary career and philosophies. Bernard Doering attempts to explain Flaubert’s contentious relationship with his novel and the overall contradictory nature of his work by examining Flaubert’s treatment of Romanticism. Although outspokenly opposed to the Romantic mode, it is evident that Flaubert was never able to fully detach himself from his work, and despite his meticulous attention to detail, could not realize purely objective literary Realism. Doering tracks the cynicism and sadness of Flaubert’s youth as turning him against both reality and Romanticism, noting that when his first book, *The Temptation of St. Anthony* (1849), was finished, the romantic movement was already dead and the idea to write a novel about mediocre people and mediocre circumstances was born. However, Flaubert could not help but muddy the facts he gathered for his world building. It’s no secret that Flaubert expertly incorporated realistic elements to present an accurate depiction of French

provincial life and the plight of womanhood. Despite this, as Doering points out, “Of course, all the information collected in his vast work of documentation could not be used; so he had to choose those elements which would interpret best the genius of the subject he was describing. It is precisely on this principle of choice that Flaubert's own genius fell foul of the doctrine of Realism...The word ‘significant’ means that the detail chosen must be a sign of something— and that something is the meaning recognized in the object or imposed on the object by the chooser” (3). The very idea of symbols functions contrary to the idea of Realism, and as *Madame Bovary* is loaded with symbols, and the narrative is laden with Doering’s “significance”, it is necessary to understand the dual nature of Flaubert’s work as a realistic depiction of French womanhood and an outspoken criticism of this reality.

Despite Flaubert’s “Romantic Realism” and his use of symbols, his attention to detail and efforts to portray an accurate representation of nineteenth century women’s struggles must be further explored. One device which Flaubert employs in order to expose the harsh realities and pitfalls of womanhood is his symbolic treatment of women and sex. Flaubert exacerbates the anxiety surrounding female sexuality in the nineteenth century by specifically linking sexuality and death, and sexual liberation and death in his work. Emma’s sexual fantasies, while being her undoing, are the main tool through which Flaubert awards Emma her agency and some degree of freedom. Conversely, sex, when performed by a woman in any capacity, traditionally denotes two explicitly separate connotations: the dutiful wife and mother and the improper sexual being. Emma fulfills both of these roles in the text, ineffectually, and eventually disregards the former for the latter. However, Flaubert does not aim to punish Emma for her sexual freedom, but rather signifies its impossibility for women by making each encounter unsatisfying and increasingly dangerous throughout the work. Flaubert cleverly links sex and death in this matter in order to

contradict the popular notions of maternal sex and death, emphasizing a greater ‘danger’ for his woman characters in sex for pleasure.

To expand upon traditional anxieties regarding sex and death for women in the nineteenth century, it is useful to explore Carolyn Dever’s work, *Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud: Victorian Fiction and the Anxiety of Origins*. In this book, Dever delves into the ways in which the multifaceted reality women in the nineteenth century faced influenced the literary and medical realities, almost as much as the reverse were true. That is to say, it is often the case that medical histories and “facts” regarding women inaccurately reflected the anxieties of the time instead of representing impartial truths. Of this phenomenon Dever writes:

Narratives of mortality are central to medical discourses of maternity, and these narratives negotiate the fine line between the canonization of the mother and their entanglement with the material and often horrifying implications of her embodiment. But stories of maternal mortality in medical literature retain agendas very different from—and revealing of—those belonging to fictional texts, for the death rate of mothers in the Victorian novel is elevated far beyond the mortality rates among the same population of living women during this period; it is far more dangerous to give birth in a fictional world than in any region, under any conditions, within any social class in Victorian Britain (10).

Dever goes on to describe the idea of death in childbirth as different from a medical disease and instead typically portrayed as a tragedy. Dever’s work helps to illuminate the effect which a nineteenth century novel could have on its readership and the gravity of Flaubert’s authorial choices. It is worth noting that Flaubert glosses over the one instance of childbirth which we see



in the novel, the birth of Emma's daughter Berthe. Suffice to say, Flaubert is not overly concerned with dutiful sex in marriage, which leads to childbirth, but rather sex as an avenue by which women can be liberated. Casual sex, as it is present in this work, is particularly dangerous (to the status quo) as it is extramarital and controlled by a woman, Emma. Emma is equally as discontented with motherhood and sex as Flaubert appears to be, and he subsequently allows her to explore sex in another way without passing judgement.

Many scholars regard the sex and death plot of the novel as evidence of Flaubert's primary contradictions; that is, his perceived condemnation of Emma's actions through death and his judgement-free allowances of her behavior. Flaubert's pairing of sex and death, and sex and motherhood, presents itself subtly within the narrative. Per Bjørnar Grande explores desire in *Madame Bovary* through the symbols which Flaubert posits throughout the work. Specifically, Grande looks at the links Flaubert creates between erotic symbols and a lack of sexuality, revealing the nuanced connection between motherhood and sexuality, two concepts which were previously and historically kept separate. In fact, Emma indulges in every sexual action which alienates her entirely from the idyllic nineteenth century wife and mother. Ironically, as Grande points out, the sexual symbols associated with Emma are explicitly linked to a lack of sexuality. Grande writes, "When Charles begins to visit Emma at her home (Les Bertaux), the burned-out embers prefigure a marriage that holds only meager sexuality. Likewise, the burned wedding bouquet indicates her future unhappy marriage. In contrast, bright fires from an open fireplace, one of Flaubert's more cherished symbols, seems to indicate real sexual desire, as when Emma, in her bedroom, thinks of Léon" (77). Grande goes on to break down the text and identify different symbols and their unlikely significance, however the discussion on the sexual symbols specifically is most important for this discussion. Grande posits these strange couplings to

emphasize Emma's "improper" associations between sex and womanhood and her overall inability to distinguish between the different roles in her life, or at the very least to accept them.

Another scholar, Amanda Kane Rooks, looks at Flaubert's intentionally odd pairing of sex and motherhood/womanhood and the ways in which Flaubert uses these pairings to create a nuanced argument in favor of women's (sexual) liberation. Given the nature of *Madame Bovary*, Rooks makes the claim that "the model of sanctified motherhood, surfacing time and again in various mid-century public debates, pediatric texts, and women's advice manuals on home economics and child rearing would have influenced Flaubert's construction of women's sexuality in *Madame Bovary*" (2). Rooks' conclusion supports the notion that Flaubert went to great lengths to carefully construct an historically accurate and ideologically realistic depiction of a 'romantic' Emma and, therefore, an accurate representation of the conditions for women in nineteenth century France. Rooks goes on to specifically reference the sexual symbols, in relation to Emma, and as defined by Grande, as subtly subverting the domestic, matronly standards established in this text. Rooks uses these mispairings to draw attention to Flaubert's careful association between motherhood and sexuality. Rooks writes:

A number of scholars note the particular contrast between Emma's apparent lack of maternal instinct towards her own child and her dramatic bestowment of maternal affections towards her lover Léon. If Emma fails to fulfill her duty as mother to her child, she proves herself able to conform to society's expectations of maternal nurture via her sexual relationship with Léon: 'She showered him with every sort of attention...she was worried about his health, advised him how he should behave...she inquired like a virtuous mother about his companions'." (3)

Rooks' observation is significant in that it aids in the understanding of Emma's rejection of her only child, Berthe, while absolving her of some culpability of her rejection. It is not so much that Emma lacks the capability to be maternal, it is simply the case that Flaubert allows Emma to express herself toward whomever she chooses and in whatever mode. It is evident that Emma was never particularly interested in having a child and even more resigned upon discovering that it would be a girl; she faints. Therefore, Emma makes the conscious effort to funnel her misguided maternal instincts into her lover, avoiding her daughter almost entirely. Similarly related to her marriage, Berthe is the only example of a moment in the text in which the reader can understand that Emma and Charles have a sexually intimate relationship, at least once. Despite this fact, Flaubert urges us to conclude that Emma and Charles' intimacy is as a result of obligation (to produce children) rather than free sexual expression, supported by Emma's general distaste and abhorrence of Charles, and representing another example of Flaubert's subtle depiction of women's lack of agency and suppression of desire in marriage.

Expanding upon Rooks' conclusion, as well as many other critics', that Flaubert incorporated numerous real-life elements into his construction of both Emma and the world of the novel, it is a useful practice to explore the references which Flaubert has included in *Madame Bovary*, including those which Emma has clearly been affected by but are not explicitly stated in the work. Ashley Hope Perez explores Flaubert's treatment of other authors and fiction, specifically related to Flaubert's critique of Romanticism, and further related to his own desires to write an unromantic text. Perez writes, "In this reading history, the narrator [Flaubert] names only *Paul et Virginie*, but he assures us that she has read plenty of trash, for 'pendant six mois, à quinze ans, Emma se graissa donc les mains à cette poussière des vieux cabinets de lecture' [for six months, at the age of fifteen, Emma greased her hands with this dust from old reading

rooms]” (33). Perez goes on to explain that *Paul et Virgine* represents the popularity and sentimentality associated with the romantic and revolutionary texts that Emma has and would have read. Coupled with Flaubert’s association of this author with “other trash works”, Perez cements this criticism of Emma’s reading habits as indicating Flaubert’s disdain for the Romantic and his own ambitions toward objective Realism.

Perez also discusses Flaubert’s expansive inclusion of other media in the sixth chapter of *Madame Bovary*, from which the Paul et Virgine reference emanates. This chapter focuses on a history of Emma’s childhood, her various, romantic obsessions and infatuations, and her morphed perception of reality. The passage in question reads,

She knew by heart the love songs of the last century, and sang them in a low voice as she stitched away. She told stories, gave them news, ran their errands in the town, and on the sly lent the big girls some of the novels, that she always carried in the pockets of her apron, and of which the lady herself swallowed long chapters in the intervals of her work. They were all about love, lovers, sweethearts, persecuted ladies fainting in lonely pavilions, postilions killed at every relay, horses ridden to death on every page, somber forests, heart-aches, vows, sobs, tears and kisses, little boat rides by moonlight, nightingales in shady groves, gentlemen brave as lions, gentle as lambs, virtuous as no one ever was, always well dressed, and weeping like fountains...

At this point she had a cult for Mary Stewart and enthusiastic veneration for illustrious or unhappy women. Joan of Arc, H el oise, Agn es Sorel, the beautiful Ferroniere, and Cl emence Isaure stood out to her like comets in the dark of history...

...the ballads she sang were all about little angels with golden wings, madonnas, lagunes, gondoliers; harmless-sounding compositions that, in spite of the inanity of the

style and the vagueness of melody, enabled one to catch a glimpse of the tantalizing phantasmagoria of sentimental realities. (32-33)

Though not explicitly stated, Flaubert makes his ridicule of the sentimental songs and writings which Emma shares with her peers abundantly clear, and their influence on young women in particular as detrimental to their progression into adulthood. Further, Flaubert deepens his critique of the media Emma consumes by remarking on the material that she sings, as noted by Perez when he writes, “Flaubert’s attitude toward these stories and songs - even before he satirizes them so scathingly - is already apparent in the construction that precedes each catalogue, the dismissive ‘netaient que’” (33).

Bernard J. Paris similarly investigates the implications of Flaubert’s inclusion of real-life influences in Emma’s life, expanding this literary device outside of the realm of criticism and into a deeper understanding of the realistic psychology behind Emma’s character and her behaviors. Flaubert discusses the literature and songs which Emma consumes in her childhood as only a fragment of an explanation for her whims and behaviors, citing religious institutions and a broader understanding of the social strata. In his book, *Imagined Human Beings: A Psychological Approach to Character and Conflict in Literature*, Paris discusses the psychological influences, such as those of Horney and Giles Mitchell, in order to establish Emma’s temperament as the true cause of her demise, and not her material obsessions and romantic misgivings. Additionally, Paris cites Emma’s ‘psychology’ as having a direct effect on her monetary indulgences and romantic affairs, all of which stem from her apparent narcissism. Citing Mitchell’s analysis of Emma’s “pathological narcissism”, Paris writes,

Nonetheless, I think Mitchell is correct in saying that Emma's destructive ‘ideals’ are not

just caused by her reading. Flaubert's detailed description of the influences to which she is exposed during her stay in the convent leaves us with the impression that her romanticism is the product of these influences and that her frustration results from the contrast between the bourgeois existence to which she is destined and the unrealistic expectations that have been fostered by the 'tantalizing phantasmagoria of sentimental realities' (I, vi) to which she has been exposed. (194)

It is here that Paris uses psychology to explain Emma's disastrous actions and various obsessions, positing Flaubert's hyper-awareness of both the influences to which Emma would have been exposed and her resulting state of mind as enhancing the realistic reading of Emma's character and also her plight as a woman in nineteenth century France.

Paris goes on to define this evident narcissism as "a reactive rather than a primary phenomenon" (194), relating Emma's narcissism to her discontentment with her life and limitations, and her subsequent inability to accept the conditions set out for her as a woman. This analysis of Emma's psychology also aids in a reading of *Madame Bovary* as a work which explicitly aims to critique nineteenth century French womanhood, which may very well be the most prominent and consistent theme throughout the work. It is impossible to deny Emma's disillusionment with her life, love, and passion. However, ascribing Emma a realistic psychological diagnosis aids in the understanding of Emma's outrageous behaviors and enhances a reading of her character as sympathetic (by Flaubert) rather than contentious. Flaubert would also have been aware of the globally changing psychological landscape of the nineteenth century, and it is clear that he utilized this perspective in his construction of a self-destructive and sympathetic character. It is also precisely through this reading that we can understand why Emma clings to her unrealistic ideals until her death, as she is not driven to actualize her desires

but rather hold onto them throughout her various disappointments. Paris goes as far as emphasizing Emma's own mother's death as a stepping stone in Emma's narcissism, as she believes that her excessive displays of grief elevate her to her true glory, and she experiences her first great disappointment and turning away from religion when this effect wears off.

Another element of society which Emma would have consumed in excess, seemingly as a result of her narcissism, and which Flaubert makes various allusions to through Monsieur Lheureux and the clothing in *Madame Bovary*, is fashion and clothing. Clothing and fashion operated as a clear indicator of social status and respectability in nineteenth century France, particularly concerning women. Accompanying the marked rise of the New Woman were various shifts in the workforce for women and an ever-changing landscape of respectability and social advancement, an always contentious relationship. Flaubert makes use of his social awareness and efforts toward Realism by positing women's fashion as a subtle and consistent avenue for agency for Emma in the work, as he does not limit her access or consumption of the material, even at the cost of her financial ruin. Emma's consumption of fashion, unbridled by Flaubert, is however complicated by Monsieur Lheureux, who acts as an agent of temptation in the novel, constantly persuading Emma to make new purchases, presenting her with the newest fabrics and fashions from Paris, and writing Emma further and further into debt.

Emma's whirlwind interactions and transactions between herself and Monsieur Lheureux can be expanded upon by looking further into Flaubert's nineteenth-century French references and understanding these influences by accepting Emma's apparent narcissism. Marie Lathers writes about the world of fashion in her essay, "The Social Construction and Deconstruction of the Female Model in 19th-Century France". Lathers asserts that the professional female model was invented in nineteenth century France, a kind of New Woman, and the rise and fall of the

model can be traced through the French academy (ruling art school) and professional agencies. Although this phenomenon can be tracked, Lathers also writes, “The very heightened awareness of and attention paid to the female model in the 1880s, however, also paradoxically signaled her ultimate demise: once a ‘model type’ was established as such, she began to disappear” (28). Essentially, Lathers notes that in the fashion and modelling world, trends fell as quickly as they rose, as working-class women competed for more lucrative positions within the growing industry and within their limited means (small amount of opportunities for working women), as many of them ended up as prostitutes and alcoholics. Lathers also discusses the surge in Italian immigration, as they were favored as models, therefore encouraging the spread of fashion and fashion imagery as well as a fast-paced air of competition and contention. The fast-paced world of fashion, as a means of consumption and an avenue into the workforce for women, offers a lens through which the reader can understand the impossibility of a woman’s existence; that is to say, the endless opportunities for failure over success and the trappings of impropriety which aimed to bind women to an unrealistic and unreasonably unattainable standard.

By the end of the century, Lathers notes that, “...the Parisian model - the ‘new woman’ of the atelier - was characterized as a degenerate, the symptom of a race that owed its decline to a nefarious mixing of races and an aged civilization. This model constituted one version of the Parisienne, a catch-all term for the modern woman...” (36). The use of the term “modern woman” and this derogatory association with prostitution and racial anxieties offers another lens through which we can understand Emma’s need to keep up with the changing trends and her desire to maintain a high-class appearance, which would, in her mind, elevate her above her meager station in life, a desire which Emma often expresses in the text. This is particularly evident in the novel when editor Margret Cohen, in the Second Norton Critical Edition of



*Madame Bovary*, includes images of the ladies' fashion to which Emma would have been exposed and aiming to emulate when attending a French ball. Cohen incorporates into the text a picture captioned, "Fashion plate of women in ball gowns, from a German edition of *La Mode* (1846). Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Note the resemblance to Emma's toilette described on pages 42-44." (43). Cohen includes this approximate image in order to enhance Flaubert's reference work in the novel and to give the reader a sense of the high-fashion which Emma strives to imitate. Cohen similarly includes an image on page 39 depicting the "greyhound as ornament of the fashionable lady... Though this plate appeared in an English publication, it indicates the fashions Emma would be following, since England, like the French provinces... looked to Paris as the capital of fashion." This image also supports Lathers explanation of the wide-reaching and fast-paced world of French fashion in the nineteenth century, which Flaubert asserts that Emma would have been consuming and always seeking out. Flaubert makes use of fashion and clothing in the work to incorporate the concept of the New Woman and its various trappings, exemplified by Emma's unbridled consumption of high fashion and her inability to achieve social advancement, a cyclical misfortune which symbolizes the social conditions and subjugation of women in nineteenth century France.

### Chapter 3: The Serial Killing of Women in *Madame Bovary*

Alex Woloch's theory on the importance of the minor character is useful in introducing the analysis of the intentional and serial killing of women in Flaubert's work that is to follow. Woloch argues for the significance of secondary characters in Realist fiction as they are always inexplicably tied to key themes and of course other characters in a work. Woloch describes the positioning of secondary characters and their relationship to the narrative as defined by two categories, "the *character-space* (that particular and charged encounter between an individual human personality and a determined space and position within the narrative as a whole) and the *character-system* (the arrangement of multiple and differentiated character-spaces—differentiated configurations and manipulations of the human figure—into a unified narrative structure)" (14). Stated simply, both the relationship of secondary characters to other characters and the strategic positioning of characters in a work function together to inform major themes in a work. In *Madame Bovary*, the presence of otherwise insignificant, according to their limited presence, characters at the start of the novel prove necessary in establishing a pattern of woman-killing in the work, which is linked to Flaubert's critique of nineteenth century French womanhood.

The three background characters that help illustrate Flaubert's critique and murderous motif are the first two Madame Bovary's and little Berthe. The initial Madame Bovary, Charles' mother, consumes part of the first chapter of the work, only to be pushed into the background by Flaubert, as she represents unattainable standards of domesticity and marital mistreatment. The second Madame Bovary, Charles' first wife, is similarly scorned in both her first and second marriage, the pain of which ultimately causes her death. Berthe, the neglected girl-child of Emma Bovary, represents the final and cyclical violence of the life of a nineteenth century

woman; Emma, our central character, presents the most detailed account of unfortunate womanhood and wifehood. However, her story is muddled up with other capitalist pitfalls and romantic notions, all of which tempt the reader to pass judgement upon her as Flaubert tries to prevent. Emma still represents this feminist criticism, and her narrative will be investigated further in this thesis, but the case is made stronger by initially establishing Flaubert's repeated killing of his secondary female characters. Woloch makes this circumstance most clear when he writes, "Secondary characters—representing delimited extremes—*become* allegorical, and this allegory is directed toward a singular being, the protagonist, who stands at the center of the text's symbolic structure, or what Giamatti calls 'the single and abiding visionary core'" (18). While Emma is at the center of the text, it would be irresponsible to overlook these minor characters as the multiple Madame Bovarys provide an allegory for her limited options and entrapment.

Flaubert sets the tone of his novel and introduces his first major critique of the status of nineteenth century married women in the very first chapter of his work. The text opens with an in-depth description of the upbringing and family dynamics of Charles Bovary, despite the title of the work. Bovary's trajectory is followed closely, as the reader watches him progress from wild-child on the farm to student in the city and, eventually, doctor of medicine. Flaubert makes sure to note, however, after the introduction of yet another male character, Charles's father, the injustices suffered by Charles's mother throughout her marriage. Flaubert describes Madame Bovary senior as, "Lively once, expansive and affectionate, in growing older she had become (after the fashion of wine that, exposed to air, turns to vinegar) ill-tempered, grumbling, irritable. She had suffered so much without complaint at first, when she had seen him going after all the village Harlots...then her pride revolted. After that she was silent, burying her anger in a dumb stoicism that she maintained till her death" (9). Flaubert does not attempt to be subtle in outlining

the increasingly unfortunate and unjust marriage of Madame Bovary the first, although his description of her is rather harsh, highlighting her ill-temperament before expanding upon her husband's wrongdoings. It is in this initial introduction of the many Madame Bovarys that Flaubert's complicated critique reveals itself.

That is, although Madame Bovary is mistreated by no fault of her own, she is redeemed by maintaining the house and suffering in silence. While it is evident that marriage is what causes Madame Bovary to suffer, it is also clear that her duties as a good wife and mother must come above all else, especially her happiness, which Flaubert is attempting to establish at this moment. It is further important to note that beyond this chapter, Madame Bovary the first only reappears within the text to oppressively mother Charles, to try to fix his household, and to continually criticize his wife Emma. Madame Bovary the first therefore reinforces the notion set forth by the role of the mother in nineteenth century texts as functioning to establish order and limit another character's mobility, in this case, Emma's. It is precisely Charles' mother's goal, in inserting herself into her son's marriage and household, to frantically attempt to maintain control of her only child, as Flaubert asserts that motherhood proves to be her only significant function in the work and in her life. As Anolik states in her description of motherhood in the gothic mode, "A number of critics note that the figure of the mother exerts social control and order, providing the resistance to deviance that is beneficial to society but detrimental to narrative" (27). This same notion of motherhood is present in Flaubert's text and helps to expose the oppressive quality of the narrative and the impossibility of the existence of the mother in this framework. This allows us to analyze Charles' mother's swift dismissal and oppressive reprisals as the first continuous matricide in the text, of course paving the way for the second Madame Bovary.

Flaubert wastes no time in introducing the second Madame Bovary, whom he responds to

even less favorably than the first. In trying to ensure his happiness, Charles' mother introduces him to Madame Dubac, a forty-five-year-old widow who was "ugly, as dry as a bone, her face with as many pimples as the spring has buds..." (13). Despite this unflattering description, Flaubert reminds us of the glorified idea of marriage, contrasted with its harsh realities, writing, "Charles had seen in marriage the advent of an easier life, thinking he would be more free to do what he liked with himself and his money. But his wife was master; he had to say this and not say that in company, to fast every Friday, dress as she liked...She opened his letters, watched his comings and goings, and listened at the partition wall when women came to consult him in his surgery" (13). Although marriage is miserable for the husband in this instance, it is no less as a result of the wrongdoings of his wife. She is too needy, too ill, too demanding, and therefore must be swiftly eliminated from the text. Flaubert immediately follows this unfavorable assessment with a double serving of Madame Bovary, both one and two, and their antagonistic natures as women. Flaubert describes a visit from Charles' mother as sparking chaos in his home at Tostes, as the two wives shower Charles in criticisms and demands. It is mere paragraphs away that Charles is forced to defend his wife from his mother in another blowout, and in the next, Madame Bovary the second is dead. Flaubert describes this sudden death as "the blow had struck home", and thus concludes the second matricide in this work, ultimately the fault of Charles' mother's futile attempts at her own survival (as mother). While Charles' mother is immediately responsible for the second Madame Bovary's passing, it is only as a result of the trappings of motherhood and her dismissal by her own husband that she must eliminate her competition in order to survive. And her victory over Charles' first wife permits her a prolonged presence in the novel, not afforded to other woman-characters.

The second section of this work promptly introduces the third and final Madame Bovary

in this text, Emma. Emma is strictly described by Flaubert through a male gaze, whichever male character happens to be seeing her. Charles discovers Emma on a house call to treat her ailing father, at which point her mother has already been dead for a long time, another signifier of the necessary absence of the mother figure. Flaubert describes Emma as follows, “Charles was surprised at the whiteness of her nails. They were shiny, delicate at the tips, more polished than the ivory of Dieppe, and almond shaped. Yet her hands were not beautiful, perhaps not white enough, and a little rough at the knuckles... her real beauty was in her eyes” (16). This description is particularly important as it sets two precedents for the text: the removal of the author’s own voice and the depiction of Emma as an object of lust for the men in the novel. This both furthers Flaubert’s critical approach to the subject of women and reflects upon the issue of male authorship and writing women. Despite his later depictions of Emma as an unfavorable character, Flaubert is saved by his dedicated removal of his own opinions of her, as defined by his commitment to a realistic depiction of nineteenth century womanhood.

Promptly following our introduction to Madame Bovary the third, Flaubert marries his protagonist to Charles and tackles the novel’s many themes through her misdeeds: a critique on Romanticism, capitalism, womanhood, and marriage, although the last two will be most important for the continued focus of this thesis. These themes are perhaps most explicitly revealed when Flaubert writes, “Before marriage, she thought herself in love; but since the happiness that should have followed failed to come, she must, she thought, have been mistaken. And Emma tried to find out what one meant exactly in life by the words bliss, passion, ecstasy, that had seemed to her so beautiful in books” (30). It is clear from the very beginning of her marriage that Emma will not make a good wife, as she hesitates to give herself to her husband completely and to love him, for want of an unrealistic idea of love. Emma’s displeasure with her

husband as well as her new life only grows, blossoming into her many corruptions and ultimately her demise. Despite this obvious interpretation of Emma's character which Flaubert posits in this work, it is also true of this text that Emma is blatantly mistreated in her marriage, simply because she is a woman. What she lacks in freedom, of sexuality and movement, she more than makes up for in insubordination, actions for which she is not judged within the world of the novel.

Despite Emma's obvious displeasure, she initially plays the role of housewife fairly well. Flaubert writes, "Emma, on the other hand, knew how to look after her house. She sent the patients' accounts in well-phrased letters that had no suggestion of a bill. When they had a neighbor to dinner on Sundays, she managed to have some tasty dish, knew how to pile the plums in pyramids on vine-leaves, how to serve jam turned out on a plate...Charles finished by rising in his own esteem for possessing such a wife" (36). Emma's ability to perform as wife, and Charles' interest in showing her off, is another critical component of Flaubert's critique of nineteenth century marriage and his overall sympathetic approach to Emma. Emma is obliged to be a good wife and to uphold every domestic standard while her husband is completely ignorant to her suffering. It then follows that Flaubert allows Emma to depart from her domestic duties to grant her some agency and autonomy. However, in regards to Emma's untimely death, it is clear she must ultimately be punished, as is a realistic consequence of her world, for her infractions. Thus begins the contentious relationship between Emma's sexual freedom and her marital obligations.

Although I have yet to investigate the role of our final mis-leading lady Berthe, another secondary and significant female-character dismissal, I think it necessary to continue following the narrative of *Madame Bovary* in sequence, as this will allow me to best track Flaubert's presentation of Emma and the contradictory necessity of her own demise, as well as establish the

endless trappings of nineteenth century womanhood which Flaubert is daring to expose and rally the reader against. Not long into Charles and Emma's marriage, and as her romantic notions of love quickly began to devolve, Emma can no longer endure her suffering in silence. Flaubert describes this shift as follows:

She now let everybody in her household go its own way, and the elder Madame Bovary, when she came to spend part of Lent at Tostes, was much surprised at the change. She who was formerly so careful, so dainty, now spent whole days without dressing, wore grey cotton stockings, and used tallow candles to light the house. She kept saying they must be economical since they were not rich, adding that she was very contented, very happy, that Tostes pleased her very much, and other such statements that left her mother in law speechless. Besides, Emma no longer seemed inclined to follow her advice; on one occasion, when Madame Bovary had thought fit to maintain that masters ought to keep an eye on the religion of their servants, she had answered with a look so angry and a smile so cold that the old lady preferred to let the matter drop. (56)

This passage is particularly illuminating as it exposes Flaubert's multifaceted, proto-feminist critique while also underscoring the necessity of the removal of the mother, foreshadowing of course Emma's own dismissal. Emma clearly forgoes her duties as wife in this passage, exemplified by her unwillingness to rule over her household and even her disinterest in presenting herself well. In analyzing her supposed preoccupation with their financial situation and apparent disinterest in clothing and material goods, it becomes clear that the novel cannot be reduced solely to a capitalist critique, done by introducing key components of the nineteenth century New Woman; she desires control of her own finances and assets and displays interest in



social mobility and advancement, all of which necessarily threaten the patriarchal standard and therefore must be suppressed.

Moreover, Flaubert's interjection of Madame Bovary the first in this moment particularly exposes her constricting nature, which is of course ignored by Emma, and the unfavorable role which she assumes, that of order and structure—a true good wife and mother by nineteenth century standards. Despite Flaubert's constant assertions that Charles' only wrongdoing is his ignorance, it is Emma whom we are conditioned to pity, as she has been forced to assume a role which provides her no agency or free will, apart from home redecoration and lording over her servants. Of course, neither Charles nor his mother is directly to blame for Emma's suffering; it is in fact the nature of marriage and domesticity itself which causes Emma to be unfairly scrutinized and what drives her to commit her sins.

Although Emma is all but entirely resigned in her marriage, she does find some solace and freedom in pursuing an extramarital affair with Léon. Although this begins as just a fantasy, Emma watching his comings and goings from the confines of her bedroom, Flaubert makes clear that this fantasy, much like her marriage, is something which Emma will pursue and which will eventually fail to satisfy her. Naturally, the consequences of Emma's affairs are not stated so explicitly, but Flaubert is sure to follow Emma's sexual deviance with an abrupt return to reality and her household duties; Emma learns that she is pregnant to her ultimate dismay. For Charles, this news is seen as a blessing and something which would deepen his perception of the love between them. For Emma however, the news brings a mixture of complicated feelings. Flaubert writes:

Emma at first felt a great astonishment; then was anxious to be delivered that she might know what it felt like to be a mother. But not being able to spend as much as she liked on

a suspended cradle with rose silk curtains, and embroidered caps, in a fit of bitterness she gave up looking for the layette altogether and had it all made by the village seamstress, without choosing or discussing anything.

Thus she did not amuse herself with those preparations that stimulate the tenderness of mothers, and so her affection was perhaps impaired from the start...

She hoped for a son; he would be strong and dark; she would call him George; and this idea of having a male child was like an expected revenge for all of her impotence in the past. A man, at least, is free; he can explore all passions and all countries, overcome obstacles, taste of the most distant pleasures. But a woman is always hampered. Being inert as well as pliable, she has against her the weakness of the flesh and the inequity of the law. (74)

This passage presents the first concrete assertion by Flaubert of the pro-woman quality of this work; his necessary assertion that Emma, and women, do not and cannot always celebrate motherhood, but are often in fact burdened and limited by the introduction of a child, starkly contrasting the narrative of natural mother-child bonding and fulfillment.

Given the Realist nature of the work, the line of thought in the passage comes from Emma's mind, as Flaubert aims to remove his own voice from the work. However, given the nature of authorship as outlined by Gilbert and Gubar, Flaubert's gaze and projections cannot be wholly removed from his female characters. Moreover, Flaubert's calculated introduction and removal of the first two Madame Bovarys in this work aid in establishing his active role in the deaths of his characters and the critical function of these killings, an exposure of the limited options for women, especially married women, in nineteenth century France. When this theory is coupled with Flaubert's own sympathetic approach to and self-proclaimed identification with

Emma, we are able to view this passage as coming directly from the mouth of Flaubert and therefore aiding in his criticism and condemnation of Emma's womanhood. Emma is explicit in bitterly acknowledging her womanhood and wifehood as equal to imprisonment, which aligns well with the Napoleonic Code in the nineteenth century and reinforces the referential quality of this work. Emma's list of the freedoms which are awarded to men, countered with the acknowledgement of her own suffering, also reinforces Carolyn Dever's ideas on the nature of nineteenth century texts as not only reflecting the fears and anxieties of their time but also having an effect on them. It is necessary to acknowledge the importance of a text and author which would so clearly outline the injustices and inequities faced by nineteenth century women, solidifying Flaubert's pro-woman stance.

Unfortunately, Flaubert's sympathies towards Emma are not enough to save her from her own damnation. Just as Emma begins to toy with the possibility of sexual freedom, she is interrupted by her pregnancy and subsequent birth of her daughter, Berthe. Upon hearing that she has delivered a girl, Emma turns her head and faints. This fainting signifies both Emma and Flaubert's acknowledgement of the cyclic nature of womanhood: birth, marriage, childbirth, and death. Death is assumed here with childbirth, and is particularly enhanced by the medical anxieties surrounding childbirth in the nineteenth century, which were, according to Dever, often exacerbated by the literature of the time. It is necessary to acknowledge this anxiety despite the fact that Flaubert pays little mind to the actual childbirth scene, as it signifies the deeper consciousness of the novel that is borne by Emma at this point in the novel.

It is now necessary to expand upon Flaubert's third and highly significant yet seldom discussed secondary female character, Berthe, who is equally devoid of any agency and serves as one of the many parts of Emma's life which she manipulates to her limited advantage. The birth

of a baby girl is also significant as a plot device by Flaubert, who highlights the reality that Emma's sudden motherhood functions to disrupt and complicate her attempts at sexual freedom and independence. This transformation presents another standard of womanhood which Emma will be unable to uphold and which will justify and explain Flaubert's sympathetic killing of her character at the novel's end. Flaubert also acknowledges that Emma is ill-prepared for motherhood and is disinterested in the role entirely, weakly masked by her fiscal frustrations. Emma's rejections of motherhood also open the door for further (unjust) criticism of her character at the hands of both the nineteenth century reader and the townspeople of the novel. Emma primarily uses her child, who is staying with a wet nurse, as an excuse to walk with Léon and foster their romantic relationship. Moreover, Flaubert makes clear that Léon, and therefore Emma's sexuality, interrupts and is intertwined with motherhood and not separate as nineteenth century standards would have it. Amanda Rooks references this exact coupling in her essay, "Motherhood and Sexuality in Madame Bovary" (2014). Rooks writes on Flaubert's subversion of traditional notions of motherhood, "...Emma's surfeit of maternal concern for all the men in her life with whom she has sexual contact and refers to examples such as Emma's tendency to chastise Charles for his irritating personal habits and her eager consoling of Rodolphe upon his revelation of having lost his own mother..." (4). Rooks' assertion supports the general purpose of the novel as a pro-woman critique of woman and motherhood, as Emma's sexual conquests defy the standards of domesticity and views of the Holy Mother. It is also worth noting that Flaubert does not aim to condemn Emma for her apparently misplaced maternal instincts or to blame her for the disconnect between mother and child. Rather, Flaubert seeks, through this unconventional coupling of motherhood and sex, to expose the ways in which nineteenth century motherhood can limit sexual freedom, giving renewed purpose to Emma's rejection of these constraints and

her sexual transgressions.

While mothering and motherhood offers one example of the function of Emma's sexuality in the work, Flaubert also posits sexuality as a tool in his criticism of both domesticity and Romanticism, as Emma's sexuality is almost explicitly linked to her unrealistic desires. Domestic life necessarily entails calm, stability, and perceived chastity, all things which Emma cannot find possible in her marriage to Charles. I say possible, as realistic ideas of love and sexual desire could potentially be fulfilled in marriage. However, Emma's unrealistic expectations, and general discontentment with her life's circumstances, prohibit her from being satisfied by Charles, and therefore drive her to commit adultery and other wrongdoings against her home. And yet, Flaubert does not aim to condemn Emma for her misdeeds, although in his quest to portray a realistic narrative he cannot let her escape from the consequences of her romantic ideals (i.e. her failed relationships).

Further, Flaubert recognizes sex as Emma's attempt at freedom, about which Per Bjørnar Grande writes, "Emma's dream of liberation tends to take erotic paths, since sex seems to be the only way in which she can realize her romantic dreams. Her dreams of freedom are captured in the image of her sitting by an open window, immersed in feelings of hopelessness and melancholy, as she looks longingly at some open space and wishes that she was somewhere else. The erotic symbols, however, seem to relate most often to a lack of sexuality" (77). Simply, Grande relates the moments which should be sexual, and in which Emma experiences intense desire, as being misplaced or sought after in inappropriate situations, relating to Charles, Berthe, and her home. This evaluation of Emma's sexuality also works to expose the ways in which sexuality is wielded by Emma as a weapon against her oppressive existence in the world of the novel, and in order to illustrate the many limitations of womanhood in nineteenth century

France.

To further the contrasts which Flaubert presents between Emma's sexuality and domesticity, it is useful to look again at Emma's performative wife and motherhood. This performance, which recurs often during visits from Charles' mother and after her major indiscretions, signals Emma's, and therefore Flaubert's, awareness of the injustices faced by women and the too-tight constraints of being a woman in the nineteenth century. During another unsatisfactory rendezvous with Léon, Emma seems to become infatuated with the idea of being a good wife once again. As the pair discusses Emma's failed passions and judge another married woman, Flaubert writes:

A good housewife does not trouble about her appearance...

It was the same on the following days; her talks, her manners, everything changed. She took interest in the housework, went to church regularly, and looked after the maid with more severity.

She took Berthe away from the nurse. When visitors called, Félicité brought her in, and Madame Bovary undressed her to show off her limbs. She claimed to love children; they were her consolation, her joy, her passion, and she accompanied her caresses with lyrical outbursts...

When Charles came home he found his slippers put to warm near the fire...she no longer grumbled as before when asked to take a walk in the garden; what he proposed was always done, although she never anticipated the wishes to which she submitted without a murmur... (88-89)

This action by Emma is performative to the fullest extent as she behaves in this way primarily in

the presence of Léon or other company, and without any sincerity. Emma seemingly doubles down on her domestic duties after becoming resigned to the idea that she could ever really be involved with Léon. She further understands good wife and motherhood as daily tasks performed as if on schedule, made all the more tragic by Charles' preoccupation with Emma as a wife and her obviously failing health. Flaubert enhances the performative aspect of Emma's wife and motherhood through his incorporation of music and religion in her actions, as these are part of her unrealistic and romantic view of life. Therefore, Flaubert makes abundantly clear once again that Emma will not be successful in her domestic role, and not by any fault of her own.

Emma is not the only actor in this work who romanticizes an alternate life, as is one of the key consequences of marriage and wifhood in the nineteenth century. As Suzanne Leonard points out in her defense of *Bovary* as an American feminist icon, and in recognition of Flaubert's outspoken critique of the status of women, the already picturesque view and expectations of wives and mothers' forces Emma into a position of rebellion and escapism for survival. Leonard writes, "Emma's status as a white wife and mother who pursues sex and consumption to fill her meaningless days identified her as precisely such a deprived figure, and, accordingly, her plight is called a 'feminist tragedy' in Lisa Gerrard's 'Romantic Heroines in the Nineteenth Century Novel: A Feminist View'" (654). Leonard goes on to describe the post-feminist identification of female heroines as having "Madame Bovary syndrome", clearly identifying Emma's plight and Flaubert's character as representing a greater struggle for both his and later audiences. Further, Leonard is sure to note that, "the image of the 'angel of the house' conceptualized the nineteenth century expectation that women serve as domestic gatekeepers of mortality and virtue..." (654) permeates both life and literature, and is therefore not an imaginary condition posited solely by Emma or Flaubert.

Flaubert introduces this broader, romantic view of wifehood through yet another even less discussed secondary female character, Emma's maid Félicité. After another encounter with Léon, Félicité shares Charles' concern regarding Emma's health. After Emma chalks her ailments up to nerves, and asks her maid not to mention this to her husband, Félicité replies that Emma is like a girl she used to know before coming to the Bovary household, stating, "She was so sad, so sad... Her illness, it appears, was a kind of fog that she had in the head, and the doctors could do nothing about it, neither could the priest... Then, after her marriage, it stopped, they say."

Flaubert goes on to write as Emma, "But with me...it was after marriage that it began." (91). It is evident that Félicité represents another case of marriage being idyllically purported as a remedy to an unhappy life, while she is ironically unmarried herself. Félicité's conditioned misgivings regarding the reality of wifehood in the nineteenth century are incorporated by Flaubert in this narrative so that he may allow Emma to present the miserable truth of the marriage experience in response. Flaubert markedly does not expand upon Emma's conclusion that marriage is the cause of her every unhappiness, as the evidence of her life in the novel up to this point overwhelmingly supports her statement.

Despite Flaubert's best efforts to sway public opinion in favor of, or at least sympathetic to, Emma's character, it is necessary for him, in order to complete the narrative of cyclic injustice against women, to expand upon Emma's bizarre relationship with her daughter, Mademoiselle Bovary, knowing that she will be subject to harsh criticism for her behaviors. Upon returning home from another disappointing rendezvous, Berthe attempts to play with her mother, despite Emma angrily wanting to be left alone. Emma eventually pushes the child away with her elbow, making Berthe fall into a chest of drawers and cut her cheek. Emma is at once overcome with performative maternal instinct as Charles rushes into the room, as she refuses



even to eat dinner in order to watch over the child and make sure she is okay. While this could be perceived as a moment of sincerity, Flaubert quickly follows the episode with Emma remarking over the sleeping child how strange it is that she is so ugly.

Emma's apparent contempt for her child can be viewed as a combination of two phenomena: her own rejection of motherhood and domesticity, and her recognition of the foreseeable (to Emma and Flaubert) future in which Berthe will find herself in a similar, unfortunate circumstance as Emma: wife, mother, prisoner. Although Berthe represents an important link in the matricidal quality of this text, she only appears twice more throughout the work, once during another affectionate and misplaced outburst from Emma, and again to reject her mother's affection on Emma's deathbed. Noting again Woloch's theory of the importance of the secondary character, Flaubert's timely inclusions and limited presentations of Berthe prove integral in exposing the trappings of wife, mother, and overall womanhood in nineteenth century France, by her own meager existence and the negative impact she has on her mother's life.

As Madame Bovary the first (Charles' mother) appears infrequently and sporadically throughout the work, it could be difficult to declare her status as a female character killed by Flaubert. However, this Madame Bovary appears exclusively to impose order in Emma's home, offer advice, and of course criticize Emma as a wife, and therefore represents precisely the kind of narrative murderer that must be eliminated, as described by Anolik, Dever, Leonard, and others. Charles' mother, spurned by her own marriage and child, clings mercilessly to the limited maternal control which she possesses over her only child, Charles, and effectively aims to disrupt Emma's narrative. She refuses to be replaced and made effectively useless by Charles' marriage to Emma, and therefore commits irreparable damage to Emma's life and marriage. Flaubert is forced to repeatedly remove her presence while devaluing her advice throughout the work, as her

visits to Tostes become increasingly hostile and eventually lead to her dismissal (as mother) by Charles. During one heated visit to the Bovary home, Charles' mother insists that Emma's behaviors and general unhappiness are all a farce and would easily be remedied by her taking up an increased interest in housework and reading less novels, to which Charles' ultimately agrees, and to Emma's outspoken dismay.

Charles' mother appears again much later in the work at his own request as a result of their financial struggles. Although Madame Bovary senior does offer them some money, she demands to see the accounts of their debts, which Emma quickly doctors to preserve her lies. Although the debt shown is significantly reduced, Charles' mother still takes issue with the extravagant expenditures and reveals to Emma that Charles had already agreed to destroy the power of attorney, leaving Emma with less outlets for secrecy. In an unexpected turn, and for the first time, Flaubert has Charles come to Emma's defense, stating that his mother is in the wrong as well and that she comes to his home only to cause scenes. Madame Bovary moves to leave the next day and replies, "No, no! You love her better than me, and you are right. It is natural, take care of yourself! ...for I am not likely to be back again soon to make 'scenes' as you say" (217). Flaubert introduces the unique phenomenon in this scene of the replacement of mother with wife, and therefore the rejection of mother by child. In choosing Emma over his mother, Charles exposes yet another pitfall of motherhood, as marriage condemns women as mothers to be and as women to be replaced. This very brief scene proves important in enhancing Flaubert's multifaceted approach to his critique. While Charles' mother is the longest living Madame Bovary in this work, her existence does not go unpunished, as is the way with wives and mothers at this time, and she is eventually burdened once more with mothering orphaned Berthe, after Charles' death and her own widowing, never to be free from her maternal trappings and to her

persistent suffering and own unhappy death, exemplifying once more the cyclical nature of women's oppression and suffering.

Toward and approaching the novel's end, Emma is left fully exposed to her husband and the town of Yonville, having been abandoned by both of her lovers and financially in ruin. Emma decides, and Flaubert makes clear, that the only solution to her plight is death, and takes poison which kills her slowly. On her deathbed, Flaubert reveals his true, sympathetic view of Emma, and the kindness he pays her in killing her in the end. Emma's death resolves many of the problems in her life and releases her from the shackles of her domestic obligations. Despite all of her wrongdoings, the people of the town do attempt to save Emma and mourn her loss, lifting some of the blame off of Emma's shoulders. This is best personified when Flaubert literally gives Emma the last laugh. Faced with death, Emma acknowledges her release from the pain of her existence and the inevitability of her passing. Of course, Flaubert could not have permitted Emma to live further as she had so dishonorably, as that could be perceived as his endorsement of her behaviors and would ultimately be an unrealistic portrayal of nineteenth century life. However, this final death is a mercy killing on the part of Flaubert, given that Emma could never be satisfied or conform to the impossible standards to which she was bound as a woman. Emma's death as a mother, and a bad one at that, also opens the door for Berthe's own journey, which we learn is all the more tragic and painful than even Emma's.

Flaubert explicitly acknowledges the heaviness borne by Emma when he writes, "The sheet sunk in from her breast to her knees, and then rose at the tips of her toes, and it seemed to Charles that infinite masses, an enormous load, were weighing upon her" (260). Not only is Emma perceived sympathetically by her husband, she is in this description still viewed as a victim of her circumstances. Flaubert truly kills Emma when he replaces her in Charles' life with

his mother, reaffirming the injustices against women and consequences of marriage, and when he reveals that Berthe has forgotten her. Flaubert writes:

Despite their fatigue, Charles and his mother stayed up talking very long that evening.

They spoke of the days of the past and of the future. She would come to live at Yonville; she would keep house for him; they would never part again. She was subtly affectionate, rejoicing in her heart at regaining some of the tenderness that had wandered from her for so many years...

The next day Charles had brought the child back. She asked for her mamma. They told her she was away; that she would bring her back some toys. Berthe mentioned her several times, then finally forgot her. (268)

Flaubert does not aim at subtlety in having even Charles' mother, the last surviving Madame Bovary, resent her status as mother, as she had been replaced by Emma and effectively lost her son. She is also eager to fulfill the role of both wife and mother in Charles' life, as she seeks to extend her influence and control over him after Emma's passing, and in her own way, breaking the bonds by which she was previously held. Flaubert challenges these notions again in Berthe's swift failure to remember her own mother, exposing those fragile relationships and waning influence of mother on child.

In one final blow, after Charles's own swift death, Flaubert reveals that Berthe is left with just enough money to be shipped off to her grandmother, Madame Bovary the first, who dies that same year. She is subsequently passed onto her aunt, who is so poor that she sends young Berthe to work in a cotton-mill. The quick passage of Berthe between her family's matriarchs, all of whom are clearly damned in their own way and are being forced to assume the role of

motherhood themselves, functions as Flaubert's final attempt to expose the condemnation of nineteenth century women, especially through these secondary characters. The novel begins and ends with the many unjust circumstances faced by the novel's women, reflecting different anxieties and the suppression of women in life, as represented by literature.

## Chapter 4: Conclusion

Flaubert, through the serial killing of his female characters in *Madame Bovary*, aims to expose the unending limitations and impossible conditions for women in nineteenth century France. Writing at the start of the Realism movement in literature, Flaubert was determined to write a novel about the every-day, a realistic depiction of French life. It is abundantly clear that in writing a 'true' account, Flaubert was also driven by the revolutionary times, and his motivations are not as pure as a true Realist author would have them. *Madame Bovary* manipulates the experiences of multiple literary women in order to more accurately depict the difficult positions in which women found themselves in the nineteenth century, and those which were not so accurately represented in previous modes of literature. That is not to say that until *Madame Bovary*, no text attempted to challenge the societal norms in regards to women and their subservient position in a patriarchal society, as this would devalue and dismiss the work of a great many emerging and existing authors globally, especially female authors. However, Flaubert's position as a male author of female subjects, and a killer of these same characters, places his novel in a unique position that is worthy of investigation.

As I previously stated, the nature of male authorship, particularly in reference to writing female characters, perpetuates the male gaze and a patriarchal standard, that which is difficult to circumvent despite any differing intentions or motivations by the author (Gilbert and Gubar). While Flaubert falls prey to some of these trappings, as he gives and takes away the life and agency of all of his characters, and particularly the women of the novel, it is clear that Flaubert worked diligently to carefully construct the world of *Madame Bovary*, not so that it could be kind to its women, but so that it could accurately and fairly represent their plight. That is to say, Flaubert's novel, and therefore Flaubert, allowed its women to transgress the lines of good and

proper womanhood freely and without prejudice, so that their suffering would be appreciated and known. In this thesis, I have shown a chain of woman-killing throughout the work, but that Flaubert's murderous tendencies are not judgment or punishment. The deaths are not to be treated as the consequences of their actions, but rather the necessary steps toward escaping their impossibly oppressive existences. In summation, I will review the various Madame Bovarys' tortured lives and deaths, as well as those of any other significant secondary characters that have been named in this thesis, in order to define once more Flaubert's murderous salvation of the women in this work.

Charles' mother, Madame Bovary the first, is manipulated by Flaubert to represent and expose a number of key criticisms of the plight of women in this work. First, Charles' mother is introduced as the victim of an unhappy marriage, forced to maintain the house and her husband's affairs while she is mistreated and suppressed by said husband. Notably suffering silently, she uses her limited agency to ensure the betterment of her son's life, through education and marriage; it is clear that Madame Bovary's only significant purpose in this novel is as a mother, and she aggressively strives to maintain this purpose until the novel's end, lest she be made useless and eliminated by no fault of her own. After the second, more successful marriage of her son, however, Flaubert writes the first Madame Bovary into a corner, in which she constantly struggles to remain relevant in her son's life and acts as an agent of chaos and disruption in the work, as is consistent with nineteenth century literary mothers. Flaubert commits this action intentionally, however, so that she may represent a harsh reality for wives and mothers at this time; the trappings and limitations of good motherhood. Although she regains some of her hold on her son after Emma's death, as she transgresses the line of wife and mother to Charles, this pleasure is short lived; Charles dies soon after and his mother, unwillingly charged with the

mothering of her only granddaughter, is killed by Flaubert within a year.

Next, we must look at the second Madame Bovary, Charles' first wife, who is more succinctly plagued by her woman and wifehood and, consequently, swiftly eliminated in the text, however mercifully. Widowed and ugly, the second Madame Bovary is paired with Charles by his mother so that he may be able to start his own, happy life with a wife by his side. These ambitions, however, remain unfulfilled, as the Bovarys' unhappy marriage leads this Madame Bovary to learn that her husband is not fully devoted to her. It is her miserable marriage, her inability to perform as a good wife, and one too many intrusions by Charles' mother that kills her. This Madame Bovary is never able to fulfill her duties as wife and mother, as she bears no children, and she is unable to keep her husband's attentions and even pushes him away by being overbearing and overstepping her boundaries into Charles' life. She is, of course, replaced by Emma Bovary, the final Madame Bovary.

Emma's unhappy existence is obviously the most drawn out, as her story takes up the majority of the novel. Emma represents the truly tortured and suppressed nineteenth century woman, unhappy in her marriage and as a mother and with no viable alternatives, save for death. Flaubert allows Emma to transgress at every turn, a degree of sexual freedom (not without consequence), and to place her maternal instincts apart from her only child, Berthe. Despite her many misgivings and sins, Emma is not written off by Flaubert as a woman in need of punishment, but a woman in need of release, as is the case with all of the other women of this work. When Emma has finally taken her whims and desires, that which ultimately cannot be fulfilled, to the very end, Flaubert grants Emma the full and final agency to poison herself and to be free from all of the trappings of her wife and motherhood. Emma's actions, of course Flaubert's doing, condemn poor Berthe to a life of hardship and misery, take away and force



motherhood once more upon Charles's mother before her own death, and reveal once and for all the cyclical and unending societal imprisonment of nineteenth century women. It is through these tortured female narratives, and by means of the incredible referential work of the novel, that Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* reveals itself to be a pro-woman work, by way of killing its women.

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