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Desire, Death and Sexual Politics in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*

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Abstract

This paper examines the interface of desire, sexual politics and death through a literary-critical study of Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary. The study focuses on the characterization of Emma which allows for a more in-depth and thorough exploration of her psychology vis-à-vis the concepts of desire and death. Firstly, the study extensively explores the Girardian models responsible for Emma Bovary's desire within the novel. It brings out to the surface the models or mediators (such as romantic fictions, or fashion magazines, or the luxurious life of the rich) responsible for Emma's desire. These mediators create a void or vacuum in Emma, which need to be filled. This, as the study has shown however, is difficult to do because of sexual politics. Flaubert here suggests that a woman's desire ends only with death – a patriarchal creed that preordains woman to live without desire. Here, then, lies the intersection between Emma's desiring pleasure and the instinct of death drive. Therefore, the study examines, from Jonathan Dollimore's paradigm, the extent to which Emma Bovary's desire, as portrayed by Girard, creates an "ideal" in her mind and causes her death. The implication of this is that a woman only ascertains a freedom from the trauma of unfulfilled desire in death, a tragic irony that surrounds Emma's moment of departure from the world as a conscious being.

Keywords: *Desire, Death, Woman, Sexual Politics and Madame Bovary.*

1. Introduction

This study broadly explores the interface of death and desire in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* through a literary-critical study. Specifically, the study examines the implications of desire in the principal female character, Emma Bovary, and investigates the ways in which this desire is connected with her death. In the end, the study puts pressure on the assumption that desire, resulting from patriarchal domination and which ends in death, is at the bedrock by which Flaubert forms his central female character in *Madame Bovary*. In his book, *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture* (2001), Jonathan Dollimore provides the paradigm basis by which this study approaches its analysis.

Dollimore (2001) focuses his theory on the "will to life" and how it is manifested as desire, springing up from lack, deficiency, and suffering (172). According to him, the desire that Rene Girard (165) speaks of, which ultimately comes as a result of "mediation", is "a condition of continual, restless, longing – 'a striving that is bound to frustrate itself' (173). Dollimore (2001) holds the argument that, majority of literary writings in the west are male-centered and "conspicuously misogynist", displaying the vital role of Christianity which notably continue to resonate today (xxiii). In these misogynistic literatures, Dollimore adds,

a woman is mostly accused of bringing death into this world, suggesting that “there might be a deep envy of women’s procreative ability” (xxiii). He further argues that the western literary canon identifies women with nature and, therefore, it establishes culture to work towards a “defense against female nature” (xxiv), which is, in the words of Paglia, “a miasmatic swamp whose prototype is the still pond of the womb” (xxiv). This study argues that Flaubert bears witness to the truth of Dollimore’s formulations of desire and death in *Madame Bovary*, and that the novel seems to take on added literary status and thematic significance when seen in light of those formulations. As a guide to achieve effective explorations of the novel, the following question is deployed: In what ways does the intersection of desire and death impose thematic limitations in *Madame Bovary*?

The discourse on desire can be traced back to Sigmund Freud in his classic study *On Sexuality* where he gave a comprehensive analysis and account on the concept (Piippo, 2006:5). Freud begins his essay by reminding his readers of Darwinian theory and concludes that sexuality is the “weak” in all the human cultural evolutions. His account is, however, essentially down-to-earth and mainly concerned with sexual desire and is partly responsible for the popular view that all desire is sublimated sexual lust (Piippo, 2006: 7). It is worth noting here that Freud bases his theory exclusively on his clinical observation of patients in mental distress, though Leslie Strevenson cited in Piippo (2006) notes that: “It is a vulgar misinterpretation of Freud to say that he traced *all* human behavior to sexual motivations. What *is* true is that he gave sexuality a much wider scope in human life than had been formerly recognised” (9).

There is a long line of scholars who have dedicated their works to address the concept of desire in Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*. Stephen Gurney (2015) places the main character of Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, Emma Bovary, in the context of Lewis’ theory of “dialectic desire”. His study concludes that Flaubert declared “aesthetic impassivity” which rings rather hollow when we realize that from first to last Emma is persecuted by the rage of her maker—a rage which is all the more intense in proportion as Flaubert sympathizes with his heroine’s “Romantic nympholepsy” (40).

Slightly deviating from Gurney, Tipper (1995) investigates one of the many symbolic paradigms of romantic bitterness in *Madame Bovary*. The differing textual ploys whereby “sugar and poison are conflated only to be dichotomized, the sweet and the bitter conjoined only to be divorced, corresponds to the hiatus between dream and real,” between Emma’s foolish fusion of dream and reality and the textual corrective to that foolishness (4). References to sugar, literal and figurative, constitute a leitmotif in *Madame Bovary* which at once furnishes a meta commentary on Emma’s “delusions” while enriching the text’s aesthetic infrastructure with a bitter-sweet pattern of suggestion that is a salutary lesson to us all.

By examining the “female” character, this study explores the extent to which woman is racked by desire, namely: a psychological construct of romantic longings and wishful thoughts. In other words, the research explores the unconscious drives or models responsible for a woman’s desire and how this desire instigates the forces of death in her existence. Desire itself stands as a problematic which still requires further scrutiny if only to show its relationship with sexual politics and death. In this context, there is a problem, which the dissertation explores, between sexual politics and desire on the one hand and desire and death on the other. In the end, the study argues that romantic longings resulting from patriarchal dominations, and which result in death, are the preeminent tools by which Flaubert and James signal to readers their thematic concerns and apprise them of their characters’ temperaments. This research is limited to the selected primary text.

However, references are made, when the need arises, to some other secondary texts relevant to the thematic and theoretical premises of the proposed dissertation. This research is desk work oriented without involving field work, questionnaires or interviews.

It is important to state here that there have been several studies on Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. A major preoccupation of the studies centres on the critical analysis of the texts as realist fictions because of their description of details of life in the society. This is done with less attention on the complex nature of desire - its psychological understanding and relationship with death and sexual politics. After all, from the time of the publication of the selected novels till date, it will seem as if there is nothing left to say about them. This research is significant because it does not simply offer explanations of the complex nature of desire, but goes a step further to uncover and explore the unconscious forces that drive the behaviors, thoughts and emotions of the central female characters as they relate to death and sexual politics in the selected works. This gives the primary texts literary status and thematic significance, and it is also a contribution to the burgeoning field of Flaubert scholarship which especially endeavors to offer explanations for the realistic nature of desire in *Madame Bovary*.

2. Method

This research is essentially qualitative. Therefore, it entails extensive reading on the subject area and consequent deductions based on the researcher's inference and understanding.

3. Results

3.1 Desire in *Madame Bovary*

Rene Girard (1965) is the first scholar to situate Emma Bovary within the psychoanalytic paradigm of romantic desire in his book, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*. His theory views desire as a product of mimesis, or imitation which is based on a triangle that consists of three basic elements namely: the subject, the model or mediator, and the object of desire. He argues that human desire is imitative in that is based on wanting what another individual has. For example, if a child of House No. 1 of Bayero University Staff Quarters has a toy and appears to be deriving pleasure with the toy, forthwith the child of House No. 2, who may have shown no interest a minute previously, will want the toy as well. The child of House No. 1 therefore becomes the mediator or model of desire for the child of House No. 2. Girard applies this postulation on Flaubert's Emma Bovary in *Madame Bovary*, albeit on a speculative and minimal scale. This study further explores this postulation thoroughly and finds that Emma Bovary, being the subject, is seen moving from one object of desire to another in order to reach a state of satisfaction. In fact, it is Emma Bovary's desire for romantic fantasies and luxury that culminate into the intrigues of the novel. These desires, however, are all triggered by models or mediators within the text which had hardly been properly explored.

This model is firstly illustrated in *Madame Bovary* by Emma's open imitation of the characters of the romantic fictions she reads as a teenager in her father's farm house and later in boarding school. As shown in *Madame Bovary*, these novels are "solely concerned with love affairs, lovers and their beloveds, damsels in distress swooning in secluded summerhouses" (34).

Emma confuses these romantic fictions she reads as a young girl with reality and therefore aims to see them reflecting in her life; she forgets the fictionality in them and

thirsts for the “indescribable emotion of love” in reading them (252). In essence, one of the models for Emma Bovary’s desire is ultimately reading; reading too many romantic novels. Her reading gives her a conception of love that is clearly orgasmic — a desire to swim in an ocean of quickening caresses, of old castles, and of moonlight meetings. Close and related to this is the woman’s magazine Emma subscribes to. She searches for vicarious gratification of her own secret desires in these magazines. These magazines are mainly “accounts of first nights, race meetings, and evening parties; she was fascinated by the debut of a singer, or the opening of a new shop. She knew about the latest fashions, the addresses of the good tailors, the right days for the Bois* or the Opéra” (52). This is suggestive of the Girardian model of mimetic desire which unequivocally states that we borrow our desire from others. Here, the model(s) of Emma Bovary’s desire are the romantic novels and fashion magazine while their romantic accounts, details, contexts and characters are the objects of her desires which she attempts to absorb as she holds firmly to the illusions of their authenticity.

One of the romantic fictions Emma Bovary reads is *Paul and Virginia* by Jacques-Henri Bernadin de Sint-Pierre. The plot of novel moves around two teenage romantic lovers that are close to each other since birth. Emma fantasizes the romantic poses and experiences of these lovers - Paul and Virginia - as this quotation illustrates: “She had dreamed...of the sweet friendship of a dear little brother who’d pick crimson fruit for you from great trees taller than steeples, or some running barefoot over the sand to bring you a bird’s nest” (32).

This novel stirs Emma’s emotion and sends a quiver into her spine, igniting a strong desire – a deep one that perturbs the serenity of her mind. Emma has wanted that desire as much as she could afford; it has flourished through her veins, fueling the need to be quenched. Her conception and emotional attachment to these stories are evident for she asserts thus: “I really love stories that keep you turning the pages, stories that frighten you. I loathe commonplace heroes and temperate feelings; the kind of thing you find in real life (35). Like the novels, Emma has also read ballads that set forth stories about “little angels with golden wings, madonnas, lagoons, gondoliers: soothing composition which allowed her to glimpse, behind the inanity of the words and the incongruity of the music, the seductive illusion of emotional realities” (35). Her consciousness threads into the “simultaneous overflow” of these poetic lines (to borrow the words of Wordsworth) and there is a kind of urge to identify with their “powerful feelings”; she feels as if her heart is beneath the costumes of their inner-emotional expressions and meanings.

The mansion of La Vaubyessard, and the subsequent events that followed its featuring, serves as another mediator for Emma Bovary’s desire. After their marriage, Emma and her husband, Charles Bovary, are invited to a ball, which the local marquis offers to prepare his political candidacy in his mansion, La Vabyessard. They are invited because Charles had created the illusion of competence and because Emma seemed to the lord pretty and well-bred. The visit to La Vabyessard causes so many objects of desire to spring up in Emma, spurring “a chasm in her life, like those great crevasses that a storm sometimes hollows out mountains, in a single night” (51). The social class of the people, the luxurious fixtures of the mansion, the professional display of waltzing by Vicomte, and the discourse on the topic of Italy left an indelible impression on her: “Emma felt herself enveloped by warm air in which the fragrance of flowers and fine linen mingled with the smell of roast meat and the aroma of truffles” (44).

Everything about La Vaubyessard ignites desire in Emma that she longs to know about the lives of its inhabitants, to penetrate into their circles, and be part of them. During

the ball, one of the waltzing experts with the name Vicomte, a perfect and sophisticated upper class gentleman in her eyes, asks her to dance with him. When waltzing through the dinner hall, Emma tries to make a connection between him and the fictional characters she had read; and later, she tries to connect the imaginary picture of Vicomte to her first lover, Rodolphe - a wealthy land owner with an estate near Yonville:

She could see, in his eyes, tiny threads of gold that radiated out all round his black pupils, and she could even smell the perfume of the pomade that made his hair glossy. Then she felt a languor come over her, and she remembered the Vicomte who had waltzed with her at La Vaubyessard (130).

Emma feels that Rodolphe is the ideal object of her desire; a person she really dreams about and who loves her truly. She goes for a ride with him and afterwards they consummate their love. In the company of Rodolphe, her life becomes what she wants it to be. She throws all caution to the winds and a full-fledged affair blossoms as she sneaks away from home to see Rodolphe regularly. This conforms to the Girardian taxonomy of desire in which the mansion serves as the mediator and Vicomte the object. In addition, the conversation about Italy between “a blue-coated gentleman” and a “pale young woman” injects the enthusiasm of learning Italian language, philosophy and culture in Emma (47), re-enacting the typology of Girardian theory. Later when Emma returns home at Yonville, she decides to “learn Italian: she bought dictionaries, a grammar, and a supply of paper”; she has embarked on some serious reading of history and philosophy (111). More so, after Emma gives birth to a baby girl, she decides to search for names with Italian endings to call the child. In the end, she recalls that she has heard the power lord in La Vaubyessard, Marquise, addressing a young woman as Berthe. From then, the name of her daughter is decided, reiterating the modelling of La Vaubyessard to her imitated desire.

3.2 Desire's Disillusion

From the foregoing, it is obvious that those psychological factors pushed Emma to an unrelenting search for suitable partner in marriage for the desire of getting self-gratification, dignified freedom and emotional satisfaction. In fact, like Emma's mobility of desire, this quest is also obvious in the intrigues of the novel. Both Emma and Charles believe that marriage will open up doors for their dreams of romantic pleasures and fantasies of luxury to be realized. Nevertheless, in all cases, those dreams and fantasies, unfortunately, have turned out to be unattainable as the realities of married life cannot fulfill them. This postulation can be traced, firstly, in Charles Bovary's dream of his maiden marriage as the beginning of a joyful life in which he would secure a “greater freedom” and more control over his wealth and how he spent it. But on marrying, Charles is exposed to strict and confined life from his wife - Madame Debut; a life that is bereft of the so-called “freedoms”. This the narrator captures:

...his wife was the boss; she told him what he ought not say in public, insisting that he fasts on Fridays, dress as she thought fit, and dun those patients who were slow in paying. She opened his letters, watched everything he did, and listened through the dividing wall when he was seeing a female patient in his consulting room (13).

While Charles Bovary's desire is informed by misogynist mentality to have a total control over his first wife (Madame Debuc), Emma Bovary, on the other hand, and the only female protagonist of the novel, hunts for a husband that will only quench her romantic thirsts – marriage, at least, to a man who can secure her emotional happiness and romantic luxury. The intrigues of Emma's wishful thoughts in the novel is a testimony to this venture – as Emma Bovary desires a man who is “handsome”, “witty”, “distinguished” and “attractive”. She expresses singular mutuality in her romantic longings for happiness: the idea of romantic extravagances – desired frequency of coquetry, desired voluptuous acts, preferred context for romantic behavior, types or frequency of fantasy, and judgement of desirable partner characteristics (Diamond, 2008) have filled Emma's heart and which, in the end, become unattainable and consequently lead to disappointment, resentment and then death.

One of the wishes of every father for his daughter in the era of *Madame Bovary* is marrying her to a man who can guarantee her needs - *desire*. There was always a kind of anxiety surrounding of the material status of a man who intends to marry one's daughter. Perhaps, this is the order of Flaubert's era, as such fear is expressed in the thoughts of Emma's father, Monsieur Rouault, when Charles seeks for his daughter hands in marriage. He thinks Charles a loser and not his dream of a son-in-law, but from what is available to him, Charles has been a good fellow, who does not spend lavishly, and it seems “he wouldn't haggle too much over the dowry (23).

It is also the wish of young women in that era to seek for a man that is wildly romantic, who will both provide the preferred context and luxury for its (romantic) display. Women during Flaubert's time see the institution of marriage as the only option for this self-gratification. Having full knowledge of this, Flaubert creates Emma as an indifferent character who considers marriage as a means for satisfying her *emotional desires* and fantasized luxury. Emma has developed these gloomy illusions from reading romance novels as a teenager and she thought a typical husband should be well-versed and articulated, dress neatly and be filthy rich. In her thoughts, a husband should “know everything, should excel at many different things, should initiate you into intensities of passion, into the refinements of life, into all its mysteries” (38). Emma's choice of a husband is ideal with most women; therefore, it should not be a matter of castigation if she chooses a considerate, loving and caring husband.

It is with these fantasies that Emma signs-in into the matrimonial home of Charles Bovary; there, she expects Charles to introduce her to new coquettes and inspire her to the fullest. At first, she had dreamed of an exotic honeymoon. Her fantasies emphasize her husband's clothes and she prides herself on running an elegant household. However, her dissatisfactions with marriage begin immediately she crosses into this matrimonial home. Having developed the illusions of what an ideal husband and matrimonial home should be, Emma becomes disillusioned by the reality of married life. Her plight is captured in the novel:

Before her marriage, she had believed that she was in love; but since the happiness she had expected this love to bring her had not come, she supposed she must have been mistaken. And Emma tried to find out what exactly was meant, in real life, by the words ‘bliss’, ‘passion’, and ‘ecstasy’, words that she had found so beautiful in books (32).

This is so because Emma finds everything about her husband, Charles, unsuitable and disgusting afterward. He is cold and inattentive; he does not care much about her feelings. He neither inspires nor helps her overcome her emotional challenges. He is a country doctor who could not empathize with Emma's emotional situation and understands it; he is unable to figure the emotional goals of his partner and much less work to achieve them. This, the narrator aptly captures:

(His) conversation was as flat as any pavement, and everybody's ideas plodded along it, garbed in pedestrian style, inspiring no emotion, no laughter, no reverie. He had never felt tempted...to go to theatre to see the actors from Paris. He did not know how to swim, or fence, or shoot a gun, and he was unable, one day, to explain to her a term in riding that she had come cross in a book...this man *taught* nothing, *knew* nothing, *desired* nothing (38, emphasis added).

In addition to this, Emma has heard and seen enough of Charles' mediocrity or even incompetency in her stay with him. Everything about him now – from his face, his clothes, his talk, his silent and entire being – annoys her. She lives with a mate who does not express his, nor fulfils her emotional needs; a husband, in her mind, who is not used to “wearing a long-skirted coat of black velvet, soft boots, a pointed hat, and ruffles at the wrist” (37). The sacrifices she made to keep their relationship going are enormous. In this regard, the narrator reports:

She thought for all her yearning for luxury, all the privations her soul had endured, the degradations of marriage and of housekeeping, her dreams falling in the mud like wounded swallows, everything she had longed for, everything she had denied herself, everything that she had! ...this man who understood nothing, who felt nothing. There he sat, perfectly serene, quite oblivious to the fact that henceforth the ridicule inspired by his name would dishonor her as well. She had tried hard to love him, and had wept tears of repentance for giving herself to another (164).

However, Charles on many occasions shows interest and even attempts to fill up the gaps of Emma's emotional vacuum. He tries for a few moments to sparkle passion in her, but she is unable to acknowledge same as “she longed for emotion, not scenery” (34) and it seems like “there was no longer anything extraordinary about Charles's love for her” (40), for she wants “something more solid than love to depend on” (155). Her failure to accept invented coquettes from Charles could also be associated with her upbringing. As a child Emma had not received much love from her parents, and this naturally created an emotional vacuum and gives her a strong desire to fill that vacuum in adulthood – and this vacuum could be filled by love such as the ones she had read from the romance fictions. Therefore, Emma's main problem is not that Charles does not love her, but Charles does not know *how* to love her. This is why, Emma, disgusted and dejected with him, often asks herself “Why in the world did I ever get married?” (41), for “she...could not believe that this placid existence of hers was the happiness of which she had dreamed” (37).

As a consequence of this, Emma begins to search for satisfaction outside wedlock, fantasizing about “another husband” and inwardly detaching herself from Charles – a trend that the society does not approve-of and therefore descends on her. The society casts a large quantity of guilt on Emma and frowns at her quest for emotional gratification without

regard for her wearisome circumstances. She is living in a disappointing, unromantic marriage with lot of disillusionment; she is emotionally lonely with a loneliness the complexity of which was difficult to understand unless one experience it firsthand. The choice of adultery for Emma is rather a matter of emotional necessity than a selfish craving:

...before the defilement of marriage and the disillusion of adultery, she had been able to root her life in the firmness of some noble heart, then virtue, tenderness, sensual pleasure, and wifely duty would all have fused into one, and never would she have fallen from so lofty a pinnacle of happiness. But that happiness must surely be a fraud, devised for the despair of all desire (199).

Kate Millet (2000) observes that incidents from bullying, obscene, or hostile remarks are a psychological gesture of ascendancy against women. In *Madame Bovary*, there are no instances where Emma's male partners in adultery are castigated. This points to a society that value men above women, in which men had social and political power and women's role was to serve men's interest. The town's people regard Emma's affair with Leon and Rodolphe as sinful and as acts of betrayal towards her husband. Her first romantic outing with the former is, in the view of the society, "compromising".

On the other hand, when Emma's tribulation and distress to settle some heavy outstanding debts reach its peak, she confronts Maitre Guillaumin to request for some funds. Rather than giving her the loan, Monsieur Guillaumin settles for an "exchange", and to make that exchange, he demands sex from Emma which she out-rightly refuses by saying "I am not for sale" (270). This is further proof that Emma's adulterous affair with Rodolphe and Leon are not borne out of self-centered lust but on the necessity to fill some emotional voids. More so, this point also brings to the surface how Emma is obliged to seek survival or advancement through men. She could only do this, as the society dictates, either through appeasement or through the exchange of her sexuality for financial support. Sex, in this society, is seen as primarily a female resource. Culturally, female sexuality is endowed with value, whereas male sexuality is relatively treated as worthless as explained by Millet (2000:54).

Millet further observes that a woman's chattel status is continuously enhanced in the conventional assumption that marriage involves an exchange of her sexual consortium for emotional needs and financial support. In that matter, the mobility of Emma's object of desire for the hope of finding emotional bliss and financial fulfillment is informed by this social-misogynist creed. Her kind of craving, which would supposedly give her happiness and contentment, is absent in, or incapable of being matched by Charles, although she has fulfilled her own part of the so-called "trade". Charles seems to be disconnected from her life, "as eternally absent, as impossible, as nullified, as if he were lying at the point of death before her very eyes" (165).

The realities of married life have, no doubt, disillusioned Emma Bovary's desire for romantic pleasure and luxury. The fact that she searches for fulfilment outside of wedlock, as seen in the novel, is a consequence of boredom, the search for sexual satisfaction, and an urge to fill an emotional void. Emma's extra-marital affair is an attempt to escape from a worn-out relationship to a better life. Coming from a background of an absence of love and affection, and being in an unemotional and unattractive marriage, Emma has a proclivity to

engage in romantic relationship outside marriage and this relationship could involve sex which is, ultimately, inevitable. Emma is not adulterous under normal circumstance; she is a determined and dedicated housewife. However, no level of marital morality can justify her emotional needs going unfulfilled, hence, her efforts to satisfy them. This is Charles' situation in his maiden marriage. When he could not find self-freedom and romantic gratification in that marriage, he opts out and begins to court Emma in an attempt to fill his own emotional vacuum.

3.3 Death and the Woman's Desire

Girard's mimetic theory identifies the driving forces behind the unrelenting desire of the most widely acclaimed female protagonist of Flaubert's literary realm. It explains, in captivating triangular proposition, the models responsible for Emma Bovary's desire in *Madame Bovary*. The analysis so far reveals that Emma's wishful thoughts and romantic longings are propelled by mediators within the world that surrounds her – which she has hoped to absorb and see them reflecting in her life.

However, Emma's desire is destined to remain unsatisfied and unattainable in a world of men. Her inability to fill these emotional voids within this patriarchal society could be associated with Dollimore's paradigm of desire and death. In discussing Schopenhauer, Jonathan Dollimore (2000) analyzes the relationship between the individual's desire and death, in that the former is a psychic urge resulting from lack, deficiency and suffering, which only attains "ultimate freedom" in the latter (173) - the other pole of life which represents true completion and the final putting-to-rest of man's never-ending state of desire. This is to say; there is an intersection between desiring pleasure and the "will-to-live" on the one hand, and the instinct of death on the other. In other words, the bliss of desire is likened to the experience of dying; it awakens or incites the death drive in humans, because it is only through death that individuals overcome the powerful and irrational desire to live.

As events continue to unfold in *Madame Bovary*, Emma's desires prove to be unattainable, and, therefore, she continues to live in a state of unfulfilled desire, and it is her secret longings that consume her life force and push her towards suicide, because she was "suffering purely through her love, and at the thought of it she felt her soul slipping out of her body – just as the wounded, in dying, feel their life slipping away through their bleeding wounds" (279). For Emma then, suffering is her true destiny since it is practically impossible for her to achieve fulfillment within the realm of her imaginary fantasies and that pushes her towards death as the only possible form of liberation. This is to say, the desire which permeates Emma's world ultimately seems to reflect the most profound unconscious yearning of all humanity in the novel. For Emma, therefore, death is a complement to life which allows for the final appeasement of desire, as illustration in her thoughts:

She slowly turned her head, and seemed overjoyed on suddenly catching sight of the purple stole, perhaps experiencing afresh, in that extraordinary moment of tranquility, the forgotten rapture of her first mystical yearnings, together with a vision of the eternal bliss to come (288).

Analyzing Bombal, Ichiishi (1989) argues that woman, endowed with the mysterious ability to give life, has remained in closer touch than man with the inner world of the body and the natural drives of life and death. Her psychic being is centered on intimacy and

love, on emotional realization through human connection. In Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, the axis of Emma's inner emotional life is desire which is triggered by the desire for another, and by the quest to realize her romantic conception of life, emotional harmony and union within the natural world. In her fantasies, Emma's ideal is the return to the lost Garden of Eden, or to the paradise of the original mother-child connection, an experience of wholeness and continuity between the self and the universe. But for Flaubert, being a male author, the woman's desire cannot be realized in the world as we know it – the world of men.

Unfulfilled desire, too heavy a weight to bear, is repressed into the unconscious where it continues to live and shape the fantasies her imaginary life. The intenseness of Emma's unsatisfied desire is so strong that it traumatizes her mind during her romantic trusts. Her dissatisfaction causes extreme pain and suffering in her. Nevertheless, she struggles to overcome this emotional trauma, which seems that its ultimate freedom, as Dollimore (2000) suggests, lies in death. In this regard, it can be seen that the lack of emotional fulfillment suffered by Emma Bovary is emblematic of something basic which touches the bedrock of the woman's experience under patriarchy.

Emma's subjective experience takes place within several time frames, shifting back and forth from the immediate present of the vigil and burial, to memories of the distant past evoked by the presence of her mourners, to the mysterious realm outside of historical time to which death beckons her. Thus the initial stage of death is presented not as the termination of human consciousness, but rather as a continuation of consciousness on a higher plane. Emma now has a total perspective on the events of her existence, for "she no longer looked so pale, and her face bore an expression of serenity, as if the sacrament had healed her" (289). She now has access to thoughts and feelings which during her lifetime were buried in the depths of her unconscious, as "immediately, like an abyss, her situation lay clearly before her" (281). In this way, Emma comes to understand the significance of every person and every decisive moment in her story, and by putting the pieces one-by-one into their proper place, gradually assembles the picture of her life. Death thereby provides the means to arrive at an understanding of her own vital experience – a phenomenon that Emma warmly welcome as an escape from unfulfilled fantasies - as it is glaring that her powerful desire is unattainable in the world of men. At the end, Emma tragically committed suicide which she believed would give her a relief from longing and despair.

4. Conclusion

Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* depicts the inner conflict of a woman in the face of desire. The novel portrays the struggle of a woman to articulate her inner experience. In this realist fiction, the female protagonist comprehends the unattainability of her emotional yearnings only on her moribund – the stage of eternal exit in human life. Flaubert here suggests that a woman's desire ends only with death – a patriarchal creed that preordains woman to live without desire. The implication of this is that a woman only ascertains a freedom from the trauma of unfulfilled desire in death, a tragic irony that surrounds Emma's moment of departure from the world as a conscious being.

In other words, the study reveals that the bliss of Emma Bovary's desire is embodied in the inevitable phenomenon of dying; this is to say, her unfulfilled desires trigger the death instinct in her, as it is only through death that she would overcome the illusionary fantasy of romance and luxury in a world dominated by men. As Girard (1965) has speculated, Emma's desire is triggered by models or mediators within her world.

These mediators create an “ideal” in the mind of Emma; and because ideals are nearly always impossible to attain, she is trapped in an endless quest for satisfaction which could only end in death. Here, then, lies the connection between desire and death as argued by Dollimore. That is to say, desire, in itself, could never be satisfied, such that relief from longing and despair comes with death.

All of these issues are articulated through characterisation. Characterisation is, thus, a powerful tool at the disposal of an author. Flaubert employed this tool to explore the intersection of desire and death as psychological issues. Characterisation allows for a more in-depth and thorough exploration and depiction of ideas and perspectives than other tools such as plot, setting or even narrative. This is because a character is a *person* in the way that a narrator is not. There is an innocence and/or naivete to a character that the often all-knowing narrator lacks. This is why this study has focused more on the analysis of the characters of Emma rather than other aspects of the novel. It is the character of Emma, with her foibles and follies, her weaknesses and strengths and, above all, her desire that allowed for the kind of analysis offered here.

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