

**An Attempt to Portray the Elements of Realism in the Work  
*Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert**

*Project submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfilment of*

*the requirements for the degree of*

**Bachelor of Arts**

**in**

**English and History**

**By**

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## **Declaration**

I, **Purnendu Mahesh**, hereby declare that this project entitled **An Attempt to Portray the Elements of Realism in the work *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert** submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in English and History, is a research work done by me under the supervision and guidance of **Mrs. Ansiya T.A**, Assistant Professor, Department of English & History, Christ college (Autonomous), Irinjalakuda.

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## **Certificate**

This is to certify that this project entitled **An Attempt to Portray the Elements of Realism in the work *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert** is a record of research work carried out by **Miss Purnendu Mahesh** under my supervision and guidance in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English and History submitted to the University of Calicut.

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## Introduction

The field of literature has been expanding immensely from time immemorial. It allows us to discover the fascinating horizons of daily lives that appear mundane. Reading books of different genres is definitely an eye opener since it prompts us to expand our cognitive and creative abilities. It always strengthens our feelings and opinions along with the purgation of our emotions. Sometimes the reading experience is so intense that the reader often builds his own imaginative world beyond the framework of the author. All sorts of literary works address human nature and social conditions. Literature taught us that imperfections are never wrong. English literature has undergone significant changes over the years. There had been the commencement with Old English period followed by Middle English period. Then comes the Elizabethan age, the age of Milton, Dryden, and the Age of transition, the Victorian age, and the birth of modern literature. Each of these periods was marked by prominent authors who established themselves through their spectacular prose and poems.

This project focus on the work *Madame Bovary* a French novel penned by Gustave Flaubert. It is arguably one of the single greatest tragic novels by Flaubert. It is the debut novel of Flaubert and undoubtedly his masterpiece. It was published for the first time as a serial work in December 1856. Then it was released as a single work in April 1857 and within no time it became an instant bestseller. It is said that Flaubert had worked for five years writing this novel. He even spent weeks for writing a single page of the book. This novel certainly was a harbinger of realism in French literature. It is remarkable for its story telling technique and was itself a generative novel. This work established Flaubert as the master of realism in French literature.

The novel discusses the vision of meaninglessness and emptiness in a life which was filled with clothes, furniture, rooms and gardens. The author bravely brings in customary moralism of the contemporary French society. It was as shock for the French readers since it explicitly discussed adultery which led to obscenity trial. From its publication the novel created deep social repercussion. The novel was later adapted as graphic novel, opera and for several films. The novel vehemently questioned the role of women and about the existence of social institutions of marriage and even about sexual life. It gained notoriety as it exasperated the concept of family and religion that existed in the society. The achievement was to relocate the social elements into a new layout that apprehends the rudimentary experience of the post romantic, commercial-industrial and democratic period.

Gustave Flaubert was one of the experts of nineteenth century French fiction. He was born in Rouen as the second son in a doctor's family. He studied law at Paris in the 1840s, which had to be terminated as he was infected by a nerve disease due to which he failed in the law exams. The failure made him devote completely into the literary field. His masterpiece novel *Madame Bovary* also had a doctor and lawyer in its characterization. Emma Bovary, the beautiful and romantic wife of Charles Bovary gets disappointed by the dull life of being a provincial housewife. She is protagonist of the novel and she seeks pleasure and release in indulging herself in extra marital affairs first with a young man and later with a lawyer. But both the relations prove to be frustrating. At the end Emma kills herself leaving her husband behind with a huge shatter. Charles soon dies due to the emotional wreck leaving behind their only daughter with no one to look after her.

Flaubert proves to well verse in handling the concept of realism even in his debut novel. The psychological development and eventual progress of the characters is impressive. He applied realistic elements to the core so that every aspect in the novel feels relatable to the reader. He also concentrated in describing the details of the place, time and events in an admirable way. The author made sure that the novel and description of events is precise. He adopted the objective method of narration while maintaining perfection to the zenith. He always carried the suitable rhythm, form, word and structure in his writings. The novel was subjected to mixed response from readers since it has unconventional happenings with obvious depiction. The novel was criticized for its lack of morality and was appreciated by some others for the honest treatment of events and the craftsmanship of the author. Flaubert once commented “Books are made not like children but like pyramids.....and are just useless!”

The author remained spirited out of existence since he followed objective mode of narration in the novel. He remains neutral instead of spreading explanations, commentary or instruction over the body of the novel. This work was modeled on the life of Delphine Delamare; a French lady who passed away in 1848. It is her life that is portrayed in this novel. She was dissatisfied with the routine married life .Flaubert came to know about this lady’s death while reading the newspaper. This piece of news attracted his attention and was the fuel to his work *Madame Bovary* which discusses the miserable consequences of married lives that existed in the nineteenth century French society.

This project discusses on the literary movement of realism implemented in the novel *Madame Bovary*. The project aims at discovering the various aspects of realism

throughout the novel which is often explicit in the narration of the text. The illustration of realism in Flaubert's works is noticeable and remarkable. The French literature reached its highest stages of realism in Flaubert's novels where he reveals the tragic consequences of romanticism. The realist writer in Flaubert evoked the harsh discovery of self-awareness and the pains of the inner life in varying degree. His renowned work *Sentimental Education*, also pictured elements of realism in a celebrated way.

Even if the work is fictional it should have stains and hints of realism in it. It's because the readers should find the work relatable and to an extent believable. The setting of the story, the era it belongs and other minor details of the work should be exempted from being fictional. If the author desires for his readers to get immersed in the novel, the story must appear real and the characters must be actual or existent. It also doesn't mean that the fictional writing be exceedingly authentic since it then lose its fictional quality. Readers of fiction expect fantasy; thereby realism in fiction is about sketching a certain reality. The root word to understand this is 'plausibility'. Plausibility means to what extent the work is credible and reasonable. The characters and their traits, themes, plot, setting should be convincing to the reader regardless of the genre.

The project is chaptered for the convenience of explaining the topic. The project begins with the introduction. The first chapter is an insight towards the literary movement, realism in general with detailed description on its features and evolution. The second chapter is about analyzing the elements of realism in the selected work *Madame Bovary*. The third chapter reveals the themes, motifs and strong symbols employed in *Madame Bovary* along with the character analysis. And finally the literary theory is deduced in conclusion of the project.

## Chapter 1

### Realism as a Literary Movement

Realism is a revival movement in art which started in the mid nineteenth century in France and later got spread to the entire world. Realism entered literature almost during the same time. Its prime concern was to root out the so called fantastic and romantic elements in literature and art and to thrust the components of reality. In realistic literature the writers use realism as a literary technique to epitomize the elements such as characters, setting, themes etc. without employing intricate imagery or figurative language such as similes and metaphors. The writers make sure that they don't sugar coat the events nor describe things in decorative language. There are contrasting views on the timing of realism as a method. Some studies have argued that realistic methods of depicting life have been around since ancient times, and these methods have gone through several stages, including the concepts of antico realism, realism of the renaissance, enlightenment realism and social realism. According to various analysis it was found that realism appeared as an innovative method at the similar time with the commence of family and domestic novels in the eighteenth century. The concept that realism got into matured stages in European literature in the 1930s has been broadly confirmed by many literary experts. It is evidenced by the fact that the principle of true outline of realism in European literature is gravely conveyed in higher social and logical forms.

The term 'realisme' was initially coined by a painter Gustave Courbet. From Courbet it was passed into literature, by Jules Husson Champrenry who was the recognised leader of the 'ecole realiste' of French novelist for his candid and forthright dealing of subjects in his novels. The terms realists and naturalists have been used

correspondingly that prohibits strict distinction between them and to decide whether an author is a realist or naturalist. Realists led heated campaigns against romantics that were similar to the scornful ones led by romantics against the classicists. The line between fiction and reality is usually considered to be a firm definition such that the facts comprising reality are prerogative over the ingenious fiction. However like all other grading these classifications massively borrow from and lend to each other. In some cases reality appears to be unusual and unknown than fiction, while fiction appears more practical. On the other hand there are recurrent crossovers between the two allowing reality to find its past present and future in fictional narratives and fiction to draw inspiration from the world it is implanted in. The theory of realism accentuate upon objectivity being mediocre and indifferent in handling the subject matter. Literary realism can be acknowledged as a unique genre which peeps into the real life people and situations. It brings out the real dialects of people. The subtle nature of realism not only moulds a fascinating story but also depicts the raw and unfiltered living conditions of a specific period. Realist's works are still considered to be strong and explicit commentary for enacting changes for certain social groups. In realism one can find characters with genuine jobs and dilemmas. For example a work of realism might chronicle the life of an average farmer in an undramatized diction.

Honesty and artistic sensitivity are two significant obligations of realism. In order to make effectual demonstration of life it needs to be all inclusive and comprehensive yet the life should be shown with all its contradictions. Therefore a blunt description of life conflicts is one of the major requirements of realism literature. Each igneous method is based on a particular social context and encapsulates the artful

ideals of a particular social class in society. Realism in literature makes choice in reference to imperfection and its occurrences are valued, experienced as aesthetic. Realism also has stains of reserved and unemotional social criticism. The realist authors always attempt to depict even the trivial affairs with minute details and attributes. In literature, realism strives to render human actions and the social environment as it occurs in our day to day lives. Realism focuses on the precise documentation of events, approaching the issues sociologically and presenting it in the vernacular terminology. Realistic works of any period reflect the contemporary lifestyle of that particular period in a profound manner. Their routine activities, their clothing, their way of communication, their common occupation, customs beliefs etc. were high lightened.

Mostly the themes revolve around the lives of middle class and lower class people as per the social and economic status. Realism arrived into American literature after Civil War through the works of Mark Twain and Henry James. These authors illustrated their observation in an unbiased and objective way. The theory of realism pictured the human lives and the natural world with fidelity and without idealizing the happenings. American realistic authors selected subjects including the crisis faced due to changing circumstances. Themes like industrialization, urbanization, population, social equality, middle class people etc. provided rich foundation for the writers. The literary movement of realism should always be placed in history specifically rather than artistical labelling. Realistic writings became popular since the readers could witness their own difficulties and struggles in the form of printed material. It is interesting to recognise that often these two realms of reality and fiction collide and amalgamate with

one another forbidding the readers to distinguish between the truths from the false creations of the mind. Writers like Dickens, Balzac, and Dostoyevsky etc. attempted and succeeded in mirroring the reality in their oeuvre. This is apparent when these rationalists poured in excessive and obsessive awareness in their lines with the obvious fabrication of all the scenes by endorsing the surrounding spaces. These pragmatic writers implicated their plots in contemporary intellectual and cultural debates. They had woven unique characters that had ideally fitted into the immediate circumstances.

For example Dickens probes the multifaceted quality of type characters, which was a contradictory task by adding engrossing shades and nuances to their conventions. However Dostoyevsky who foregrounds the heterodox character of Raskolnikov (*Crime and Punishment*) to use his schizophrenia as a medium of sketching all other characters, that is the men around him become fragments of his own consciousness. For Balzac, (*The Human Comedy*) the city of Paris is transformed into a character in its own right; its filthy housing crime and stylish streets hiding the social hypocrisy behind the balls and .The above mentioned realist authors presented reality in varying ways in these renowned works. The subjective behaviour of the circumstances the upcoming notions in physical and social science, the modification happening in religion and social circle they belong to etc;decide the realities they opt to draw. New development to the field of criminal psychology was contributed through the work *Crime and Punishment*. Readers were introduced to the concepts like conscious sub conscious and unconscious state of human mind. These concepts were then perfected by Freud in his psychological theories.

Like any other movements, realism has got its own sub sects. Magical realism, Social realism, naturalism and psychological realism are the most popular and significant ones. Magical realism is a sub-genre that has got elements of magic knitted into realistic setting (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*). Social realism portrays the lives of working class people along with their demolishing and dreadful social lives (*Of Mice and Men*). Naturalism adopts scientific principles to explore human relationships (*A rose for Emily*). Psychological realism dives into the characters thoughts and convictions rather than focussing on the plot of the story (*The Portrait of A Lady*). The members of early school of realism saw nothing fine and virtuous in poetry and believed that prose as the only elated literature. The present day chief realistic wordsmiths like Balzac and Flaubert weren't recognised as realist by the early school. The modern definition of realism can be quoted from Edwin Dargans work *Studies In Balzac's Realism*. It says that 'It is the art of representing actuality viewed largely from material standpoint in a way to produce as closely as possible the impression of truth'. The crucial direct of early realists was psychological; a study of characters.

Realism was invigorated by several intellectual evolutions in the first half of nineteenth century. Among these the most prominent were the Anti-romantic movement in Germany, positivist philosophy of Auguste Comte, rise of professional journalism and photography. Another absorbing aspect common in rational novel is that the characters physical appearances often reveal their inner realities through delicate and subtle details .This allows the readers to travel around the twist and turns still making it possible to catch up with them unlike the traps in post modernism which occur much

later in future. Literary realism is well rounded. In addition to cultural differences, the designs of each type of literary realism are unlike as well as the issues of each variety. Realistic novels were often the exhibitions of a man in hunt of salvation via the exercise of his mental capacity in a chaotic world of anxiety and progress .The realism of Howells is the realism of here and now, that of Mark Twain is a criticism of present social condition and the realism of Henry James is often concerned with the psychological development of his key characters.

Belinsky says that beauty in art is present in life and that the expression of beauty is a prerequisite for artistic integrity. This definition includes most of the traits of realism in a nutshell. Picturing life in realism is not a copy of life but an aesthetic way of appreciating the meaning of life events and choosing their meanings. This selection demands an essential ‘texture’ of creativity. The creator should be capable to contemplate distinctly about the meaning of facts and simultaneously complement the truths which are alike. Thus the growth and expansion of elevated realism could only be attained by turning away from reality but top tiring the portrayal of lives of masses.

Thus one can arrive at the conclusion that in literature, realism is reference that gives an illusion of exact correspondence with reality in its limited aspects. It is not unlimited ultimate reality but the fragmented, flawed world of quotidian experience that literary realism seems to refer to; it may be something felt as borrowed from that kind of experience, for instance, fragmentation or flawedness simply as such. Not only qualitative limitations of the mundane and unheroic or the homespun are to be thought of as limited reality; singleness of focus upon small or the unnoticeable too induces realism .

## Chapter 2

### The Elements of Realism in Madame Bovary

The unprecedented pearl of the tormented mastermind of Gustave Flaubert –the novel Madame Bovary epitomize and embodies the kind of enchanting baffle that allures the heed well beyond the realm of literary criticism. In the early twentieth century it stirred up Jules De Gaultiers philosophy of Bovaryism, a psychological complex refined from the novel and it even collected existentialist therapy at the hands of Jean Paul Sartre. Madame Bovary is often showered as a landmark in the blooming of the psychological novel. The descriptive standpoint moves in a strange and unnatural way, from a frozen analytic distance to most confidential and heated contemplation. The reader comes to know about the protagonist Emma's youth, her schooling in convent, her return to her father's farm, her engagement with Charles, their splendid wedding and Charles bottomless joy in life with the arrival of the love of his life, Emma. But only once Emma settled into her life in Tostes the readers all of a sudden learns to find ourselves really in the privacy of her consciousness with an abrupt and catastrophic apprehension.

Throughout the novel there is a very carefully planned selection of episodes and incidents, so that "realism" if interpreted to mean a kind of journalistic reportage, is misleading. Every detail in Madame Bovary is chosen for a purpose and is closely related to everything else that precedes and follows it, to an extent that may not be evident (or possible) in real life. There is profound artistry involved in what is selected and omitted and in what weight is given to specific incidents. Many of the techniques

Flaubert used for descriptive purposes are cinematic in their quality, such as the flashing back and forth between the Prefect speech and Rodolphe; flirting at the Agricultural Show. During the wild coach ride taken by Emma and Leon through the suburbs of Rouen, and at other points, the reader is made to view events from the outside. This adds to the air of reality, and it makes it necessary for the reader to call upon his own experiences to assist in understanding the experiences of the characters. The reader, in a sense, is made to participate with them.

Flaubert seemed fair and impartial reality in his depiction of the bourgeoisie and was especially cruel in his portrayal. Emma Bovary whose head was packed with romantic novels and fantasy had dejected marriage which leads her to unlawful love affairs with .This sort of extramarital affairs could very well have been true in Flaubert's time and is also a truth even in present day situation where the Emma is soaked with romantic movies rather than with novels. It was economic desperation that paved way for Emma's suicide rather than the outlawed affairs of her, though these affairs were the prime reason of her financial degradation. Flaubert also had lost most of his wealth in a court case, and the real life events made him trouble free in describing them in his novels. Flaubert grouped the characters of his novel in a scientific way like that of a biologist who classifies the species.

Emma's inner thoughts become the merging gist of the story, yet the author permits us to enter into the retirement of those who conceal from her, as when Rodolphe initially visits the house and appraises the doctor's behaviour and Emma's maturity for seduction. Partially using this faculty of switching stances, the characters are displayed to be living in chiefly self enclosed worlds-habituated upon a close knit

society and yet hysterically and spiritually cut off from it. Self-enclosure that Flaubert induced must equally be considered to the bewildering existential condition that we all share, where we dwell in a universe that intrigues us with its conspiring beginning and beyond. Flaubert performs his brilliance in constructing a knit plot in which the casual relationship of events in the novel brings a faithful ending. The convincing plot of *Madame Bovary* began when Emma later found that Charles Bovary was not her Prince Charming.

The tangled Charles's hat in the first chapter is not portraiture of necessary to a realistic report of his school days, but has been shown to signify many angles of his personality and future development. Other exemplars of symbols comprise of the blind beggar, the wedding bouquet of Charles; first wife, and Emma's pet greyhound. Critics have pointed out that even the names of the characters in *Madame Bovary* have figurative meanings — for indeed bovine. Flaubert also engulfs prolonged descriptions of things which seemingly have no endowment to plot, character or theme but which are simply there to give a sense that the world of the novel exists unaccompanied of the characters and is moderate to what the characters might be going through. For example, at the beginning of Part Two, there is a long description of Yonville-l'Abbaye, the town at which the Bovarys are shortly arriving. The description includes its geography, the buildings situated in the town, and even the graveyard and its resident gravedigger. It is these details and descriptions, which provides the novel with the 'Effect of Reality'

Flaubert also endures this realism by using symbolism only rarely in his prose, and even when he does use metaphors, they are taken from every day, ordinary life instead of being broad and metaphysical. For example, Charles's mother, when she

feels slighted and left out by Charles's new marriage to Emma, is described to be "like a ruined man gazing through the windows at people dining in his old home. Such metaphors, are firmly established as they are in reality, and synthesised with the certain details which allot finish to the world of the novel, moulding the events in the novel realistic. Madame Bovary employs a style of writing known as free indirect discourse or style indirect libre. This is a style of third-person narration which assimilates the soul of first-person direct speech. For example, when Emma becomes involved with Rodolphe, the novel goes, "So at last she was to know those joys of love that fever of happiness of which she had despaired! She was entering upon marvels where all would be passion, ecstasy, delirium." These lines are occasions of free indirect style, as they are the thoughts of Emma intermixed into the story-telling. Because free indirect style allows the reader to get inside the mind of the characters and look at things from bigoted point of view, it goes against the all-seeing, disconnected narrator which other realists had chosen.

But Flaubert employs this technique in such a way that the prose has a detached, neutral style. The way Flaubert uses it effaces the narrator and his discernment from the story. It renders things as they are, without the narrator or the authorial voice giving his own intuitive belief on them. He infuses realism with emotional subjectivity but still creates a world which is real and equitable. An example of Flaubert's purposeful election of episodes takes place in Part I, Chapter 30. Even that early in the novel, the reader is given a search of understanding into the operation of Emma's mind and a sign of things to come, when the author comments: Emma, for her part, would have liked a marriage at midnight by the light of torches, but her father thought such an concept foolish.

This fleeting comment solidifies the objection between the sentimental romanticizing that will later cause Emma's disposition and the unsympathetic real world, illustrated by her pragmatic peasant father. A reporter must retell his story as it happens. He has no more insight or perspective than the contributors, and he can only represent random slices of life, drawn out of context. Flaubert aspired to depict a precise contention by his story. Although his method was realistic, he determined where to place his attention and what to focus on by reference to this purpose.

This novel employed suspense and surprise and they are caused by the mysterious answer for several unsettled problems. Who would be Emma's lover was a mystery, the readers might think that Leon was the man but they are surprised to find Emma could still control herself from him. León came to her life when she was at the peak of her hatred towards Charles .It was not a surprise if Emma finally fell in love with Rodolphe. Romanticism is heavily attacked by verisimilitude and disappointment that were experienced by Emma Bovary in her attempts to build an imaginary world full of passion, emotion, and beauty .The author focuses on character development to disclose the ambivalence of the plot and provides realistic details becoming symbolic in light of the romantic recession. The character development in the story is presented through Emma's realization of the imperfection of the world. She lives in a false reality that prevails in her imagination, disclosed through cultural modes of visions. The heroine is incapable of distinguishing between the fantasy and reality, past and present; she also has a false imagination about the man. Therefore, the author makes use of realism to make Emma realize that the world is not a romantic fable; it is overwhelmed with problems and routines.

Viewing the tragedy novel as a confrontation between romanticism and realism, the story, on the other hand, provides a romantic and illusionary world created by Emma Bovary to detach herself from reality. On the other hand, psychological realism still dominates in the novel because all dreams and utmost expectations are shattered in the end. The world surrounding the heroine is realistic because reason takes control of emotion. In this respect, Emma's particular visions dictated by her cultural background prevents her from accepting real life. Although *Madame Bovary* as a realistic novel is widely recognized, Flaubert's quest of distortions and illusions lead to the idea that the work itself is a protest against the dullness of the existence. Such an apposition generates more deliberations on the nature of the novel's ideas and insights. Flaubert's deep contempt for reality does not allow him to be detached and indifferent enough for expressing aesthetic distance.

The writer's vacillation between pretentious objectivity and passionate subjectivity prevents him from disclosing his full affiliation to the realistic tendencies of the nineteenth century. Hence; the heroine is more obsessed with her romantic adventures. As is clear from the summary, her aspiration to go beyond the established reality is impossible because the frames within she lives do not allow her to turn her imaginary world into the truth. While reflecting on the essence of Flaubert's ideas, "the romantic proclamation of the individual's right to happiness proved illusory because for him happiness itself proved to be an illusion". This melancholy later turned into pessimism and realization of moral solitude, as the writer is aware that real life has no meaning. Despite the mentioned instances of romanticism in *Madame Bovary*, the novel still proclaims that this movement was gradually suppressed by realistic waves.

The novel, the writer also oversees a significant literary dimension through the display of realistic details. Even though Flaubert the master of realism, he still refers to reality as to the point of departure for the creator. While striving to render the beauty of the ideal world, the writer also makes use of realistic details to initiate the reader into metaphoric and romantic dimensions of the concealed world created by Emma Bovary. Her false visions are explicitly represented through realistic precision, providing a ground for symbolism that forms the essence of the novel's themes. Hence, the main heroine's hidden world is full of passion, emotion; it is too ideal for reality, but it makes Emma be protected from the boredom and existentialistic tendencies of the nineteenth century's society.

At the same time, the ideal she creates does not fill in her life with sense because she is a constant and desperate search of the unknown, of something that does not exist. In conclusion, it can be stated that, although the author has introduced notes of romanticism in the novel, the core of work is still focused on the rise of realistic tendencies that suppress any displays of passion, emotion, and beauty. Therefore, Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary is an example of the realism genre. The proclamation of the reason is still accompanied by the author's rigid confrontation with the reality that does not provide people with the right to be happy and independent in making decisions. Thus, this can be viewed as the main evidence of realism in Madame Bovary.

To top this off, there is ("hanging down at the end of a long cord a little cluster of gold threads, like a tassel en manière de gland"). The description of Charles and Emma's wedding cake, no less outrageous and incomprehensible than the hat,

culminates in an analogous simile: at the very top, there is “a little Cupid perched on a chocolate swing, its two poles finished off with two real rose-buds, just like knobs, on the top” (de rose naturels, en guise de boules, au sommet”). These ridiculous minutiae not only are part of a pseudo-description but are themselves representative of other artifacts. Flaubert’s mock-referentiality seems to suggest that a realist novel in itself is apathetic—if also flamboyant—simile, just as the gold threads in the hat or the tacky rosebuds on the cake are there only en manière de something else.

The roles of the narrator and character are constantly on the verge of collapsing into one another in canonical realist consciousness representation. Again, this underlying unnaturalness is thematized in Flaubert, notably in the famous discrepancy between the beginning and the overall design of the novel: the story opens with the word “nous,” referring to the school mates of young Charles Bovary, forming their first unfavourable impression of him and his hat; soon after the opening, first-person references gradually give way to omniscient narration, the narration thus generating what Jonathan Culler calls Flaubert’s elusive narrator (*Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty*). Another crucial observation on narrative disturbances in *Madame Bovary* is also made by Culler, albeit over thirty years after his seminal Flaubert study *The Realism*.

Charles pays a visit to père Rouault, yet supposedly to meet Emma, whom he finds alone in the kitchen: He arrived there one day about three o’clock; everybody was out in the fields; he went into the kitchen, but at first didn’t notice Emma; the shutters were closed. Through the cracks in the wood, the sun cast along narrow stripes of brightness that broke across the angles of furniture and trembled on the ceiling. Flies,

on the table, were crawling up the glasses left there, and buzzing about in the bottom, drowning in the cider dregs. The daylight that came down the chimney, turning the soot on the fire-back to velvet, touched the cold cinders with blue. Between the window and the hearth, Emma was sewing; she wore no fiches, on her bare shoulders you could see little drops of sweat. Several details invite the reader to naturalize the entire description of the stagnant, grotesquely aesthetic setting as perceived by Charles: we are told that first he does not see Emma, so presumably we should get a report on what he did see. Yet, as Culler notes, at the same time we are hard-pressed to imagine such exquisite sense of detail (the prismatic effects of light, the drowning flies, and the drops of sweat) emanating from Charles's dull and indelicate disposition. For Culler, the passage marks one of the cornerstones of Flaubertian aesthetics, his desire to frustrate any readerly attempt to personalize narrative stances (*The Realism* 690–91). Consequently, *Madame Bovary* displays a world that is realistic: “Realism, one might say, is based on a sense that there is a world there, independent of any human meaning or desire, as well as on the theme of the world's resistance to human purposes” (692).

The example of Charles and the flies betrays one further characteristic typical of realist textual architecture. A frequent argument in favour of the immersive and illusionist quality of realist fiction arises from the level of detail. Yet one might argue, as does literary critic James Wood from his privileged position outside narratological debates, that the obsession with verisimilar detail in realist fiction is, in fact, rather counter cognitive. Wood is affected by Flaubert's devotion to detail, which, according to Wood, manifests as selection (not as randomness imitating on-line perception); Flaubert's details are “frozen in their gel of chosenness”. The effect is that of both recognition and estrangement. It is as if the flies in the kitchen of Rouault are dipped

not only into the cider dregs but into the “gel of chosenness”: the traces of selection imply intentional construction, and yet the effect is that of a “world just being there”—all sorts of beautiful banality taking place beyond the mediocre interests of Charles Bovary. Moreover, the metonymic essence of realist descriptions creates an effect of—not precision but—disproportion. As the famous definition of Barthes goes, the code of *effet de réel* should be invisible to a reader accustomed to novelistic conventions (“The Reality Effect”); in other words, the extrapolation of the story world from metonymic evidence should be a naturalized procedure. The prominent characteristic of free indirect discourse is visible. Sentences such as “Charles’s conversation was as flat as any pavement” or “Any woman who had imposed such great sacrifices on herself could well be permitted a few fancies” can and will, obviously, be naturalized as displaying Emma’s postures, but the form is not that of immediate impression but of narrative takeover, even rhetorical intention.

Thus concluding this chapter one finds that, the nineteenth-century gave rise to realistic and symbolic movements that were still closely intertwined with visions creating more ambiguity and ambivalence. Based primarily on the true story, Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* was often considered as an example of a romantic novel because of the protagonist’s delusion outlooks on life, relations, and attitudes to people. However, the story is also seen as a realistic representation because the author resorts to representing romantic delusions that prevent the main heroine from living in a grim reality.

## Chapter 3

### Themes, Motifs and Character Analysis in *Madame Bovary*

*Madame Bovary* explores the possibility that the written word fails to capture even a small part of the depth of a human life. Flaubert uses a variety of techniques to show how language is often an inadequate medium for expressing emotions and ideas. The character's frequent inability to communicate with each other is emblematic of the fact that words do not perfectly describe what they signify. In the first chapter, for example, Charles's teacher thinks he says his name is "Charbovari." He fails to make his own name understood. This inadequacy of speech is something Emma will encounter again and again as she tries to make her distress known to the priest or to express her love to Rodolphe. It is also present when Charles reads the letter from Rodolphe and misinterprets it as a note of platonic affection.

The strong sense of the inadequacy of language is in part a reaction against the school of realism. Although Flaubert was in some senses a realist, he also believed it was wrong to claim that realism provided a more accurate picture of life than romanticism. He deploys ironic romantic descriptions to establish a tension between various characters' experience of events and the real aspects of life.

Emma Bovary's hope that her baby will be a man because "a woman is always hampered" is just one of the many instances in the novel in which Flaubert demonstrates an intimate understanding of the plight of women in his time. We see throughout *Madame Bovary* how Emma's male companions possess the power to change her life for better or worse—a power that she herself lacks. Even Charles contributes to Emma's powerlessness. His laziness prevents him from becoming a good doctor, and his incompetence prevents him from advancing into a higher social stratum

that might satisfy Emma's yearnings. As a result, Emma is stuck in a country town without much money. Rodolphe, who possesses the financial power to whisk Emma away from her life, abandons her, and, as a woman, she is incapable of fleeing on her own. Leon at first seems similar to Emma. Both are discontented with country life, and both dream of bigger and better things. But because Leon is a man, he has the power to actually fulfil his dream of moving to the city, whereas Emma must stay in Yonville, shackled to a husband and child.

Emma's disappointments stem in great part from her dissatisfaction with the world of the French bourgeoisie. She aspires to have taste that is more refined and sophisticated than that of her class. This frustration reflects a rising social and historical trend of the last half of the nineteenth century. At the time Flaubert was writing, the word 'bourgeois' referred to the middle class: people who lacked the independent wealth and ancestry of the nobility, but whose professions did not require them to perform physical labour to earn their living. Their tastes were characterized as gaudily materialistic. They indulged themselves as their means allowed, but without discrimination. The mediocrity of the bourgeoisie was frustrating to Flaubert, and he used Emma Bovary's disgust with her class as a way of conveying his own hatred for the middle class.

There are many disturbing references to death and illness in *Madame Bovary*, and the novel can seem very morbid. These references emphasize Flaubert's realistic, unflinching description of the world, and also act as physical manifestations of Emma's moral decay. For example, Lestiboudois grows potatoes in the graveyard because the decomposing bodies help them grow, and Homais keeps fetuses in jars. Such excessive

corruption is a comment on the physical state of the world. Flaubert constantly reminds us that death and decay lurk beneath the surface of everyday life, and that innocence is often coupled very closely with corruption. This focus on the negative aspects of life is part of Flaubert's realism.

Windows are frequently associated with Emma. We often see her looking out of them, or we glimpse her through them from the street as she waves goodbye to Charles or Leon. For Emma, these windows represent the possibility of escape. A shutter bangs open to announce her engagement, and she contemplates jumping out the attic window to commit suicide. But Emma never manages to really escape. She stays inside the window, looking out at the world and imagining a freedom that she never can obtain. Windows also serve to take Emma back to the past. At the ball, when the servant breaks the window and Emma sees the peasants outside, she is suddenly reminded of her simple childhood. Such a retreat to childhood also could be a kind of escape for Emma, who would surely be much happier if she stopped striving to escape that simple life. But, again, she ignores the possibility of escape, trapping herself within her own desires for romantic ideals of wealth she can't obtain.

A picture of physical decay, the blind beggar who follows the carriage in which Emma rides to meet Leon also symbolizes Emma's moral corruption. He sings songs about "birds and sunshine and green leaves" in a voice "like an inarticulate lament of some vague despair". This coupling of innocence with disease relates to the combination of beauty and corruption that Emma herself has become. While her words, appearance, and fantasies are those of an innocent and beautiful wife, her spirit becomes foul and corrupt as she indulges herself in adulterous temptations and the

deceptions required in maintaining her illicit affairs. Later, when Emma dies, the blind man gets to the end of his song about a young girl dreaming. We then discover that what we thought was a song about an innocent woman is actually a bawdy, sexual song. This progression from innocence to sexual degradation mirrors the path of Emma's life.

When Emma comes home with Charles, she notices his dead wife's wedding bouquet in the bedroom and wonders what will happen to her own bouquet when she dies. Later, when they move to Yonville, she burns her own bouquet as a gesture of defiance against her unhappy marriage. The dried bouquet stands for disappointed hopes and for the new promise of a wedding day turned sour and old. In another sense, Emma's burning of her bouquet foreshadows the way her desires will consume her youth and, eventually, her life. Binet's habit of making useless napkin rings on his lathe is a symbol with several meanings. First, it represents the useless, non-productive, ornamental character of bourgeois tastes. Second, it represents something more ominous—the monotony of the life that traps Emma. In the scene in which she contemplates throwing herself out the window, Emma hears the sound of the lathe calling her to suicide. Finally, the lathe represents the craftsman repeatedly making a simple, uniform work of art. Flaubert once compared himself as a writer to a craftsman working on a lathe.

In *Emma Bovary*, Flaubert uses irony to criticize romanticism and to investigate the relation of beauty to corruption and of fate to free will. Emma embarks directly down a path to moral and financial ruin over the course of the novel. She is very beautiful, as we can tell by the way several men fall in love with her, but she is morally corrupt and unable to accept and appreciate the realities of her life. Since her girlhood

in a convent, she has read romantic novels that feed her discontent with her ordinary life. She dreams of the purest, most impossible forms of love and wealth, ignoring whatever beauty is present in the world around her. Flaubert once said, “Madame Bovary is me,” and many scholars believe that he was referring to a weakness he shared with his character for romance, sentimental flights of fancy, and melancholy. Flaubert, however, approaches romanticism with self-conscious irony, pointing out its flaws even as he is tempted by it. Emma, on the other hand, never recognizes that her desires are unreasonable. She rails emotionally against the society that, from her perspective, makes them impossible for her to achieve.

Charles represents both the society and the personal characteristics that Emma detests. He is incompetent, stupid, and unimaginative. In one of the novel’s most revelatory moments, Charles looks into Emma’s eyes and sees not her soul but rather his own image, reflected in miniature. Charles’s perception of his own reflection is not narcissistic but merely a simple, direct sensation, unmediated by romantic notions. The moment demonstrates his inability to imagine an idealized version of the world or find mystic qualities in the world’s physical aspects. Instead, he views life literally and never imbues what he sees with romantic import. Thus it is the physical aspects of Emma that delight Charles. When the narrative focuses on his point of view, we see every detail of her dress, her skin, and her hair. When it comes to her aspirations and depressions, however, Charles is at a loss. He nods and smiles dumbly as Emma conducts the same sorts of conversations with him that she does with her dog. Charles is

too stupid to manage his money well or to see through Emma's obvious lies, and he is a frighteningly incompetent doctor.

Realist literature often focuses on middle-class life—such as the bourgeois society in which Frédéric moves in *Sentimental Education*—and is most concerned with portraying actions and their consequences with little or no subjectivity. Social factors and cultural environments are often very powerful forces in realist literature, as are elements of rationalism and scientific reasoning. Flaubert was one of the earliest practitioners of realism, and in *Sentimental Education*, his satirical, biting observations of the French bourgeois reveal his genius at the form. *Sentimental Education* was in many ways a fictionalized autobiography of Flaubert, documenting both his unrequited love for a married woman as well as the social and political climate of the 1840s, when his friendship with Elise was flourishing. In 1848, students and the working class revolted against the increasingly oppressive regime of King Louis Philippe.

Emma, the protagonist of the novel keeps trying to develop a more glamorous life but feels bogged down by her own husband and then by her lovers who continue to fail her. Throughout the novel Flaubert constantly reminds us that women of his time tend to define themselves but was forlorn to be defined by the men in their lives. In 1870s the then new school of naturalist writers greeted the work of Flaubert, though he himself has abhorred any label including the tag of the realist. He wrote till his end but his last days were shadowed by financial issues. The novelist died of cerebral hemorrhage on 8 May 1880. Posterity has brought him the glory and eminence of a pristine artist.

## Conclusion

Flaubert's trial, there were two principal concerns which the prosecution and the defense approached from complementary but opposed directions: those of unproblematic deviance from, and conformity to, established norms and laws. One concern was the relation of the novel to basic categories and oppositions essential to familial and religious values. The question in this respect might be condensed into that of the status of the holy family in modern society. Did the novel praise marriage and religion while condemning adultery and irreligion? Or did it praise adultery and irreligion while condemning marriage and religion? The conflicting conclusions of the defense and the prosecution on this limited issue were made possible by an unexamined consensus on the fundamentally legitimate nature of the larger sociocultural context which was used as a standard in judging the novel. And they both assumed the clear-cut sub-ordination of literary to established social and religious norms.

For Flaubert in his novels represents a world that has been familiar since modernity became a concern: one in which structures-with the categories, identities, oppositions, and norms that subtend them-are too rigid, fragile, or exhausted to order life in a meaningful way that is confident enough to allow for challenges to its very meaning. Indeed these structures are, in a viciously paradoxical fashion, combined with modes of indeterminacy or disorientation that do not really challenge them because they are not viably related to them in an on-going process of exchange and renewal. The relation tends rather to be one of oscillation and possible collapse. And as order becomes hollow, excess itself veers toward the hysterical sublime which threatens to become equally hollow in that

it has little of substance to engage it. Yet this is the context that Flaubert himself somehow had to engage in his writing. *Madame Bovary* is situated on a fascinating threshold in the history of the novel and its relation to social and literary conventions.

On one level, it follows conventions to a certain point-and this too renders plausible readings such as those at the trial. But beyond a certain point, it critically sounds those conventions out, at times to the extent of excavating them. This is what helps to account for the ideologically criminal and scandalous quality of the novel. On the level of narrative practice, the vital issue is that of the shifting positions of the narrating subject in relation to characters and other objects of narration. The entire question of the so-called "free indirect style," with its inflexions of irony and empathy in the relation between narrator and narrated, should be seen in this light. For the broader question is that of tropisms in narrative perspective or voice that decenter the narrating subject and create a dialectic between forces of unification and dissemination in the structure of the narrative itself. Indeed a narrative that reads so smoothly those even drastic breaks, such as that between first and third person, can appear natural and readily pass unnoticed, poses the question of the interaction between unification and its adversaries.

This project attempts to provide a detailed study on the literary theory of realism in the work *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert. The introduction of the project gives an insight into the above mentioned topic. It also discusses the broad storyline of the novel along with the relevant details about the author.

The first chapter is all about realism in general. The chapter renders a precise idea about the concept of realism in literature. The specific features and aspects of renowned realistic works are portrayed. The next and most significant part of the project is the second chapter. It brings out the elements of realism in the selected work *Madame Bovary*. This chapter is a focus on substantiating that the work is realistic by depicting the realistic details from the work to assist the statement. The incidents from the novel allow the reader making him or her convince about the realistic nature of the work. The third chapter of the project describes the motifs themes and character analysis of the chosen work. The introduction along with the three chapters exhibits the authentic facts regarding the chosen work *Madame Bovary*.

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