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LIFE'S BUT A WALKING SHADOW: A PSYCHOANALYTICAL QUEST INTO
MADAME BOVARY'S LIFE

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ABSTRACT

The central issue raised in the paper deals with the psychoanalysis of the human mind in relation to Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Emma Bovary, the heroine of the novel who undergoes a tremendous brain wave changes during the course of her life. From a psychoanalyst's point of view, the study of the character - Emma - would be essential to find out the reason behind her downfall. A romantic by temperament, Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) is regarded as the great master of the Realist school of French Literature. Whether he chose a romantic subject (*La Tentation de Saint Antoine*) or one that seemed better suited to the doctrines of realism (*Madame Bovary*) his work was always based on scrupulous research and observation. He is an indefatigable stylist who strove for complete objectivity and precise expression of the underlying emotions of his characters. His profound compassion for the characters in his novels and his resentful contempt for the bourgeois are particularly evident in *Madame Bovary*. The main essence of his work is that he consciously or unconsciously laid the great foundation of character portrayal not by the character's actions but through the psychological workings of the mind. Emma Bovary, to the readers, is a flesh and blood character. She in reality turns against the Victorian women who dare not be true to themselves. Emma followed her dreams and ideals in life, but fared miserably for her goal was good but means rather immodest.

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INTRODUCTION

Psychoanalysis, a particular method of medical treatment of mental illness was developed by Sigmund Freud. He derived this method from his clinical observations as well as his theoretical speculations regarding poetic and artistic creation and religion. Psychoanalysis gradually became known as the science of unconscious mental processes, and the usefulness of its theories became valuable for the understanding of the mental behavior in health as well as diseases. As a physician who specialized in treating the mentally ill, Freud developed a comprehensive theory concerning the psychological structure and functioning of the human mind.

Freud's most fertile years were those between 1895 and 1900. In the latter years, he published what is considered his magnum opus, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. This deals not only with the puzzling problems of dream life and the complex mechanisms at work in the manufacture of dreams, but also with the structure and mode of functioning of the deep layers of the mind, the unconscious. Freud's most important contribution of knowledge was his detailed study of what he called the 'primary' and 'secondary' systems of the mind. He showed how fundamentally different mode of functioning is in these, and how complicated and fateful the relation and interactions between the two are.

He has given numerous lectures and his 'dispersed meditations' to some extent had been compiled and worked over by Robert C. Priddy. The inexhaustible text is the *The Human Mind: An Outline of the Higher Psychology*. In this book, Robert C. Priddy, with the help of the theories of Freud, gives a detailed analysis of the *The Human Whole* dealing with 'higher' and 'lower' psychologies. The 'higher' or as Freud calls it, 'primary' systems of the mind deal with the psychic health, consciousness human possibilities and the challenges of personal and spiritual development. The 'lower' or 'secondary' systems of the mind deal mostly with bodily conditioning, egoistic desires, unacceptable wishes or impulses.

Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* is about a common woman, Emma Bovary who marries an ordinary down-to-earth doctor, who lives in an unglamorous middle class provincial town. The action of the novel starts with Emma's boredom of her ordinary life with her husband. Charles Bovary does not seem to excite her anymore, leaving Emma depressed with life. Emma, a person solely of fancy and adventure, imagines her love life full of intense passion and adventure but reality is far from expectation. Because of the presence of the vacuum in her life, she becomes attracted to other men whom she meets along the way within a limited period of time she begins to live her life of adultery, fearing in her heart of being found out by her husband. Charles, although weak and unambitious and lacking the gallant prince image of Emma's imagination, does not lack pure love for his beautiful wife. His love for her is beyond a husband-wife relationship. In other words, he simply adores her and her inexhaustible beauty. Moreover, the irony is that she fails to see it. He trusts her so much, foolishly believes her lies that he fails to see through her deception.

During Emma's deep quest for love, one is tempted to feel that – as much as a hopeless romantic in search of 'real love', Emma in reality was in love with herself. She wanted someone to admire, to praise and to pet her, when Charles absentmindedly failed to do that anymore, she conveniently accepts other men. But the question arises: what was the 'reason' that led her to make these illicit moves, in spite of the fear in herself and that of deceiving her husband. In order to have a closer look at Emma's behavior, one is tempted to view it through a psychological perspective. Freud's psychoanalytical theories of human illness points out the working of the human mind especially related to the development of the mind and the inner consciousness. He deals with the questions concerning the inner self and of its psychological aspects. Freud details out each aspect of the inner conflicts and mental illness on both spiritual and holistic levels.

The investigator's intention is to make an analytical study of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, the character Emma, her motivation behind every action, and to bring out the psychological problems she faced: The study deals with the basic concepts of psychoanalysis, gives a detailed picture of the initial growth and development of Emma to her later stages in life, parental love, their disposition towards Emma, way of life and thought – concepts, her marriages towards Charles, and her adulterous relation with Rudolphe Boulanger and Leon Dupuis and finally, deals with Emma's death, psychologically explained.

Freud is the first chief proponent in psychology of the concept of the unconscious. The unconscious minds of people are not identical, self-observation make us aware of only a portion of our psychic processes. The unconscious contents of a mind are of similar character to the conscious ones; they are composed of thoughts, desires, fears, hopes (Waelder 9). As long as they are neglected the psychic process remains comparable to a book from which pages have been torn.

Psychoanalysis discriminates between different agencies in psychic life, the "id" our instinctual life, the "ego" or the organized share of personality and the "super ego" which approximately corresponds to the conscience. The contradictory claims of these agencies incessantly create problems which we solve some way

or other and our attempts at solutions produce new problems in the place of old ones. Neurotic traits of character are the result of failure to solve these problems.

The doctrine of the instincts, of their constitution and development, is called id-psychology, the doctrine of the ego and super ego, ego-psychology. Among the instincts of id, Freud differentiates between the sexual and aggressive. By 'sexual' Freud means not only what serves propagation: he uses the word in the wider sense of sensuality; approximately in the same way as writers mentioned 'carnal is concupiscent', or in the layman's use of verb 'to love'. Aggression, on the other hand, comprises on the impulses of hatred, of hostility and destruction.

Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* is a psychological study of the "romantic malady". The utter unhappiness faced by those who are unwilling to resolve the conflicts between their dream or idealized aspirations and the real world; in modern terms, one might say it is a study of neurosis. Furthermore it examines middle class conventions and the myth of progress, exposing weakness and the inability of the different characters to communicate with each other.

Emma Roualt's character especially during her childhood days is not described vividly when compared with Charles Bovary's. Anyhow, Flaubert gives us a detailed analysis of her behavioural aspect as a child and her stay at the convent. Her parents most probably, did not impose on her any rules or laws – in fact, being an only child she was left to herself. This is the greatest tragic situation in her life, she had no siblings nor does Flaubert refer to a friend. Psychologically she remained 'detached' from her immediate surroundings. From the novel it is clear that she was afraid of boredom and hard work, but like to linger somewhere in the middle. Before attempting to analyze her character, it is vital that one must look into the Freudian concept of Ego.

Unbalanced parental reactions to a baby's burgeoning desires to control its environment – when to feed, sleep, move etc. – can stunt the growth of a healthy ego personality. (Priddy 82)

"Unbalanced parental reactions", in the novel – motherly affection and tenderness is not mentioned – Mr. Roualt's lazy and extravagant tendencies are exuberantly described in the novel. Roualt was just as good in farming just as anybody was – in short, he never took farming seriously and just flowed with the current. He had debts to pay and loved a luxurious life of ease and comfort. In Part 1, Chapter 3, we get a photographic picture of his 'lifestyle'. Even though drowned in debt 'he like old cider, underdone legs of mutton, glorious well beaten up. (Flaubert)

This father trait is very much seen in Emma's character, after her marriage with Charles in squandering of his money with and without his knowledge.

The Freudian concept of the development of ego is ample importance to the development of a healthy ego only with the possibility of parental care. Moreover, in the novel, it is quite clear Roualt is her father, by name only; he is least concerned about her welfare. She, to him, is just a reminder of his marriage to Emma's mother. After the latter's death, Emma was placed under the care of nuns.

The greatest enigmas of life include questions like 'what is real and what is mere appearance? To what extent does my mind color or even distort things or can the human mind know the truth about life and the cosmos, or only what is subjective and relative?...' these issues also rise in many other ways in daily life and in all human communication where it is necessary to distinguish reality from fantasy, confusion and lies. Our view or perception, that is how the mind forms impressions and ideas about the world of nature, of others and the self which has far reaching consequences in many spheres of life. (Priddy 91)

Emma's life in the convent, amidst all the disciplinary acts and rules concerning moral values, only proved to be a tonic for all her sentiments, emotions and dreams. In order to fill the void in the mind of this adolescent girl, she herself painted dreams of impossible colors pushing the 'bare' reality of life to the very remote corner of her mind.

Her life in the convent, during her thirteenth year, was pleasant at fist. The nuns were different from her, she liked adventurous things like answering difficult questions, and soon she started enjoying the church and its beauty. Beauty to her was to be admired for its physical manifestation rather than for its mystical powers. She gave herself over to romantic notions concerning the church and dreamed of the 'sick lamb' and

metaphors of a 'betrothed spouse, heavenly lover marriage everlasting'. An old woman, the washerwoman of the convent visited the convent and instilled into the minds of young girls' stories of romantic evening and lonely meetings – she also sang romantic ballads.

Degrees of egoism that are self-destructive are seen in selfishness, systematic egocentricity and intense narcissism. Such egoism obviously takes on many shapes and forms. It may be blatant or deceptively hidden. It may trumpet itself in self- certainty that at least outwardly knows or it can dissemble as shrewd charm and manipulation...more than psychological studies and classifications, that art, especially great literature provides great stimuli in the inner aspects of the mind. (Priddy 88)

Priddy gives ample importance to the use of 'great literature'. The literature that paved the way of Emma was *Paul and Virginia* by Scott, a highly sentimental and romanticized view of life and love. This novel of idyllic love contributed to Emma's dreamy sentimentalism. Left alone, she physically and mentally developed into a dreamy girl who wanted all the elements of romantic fiction to come alive in her own life. She longs for old castles, for romantic lovers charging up to a balcony on a white horse, for moonlight meetings in faraway places. She felt the need of excitement and mystery but could not tolerate the normal everyday life.

Then the question arises: how does she perform with her school and hostel mates? The answer has not been given by Flaubert but he gives two instances as to how her 'superiors' near her felt about her. "Old Roualt would have not been sorry to be rid of his daughter' (34), 'When her father took her from school no one was sorry to see her go. The lady superior even thought that she had latterly been somewhat irrelevant to the community' (56)

Freud in his variety of theories has found out through love self-development occurs in every individual. 'In the most universal sense possible, the motivating energy that makes self-transformation possible is love, through its many manifestations and transformations...the importance of love in human psychology is therefore obvious, it is paramount. Love in one or another form of expression is so fundamental to the growth of body and mind, of personality and character that no psychology can reasonably ignore the subject'. (Priddy 130)

If Freud application of love is said to be the correct, then, what has gone wrong with Emma's marital relation? Charles is a perfect husband to Emma in every aspect but she prefers to be passive and idle. During her days of courtship, Flaubert gives proof of Emma as a dreamer and sentimentalist. For instance, 'she showed him her old music books, the little prizes she had won and the oak leaf crowns lefts at the bottom of a cupboard.'(32) Emma had a variety of dreams concerning her marriage and her honeymoon. As a young woman, she was always padded with dreams and romance. To her, Charles was a hero who had arrived in the early morning to save her father from the pain of a leg fracture. Her conception of Charles as her prince in the beginning seems to change into that of an uninteresting, boring and dull man who could not explain a riding term in one of her novels. Ideally, she dreamed of a man who would introduce her into a multitude of activities and passions, which would inspire her to live her life to the fullest.

Freud and other thinkers observed that "love has an erotic-libidinal instinct or need that supersedes all other aspects of love." Modern thinking about love is over influenced by psychoanalysis, 'which saw love as being fundamentally, a biologically conditioned sex urge, an instinct.' (Priddy 99) Besides this, 'love was also regarded as a matter of affection and attachment necessary to the ego, which is to say the fulfillment of self-oriented desires' (100)

Emma's psychic problem was this 'fulfillment of self-oriented desires'. She desired a truly colorful and variant life concerning every aspect of life, even death. She had the capacity of romanticizing every event to fulfill her dreams. Unfortunately, she marries the most uninteresting and immobile character in the whole of Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary*.

Emma's dreams being dashed to the ground she feels that she must reoccupy herself with various activities. "She took the shades off the candlesticks, had new wall paper put up, in the staircase repainted and seats made in the garden round the sundial; she even inquired how she could get a basin with a jetting

fountain and fishes" (47). After she had felt, thought and done with her whirlwind of activities she came to one conclusion 'Charles seems no more amorous and no more moved...why did I marry him?' (62-63)

The proverb "love is blind" expresses how lovers very frequently fail to see the loved one as he or she is. What hinders clear vision is almost invariably some form of projection of idealist images onto the loved one... The 'old, old story' of confounded or disaffected love come about typically when the projected model can no longer be upheld, for one reason or another and expectations and fantasies as to how it should have become are broken by the blows of what is felt as hard reality.' (Priddy 92)

Our heroine turned her head to another variety of activities and also gets ready to attend the ball at the chateau of the Marquis d' Andervilliers. She spent weeks on deciding what to wear at the ball. She was thrilled by the opportunity to dance among dukes and duchesses. Emma was overjoyed at the opportunity of being able to move freely in such a noble company. During their stay at the chateau, she constantly berated Bovary, who she felt looked like a country buffoon and whose presence embarrassed her. She dressed and attempted to behave as if she too were a great woman and mingled with other guests. The ball and the people as it seemed to be transferred from out of the novels and dreams she had long cherished. After the ball, Emma suffered from bitter disappointment of her mediocre life. In her disillusionment, she saw Bovary as a clumsy, simple oaf. At home, her frustration caused her to be cross with him, and in a fit of pique, she fired the house cleaner. Each day Emma attempted to recall the great events of the ball but in the time, they grew vague.

Emma was deeply dissatisfied with her daily, mundane life and her constant hankering for a change left her depressed and lonely. In her depression, she gave up music, sketching and other pursuits. She was often sad and lonely and during a long winter, her plight became worse.

The question of 'projection' includes how and why our inner mental and emotional states tend to alter our perception of what is around as even perhaps determine what we see, what we perceive, and how we understand it. A classic poser in psychology is one may draw the line between the subjective imaging and objective reality or between what the mind 'receives' and what it 'projects'...Our perception of reality can literally change entirely and the senses can lie most thoroughly about appearances ... no psychological or other scientific theory today succeeds in explaining these awkward facts. (Priddy 92)

This 'hallucinatory fever' induces Charles to leave Fostes, on the advice of the medical professor under whom he studied, and move to another town of Yonville. In the novel, Book II, Emma is quite satisfied with the change and gets accustomed to the new people in the town. In addition, she grows more attached to Leon.

Attachments having a psychological basis tend to be stronger than those resulting largely from the minds autonomous activity as when it leads us on by multiplying one want it more. (Priddy 98)

Emma becomes romantically inclined towards Leon - according to the society, 'Madame Bovary comprised herself' (131). This psychological aspect of Emma has been foretold by Freud, "our expectations as regards love, or lack of it, in all kinds of relationships or roles can easily be 'unrealistic' and lead to disappointments.' Her relationship with Rodolphe Boulanger after Leon's departure gave way to 'hallucinatory fever' once again, and Rodolphe's presence gave way to another set of 'fairy-tale' dreams. Rodolphe, according to the standards set by her was perfect in every sense, he was handsome, dashing and had a prince-image, and he was clever, frank and forward and unlike Charles, paid respect and love to Emma in a most gallant manner.

In Emma the interesting feature of her behavior is her willingness to accept Rodolphe as her lover. She is a mother hen to her colorful fantasies and refuses to sacrifice then for the sake of her husband and little Bertha. In reality, she is suffering from *fortified ego identity*. Priddy observes that,

These defenses are ways of forcible or manipulative reactions, designed to protect the egos perceived interests, which may imply a person who experiences usually strong needs and desires... strong desires and needs, whether inborn or acquired, whether normal or the result of aberrations in development, are a sign of psychic weakness than the contrary ... a lack of self-control and mind discipline. This is because the very basis behind such ego is insecurity of some sort or another. (Priddy 87-88)

Rodolphe Boulanger, a very intelligent, shrewd, clever womanizer takes advantage of Emma's weakness and depression. He had a battery of love letters and love mementos and he could hardly remember the women who had sent them to him. Rodolphe, thrilled by Emma's favor of love and passion grew dubious about the whole affair. At times, he warned her of the illicit relation between them. Rodolphe being a man of the world was not worried of ruining a married woman's reputation; neither was he aware of Emma's spiritual quest for love. Even if he was aware of it he displaced her feelings of mere 'fantasy'. In spite of his worldly wisdom, he manipulates Emma in every possible way and finally crushes her to the last when the need for (financial) help arises.

Leon Dupuis, a naïve, sentimental and a qualified pretender 'wins' Emma's heart. He is rather a flat cardboard figure letting Emma pay for all the expenses incurred. He knew how to put on 'airs' especially with the scene regarding their secret meeting (350-352). The carriage ride and the carnal lust of Leon can be extended as the beginning of Emma's last fated episode that will lead to her suicide.

The Church also plays directly or indirectly, a very important role in Emma's share of depression. She had been suffering from neurosis to a great extent and went in for spiritual aid. The priest was not interested in Emma or her problems. Her desire to reveal her inner ailment went quite unsuccessful with the priest or rather the priests were forbidden to practice psychoanalysis (just as they have been forbidden to practice surgery for many years), and both priests and religion were forbidden to seek the aid of psychoanalysis without the permission of the Pope, according to the document issued by the Holy Office in 1961.

Flaubert places romance against an intensely realistic setting. Such juxtaposition has made his work into a novel. Emma's disillusionment does not spring merely from her desire for the unattainable. It springs from the conflict between impulses and longing that have nothing unnatural about them. The conflict has credibility about it. Emma is no gossamer, fluffy abstraction moving away from space but a real person.

Emma's tragedy is two-fold. It lies in her ability to adapt herself to the world of reality and in her failure to evolve within herself a satisfying inner life, which would make up for all the deficiencies of the real world. When the pressure from the real world increases and she feels approaching disillusionment, she seeks in extra marital relationship with two men. Her religion is of the same quality as her romantic love. It is largely emotional, a desire to return to childhood and be a little girl, 'fluttering and dancing in the breeze.'

Emma was rather impulsive about her emotions, and grew rather confused and distraught. She had or believed to have a firm hold on her emotions but Rodolphe aware of her infatuated love for love took ample advantage of it. After Rodolphe's betrayal, Emma took forty-three days to recover and at the second betrayal of Rodolphe, she decided to end her life. Thus, Emma's suicide is motivated by her sense of betrayal by one man whom she might have loved. In other words, Flaubert is suggesting that Emma was capable of profound love.

Emma, in the novel, stands for the very embodiment of dreams, imagination, passion and ecstasy. Emma's death reflects the pathetic misuse of her life. As she had spent her life for the unattainable and has failed miserably, instead of being taken advantage of, she decided to give herself to Death and tried to relive her dreams without any worldly constraint.

To conclude, Flaubert was one of the most important European writers of the 19th century. In addition, in him the French novel reached a high level of development. None of his later works except the three short stories, ever equaled in the artistic and technical quality of his first novel, and it is primarily on *Madame Bovary* that his reputation rests. In *Madame Bovary* Flaubert depicted an entire segment of society and unmercifully analyzed its characters. He created unforgettable characters from whom our own age can learn valuable and essential lessons. His greater talent lies in his study of the psychological working of the unconscious mind, the romantic reverie. He transferred feelings into images, and each image is an explanation of an imaginary voyage and mental event in Emma. Emma tries to impart this romanticism into her marriage with the humdrum stay at home with Charles. By moonlight in the garden, she recites all the romantic, passionate rhymes she knows. She sings to herself many melancholic love songs, but she finds that her pulse beats no faster as a consequences and Charles seems no more moved or amorous.

Madame Bovary, as an individual is capable of true feelings, love and true emotions but the ability to look into reality was lacking in her. Probably it may be correct to call that lack her 'tragic flaw'. Emma, before marriage lived in her dreams, during her marriage with Charles and broad play of illicit relations with Rodolphe and Leon, she tried to capture and recapture her dreams into reality and in her death she gave herself unto her dreams. Even though society calls her weak and immoral, psychologically she was a strong and uncompromising mentality.

Even though Emma is responsible for her death, four male characters consciously or unconsciously, throw her into the pits of death. Her husband Charles, a very devoted husband could not keep her happy and occupied. He remains faithful to her from the very beginning until her death. Even with the dogged admiration for Emma, he fails miserably to excite her, which forces her to look for other alternatives like Leon Dupuis and Rodolphe Boulanger. Leon and Rodolphe symbolically suggest the animal world or rather the world of lust. What she really believes in is 'pure love' but in return, all she gets she gets is a fiasco of love. She turned out to be a mere instrument in the hands of both her lovers. Another bit of irony is that Justin is directly responsible for Emma's death. The irony is because he is the one character in the book who has demonstrated a constant, undeviating love for Emma, but the truth remains that he turns into the mythical *charon* ferrying her across the river Styx to reach the underworld.

Failure to see or face one's own weakness is the greatest of weaknesses. One common way of failing here is to place the blame elsewhere. This may be done quite intentionally, and with good reason, but it may be an expression of an ego disturbance (Priddy 86)

What Emma had to face was the failure of her desires, her dreams and aspirations. Her belief in love was too strong to be tempered by society or human values. Even though she committed adultery right the nose of her husband, she was not ready to prostitute herself, to Monsieur Guillaumin, when she cried out "I am to be pitied not to be sold" (435) Emma Bovary, whatever her actions may amount to, was true to herself. She was elegant, beautiful, cool, well dressed, and confident and surpassed all the other women of Yonville. She died because she refused to compromise herself to the whims and fancies of her society.

Good acts generate good karma, which in practice means that sometimes there will be 'rewards' for the individual equivalent to the quality and quantity of these acts. Bad acts generate bad karma, which sooner or later reflects on the individual as ill consequences (Priddy 58)

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