

FROM WEDLOCK TO DEADLOCK: MADAME BOVARY'S PATH TOWARD SELF-DESTRUCTION

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Abstract: By undertaking an investigation into the unexplored thicket of nineteenth-century ideology, this study reappraises the rationale behind Emma Bovary's suicide. The historical examination in this article reveals that the doctrine of the separate spheres exerted a great influence on the lives of middle-class women. Furthermore, the practice of this doctrine resulted in the reinforcement of a rigid housewife/harlot dichotomy. As the upshot of such an ideology, an association was made between women in public and the public women i.e. the prostitutes. By unearthing the traces of this ideology in *Madame Bovary*, this article aims to substantiate that as a middle-class woman, Emma's longing for public life culminates in her identification with the figure of the prostitute. This abject metamorphosis, which is the ramification of societal adherence to the doctrine of separate spheres, ushers her toward her ultimate suicidal act.

Keywords: domestic sphere, harlot, housewife, Madame Bovary, public sphere, suicide.

“Women had only two possible roles in society: that of a
housewife or prostitute”
Pierre Proudhon

Introduction

Suicide is portrayed as the last resort of many fictional female characters in nineteenth-century literature. Hedda Gabler, Anna Karenina, Miss Julie, and Emma Bovary are not immune to this destructive end and their suicides are scrutinized by many scholars. Margaret Higonnet, the writer of “Suicide: Representations of the Feminine in the Nineteenth Century”, remarks that the literary works of this period limned female suicide as a consequence of the deficiencies of social institutions. Higonnet, for instance, examines Emma Bovary's suicide as a

nineteenth-century cultural obsession. According to her, Emma's suicide implies "disintegration and social victimization rather than heroic self-sacrifice" (106). Thus, Emma similar to other female protagonists of this century dies by the "victimizing effects of a society that imprisons women" (112).

Nevertheless, the contentious nature of Emma's death has generated other valid interpretations as well. Jacqueline Merriam Paskow avers that *Madame Bovary* deviates from other canonical texts of the nineteenth century that deal with female suicide. Emma's reasons for taking her own life "are not those common to nineteenth-century female adultery" (234). Paskow contends that through her love affairs, Emma is attempting to quench her yearning for absolute oneness with the other. Yet this unity with the other cannot possibly exist. As she realizes this bitter truth, despair overcomes her and she takes her own life. While Higonnet condemns the social institutions for Emma's death, Paskow whittles down her motives for self-destruction to the unfulfillment of a psychological need. In respect of Emma's suicide, Jacques Rancière employs a different method of analysis. As stated by Rancière, Emma attempts to merge literature into life and she "makes the error of mistaking literature for life" (534). However, she betrays the artistic experience by reducing art to material commodities that she purchases for her house. Since Flaubert treasures pure literature, she brings Emma to trial and sentences her to death. Rancière then proposes that *Madame Bovary* is an anti-kitsch manifesto and Emma Bovary is killed by the author for committing the sin of being a bad artist.

Whilst the aforementioned studies on Emma's suicide are illuminating and instructive, they are far from being exhaustive. The present paper attempts to approach *Madame Bovary's* suicide, yet again, from a different angle. This article investigates how the dominant doctrine of separate spheres, by accentuating the housewife/harlot dichotomy, contributed to Emma's mental breakdown. In order to shed light on how the dominant discourse of the time shaped Emma's self-perception, it is imperative to provide an excursus on how women were viewed in nineteenth-century France. The following discussion will provide the essential grist for analyzing Emma's suicide.

The Paradigm of Housewife and Harlot

The social condition of women did not improve after the French revolution and assuming that post-revolutionary France was a good time to be a woman is gratuitous. Although the Enlightenment movement and the French Revolution underscored the significance of universalistic values such as liberty and equality, these opportunities were not

granted to women in post-revolutionary France. Yet, one should not overlook the fact that the living standards of some women were ameliorated; for instance, more women had access to primitive birth control pills and as a result, “the high rate of unintended pregnancy plummeted” (Théré 252-265). Nonetheless, even this advantage arouse suspicion and controversy since it was argued that birth control allowed “the female body to succumb to dangerous excesses” (Mesch 77). Thus, the historical body of evidence indicates that “the misogynistic tradition which had come down from the ancient and medieval worlds persisted in this era” (McMillan, *France and Women* 4). According to Outram, the systematic exclusion of women from political rights and the public realm testifies to “the limited application of the universalistic values of the Enlightenment” (972). Landes also expresses that “the enlightened thinkers usually maintained an ambivalent posture toward the justice of the women’s cause” (21).

Moreover, some of the notions of the Age of Enlightenment, such as the Rousseauian ideal of motherhood exacerbated the already-undesirable condition of women. Rousseau’s model of motherhood hugely influenced the ideology of the time. Following this model, “the maternal-centered family was lauded as the basis of a stable society and the wellspring of civic virtue” (Foley 45). As a consequence of this model of motherhood, the ideal of the woman by the hearth was propagated and diffused. The domestic ideal was established as the dominant model of femininity and was privileged over public life. While “man’s destiny was to work and participate in public affairs: women’s place was to organize the household and raise children” (McMillan, *Housewife or Harlot* 12). The hypothetical clash between the domestic ideal and public life accounted for the confinement of women to the private sphere. Protecting women’s purity, spirituality, and innocence was “a justification for her necessary privatization” (Landes 21). On that account, it can be deduced that the French revolution did not make women into citizens, on the contrary, it “gave a powerful boost to the ideology of domesticity which was soon to become the dominant discourse on women’s place in the post-revolutionary social order” (McMillan, *France and Women* 31).

Although the doctrine of separate spheres had existed in the pre-industrial era, the drastic separation between home and work was accentuated with the arrival of the industrial age. A great number of treatises and books advocated the ideal of separate spheres; for instance, Baronne Staffe, author of *Usages du Monde*, a best-selling book, warned women against “the perils of attempting to abandon the separate sphere” (McMillan, *France and Women* 13). Likewise, Jules

Michelet, the French historian, eulogized motherhood by stating that women had no need to work outside the home “since it is the paradise of the marriage that the man works for the woman” (McMillan, *France and Women* 10). Alexis de Tocqueville, the prominent political thinker of France, had a favorable view of the doctrine of separate spheres. In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville writes “the confinement of American women to the domestic sphere testifies to their superiority” (qtd. in Keber 10).

These books helped contain the dominant ideology of time by laying down the admissible norms of society. Nevertheless, one must not fall into the trap of easy generalization while examining the ideologies of a historical period. Even though the roles of men and women were allocated according to their gender, some women entered the public sphere by becoming the workforce of the industrial age. It should be noted that the degree of acceptance of this ideology varied among different social classes. While the upper-class and the working-class families were not entirely controlled by the doctrine of the separate spheres, the bourgeoisie set store by this doctrine and the notion of a maternal-centered family. “The maternal-centered family distinguished the ‘bourgeois’ model of womanhood from the aristocratic pattern in which mothering had played only a minor role” (Foley 45). This doctrine was mainly directed at middle-class women and it retained its effect till the end of the nineteenth century when “women of the middle classes began to enter the labor market in significant numbers” (McMillan, *Housewife or Harlot* 5). Ergo, by 1814–15, many middle-class women had restricted access to the public sphere. The ideal of women as wives and mothers was not just an abstract “moral ideal but an important social reality” (McMillan, *France and Women* 44).

The ideology of separate spheres, nevertheless, did not merely make an impact on the involvement of women in the social aspect of life. This doctrine, more essentially, generated a paradigm of harlot/housewife and in this regard, it is pertinent to the argument of this study. Due to the strict division between the public and domestic sphere, frequenting the outside world for women was associated with sexual freedom, whereas confinement to the domestic sphere betrayed women’s chastity and good sexual mores. This view was extended toward the working-class women who entered the public sphere of life by working in factories and fields. On account of their presence in the public sphere of life, young working-class women had the opportunity of having sexual relations. To some people, the entrance of working-class women into the public sphere heralded the arrival of sexual freedom. The bourgeoisie interpreted this freedom as the

“incontrovertible signs of the immorality of the working class and of the disintegration of the family in their milieu” (McMillan *Housewife or Harlot*, 41). This ideal finds its full expression in Pierre Joseph Proudhon’s *Contradictions Économiques*.

Proudhon maintained that “women had only two possible roles in society: that of a housewife (*ménagère*) or prostitute (*courtisane*)” (Proudhon 197). It should be noted that Proudhon endorsed this state of affairs instead of condemning it. Proudhon’s doctrine of “woman by the hearth” was fervently championed, especially by union leaders” (McMillan, *France and Women* 184). Strangely, this dictum was not repudiated by the general middle-class public either and it was cited as “a definitive statement about women’s position in French society” (McMillan, *France and Women* 92). Swoerwine underscores that “Proudhon meant this barb seriously” (418). As a result of such infamous statements, the association between “women in public” and “public women” (or prostitutes) was reinforced. Based on this model, the presence of middle-class women in the public sphere signaled their sexual degeneracy. The huge rift between the private and the public sphere resulted in the formation of housewife/harlot binary opposition. Yet, this is not to suggest that this ideology forced actual women into these roles, but to highlight how women’s sexuality and their involvement in the public sphere were intricately related.

As maintained by Mesch, the housewife/ harlot opposition was the nineteenth-century “variation of the age-old madonna/whore complex” (Mesch 71). As a result of the ideal of the separate spheres, “the opposition of *bonne épouse* and *maîtresse*, housewife and harlot, continued to dominate” (Mesch 71). During this period, the sexuality of the middle-class housewife could not be reconciled with her role as a mother. This notion finds its way to the pamphlet of Neo-Malthusian propagandists who wrote “the price of the woman is the child, childless by choice, she falls to the rank of the prostitute, the whore whose organs are only instruments” (McMillan, *Housewife or Harlot* 191).

This viewpoint can even be observed in some literary works of post-revolutionary France. In Honoré de Balzac’s epistolary novel *Mémoires de Deux Jeunes Mariées* “motherhood is pitted against sexuality” (Mesch 71). Balzac’s opposition between housewife and harlot betrays “a deeply felt cultural anxiety about the integration of female sexual desire into a broader female identity” (Mesch 73). The deep-seated anxieties about the sexuality of the housewife reveal that the French society perceived “potentially threatening fluidity between the sexualities of the good wife and the mistress” (Mesch 73). The deeply ingrained ideology was so persistent in the literary works of post-

revolutionary France that the later “women writers had to challenge the binary opposition between the Harlot and the housewife” (Mesch 80). At that period, since sexuality and wifhood could not be reconciled, the middle-class women were pigeonholed into the strict dichotomy of the housewife and the harlot. Due to the parallel that was drawn between sexual freedom and the public sphere, middle-class women found it hard to participate in the public sphere of life without getting associated with the soi-disant *public women*.

In post-revolutionary France, prostitution was not necessarily seen as a way of life or a career. Parent-Duchâtelet, a French physician who wrote *Prostitution in Paris*, highlighted the distinctive physical characteristic of prostitutes and identified them as members of another breed. Paradoxically, as opposed to this biologically deterministic view, “Parent was prepared to concede that prostitutes were most often hapless proletarian women driven to sell their bodies out of *economic necessity*” (McMillan, *France and Women* 107). Consequently, women had to have specific *physical and financial* traits to choose the path of prostitution. In the French society of the time, prostitutes were seen as agents of depravity and the well-run middle-class house was haunted by the shadow of the prostitutes that could endanger the bliss of the family. This ideology found its way to the literary works of the time. Writers such as George Darien ‘developed the theme of the prostitute as the corruptor of the bourgeoisie’ (McMillan, *Housewife or Harlot* 23). Hence, the figure of the prostitute was demonized, but what was society’s stance on women who were engaged in extramarital affairs?

Women were expected to be chaste and loyal and any sexual activity outside marriage was deemed to be immoral. Nonetheless, due to the prevalence of arranged marriages that were usually deficient in love, extramarital affairs were rampant. As maintained by Patricia Mainardi, adultery in nineteenth-century France was a major social problem and this illicit action was punishable by law. Adultery was a “major theme in the mentalité of the period” (22). Still, as opposed to other crimes “adultery could be prosecuted only on the complaint of one of the spouses” (22). Not many husbands filed charges of adultery against their wives and the cases that ended up in court constituted only a small percentage of the incidence of this offense. In most cases, women’s adulterous affairs were condoned as long as they retained their positions as housewives. In other words, in middle-class families, women’s freedom and prosecution were contingent upon the mercy of the husband. That being said, the approach toward the adulterous affairs of French women from upper-class families was much more lenient. “In polite society, female sexual infidelity was tolerated,

provided it was not flaunted and the honor of a husband not impaired” (McMillan, *France and Women* 3). This is not to suggest that female infidelity was normalized or celebrated, but assuming that adultery was treated as an inexcusable deed is a faulty misconception. All in all, by undertaking an investigation into the historical thicket of the time, one can perceive the reverberations of the dominant ideologies of the time in nineteenth-century literature. Circling back to the main subject of the discussion, it is imperative to see how the dominant notions of the time effectuated Emma’s downward spiral and propelled her toward self-destruction.

The Separation of Spheres and Emma’s Suicide

To unearth what propels Emma toward suicide, Madame Bovary’s death should be seen as the outcome of a life-long procedure rather than an impulsive decision that is made on the spur of the moment. As a woman who was born into a rural family, she “grew up in the expectation that marriage was their destiny” (Foley 254). While Emma has unrealistic presumptions about romantic love, she resembles provincial girls in assuming that marriage defined her life. That being so, Emma is hurled into the web of matrimony, without fully appreciating what a nuptial bond entails in the French society of the time.

The problematic aspect of the doctrine of separate spheres becomes apparent when Emma’s desire for a public life cannot be realized in her newly-formed middle-class family. Madame Bovary’s confinement to the domestic sphere reveals itself from the beginning of their marriage. While Charles “toddles off to see his patients, she stays home and darns socks. And everything’s so boring! How we’d love to live in the city and dance polkas every night! Poor little thing” (116). The situation gets exacerbated as Emma becomes a mother, shackled by the impairing values of the bourgeois family. As a middle-class mother, Rousseau’s restricting model of motherhood is set as an ideal for her. Even though in this model motherhood “was seen as the key, not the barrier, to progress for bourgeois women” (McMillan, *France and Women* 50), Emma struggles in fulfilling her maternal role. Throughout the novel, Emma dissociates herself from her child and the readers are informed that “she never engaged in those preparations that stimulate maternal love, and this may perhaps have blunted her affection from the start” (79). In congruence with the bourgeois ideology of the time, Flaubert’s novel does not reconcile Emma’s maternal life with her desire for public life. Emma’s yearning for a vibrant life that would emancipate her from the domestic sphere is revealed in the following passage:

For indeed not all husbands were like this one. He might have been handsome, witty, distinguished, attractive, as were no doubt the men her old school friends from the convent had married. What must they be doing now? In the *city*, with the noises of the streets, the hum of the theatres, and the bright lights of the balls, they were leading lives where the heart had space to expand, the senses to blossom. But her life was as cold as an attic with a skylight facing north, and boredom, like a silent spider, was weaving its web in every shadowy recess of her heart. (41)

This passage discloses Emma's two main impulses; first, her fancy for attractive and distinguished men, and second, her desire for inclusion in the public sphere of life. Nevertheless, one can argue that her desire for public life is even stronger. In fact, she wants to be with such men since these men can offer her the public life that she desperately yearns for. It can be inferred that Emma's sexual desires do not push her toward involvement in the public sphere, but the languor of domestic life drives her toward extramarital affairs; "the mediocrity of her home provoked her to sumptuous fantasies, the caresses of her husband to adulterous desires" (97).

This is the point that one might overlook by merely foregrounding Emma's romantic ideals. The readers are told that Rodolphe and Leon, as opposed to Charles, are able to pull her out of the debris of *domestic* life [that] fed her unhappiness" (111). Emma's confinement to the domestic sphere is the main reason for her dissatisfaction with life. Emma is excluded from a public life that offers "the vast realm of joy and passion" and the mediocrity of life seems "to her the exception, a freak accident that had befallen her alone" (53). Her unquenched desire for the public sphere manifests itself, once more, when she wishes to bear a son rather than a daughter. The readers are told that she can take revenge for the powerlessness of her past life by having a son since "a man is free, free to explore all passions and all countries, to surmount obstacles, to indulge in the most exotic pleasures. But a woman is constantly thwarted" (80). As a middle-class woman, such liberties are not offered to Emma; nevertheless, Emma's adulterous affairs with Leon and Rodolphe can, to some extent, undermine the restrictive lifestyle that her position as a middle-class housewife brings about. In other words, only through her adulterous relationships can she get involved in the public sphere of life. Thus, Emma's zest for a romantic relationship pales in comparison with her desire for public life.

On numerous occasions, Emma accompanies Leon and Rodolphe to the gatherings of upper-class families. When Emma appears in the

company of the aristocratic women, she attempts to imitate their behavior and through this emulation, she rids herself of her limiting role as a middle-class wife and mother. Furthermore, as long as Emma frequents the circles of the aristocratic women, her adulterous behavior is pardoned since “sexual infidelity was tolerated in polite society” (McMillan, *France and Women* 3). This is partially due to the fact that the doctrine of separate spheres exerted a paltry influence on the situation of women from upper-class families. In fact, in post-revolutionary France, in the elite circles, a new female had emerged that reasserted “something of the influence which the *salonnières* had wielded in pre- Revolutionary society” and their interest was “in the unfettered pursuit of pleasure, partying, and dancing” (McMillan, *France and Women* 35). Be that as it may, this lifestyle was heavily frowned upon, and the behavior of the loose women of the salons and the cities was contrasted with “the virtuous and amiable disposition of the women from the middle-class families” (McMillan, *France and Women* 10). In the light of this essentialist view, the women who had active social lives were dubbed “*une femme-homme*”. Although this worldview persisted in the middle-class society, the French society, in general, was notoriously tolerant of the promiscuous behavior of upper-class women.

Emma’s perceptive mind does not overlook this fact when she observes “rich woman’s wealth seems to protect her virtue like a cuirass, as if all her banknotes were stitched into her corset lining” (205). Even though Emma is living vicariously through the figure of the upper-class woman, she is not acknowledged as a member of this class. Emma’s identity as a bourgeois woman has such a strong and definitive hold on her that she cannot shake off the feeling of alienation even when she attempts to identify with the upper-class women. When she attends the parties of the aristocratic families, she is plagued by a sense of estrangement and isolation. Nonetheless, female aristocrats are not the only women who are allowed in the public sphere. As Emma wanders through the streets of Rouen, she constantly finds herself in “the area of theatres, bars, and whores” (234). She notices the unconstrained presence of these women, but she refuses to identify herself with them. In spite of that, by the end of the novel, circumstances change and Emma in fact is acknowledged as a ‘public woman’.

It is generally assumed that Emma’s suicide is the upshot of her adulterous affairs and financial ruin. This type of reading posits that Emma feels apprehensive about the divulgence of her marital trespass before her husband and the scornful society. Concerning Emma’s infidelity and society’s attitude toward it, Paskow writes “it is true that

at the beginning of her marriage Emma is worried about what people would think of her were they to discover her with other men. But she soon changes her attitude, feeling only contempt for the bourgeois provincialism of her fellow Yonvillians" (Paskow 325). As was indicated earlier, the French society exonerated adulterous women who were forgiven by their husbands.

As a person who can grant Emma this exoneration, Charles is in no way a vindictive man. After he learns of Emma's infidelity, he does not erupt into fury; he even fantasizes about being one of her lovers. He experiences this daydream when he sees Emma's lover, Rodolphe. "He would have liked to be that man" (310). This might appear as an unorthodox and deviant fantasy, yet it uncovers the nineteenth-century husband's "real desire and in some cases a poignant need to imagine the wife as a sexual being", yet the opposition of *bonne épouse* and *maîtress* "impeded the imagining" (Mesch 71). Charles begins to view Emma as a sexual being only after the divulgence of her love affairs. When he peruses Emma's letters, he thinks

everyone must have adored her. Every single man, without a doubt, must have lusted after her. Because of this she became, in his eyes, only the more beautiful, and he conceived for her an unremitting, raging *desire* that fed his despair, and was unbounded, because it could never be satisfied now. (305)

This passage demonstrates that the imposition of the housewife/harlot dichotomy caused a huge rift between sexual and conjugal love. Due to the distinction that was made between erotic and marital love, "men were discouraged from viewing their wives as sexual beings" (Mesch 68). Charles's reaction to Emma's affairs points to a troublesome clash between "sexuality and patriarchal marriage structures in nineteenth-century France" (Mesch 82). By de-sexualizing the figure of the housewife, the dire impact of the doctrine of separate spheres reveals itself in Emma and Charles's marital life. Charles commences sexualizing Emma only after the divulgence of her extramarital relationships. In a way, both Charles and Emma are victimized by the imprisoning ideology of the bourgeoisie. Therefore, as Paskow also points out "fear of Charles's wrath should he find out about her affairs [...] cannot have been the motivating forces of her suicide" (Paskow 324). For Paskow, Madame Bovary commits suicide since she is unable to reach oneness with the other and indubitably, Emma's failed love affairs contribute to her sense of dismay and misfortune and precipitate her into self-destruction. Nevertheless, the following discussion will indicate that Emma's lack of success in love might have further significance.

Throughout the novel, Emma dwells on the feeling of love that she has for Leon and Rodolphe. She draws an analogy between herself and the characters who are the emblems of ethereal love in works of literature. As it was indicated, Emma cannot fit into the figure of the de-sexualized and angelic housewife. Hence, by holding on to the far-fetched romantic fantasies, she shows her quest for fashioning an identity that would incorporate her desires and would also defy the housewife/harlot dichotomy. Therefore, not only does her romance get her involved in the public sphere of life, but it also helps her to forge an identity that engulfs her amorous desires, without getting demoted to the rank of a harlot. However, the feeling of love dissipates eventually and Emma's financial ruin changes her body into a commodified entity.

When Emma's accumulated debts reach a troublesome amount, she desperately attempts to repay the money by any means necessary. Throughout the novel, she sells some items to repay her debt to Monsieur Lheureux, the merchant of Yonville, who brings about Emma's financial ruin. When he finally confronts Emma about the sum of her debts, Emma anxiously says that she can still sell things to reimburse him for the debt. Lheureux responds "Don't pretend! You've nothing left to sell" (262). However, Emma can still sell her body in exchange for money. This is insinuated by Lheureux when Emma presses her hand on his knee as a gesture of pleading and he remarks "Don't touch me! Anyone would think you're trying to seduce me!" to which Emma replies "You're despicable!" (261). Later, he suggests that she can procure the money from her lovers or so-called friends. When he says this, it is mentioned that "he stared at her with such a knowing, terrifying look that a deep shudder of fear ran through her" (262). At this point, Emma realizes that Lheureux's knowing look suggests the commodification of her body. He is intimating that Emma should sell her body to her lovers to wrest herself free from her financial burden. Although Emma is infuriated by what Lheureux suggests, she still shuns the association that society draws between her and the figure of a harlot. Yet again, she takes notice of the crystallization of this trait, when she meets the notary, Maître Guillaumin. Emma explains her predicament to him and in reaction to what she mentions, he makes sexual advances toward Emma.

Stretching out his hand, he grasped hold of hers, planting a voracious kiss on it, then held it on his knee; and he toyed gently with her fingers while mouthing an endless succession of sweet nothings. His toneless voice babbled on like a flowing stream; his eyes sparkled behind his glinting spectacles, and his hands were

creeping up inside Emma's sleeve, stroking her arm. She could feel his urgent breath against her cheek. What a horrible man! (270)

At this juncture, even the notary proffers financial help in exchange for sexual relations. Emma notices that due to her monetary trouble, her body is commodified once more. For this reason, she states "You are shamelessly taking advantage of my distress, Monsieur! I am to be pitied, but I am not for *sale!*" (270). When he leaves the notary's office, she is filled with "indignation over the insult to her honor" (271). She desperately attempts to latch on to her last shred of dignity; But this effort is of no avail since, after her financial ruin, society regards her as a harlot, *not just a mistress*. Due to her financial debt, Emma's body has become a public commodity, available to everyone and not just her lovers.

Emma's encounter with Binet, the tax collector, also highlights the degrading perception that society has of her. Madame Tuvache and Madame Caron witness Emma's arrival at the tax collector's office, but they cannot hear what is exchanged between them, therefore they make baseless speculations. They imagine that she is mouthing the word franc and deduce that Emma's begging for money by making sexual advances. Emma takes Binet's hands and Madame Tuvache asks Madame Caron "is she making up to him?" Although they cannot hear them, they infer that "she must surely be proposing something infamous". Madame Tuvache states "women like her should be whipped" (273).

What indeed transpires in this meeting is never explicated, yet it provides us with society's outlook on Emma's new position. It is clarified that due to Emma's financial distress, her behavior is interpreted in a new light. The combination of precarious financial status and Emma's sexual desire destabilizes her position as a middle-class housewife. Emma has always had one of the two characteristics that Parent-Duchâtelet had outlined for prostitutes; that is having a high libido. David Barash in his book *Madame Bovary's Ovaries* asserts that "Madame Bovary is, in fact, a lustful married woman" (8). However, till the end of the novel, she lacks the other determinant factor that in Parent's view drives women to prostitution, namely dire financial need. The dominant ideology of the time proposed that having specific biological and sociological characteristics could propel women toward prostitution; these passages illustrate Emma's gradual change from a mistress to a harlot. Nonetheless, Emma tries to retain her previous position by visiting her lovers and highlighting the love that she felt for

them while asking for money. Emma's final meetings with Leon and Rodolphe wield the final blow to Emma's self-perception.

Since Emma cannot confide in Charles, she deigns to demand money from Leon. As she is entreating him for money, she expresses her love for him, even though her feeling for Leon is not as intense as it used to be. Leon's response to Emma's solicitation is "You must be crazy!" to which Emma answers 'No, not yet!' (264). This conversation displays an impending transformation in Emma's psychological state. When Emma realizes that Leon cannot provide her with the money that she requires, she decides to turn to her previous lover; Rodolphe. After the commodification of her body by several people, she sets off for Rodolphe's place to consolidate her position as his mistress. However, due to her delicate financial state, this attempt is also fruitless and she cannot curb her transformation into a harlot. When she is headed to Rodolphe's house, the readers are informed that "she is about to prostitute herself" (275).

Flaubert's narrator employs the term 'prostitution' for describing Emma's request for money from Rodolphe. Based on the principles of French society, at this point, Emma is selling her body to pay her bills. Emma's affection for Rodolphe had dissipated long ago. Even so, the instant that she meets him, she reminds herself and him of the love that she once had felt for him. She says "if you only knew! . . . I loved you so much" (276). Emma's insistence on the love that she had for him is not merely a manipulative tactic. Throughout their conversation, by stressing the emotional aspect of their relationship, rather than her monetary demand, she reasserts her identity as Rodolphe's mistress and *not as his prostitute*. Rodolphe, at first, becomes susceptible to Emma's expression of love and responds by saying:

-I've been stupid and vile! I love you! I'll always love you! What's the matter? Please tell me!

-Well, then! . . . Rodolphe, I'm ruined! You must lend me three thousand francs!

-But . . . but . . ., he said, slowly standing up, a serious expression coming over his face. [...] Ah! thought Rodolphe, suddenly turning extremely pale: so that's why she's here!

Finally, he said, without a trace of emotion: I haven't got three thousand francs, dear lady. (277)

As soon as Emma mentions her financial situation, Rodolphe's face grows pale and his demeanor becomes cold, as though he is interacting with a completely different person. The narrator expresses that even if he had given the money, his generous gesture would have tainted their

love because “of all the icy blasts that can lay waste to love, a financial demand is the coldest and most devastating” (277). From Rodolphe’s standpoint, Emma’s financial demand mars the loftiness of her love. Since this emotional aspect dissipates, only the sexual and financial aspects of the relationship remain. As a result, Emma’s monetary necessity relegates her, even in the eyes of her lover, to the level of a prostitute. Due to Emma’s financial turmoil, she cannot escape the dire consequences of her licentious behavior. Whereas a rich woman’s wealth protects her virtue like a cuirass, an indebted woman such as Madame Bovary cannot defend her extramarital affairs. This implies that after losing her financial resources, Emma is unable to secure a reputable position for herself among the members of this community. Therefore, she is no longer the amorous mistress with an unconventional lifestyle but a ‘petty’ prostitute that is looked upon with aversion and condescension by the society of the time. In a society within which only two possible roles are offered to middle-class women, Emma’s identification with the public women of her time seems inevitable. Emma’s longing for public life culminates in her eventual dégringolade and molds a public woman out of her.

By the time Emma leaves Rodolphe’s house, Emma realizes that her body has become a commodity that she needs to sell, not enjoy. As soon as the awareness of her abject position dawns on her, she scurries toward Mr. Homais’s apothecary shop and buys arsenic. The breakdown of Emma’s position as a housewife is irretrievable. But in order to dispose of her role as a harlot, Emma needs to demolish her sexualized body. Her agonizing and prolonged death affects every part of her body that had participated in sexual pleasure. While Emma is incapacitated by pain, Canivet, the local doctor says “this paroxysm may perhaps be a sign of recovery” (285). Indeed, the destruction of Emma’s sexualized body is interpreted as a sign of recovery in the French society of the time. When the priest is called upon her bed to anoint her with oil, Emma bestows a passionate kiss on the crucifix; This kiss is “the most passionate kiss of love that she had ever given” (289). Emma’s last spiritual kiss and the priest’s unction purge her of the sexual desires that haunt her. The priest begins administering extreme unction:

first upon the eyes, which had so fiercely craved every earthly luxury, then upon the nostrils, so greedy for caressing breezes and erotic scents, then upon the mouth, which had opened to lie, to bemoan her wounded pride, and to cry out in lustful pleasure, then upon the hands, so avid for pleasurable sensations; and lastly upon the soles of the feet, once so swift in speeding her to satisfy her desire. (289)

As the priest administers the sacrament of unction, Emma's face "no longer looks so pale, and her face bears an expression of serenity, as if the sacrament has healed her" (289). Although Emma is not cured of poisoning, she is cured of her sexuality. After her death, Emma's body is donned in the bridal gown and it is at this point that she reverts to her previous desexualized position, viz. being a middle-class housewife. This bridal gown also signifies the de-commodification of her body. Upon Emma's passing, Charles says "I want her to be buried in her wedding dress, with white shoes, and a wreath" (292). At this point, Charles stakes a claim for Emma's lifeless body. Emma's suicide has returned her body to her husband and for this reason, it is no longer a public property that can be controlled. Yet, even with her death, Emma cannot secure her position as Charles's middle-class wife. When they lift her body, "a stream of black liquid, like vomit, flows from her mouth" (295) and threatens the sanctity of her bridal gown. The purity of her dress is besmirched by the black liquid, symbolizing Emma's licentious behavior. Hence, similar to Balzac, Flaubert is unable to reconcile Emma's sexuality with her roles as a mother and wife. Since the eroticization of marriage undermined the entrenched ideology of the time, it is not realized in the pages of Flaubert's novel. Flaubert does not come up with a third term to mingle the supposedly opposing impulses of Emma. She has to waver between two identities that were offered to her. Even though she tries to fabricate a new identity for herself by emulating the lifestyle of the upper-class women, due to her financial misfortunes, she eventually falls into the category of 'the harlot'.

Therefore, one can observe the reflection of the dominant ideology of the time in Flaubert's novel. It can be inferred that Flaubert's book first subverts and then contains the dominant discourse on women. Initially, it attempts to construct a female identity that does not fall into the rigid dichotomy of housewife/harlot, but Emma's suicidal act confirms that the realization of such an alternative identity is not feasible for the women of that period. Conventionally, it is deduced that two reasons contribute to Emma's suicide; her debts and her extra-marital love affairs. Nonetheless, it is important to note that Emma is not, as Paskow indicates, particularly concerned about the disclosure of her love affairs. Furthermore, it is not Emma's financial loss per se that leads propels her toward suicide, but what that financial loss signifies, i.e. her position as a harlot in society. The previous studies fail to recognize the important distinction between Emma's identity as a mistress and as a harlot and the role that it plays in Emma's suicide. By concentrating on the commodifying impact that the housewife/harlot

dichotomy had on Emma, this article expanded upon Higonnet's main argument that Emma's suicide is symptomatic of social illnesses. It might also be appropriate to add that although Emma reduces art to a material commodity as Rancière points out, society also transforms her body into a commodified and abject object in return. In retribution for betraying her socially-assigned role, Emma's body is transformed into a lascivious monster that society abhors. Her debauchery made such a corrupting impact on Charles's life that the readers are informed that "she was corrupting him from beyond the grave" (305).

The serenity of Emma's middle-class household is disrupted from within. In *Madame Bovary*, no wanton outsider corrupts the fabric of the family; the threat comes from the inside. Emma had to be either a housewife or a prostitute, and what other choices except for drinking arsenic she had if she desired to be neither? This was the solution that was offered by a society that refused to eroticize marital relations and commodified the body of impoverished women. That being the case, Emma's wedlock had to reach its lethal and even foreordained deadlock.

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DE WEDLOCK À DEADLOCK: LE CHEMINEMENT DE MADAME BOVARY VERS L'AUTODESRUCTION

De nombreuses interprétations ont été tirées du suicide de Madame Bovary à la fin du roman. Néanmoins, tout en entreprenant une investigation dans le fourré de l'idéologie inexplorée du 19^e siècle, cette étude réévalue la logique derrière le suicide d'Emma une autre fois. L'analyse historique dans cet article révèle que la doctrine des sphères séparées a exercé une grande influence sur la vie des femmes de la classe moyenne. En outre, la pratique de cette doctrine a abouti au renforcement d'une dichotomie rigide de femme au foyer/prostituée. Comme le résultat d'une telle idéologie, une association est faite entre femmes en public et femmes publiques, c.-à-d. les prostituées. Tout en mettant au jour les traces de cette idéologie dans *Madame Bovary*, cet article a pour objectif de démontrer que le désir d'Emma, comme une femme de la classe moyenne, pour la vie publique aboutit à un point où elle s'identifie à la figure d'une prostituée. Cette métamorphose pitoyable, qui est la ramification d'adhérence sociétale à la doctrine des sphères séparées, l'amène vers son acte suicidaire final.

Mots-clés : sphère domestique, prostituée, femme au foyer, Madame Bovary, sphère publique, suicide.