

الرغبة غير المُشبَّعة في العالم الداخلي لإيما بوفاري: دراسة نفسية للإشباع العاطفي في رواية
مدام بوفاري

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Unfulfilled Desire in Emma Bovary's Inner World: A Psychological Study of Emotional Fulfillment in Madame Bovary

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المخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة البنية النفسية المعقدة في رواية مد/م بوفاري لغوستاف فلوبير، مركزة على كيفية تشكّل ذات إيما بوفاري من خلال خيبة رغباتها العاطفية والقيود الاجتماعية في المجتمع البرجوازي الفرنسي في القرن التاسع عشر. تستكشف الدراسة كيف تتشكل سعيها للإشباع العاطفي من خلال صراعات نفسية لاواعية، وتتقاطع مع توقعات ثقافية متجذّرة في أدوار الزواج والأمومة والطبقة الاجتماعية. وبدلاً من حصر إيما كرمز للرومانسية المثالية أو الانهيار الأخلاقي أو المقاومة النسوية، تقدم الورقة قراءة تحليلية نفسية تركز على هويتها المتجزئة وكبتها العاطفي ودوافعها الداخلية. توظف الدراسة مفاهيم التحليل النفسي الفرويدي،

ونظرية العلاقات الموضوعية، ونظرية التأثير (Affect Theory) في تحليل دقيق للنص، من خلال قراءة متأنية لأفكار إيما وخيالاتها وعلاقاتها. يتم تطبيق مفاهيم مثل مبدأ اللذة، وتكرار القهر، وغريزة الموت لتفسير دورات الرغبة واليأس لديها، في حين تكشف نظرية العلاقات الموضوعية (عند كلاين وونكوت) عن اعتمادها على "الموضوعات الخارجية" كوسيلة لتعويض نقص الإشباع الداخلي. كما تُستخدم نظرية التأثير، ولا سيما أفكار سارة أحمد (2004)، لفهم كيفية تشكيل المشاعر من خلال الرموز الثقافية المرتبطة بالإشباع الأنثوي وتوقعات المجتمع. من خلال الجمع بين التحليل النفسي الكلاسيكي ودراسات التأثير في تحليل أدبي مركّز، تقدم الدراسة منظوراً جديداً حول مدام بوفاري، وتؤكد أن مأساة إيما لا تنبع فقط من القيود الأبوية، بل أيضاً من استحالة تحقيق التماسك العاطفي في عالم رمزي يقيد الذات الأنثوية ويحرمها من وسائل التعبير الأصيل عن الهوية والرغبة.

Abstract

This study examines the complex psychological landscape of Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary, focusing on how Emma Bovary's emotional dissatisfaction, inner desires, and the constraints of 19th-century bourgeois society shape her subjectivity. The research explores how her quest for emotional fulfillment is shaped by unconscious psychological conflicts and distorted by the cultural expectations of marriage, motherhood, and class. Rather than viewing Emma solely as a symbol of romantic idealism, moral decline, or feminist resistance, this paper offers an integrated psychoanalytic interpretation that emphasizes her fragmented identity, emotional repression, and internalized desire. Drawing from Freudian psychoanalysis, object relations theory, and affect theory, the study conducts a close textual reading of Emma's thoughts, fantasies, and relational patterns. Freudian concepts such as the pleasure principle, repetition compulsion, and death drive are used to explain her emotional cycles. Object relations theory (Klein, Winnicott) reveals her dependence on external objects to stabilize a fractured sense of self, while Sara Ahmed's affect theory is employed to frame her emotions within cultural narratives of fulfillment. Secondary sources in psychoanalytic criticism, feminist theory, and literary affect studies are used to contextualize the analysis. By combining classical psychoanalysis with affect theory in a focused literary case study, the paper offers a renewed perspective on Madame Bovary. It contends that Emma's tragedy lies not only in patriarchal limitations, but also in the impossibility of achieving emotional coherence in a symbolic world that restricts female subjectivity and denies authentic emotional expression.



1.Introduction

Madame Bovary by Gustave Flaubert has been one of the most discussed works in Western literary history since its publication in 1857. Its continued relevance lies in the novel's intricate psychological portrayal of Emma Bovary—a young woman whose emotional yearnings and idealized expectations are shattered by the constraints of bourgeois life. Contemporary readers and scholars alike remain drawn to the novel's exploration of emotional repression, symbolic dislocation, and gendered identity, which resonate with modern psychological and feminist critiques. Different points of view, moral, feminist, historical, and aesthetic, have looked at Emma's fall into despair, financial ruin, and finally, suicide. While Madame Bovary has been widely studied for its themes of romantic idealism, moral decline, and feminist rebellion (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979; Schor, 1987), fewer studies have emphasized the novel's internal psychological mechanisms, particularly the interaction between Emma's emotional landscape and the symbolic structures that shape her identity and desires. This study wants to bring attention to this overlooked area of psychology by looking at Emma's emotional growth and breakdown using both traditional psychoanalysis and modern affect theory.

People often talk of Emma as a lady who has been fashioned by books, romantic novels that fill her mind with thoughts of passionate love, grandeur, and getting away from the everyday. These made-up stories give her a framework for what she hopes will make her happy. But as the story goes on, the difference between what she wants and what she has grows, and this difference is what causes her mental problems. Scholars like Berman (1988) have pointed out that Emma is a perfect example of a modern person who is stuck between imagination and materialism, between wanting to be more than just a person and being bored with life in the country. Her mind becomes a battleground for these opposing forces, which leads to emotional instability and a growing reliance on fantasy.

The main point of this research is that Emma Bovary's mental breakdown is not just the result of being morally weak or rebelling against society; it is also a sign of a deeper emotional dislocation. Her constant search for emotional fulfillment through romantic love, money, motherhood, and beauty might be seen as an attempt to fill a psychological emptiness caused by suppression, narcissistic injury, and the failure of symbolic

identification. Her tragedy is that she can't meet her emotional needs in a society that has strict rules about what it means to be a woman, which are restrictive and authoritarian. Freud (1920) said that the search for fulfillment is often driven by unconscious desires that hide deeper fears and losses. Emma's example shows this pattern since she goes back and forth between being excited and empty, passionate and detached. Freudian and post-Freudian theories are very useful for looking at Emma's character's psychological development. Freud's concepts about the pleasure principle and the repetition compulsion help us understand Emma's conduct, which is a cycle of going back to emotional highs and then crashing into depression. She looks for romantic connections not just to get away from the dullness of being married, but also to relieve her feelings of longing and failure (Freud, 1920). Also, object relations theory, especially the work of Melanie Klein and D. W. Winnicott, helps us comprehend Emma's emotional need for outside approval and imaginary objects on a deeper level. These theories say that the self is made up of relationships with other people that are internalized. Emma's inability to form stable emotional attachments with her father, then with Charles, and later with her lovers shows that she has an unstable emotional core that was shaped by loss, disappointment, and unmet childhood needs (Mitchell, 1986).

At the same time, modern affect theory gives us a bigger picture of Emma's feelings in the social world. Sara Ahmed (2004) says that emotions are not only private feelings; they are influenced by social and cultural influences. They "stick" to particular things and become part of how people move through the world. Emma's need for love, luxury, and respect isn't just her own; it's something that has been built into the gender roles of 19th-century France. What society thinks a woman should be like, beautiful, submissive, devoted to romance, and caring for children, guides her feelings. When these values don't make her happy, Emma goes through a crisis not only of who she is but also of what she stands for. She doesn't fit the mold of a wife, mother, or lover anymore, and as these roles fall apart, so does her emotional world. Emma's marriage, the Church, the medical field, and even literature all add to her mental problems. Charles Bovary is nice and loyal, but he can't be there for Emma emotionally and doesn't comprehend her mental health requirements. The local priest, who is a member of the Church, doesn't help her with her spiritual or emotional problems. Doctors and apothecaries, who are emblems of reason and progress, only treat her body and not her soul. Flaubert's description of these institutions as



emotionally empty is part of a bigger criticism of a middle-class society that values order, rationality, and material success over emotional truth and mental health (Flaubert, 2004).

This study looks at Madame Bovary not just as a book about cheating or people being unhappy with society, but as a profound psychological look at emotional fulfillment, its illusions, its failures, and its deadly effects. It will look at Emma's emotional journey from her early idealism to her eventual breakdown, using both psychoanalytic and affective frameworks to explain each stage of her growth. The study's goal is to add a new level to the existing research on Madame Bovary by showing how Flaubert not only criticizes the society of his time but also foreshadows modern ideas about how complicated emotions can be and how the mind may be broken up. This piece doesn't see Emma as a warning or a symbol of excess; instead, it sees her as a literary case study of the emotional toll of repression, unsatisfied desire, and the search for happiness in a society that only gives you illusions in return. Her narrative is still interesting not because of her moral failings, but because of how deeply psychologically vulnerable she is. This vulnerability still resonates with modern readers who are dealing with similar dilemmas between what they want and what others demand of them.

2.Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

A vast body of scholarship has examined Madame Bovary through diverse critical lenses—ranging from moralist critiques (Brown, 1966) to feminist readings that view Emma as a symbol of patriarchal repression or resistance (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979), and stylistic analyses emphasizing Flaubert's narrative technique and realism (Schor, 1987). Psychological interpretations have also explored Emma's neuroses and emotional instability through Freudian or symbolic frames. Yet, despite this richness, fewer studies have focused on how her emotional fragmentation emerges from the convergence of unconscious desire, symbolic repression, and affective overload. This study aims to fill that gap by integrating psychoanalytic theory and affect studies to explore how Emma's emotional life deteriorates within and in response to the symbolic structures of her world. A lot of researchers have looked into her emotional instability, her unhappiness with her home life, and her slide into delusion and despair. Although Emma Bovary's behaviors, such as her affairs, materialism, and emotional volatility, have been extensively analyzed, much of the scholarship has prioritized moral, feminist, or

sociological readings over in-depth psychological inquiry. For example, critics like Gilbert and Gubar (1979) and Naomi Schor (1987) focus on Emma as a literary symbol of patriarchal repression or romantic excess, rather than as a subject of internal emotional fragmentation. This study addresses that gap by focusing on the unconscious motivations behind Emma's pursuit of emotional fulfillment, desires often masked by external actions.

This section reviews key works on Madame Bovary and establishes the theoretical foundation for this study, which integrates classical Freudian psychoanalysis (including drive theory and object relations) with Lacanian concepts of desire and modern affect theory. Unlike previous studies that isolate psychological or feminist interpretations, this paper synthesizes them to reveal how Emma's emotional instability arises not merely from external repression but from a deeper conflict between unconscious longing and symbolic structures. This interdisciplinary approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of her psychological collapse within the emotional and cultural constraints of 19th-century society. At first, people who didn't like Madame Bovary typically said it was immoral or that it went against bourgeois norms. Sainte-Beuve didn't like the way the book showed infidelity and sexual pleasure, while other people praised Flaubert's attention to detail and mastery over style (Brown, 1966). As literary criticism changed in the 1900s, scholars started to see Emma Bovary as an emblem of middle-class unhappiness. For example, Marxist opponents thought that Emma's unhappiness was caused by her feeling alone in a capitalist society. Lukács (1962) put the book in the realist tradition and said that Emma's dreams showed how limited her social status was.

Feminist readings show that Emma is a woman who is fighting against the rigid rules of a male-dominated society. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979) say that her reading and sexual freedom are ways of fighting against being trapped in a world where males are in charge. They also say that Emma's identity is built on male-written dreams, such as romance novels and male partners, that end up betraying her. Emma's sorrow is not simply the result of social restrictions, but also of her own unrealistic ideas about what it is to be a woman. This interpretation says that Emma's search for emotional fulfillment is doomed from the start since it is based on a false symbolic order. Recent feminist and psychoanalytic research has tried to find deeper levels of Emma's inner self. Naomi Schor (1987) says that Emma's longing isn't just romantic; it's



also textual. She wants the language of love, the structure of stories, and the beauty of emotional excess. The novels she reads, the clothes she wears, and the places she lives all have a big impact on her emotional needs. Schor's poststructuralist feminist method puts Emma at the crossroads of desire, gender, and language, revealing how her emotional existence is shaped by symbolic codes that she can't entirely control.

This research builds on this body of work by using a different method: it combines Freudian psychoanalysis with modern affect theory to look into how Emma's emotional needs are met, put off, and finally destroyed. Freud's theory of the mind, which includes the id, ego, and superego, helps us understand Emma's inner struggle. Her id, which is her impulsive, amorous, and sexual wants, often conflicts with the moral and social rules that her environment puts on her (superego). This leaves her ego to mediate between the two. Freud's ideas about the pleasure principle and the repetition compulsion are quite useful for figuring out how Emma's mind works. Freud (1920) said that people often do harmful things again and over again in a compulsive effort to deal with unresolved trauma or get what they want. Emma's repeated cycles of putting people on a pedestal, being disappointed, and having an emotional collapse fit this pattern well.

Several critics have interpreted Emma Bovary's emotional dissatisfaction through the lens of romantic projection and psychological instability. Naomi Schor (1987) emphasizes Emma's immersion in a world of symbols and literary fantasies, suggesting that her lovers are not real partners but narrative constructs through which she seeks transcendence. Similarly, Gilbert and Gubar (1979) argue that Emma projects her emotional and aesthetic ideals onto male figures, only to be disappointed when reality fails to match her fantasy. These scholars position Emma's affairs not as expressions of romantic agency, but as attempts to fill an emotional void through repetition and substitution.

Building on this scholarship, the current study takes a psychoanalytic turn by analyzing how Emma's relationships with Rodolphe and Léon serve as emotional projections of her unconscious needs. Rather than offering genuine intimacy, these figures become phantasmatic objects onto which Emma displaces her longing for emotional coherence—only to be met with disappointment, disillusionment, and eventual collapse.

In addition to Freudian theories, the study also uses object relations theory, especially the work of Melanie Klein and D. W. Winnicott. These theorists change the focus from impulses to connections, saying that early relational experiences are what shape the self. Klein says that emotional experiences with the mother or primary caregiver that aren't dealt with leave mental scars that show up later as idealization, envy, or emotional isolation. Emma's existence before marriage, which included her mother's death, her father's emotional distance, and the convent's emotional emptiness, shows that she didn't have strong bonds. This early lack of things shapes her adult emotional life: she is always looking for things (lovers, motherhood, beauty, religion) to fill the hole, but none can provide her the emotional support she needs (Klein, 1940; Winnicott, 1971). Psychoanalysis shows how Emma's emotions work on the inside, whereas affect theory looks at how they work in the larger social and cultural context. Sara Ahmed and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick are two affect theorists who say that emotions are not just experiences that people have on their own, but cultural practices that connect them to societal norms and ideals. Ahmed (2004) says that certain cultural things, like marriage, parenthood, and romantic love, "stick" to people's emotions. People go after these things hoping to find happiness or contentment. Cultural scripts of femininity that offer emotional fulfillment in marriage and passionate love shape what Emma wants. She is not only disillusioned when these ideas turn out to be false, but she is also emotionally unanchored. Affect theory can also help us understand why Emma's feelings are getting stronger and stronger—her "too muchness." She doesn't feel moderate; she wants rapture, transcendence, and lyrical passion. She feels more strongly because she has internalized the idea that true love is only when you feel an overpowering intensity. But this extra emotion puts her open to disappointment and emotional collapse when reality doesn't match up to her high expectations. This dissonance makes her want things, get them for a short period, and then feel hopeless, which over time makes her emotional stability worse.

This study uses Freudian psychoanalysis, object relations theory, and affect theory to provide a complete picture of Emma Bovary's emotional journey. The next parts will look at how this framework helps us understand Emma's psychological evolution, from love idealization to mental breakdown, and how it also shows us the bigger social structures that affect and destabilize her emotional life.



3. Freudian Psychoanalytic Concepts: Id, Ego, Superego, Repression, and the Death Drive

Freudian psychoanalysis gives us a complete and detailed way to look at Emma Bovary's inner struggles in *Madame Bovary*. The id, ego, and superego are the three parts of Freud's structural paradigm that control how the mind works.

The id is the inherent and unconscious drive for pleasure. This idea is shown in Emma's yearning for love, wealth, and adventure. Her emotional and material excesses—affairs outside of marriage, lavish spending, and dramatic daydreams—show an uncontrolled id that wants rapid satisfaction. Her paradoxical statement, "She wanted to die, but she also wanted to live in Paris" (Flaubert, 2004, p. 183). Shows that she was torn between wanting to kill herself and wanting to live in Paris.

On the other hand, the superego is made up of moral and social rules that we have learned from others. Emma's Catholic background and the strict rules of bourgeois society give her a moral conscience that goes against her instincts. This makes people feel very guilty and ashamed. She feels bad about giving in to temptation: "She hated herself for giving in to impulses she couldn't control" (Flaubert, 2004, p. 214). Freud says that the superego punishes people by making them feel bad about themselves. In this case, her emotional pain comes from both outside criticism and her own internalized norms.

The ego doesn't work for Emma because it is supposed to be the link between the id and the superego. Her ego doesn't combine desire and duty; instead, it retreats into fantasy. Her quote, "All my dreams were of love and splendor" (Flaubert, 2004, p. 67), shows how much she relied on idealized imaginations. As she loses touch with reality, her ego loses its ability to keep things in balance inside. Freud's idea of repression helps explain what Emma did. Her unhappiness with her marriage and emotional emptiness are buried deep in her mind, yet they come out in obsessive behaviors like shopping sprees, love obsessions, and emotional breakdowns. Also, her repeated relationships show signs of repetition compulsion, which means they are reenacting past traumas that haven't been dealt with. As we can see, "Before long, Emma was as tired of Léon as she had been of Rodolphe" (Flaubert, 2004, p. 228), showing a cycle of wanting something and then being disappointed since she didn't admit it. In the end, her death drive (Thanatos), or desire to kill herself, leads to her suicide. Her words, "She had tried everything; now nothing was left" (Flaubert, 2004, p. 272), show that she was quite mentally tired. From a Freudian point of view, Emma's demise is the predictable result of a mind broken by desire, shame, repression, and unmet emotional needs.

4. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative and interpretive approach rooted in literary hermeneutics and theoretical application. Since the aim is not to measure real-world outcomes but to explore the emotional and psychological construction of a fictional character, a qualitative method is most appropriate. Hermeneutic interpretation is particularly suitable because it allows for a nuanced analysis of how meaning is generated through language, imagery, narrative structure, and symbolic form. This approach enables the researcher to uncover layers of unconscious motivation, emotional repression, and symbolic dislocation embedded in the text.

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in literary hermeneutics and psychoanalytic theory. The research is primarily theoretical and draws on both primary and secondary sources to explore the psychological dimensions of Madame Bovary. The aim is not to measure empirical phenomena, but to critically interpret the emotional and symbolic structures embedded in the character of Emma Bovary. A hermeneutic approach is particularly suitable for this study, as it allows for an in-depth reading of language, imagery, narrative design, and symbolic form to reveal unconscious meaning and emotional processes.

The primary source, Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, is examined through close textual analysis, focusing on key narrative moments where Emma expresses inner conflict, desire, and emotional instability. Specific passages are selected based on their relevance to recurring psychological patterns such as fantasies, internal monologues, emotional outbursts, and moments of despair. The textual evidence is chosen purposefully to reflect the major emotional stages of her character arc: longing, projection, disillusionment, repression, and collapse. Passages are not analyzed in isolation but situated within the broader emotional and symbolic context of the novel.

The theoretical framework guiding this analysis combines Freudian psychoanalysis, object relations theory, and affect theory. Freudian concepts such as the pleasure principle, repetition compulsion, and the death drive are used to interpret Emma's emotional cycles of desire and despair. Object relations theory, particularly as developed by Melanie Klein and D. W. Winnicott, helps examine Emma's reliance on external objects (romantic partners, material symbols, idealized roles) as compensations for internal emotional voids. Lacan's notion of desire as lack informs the study's reading of Emma's compulsive longing for transcendence. Affect theory—most notably Sara Ahmed's (2004)





work—is used to situate Emma's emotional experiences within larger cultural symbols and social scripts for fulfillment.

Secondary sources are selected based on their relevance to both the thematic focus of emotional fulfillment and the chosen theoretical frameworks. Priority is given to peer-reviewed scholarly works in psychoanalytic literary criticism, feminist theory, and affect studies. These sources are used to frame the research within existing scholarship while also identifying areas where this study contributes a deeper or novel interpretive layer—particularly by synthesizing theories that are often treated separately. To ensure interpretive validity, the analysis engages in reflective comparison between Emma's textual behavior and the theoretical models applied, while triangulating interpretations across multiple frameworks. Rather than generalizing across texts or authors, this study treats Madame Bovary as a concentrated case study for exploring how emotional subjectivity is constructed and dismantled through narrative, symbolic expectation, and psychic tension.

5. Emma's Emotional Trajectory

This part uses the psychoanalytic and affect-theoretical framework from previous to look at how Emma Bovary's feelings changed over time. Using Freudian drive theory and modern theories of affect, this section closely examines the text to show how Emma's emotional journey represents a deeper psychological split caused by social expectations, symbolic dislocation, and unmet inner desires. Emma Bovary's emotional life is a sequence of growing desires, each one coming from being disappointed with the past one. From the romantic books she read as a child to her last terrible act, her emotional journey is marked by a desire that never gets fulfilled. Her path is not just a series of romantic mishaps; it is also a deep psychological breakdown in which each stage of desire is a failed attempt to build a stable sense of self. This part shows how Emma's emotional state changes over time, showing how her inner life gets worse because of illusions, repetition, and unmet psychic demands.

Emma's emotional growth starts when she is a youngster and a teenager, and it is mostly influenced by being alone, imagining things, and being locked up. Her father, who is emotionally aloof, raises her when her mother dies. Later, she is taken to a monastery. The convent should be a place for Emma to think about her spiritual life and get moral instruction, but instead it becomes a place where she feels bored and alone. She goes to religion not because she believes in it, but because it makes her feel better "She tried to find comfort in religion, but the convent's mysticism

soon faded in comparison to the dramatic passion she found in books" (Flaubert, 2004, p. 34). These books give her a way to express her feelings, a script for her desires, and a picture of life that promises excitement and greatness. From this point on, Emma's feelings are formed by fiction rather than real life. Emma thinks that marrying Charles Bovary will give her the emotional intensity she wants. But Charles is emotionally basic, gentle, and boring, and he can't grasp or respond to the emotional complexity that she is. She is immediately disappointed: "The reality did not match the poetry of her dreams." She thought she was in love, but she didn't feel the joy that comes with love (Flaubert, 2004, p. 52). Emma's emotional growth takes a big turn when she gets married. She feels betrayed, not simply disappointed. This creates an emotional emptiness that pushes her to the next level of imagination.

Shortly, Emma's emotional needs develop into needs for monetary and aesthetic satisfaction. She fills her home with decorations, reads publications, and eats things that represent wealth to fill the emotional void. But even though she enjoys these outside things, she is nevertheless unhappy emotionally. According to object relations theory, people who have trouble forming emotional attachments as children may try to "fill the void" with things outside of themselves (Winnicott, 1971). Emma's excessive attention on financial items, attractiveness, and social refinement can be interpreted as efforts to build a consistent identity when she doesn't have any emotional footing inside. But none of these "objects" last, and her unhappiness only grows. This is when Emma starts her first affair with Rodolphe Boulanger, who is not her husband. She sees him as the romantic savior, a man who will save her from the boring life in the country. Her love for him is less about who he is than about the vision he represents. "She was rediscovering in adultery all the platitudes of marriage" (Flaubert, 2004, p. 142). Her love for Rodolphe is another example of the emotional script she learned from books: powerful, dramatic, and fatal. But when Rodolphe finally leaves her, Emma is heartbroken. The emotional collapse that follows is like the repeating urge that Freud talks about: Emma keeps going through a cycle of hope and loss, never healing her main emotional wound and instead reliving it through different situations (Freud, 1920). After getting over the breakdown that Rodolphe's leaving triggered, Emma starts another emotional cycle with Léon Dupuis. Emma puts excessive expectations on him again, even though he is younger and more sensitive than Charles. Their relationship starts with cerebral flirting and later turns into passionate escape, with secret encounters and city escapades. But even



this partnership, which is based on shared fantasies, becomes empty. "Before long, Emma was as tired of Léon as she had been of Rodolphe." She needed someone to feed her fantasies, and he had also failed (Flaubert, 2004, p. 228). The fact that this emotional pattern keeps happening—infatuation, disillusionment, despair points to a deeper psychological process at work. Emma's goal is not to find love, but to find a sense of emotional wholeness that is always out of reach.

Emma's mental health gets worse as her relationships fall apart and her bills pile up. Her conduct becomes more erratic, more anxious, and more impulsive, which are all indicators of a psychiatric collapse. Her emotional needs become more urgent, and her reactions become more severe. At this moment, her need for emotional fulfillment turns into a death wish, her last chance to get away from the dreadful emptiness that has become her life. "She had tried everything; now nothing was left" (Flaubert, 2004, p. 272). In Freudian terminology, her suicide is not merely an act of despair, but also the end of a psychic process in which pleasure and destruction, desire and death come together (Freud, 1920). Emma Bovary is stuck in a circle of yearning and disappointment throughout her emotional journey. She can't bridge the gap between what she wants and what is real. Her hopes and dreams, which are influenced by literature and fantasy, always go beyond what is possible in her social life and personal connections. Her highs are short-lived, but her lows are horrible. From a psychoanalytic point of view, Emma is not only a romantic idealist or a victim of bourgeois tyranny; she is a severely broken person whose unsatisfied needs for love, recognition, and emotional security control her inner world. Her constant failures to find genuine happiness show that she has a deeper psychic hole that no romance, luxury, or illusion can fill.

In short, Emma's emotional journey shows a person who is stuck between wanting and misery, imagination and reality. Her inner struggles can't be explained by moral weakness or societal disobedience; they're signs of a mind that was fashioned by a lack of emotional support as a child and kept going by fantasy constructs that always fall apart. Her sadness is that her emotional search is continually going in circles: she always wants more but always ends up with nothing.

6.The Role of Social and Symbolic Structures

To properly understand Emma Bovary's emotional and mental journey, we need to look at the social and symbolic institutions that shape and

limit her identity. Her inner existence is influenced by fantasy, desire, and emotional longing, but her perception of the world is deeply affected by her place in 19th-century French society, which was ruled by patriarchal standards, strict class hierarchies, and limited women's power. These outside pressures have a big impact on how she feels and what she expects from others. In this part, we look at how marriage, religion, motherhood, social class, and cultural representations work as symbolic systems that promise happiness but end up making her feel worse.

The institution of marriage is what makes Emma unhappy. In the 19th-century bourgeois world, marriage was not a passionate connection but a business deal. Emma thinks that marrying Charles Bovary will give her passion, closeness, and a sense of purpose. These hopes are based on the romance books she read in the convent, not on what actually happened. But her husband's emotional simplicity and the dullness of life in the country quickly shatter this dream. Instead of making her feel better, marriage becomes a prison: "She had thought that love would come suddenly, with thunder and lightning... but nothing happened" (Flaubert, 2004, p. 46). Charles is not a partner in emotional growth; he is a figure of stasis and routine who can't get into Emma's complicated emotional world. As a wife, Emma also has a symbolic role in society that comes with certain expectations, such as being passive, domestic, humble, and willing to make sacrifices for others. These expectations go against Emma's deeply held beliefs about adventure, freedom, and intensity. Lacanian psychoanalysis says that language and social roles create desire and let the subject into the symbolic order (Lacan, 1977). Emma's identity as a wife doesn't leave room for her own emotional demands, which makes herself and position not match up. She feels more and more cut off from both Charles and her own feelings.

Motherhood is another important symbolic structure that doesn't provide Emma the emotional significance she wants. She gives birth to a daughter named Berthe, but she doesn't show any love for her. There are two ways to look at her lack of enthusiasm in being a mother, personally and symbolically. Emma may not have the emotional capacity to care for someone else because she has her own needs that aren't being satisfied. On a symbolic level, being a mother is like being a woman who is stuck in a box and has to do emotional work without getting any emotional support in return. Emma wants to be passionate and intense about herself, but becoming a mother makes that hard. Ahmed (2004) says that things in society, like "motherhood," are given cultural meanings that include



happiness, purpose, and fulfillment. When these values don't connect with Emma, she feels not only let down but also emotionally cut off from the symbolic order itself. Religion, which is often a source of solace in classic stories, doesn't help Emma either. Her time at the convent at the beginning of the book introduces her to mystical love and spiritual ecstasy, but she swiftly gives up religion for sensual and aesthetic pleasures. Later, when she is feeling hopeless, she goes back to the Church, but it doesn't help her. Abbé Bournisien, the local priest, doesn't care about her inner agony and instead talks about her physical health and religious platitudes. His failure to see her pain makes the emotional void in institutional religion even worse. Flaubert criticizes religion not as a belief system but as a bureaucracy that is separate from real spiritual or emotional needs. As a result, religion, like marriage and motherhood, becomes a symbolic structure that promises emotional stability but doesn't give.

Emma's mental breakdown is also heavily affected by her class and social ambitions. Emma lives in the middle class, but she wants to live like the upper class. She dreams of being rich, elegant, and having good taste because she thinks that being upper-class means being emotionally sophisticated and having good taste. She thinks that moving up in the social ladder will help her find a more meaningful life. Her uncontrolled spending on luxury products and lavish furnishings shows that she wants to build an emotional identity through things that mean something to her. In the Kleinian sense, these things become "objects of desire" for her, something she uses to deal with her emotional problems (Klein, 1940). But as her debt grows, the world around her becomes hostile. The very symbols she thought would prove her identity now show that she failed and lied. Literature and culture, especially the love books she read as a child, have also had a big impact on Emma's life. These writings give her a script for how to live emotionally: love as passion, identity as performance, and fulfillment as transcendence. She tries to follow this script, but things don't go as planned. Naomi Schor (1987) says that Emma doesn't simply want love; she also wants the language of love and the beauty of heightened feeling. She uses this internalized literary language to make sense of her experiences. But when real life doesn't have the structure, drama, and release of fiction, Emma feels lost and let down. In this way, culture acts as a symbolic structure that affects her emotional expectations but doesn't help her grow emotionally. Emma moves through all of these structures, marriage, motherhood, religion, class, and literature in her pursuit of emotional fulfillment. But instead of

making sense, they make things emotionally confusing. When a person enters the symbolic order, Lacan says, they inevitably lose something: they don't recognize the difference between who they are and the social roles they have to play (Lacan, 1977). Emma's experience backs this up: she doesn't fail to play her symbolic roles; the roles themselves don't fit with her emotional truth. When these structures fall apart or betray her, she loses her sense of who she is, which speeds up her mental breakdown. The symbolic structures of 19th-century middle-class society don't just limit Emma; they also define the way her emotions are built. Each structure promises to make her happy, but instead makes her feel alone, which makes her feel even more inadequate and wanting. Emma's inner wants and the symbolic order she lives in are at odds with one another. This shows how unfortunate it is that emotions can't be consistent in a world where symbols are limited and don't work. Emma Bovary's mental breakdown is not merely a personal tragedy, but it is also a criticism of the symbolic systems that define and limit women's emotional options.

7. Hidden Desires and Emotional Repression: A Psychoanalytic Deepening

Emma Bovary's emotional decline is affected by her duties in society and the symbolic structures around her. However, her mental breakdown is also caused by a deeper layer: the presence of unconscious desire and emotional repression. This psychoanalytic deepening tries to find the hidden reasons, unspoken traumas, and emotional conflicts that Emma has inside her that affect how she acts even when she doesn't want to. Emma isn't just unhappy or disappointed in love; she's haunted by unfulfilled desires, narcissistic wounds, and a false persona she developed to protect herself from being emotionally vulnerable.

Freud's theory of the unconscious says that a lot of our wants are hidden beneath the surface of consciousness and only come out in dreams, fantasies, lapses, and neurotic symptoms (Freud, 1915). Emma's life is full of these kinds of indirect signs: her obsessive spending, her feverish attachments to lovers, and her mood swings all point to emotional problems that she can't fully understand. Emma doesn't just want love or luxury; she wants to be completely emotionally connected, a condition of being that goes beyond loneliness, feeling unimportant, and feeling empty inside. She wants to be emotionally complete, but she looks for it in other people who don't have what she needs inside. This is a great example of Lacan's idea that desire is "lack." Lacan says that desire comes from a





basic difference between the self and the symbolic world. The subject never really gets what they want because their desire is influenced by how the Other looks at them and by social language (Lacan, 1977). So, Emma doesn't want Rodolphe or Léon for who they are; she wants the notion of being loved, worshiped, and raised. She uses her lovers as mirrors to try to prove to herself that she is perfect. When the lover stops keeping up the fiction, Emma pulls away emotionally and feels betrayed and hopeless, not just in love but also in her own identity. This process is connected to emotional repression, which is the mental process that inhibits feelings or wants that are too strong to handle from becoming aware of them. Emma probably pushes down feelings of being abandoned and useless that she developed when she was young. Her mother's death, her father's distance, and the convent's lack of emotional support all point to a history of unmet emotional needs. According to object relations theory, people with these kinds of backgrounds typically develop a "false self" to help them deal with relationships. Winnicott (1971) says that the false self is a defensive mask that people put on to hide their genuine emotions while meeting other people's expectations. Emma's self-presentation, elegant, passionate, and cultured, is an act. Underneath it all is a weak emotional self that doesn't know how much it's worth and is always looking for proof. This is especially clear in Emma's over-the-top emotional reactions, which go from exuberant expectation to devastating grief. These states are not just theatrical; they are symptoms of emotional dysregulation, which means that the mind can't handle and settle emotions. Her emotional highs, like falling in love, arranging an escape with Rodolphe, and getting lost in Parisian fashion, are very different from her emotional lows, which happen when she feels abandoned, rejected, or ashamed. From a modern psychological point of view, this shows not simply mood swings but also a bigger problem with self-fragmentation. When outside sources of emotion don't help her feel better, she implodes inside, unable to hold back or express the sentiments that are too much for her.

Emma also often shows her wants through things like clothes, notes, jewelry, or romantic decorations. These things are not just things she buys; they are emotional placeholders that help her deal with her repressed sentiments. Klein (1940) says that when people don't have enough emotional resources inside, they project their desires onto things outside of themselves to try to control their anxiety and keep their sense of self. So, Emma's materialism isn't a weakness in her character; it's a way for her to stay alive because she has never really encountered

emotional closeness. Flaubert interestingly indicates that Emma knows about this emotional contradiction. She sometimes thinks about how unhappy she is with herself, not simply her circumstances. "She hated herself for giving in to impulses she couldn't control" (Flaubert, 2004, p. 214). This internal split—between the part of her that dreams and the half that regrets shows that she is repressed, which means that her conscious aspirations are always at odds with truths that are hidden from her. Her last sorrow comes not only from losing everything outside of her, but also from the disintegration of her illusions. When there are no fantasies left to support her sense of self, she will inevitably lose her mind.

In this way, Emma's suicide is more than just the end of a sad love story; it's the end of keeping her feelings hidden and not being able to satisfy her psychological needs. Freud's death drive comes back again, but not as a longing for physical death. Instead, it's a wish to escape the emotional pain that comes from wanting what you can't have. The fake personality falls apart, the fantasy breaks, and Emma is left with a hole that no partner, symbol, or dream can heal. This psychoanalytic deepening shows that Emma is not weak or vain, but rather a mentally fragile person whose hidden wants and repressed emotional wounds have nowhere to go in a culture that expects women to be calm, conform, and deny themselves. Her sadness is not just that society's institutions have failed, but also that her emotional world has not been able to stabilize under the weight of lies, repression, and unfulfilled human needs.

8. The Psychological Collapse

Emma Bovary's existence is marked by a constant cycle of extreme emotions and deep misery. Emma's emotional condition changes, and the symbolic structures she relies on fall apart. This leads to her mental breakdown, which is distinguished by losing her sense of self, acting irrationally, and eventually killing herself. This collapse isn't just a response to outside problems like bankruptcy or betrayal; it's the last step of a long-term emotional breakdown caused by psychological fragmentation, cycles of unsatisfied desire, and institutions that don't make sense. This segment looks at Emma's breakdown from a psychoanalytic point of view, with a focus on Freudian death drive, narcissistic wounding, and affective overload.

Emma is already very emotionally unstable by the time Rodolphe and Léon leave her, and she is left with a lot of debt. Her view of reality gets more and more broken, and her choices show that she is not thinking



clearly. She goes from being too excited to being completely hopeless. "She didn't know if she was in pain or having fun anymore" (Flaubert, 2004, p. 285). Freud (1920) talks about the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. This is a drive to destroy oneself that comes about when the mind can't find balance through normal means of satisfaction or repression. Emma's quest for happiness gets so mixed up with failure that only death seems to bring her peace. Emma's mental breakdown is likewise quite self-centered. Heinz Kohut, a psychoanalyst, said in 1971 that people who can't build a stable sense of self because they don't get enough mirroring and reinforcement from others are suffering from narcissistic injury. Emma's ongoing need for attention, admiration, and validation from outside sources like boyfriends, friends, and material things shows that she depends on other people to build a consistent sense of self. But none of these numbers give permanent proof. Rodolphe says she is just a temporary distraction. At first, Léon is fascinated, but then he pulls away emotionally. Charles, her spouse, still doesn't know how she feels. Every time she doesn't feel "special," it makes her feel even more inadequate and ashamed within.

This narcissistic wound becomes too much for Emma to take when she discovers that not only have her dreams failed, but she is also the subject of mockery, scandal, and impending impoverishment. She loses all sense of her worth. Object relations theory says that losing important "objects," including persons or symbolic attachments, can cause a crisis in self-cohesion (Mitchell, 1986). Emma loses all of her emotional and symbolic ties. She can't be a wife, mother, lover, or even a customer anymore. Her emotional stability also falls apart as these identities break down. Her emotional intensity also starts to escalate into what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) calls "affective excess," which is when emotional experiences become too strong to be processed by the mind. Emma's ability to feel becomes too much for her: her passions, disappointments, and anxieties are so strong that they go beyond what she can handle. Her conduct is getting more and more abnormal, as seen by her fights with lenders, frantic calls to old lovers, and urgent trips to religious and medical authorities. When none of these options work, she chooses the most extreme and final option: suicide. Some readings say that Emma's suicide was just a way to avoid going broke, but it was the end of a long mental breakdown. She eats arsenic in a physical and figurative sense. Ahmed (2004) says that emotions are tied to cultural items and stories. Emma's love script needs a terrible, beautiful finale, and her suicide fits this story she has in her head. But it also shows that she now has control

over a life where she has always felt helpless. Emma briefly takes back control by choosing her death, but at a terrible cost. But the horrible way she died goes against the beauty and poetry she always wanted. Flaubert won't let her leave nicely. Her pain lasts a long time and is humiliating: "Her whole body was convulsed... her teeth chattered, her eyes rolled back, and blood oozed from her mouth" (Flaubert, 2004, p. 298). Flaubert's criticism of the ideas that Emma had internalized is shown by the fact that she couldn't find romantic closure. Her dream of perfect love ends in physiological agony, which is a cruel warning that emotional illusion can't stand up to physical reality.

From a Freudian point of view, Emma's breakdown might be seen as the failure of repression and the emergence of what was previously hidden. Her lifetime attempts to deal with her unhappiness through fantasizing, shopping, and romance finally fail since she can't have what she wants. The ego gives in to self-destruction when it can't handle the tension between the id (desire) and the superego (social rules). Her suicide marks the conclusion of a life ruled by an emotional ideal that was impossible to reach and a lack of any lasting symbolic structure to maintain her sense of self. It's also important to think about how Emma's death affects society as a whole. The psychological causes are personal, but they are also tied to her surroundings. There aren't any emotionally relevant positions for women in her society other than being married and having children, both of which she finds emotionally empty. A system that prizes women's obedience and repetition can't meet her need for passion and purpose. Toril Moi, a feminist academic, says that the symbolic limits put on women's subjectivity sometimes cause a disconnect between social roles and emotional experience. Emma's fate is a good example of this misalignment: she wants more than the world can or will offer her.

In the end, Emma Bovary's mental breakdown is the result of a long-lasting emotional crisis caused by her own mental fragmentation, continuous disappointment from the outside world, and the inability of symbolic roles to make her feel emotionally stable. Her suicide is not simply the end of her own life, but also a criticism of the social, emotional, and cultural structures that shape and hold back women's wants. Flaubert paints a frightening picture of a mind coming apart at the seams because of its own unfulfilled desires and the harsh indifference of the world around it through Emma.



Conclusion

In *Madame Bovary*, Gustave Flaubert constructs a psychologically intricate portrait of Emma Bovary, whose inner conflict arises from the tension between her intense emotional needs and the symbolic structures of 19th-century bourgeois society. This study has demonstrated that her suffering cannot be solely attributed to acts of infidelity or material excess; rather, it stems from the fundamental mismatch between her inner emotional yearnings and the societal scripts available to her. Emma's pursuit of fulfillment through romantic love, motherhood, luxury, and social elevation reflects not empowerment, but a deeper emotional dislocation shaped by unconscious psychological drives.

Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, the research has traced Emma's internal fragmentation through cycles of hope, disappointment, and despair. Institutions such as marriage and motherhood fail not because Emma rejects them, but because they are structurally incapable of accommodating the psychological complexity and emotional depth she embodies. Her descent is intensified by unresolved psychic wounds, narcissistic vulnerabilities, and the repression of desire, all of which operate beneath her conscious awareness.

Ultimately, Emma's suicide is not merely a moral or social failure, but the tragic endpoint of a psyche trapped between repression and the impossibility of authentic self-realization. Her demise reflects a broader critique of how emotional coherence becomes unattainable in a symbolic order that denies women agency over their inner lives. Flaubert's novel thus emerges not only as a critique of bourgeois norms but also as a



powerful exploration of what occurs when emotional needs are pathologized and hidden desires are left unspoken.

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