REFLECTIONS OF AN IMPOSSIBLE IDEAL: PASSION AS THE WILL TO DOWNFALL IN *MADAME BOVARY*

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ABSTRACT

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Broadly speaking, this thesis is an examination of passionate love: its qualities, its presentation, the ends to which it is employed, its paradoxical nature, and set of beliefs surrounding it—in short, the impossibility of it all. More narrowly, this thesis argues that in Madame Bovary, Flaubert attaches a specifically twelfth-century understanding of passion to Emma Bovary, one that is at the heart of troubadour lyric poetry. What is more, I argue that Emma finds in this vision of love, whose structure is built upon a Neoplatonist dialectic and expressed through a paradoxical antithesis, an Ideal—an ideal world, life, and vision of herself—to which she devotes her entire life.

An understanding of passion in this way, I believe, changes the light in which Emma Bovary is too often cast. Rather than advancing a point of view that perpetuates interpretations of Emma as naive, hopelessly sentimental, and at the complete mercy of (dis)illusion, this thesis argues that conceptualizing passion as an end in itself reveals in Emma a purposeful quest for transcendence as well as a nonpareil level of agency and self-actualization, the likes of which there is no equal in nineteenth-century French fiction.
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INTRODUCTION

I. Emma Bovary and the Question of Desire

The role of Madame Bovary

There exist certain works of art—literature, music, painting—that continue to resonate long after their original time and place. Despite being written in c. 385–370 BC., philosophers still consult Platonic dialogues in search of immutable truths; a Wagnerian aria, some 150 years after its composition, still holds the power to bring opera aficionados to tears; lovers of literature find the classical myths of Antiquity consistently reborn and recast across every subsequent era and genre as each new tradition takes for their champion the likes of Narcissus, Orpheus, and Prometheus; and, despite our age of widespread desensitization, anyone willing to take a tour inside the mind of the Marquis de Sade will find that he still has the power to make our stomachs churn. In one way or another, these texts operate on us, whether it is on our knowledge of the world (Roche), or ourselves (Iser, Carroll), as training grounds whereby we fine-tune our mental capacities (Landy), in order to strengthen our capacity for empathy (Nussbaum), or simply to show us what is beautiful, and in the process, reveal something deeply true about ourselves (Nehamas). Nevertheless, despite the hundreds and even thousands of years of criticism that have followed these works—criticism that has torn apart, dissected, put back together again, resuscitated, and ultimately reenvisioned the works, only to be torn down again—we still find that we have something to say about them. Or, perhaps, it
would be more accurate to say that they still have something to say to *us*. They are almost mythical in the sense that they seem to continually be a part of our culture, always there to reveal a hidden truth, one that has perhaps been forgotten, dismissed, subsumed, or dispersed. Or, following Barthes’ assertion that “criticism is not an homage to the truth of the past or to the truth of the ‘others’—it is a construction of the intelligibility of our own time,” maybe these works simply hold up a mirror to ourselves.⁶

*Madame Bovary* is no exception to this list. It is, in fact, a novel that holds a unique place in our transhistorical consciousness by virtue of the simple fact that it has been continuously taken up, from its inception to the present day, for altogether different purposes. Each new school of thought, each retaliation, each splintering from structuralism and feminism to postmodernism (and any of the other *isms*) have seemed to call on *Madame Bovary* in order to illustrate a point. Many, such as Proust, Barthes, Nabokov, Poulet, and Levin, have focused on style, with W. von Wartburg going so far as to say “[Flaubert] did for language what Descartes did for the self when he made it the foundation of human consciousness.”⁷ Others have taken to the novel in search of didactic meaning.⁸ And there has even been, as Joshua Landy points out, a recent surge in what can rightly be termed Charles Bovary apologists—a radical departure from the long-standing discourse painting Charles as odious (Thibaudet), inferior (Baudelaire), as cluelessly facilitating his own status as cuckold (Nabokov), and as having a mediocre intelligence (Auerbach).⁹ This new wave of critics disagrees with the emphasis on Charles’ mediocrity, believing instead, for example, that “only in the astonishing figure
of Charles Bovary, to whom little justice has been done, does Flaubert allow us a glimpse of the unplumbed depths of the soul.”

But among the most polarizing debates, and that which is most germane to this thesis, are those regarding the validity of Emma Bovary’s desires, in which case there exists two antithetical camps: those who, on the one hand, give a positive qualification to Emma—heroic, steadfast, radical—and those who, on the other, attach a negative one—foolish, juvenile, vulgar. Much of this debate is deeply rooted in the ways in which critics, theorists, and everyday readers interpret Emma’s outlook on love. I believe this divide to be ostensibly an issue of taxonomy, specifically, that of the Romantic/Realist divide, by which I mean those who view Emma as foolish or immature tend to fall on the side that sees the novel as a work of Realism. In a similar vein, B.F. Bart believes that much of the criticism that has since followed the publication of Madame Bovary have all been variations of a single debate which has at heart this issue of categorization: that of the debate between Sainte-Beuve and Baudelaire. He writes: “The two reviews taken together set forth, from the very start, the major concerns which have dominated much of the criticism of Madame Bovary ever since, and upon which readers today are still embroidering variations.” Those who are sympathetic with the critique of Sainte-Beuve may be seen in the likes of Henry James, for example, who believes that Emma Bovary is “ignorant, vain, [and] naturally depraved”; moreover, James believes she stands as the poster child for “a great many Madame Bovarys, a great many young women, vain, ignorant, leading ugly, vulgar, intolerable lives, and possessed of irritable nerves and of a high natural appreciation of luxury, of admiration, of agreeable sensations, of what they
consider the natural rights of pretty women.” Nabokov, while nowhere near as acerbic as James, still sees Emma in a negative light: he believes her to be a philistine—juvenile, deceitful, vulgar—with a “meandering intelligence.” Likewise, Rene Girard’s landmark work on external mediation ultimately strips Emma of any and all agency, reducing her entirely to her desires—desires which have “destroyed all her spontaneity” and individuality.12 On the other hand, those who champion Emma as heroic—Baudelaire, Jean-Paul Sartre, and, more recently, Naomi Schor and Dennis Porter—tend to see the novel not as the violent rejection of Romanticism, but as an extension of the Romantic movement.13 I myself subscribe to the belief that Madame Bovary is an unmistakable work of Romanticism, one that probes the most pressing beliefs of the Romantic outlook, one that champions an alternative way of living life, and one that finds freedom and an altogether more sincere and authentic mode of being through the creation and dedication to an Ideal that is at odds with the constrictions of everyday life. And while all the various criticisms pertaining to Madame Bovary are too numerous to cite here, I find that in order to properly situate Emma Bovary as a Romantic heroine, it is imperative to first outline two critical debates surrounding the text. The first of these debates has just been hinted at, namely, the infamous critique of Sainte-Beuve and the subsequent response by Baudelaire, which deals primarily with the categorization of Madame Bovary, that is whether or not the novel is considered a work of Romanticism or Realism. The second is a debate taken up much later: that of the reclamation or assertion of Emma Bovary as a heroic figure by feminist theory.
II. Flaubert and the Romantic/Realist Divide

Romantic or Realist: the dispute over *Madame Bovary*

In the annals of literary history, Flaubert has been credited with kicking off a new literary tradition: *Realism*. And as such, there has been no shortage of critics and writers who label Flaubert as a *de facto* Realist. In fact, Flaubert has been called everything from the father of Realism to the creator of a style without the likes of which there would be “no Marcel Proust in France, no James Joyce in Ireland [and] Chekhov in Russia would not have been quite Chekhov.” Eric Gans highlights the fact that by the end of the nineteenth century, “Flaubert’s novels were spoken of by literary historians as the masterpieces of French Realism,” and that *Madame Bovary* is, to this day, described as the “exemplary realist novel.” Indeed, scholar Peter Brooks goes so far as to say that “*Madame Bovary* is the only true “realist novel” of the French nineteenth century.” And if we are to follow this train of thought, we find that Berlin’s assertion that the nineteenth century contained a “conscientious and painful effort to construct myth” comes to an end. This is, of course, consistent with the sort of mythology that has followed Flaubert—that which cites him as the deflator of myth as well as the executioner of Romantic topoi—a mythology that is quick to cite his precision and exactitude in writing, as well as detached and objective observations, a distance which make him better equipped to capture “truth” from a distance and earned him the adage: “the one who handles the pen like others the scalpel.” But to attach a value-neutral label of Realist to Flaubert and, by extension, to consider *Madame Bovary* a Realist novel, would
be to miss an essential component of the novel. I would go so far as to argue that it is an act of brutal reductionism. In fact, Sartre equates the labeling of *Madame Bovary* as a Realist novel to a complete lack of comprehension, not just for the novel but for Flaubert himself:

> If one has lazily defined Flaubert as a realist and if one has decided that realism suited the public in the Second Empire (which will permit us to develop a brilliant, completely false theory about the evolution of realism between 1857 and 1957), one will never succeed in comprehending either that strange monster which is *Madame Bovary* or the author or the public.\(^{24}\)

Overall, the problem that writers such as Sartre and Baudelaire found with the label of Realism was in the fact that this label intimated a conscious denial of certain invaluable symbolic structures inherent in the Romantic tradition. That said, what Flaubert was after in the publication of *Madame Bovary* was not simply an act of Romantic (Romanesque) imitation.\(^{25}\) Nor was he attempting, on the other hand, the task of complete objective representation - where any element of illusion, mysticism, or imagination should be taken as artificial, foolish, and ultimately devoid of any deeper meaning. *Madame Bovary* is, rather, an attempt at renewing Romanticism via the ways of old.\(^{26}\) If, such evidence notwithstanding, critics like Eric Gans continue to view Flaubert’s novel as a work of literary Realism, it is because they are of the sort that sees *Madame Bovary* as “debunking the illusions of Romantic desire.”\(^{27}\) In other words, they are of a piece who saw Flaubert’s work as a complete rupture from Romanticism. In Gans’ opinion, Emma’s ideal is not a “justified yearning for something higher,” but simply a Romantic cliché.\(^{28}\) This, then, becomes the essential point of demarcation for critics: whether or not they view Emma Bovary’s desires as something *more* than a simple act of Romantic mimesis,
which is to say that Emma, rather than following her own sincere or authentic will, is merely modeling her life after characters in a novel.

The critiques of Sainte-Beuve and Baudelaire

The question of how to read Emma Bovary is by no means a new one. In fact, it dates back to the original dispute over Madame Bovary, which, to be sure, necessitates, nolens volens, a return to the first critical debate, a debate that perfectly encapsulates the bivalent character—that of the impersonal surgeon and the perennial Romantic—of Flaubert himself.29

The two most famous critiques of Madame Bovary came from two of Flaubert’s contemporaries: reigning critic Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, and poet Charles Baudelaire. Sainte-Beuve’s review of Madame Bovary appeared in Le Moniteur shortly after the novel’s publication. In this review, he lauds Flaubert’s exactness: “Madame Bovary is first of all a book, composed, mediated, one in which nothing is left to chance and in which the author, or better the artist, has from one end to the other done exactly what he wished to do.”30 However, Sainte-Beuve ultimately comes to mourn Flaubert’s vision of the provinces, citing the lack of attention to the bucolic ideals that have come to typify Romanticism: “The ideal has come to an end; the lyric source has dried up. People have gotten over it. A severe and pitiless truth has entered even art as the last word of experience.”31 To be sure, Flaubert’s province is a far cry from the likes of Rousseau's, but rather than probe deeper into the nature of the work, Sainte-Beuve takes this as irrefutable evidence of the changing times. And these new times, he believes, are marked
by an ushering in of a new form—one characterized by ‘objectivity’: “science, the spirit of observation, maturity, strength, a bit of hardness. These are the characteristics which the leaders of the new generation seem to affect.” Another important distinction for Sainte-Beuve is the detachedness of it all; one cannot seem to find the image or presence of the author at all:

Another equally surprising anomaly: among all those very real and alive characters, not a single one seems to be the kind of person the author himself would have wanted to be…he is present only in order to watch, to reveal and to say everything, but not even his profile appears in a single corner of the novel. The work is entirely impersonal.

Sainte-Beuve finds no problem with this; in fact, he sees it as “demonstrat[ing] remarkable strength. Where he finds fault—his “one reproche”—is in the fact that virtue is likewise absent:

Although I am fully aware of the particular bias which constitutes the method and ars poetica of the author, I have one reproach to make: virtue is too absent from this book; no one represents it...The book is certainly not without a moral; the author has not spelled out the lesson, but the reader can reach his own frightening conclusions. Yet, is it the true function of art to refuse all consolation, to reject all clemency and gentleness for the sake of total truth?

For Sainte-Beuve, then, Madame Bovary marks the end of the Romantic ideal for the simple fact that it does not contain the immediately recognizable motifs of Romanticism. Instead of finding pleasure in chasing chimeras, we are faced, according to Sainte-Beuve, with the reality that they are simply phantoms - incompatible with reality; better still, they are positively harmful; the employment of Romantic ethos in Madame Bovary becomes simply the “quirks and inconstancy of feminine nature,” to which M. Flaubert
shows his “pitilessness.” Madame Bovary is, according to Sainte-Beuve, Realism in its unremitting verisimilitude: no ideals, no poetics, no myth.

Baudelaire’s review in L’Artiste arrived several months later and struck a very different chord. In response to the charge of “realism,” he writes:

As we have heard of a certain literary procedure called realism—a disgusting insult thrown in the face of all analysts, a vague and elastic word which means to the common herd not a new method of creation but a minute description of the accessories—we shall take advantage of all the confusion in people’s minds and the universal ignorance. We shall spread a powerful and sensitive style, picturesque, subtle, and exact, over a banal canvas. We shall enclose the hottest and most boiling of feelings within the most trivial of adventures. The most solemn words and the most divisive will issue from the most stupid mouths.

For Baudelaire, Sainte-Beuve completely misses the mark. In his mourning of the picturesque, Sainte-Beuve loses perspective and finds fault in trifling details. True Romantic passion comes not from the mouth of the learned artist who is able to paint a picturesque landscape, but from the soul of the inspired. What is more, one does not need to engage with the noble savage, give up one’s life to virtue, or frolic in medieval pastures such as those painted by Walter Scott in order to feel oneself in the throngs of unremitting passion; Romanticism is present, according to Berlin, whenever an ideal that is at odds with the present way of living is presented. And it is precisely because it is an ideal that is unattainable that it is Romantic:

The whole point of the Romantic vision of the noble savage was that he was unattainable. If he had been attainable, he would have been useless, because then he would have become an awful given, a frightful rule of life, just as confining, just as disciplining, just as detestable as that which it replaced. Therefore it is the unfindable, the unattainable, the infinite which are the heart of the matter.
Sainte-Beuve believes that Flaubert’s treatment of the relationship between Emma and her ideal is evidence that Flaubert has done away with the Romantic ethos. This, Baudelaire understands, could not be further from the truth; the ideal exists only insofar as it cannot be realized. Consider, again, Isaiah Berlin:

If there are values in the past which are more valuable than those of the present, or at least in competition with them, if there is magnificent civilisation somewhere in thirteenth-century Britain or in some remote part of the world, whether in space or in time, which is as attractive as, if not more so than, the drab civilisation in which you are living, but nevertheless (and that is the important thing) irreproducible - you cannot get back to it, it cannot be rebuilt, it must remain a dream, it must remain a fantasy, it must remain an object of disappointment if you seek it - if that is so, then nothing will satisfy you, because two ideals have come into collision and it is impossible to solve the collision. It is impossible to obtain a state of affairs which will contain the best of all these cultures, because they are not compatible. Therefore the notion of incompatibility, of plurality of ideals, each of which has its own validity, becomes part of the great battering-ram which Romanticism employs against the notion of order, against the notion of progress, against the notion of perfection, classical ideals, the structure of things.  

Romanticism is not incumbent on the presentation of certain immediately recognizable signifiers—rolling hills, the provinces—nor does it depend on the fantastical, the phantasmagoric, or the virtuous; it relies on the clash of ideals, on the unwavering belief in one’s vision of perfection. This, too, is at the heart of passion; such is what Denis de Rougemont understands, and captures beautifully in his description of the passion myth:

The [passion] myth operates whenever passion is dreamed of as an ideal instead of being feared like a malignant fever; wherever its fatal character is welcomed, invoked, or imagined as a magnificent and desirable disaster instead of simply a disaster. It lives upon the lives of people who think that love is their fate…that it swoops upon powerless and ravaged men and women in order to consume them in a pure flame; as that it is stronger or more real than happiness, society, or morality…it is the great mystery of that religion of which the poets of the nineteenth century made themselves the priests and prophets.
It is for these reasons that I believe *Madame Bovary*, a novel which deals explicitly in the movements of the heart, is unmistakably Romantic.

*Autres temps, autres mœurs: a new vision of Emma Bovary*

With the exception of Baudelaire, the refusal on the part of literary critics to see Flaubert as a Romantic writer by and large meant that it would not be until second- and third-wave feminism that the literary world would see, on a wide scale, the retroactive attachment of personal agency to Emma Bovary. Along with the second and third waves of feminism came a renewed interest in *Madame Bovary*, this time with the goal of saving Emma from the more dominant misogynistic readings. (For even when Emma was being praised, it was not for her tenacity but for her conforming to gender stereotypes: “We cannot withhold our approval from her attempts to improve her mind or from the pride that she took in her personal appearance and in the running of her house”).\(^4^0\) When new life was breathed into Emma, the renewed interest and new outlook infused Emma Bovary with positive energy, renewed vitality, and a characteristic ferociousness. And while this was not groundbreaking territory (Baudelaire championed Emma from the offset, writing: “As for the intimate, deeper center of the book, there is no doubt that it resides in the adulterous woman; she alone possesses all the attributes of a worthy hero”),\(^4^1\) what was groundbreaking were the ways in which this new vitality was demonstrated; Emma was not heroic because she exhibited masculine qualities—such as Baudelaire and Sartre argued\(^4^2\)—but because she was *unapologetically feminine*. Naomi
Schor, for example, reverses the argument put forth by Baudelaire, that is, that Emma exudes male energy, and instead argues that: “Emma is also the portrait of an artist, but the artist as a young woman, and it is this difference, this bold representation of the writer as a woman which disconcerts, which misleads, and which, for these reasons, must be examined.” For Schor, Emma’s value (if one can use such a term) as a character is in part connected to the ways in which the status of being a female in a position of power—that of “artist”—casts a discerning light on our social landscape. In other words, why is it that we are unable to read Emma as the author of her own life, as an agent of her own will, without having such gross misreadings of her actions coming as a result? Why must this behavior be read as *male* instead of *female*?

It is around this time that there arose arguments and affirmations of Emma’s (and other fictional female protagonists’) subversive feminist gestures, specifically those surrounding her refusal to comply or submit to a system that oppressed and relegated women to the sphere of domesticity. Suzanne Leonard likewise highlights this trend, writing:

Though long regarded as a canonical fixture of male-authored Western literature, during the 1970s and 1980s she garnered attention from Anglo-American feminist scholars, many of whom were intrigued by Emma’s violent rejection of a life to which she was flagrantly ill suited…Emma became a figure of interest to feminists when they recast her failings as indictments of gendered expectations and laid blame for her sad fate on the biases of a culture inhospitable to women who stray from proscribed roles. Emma’s feminist recuperation began with a recognition of these limitations but took hold with even more vigor when she was made into a figure of identification for feminist critics and fictional women alike who located characteristically female struggles in her plight…
Some of these works include Susan J. Rosowski’s “The Novel of Awakening,” which cites *Madame Bovary* as “the novel of awakening,” a genre concerned with “a female protagonist who ‘attempts to find value in a world defined by love and marriage’ but ultimately realizes that living in that world is difficult or impossible.” Lisa Gerrard’s “Romantic Heroines in the Nineteenth Century Novel: A Feminist View,” somewhat similarly argues this position, believing that blame need be recast in the direction of the unjust society she occupies, and not on Emma’s behavior in and by itself. More generally, Judith Weissman rather convincingly argues that nineteenth-century texts offer women heroic images of their own possible best selves and that these images correspond with a radical tradition of resistance. Schor, while ultimately arguing that nineteenth-century French fiction fails to deliver any concrete change to the feminine sphere, nonetheless points to a marked change apropos of female representation in literature. This change is most clearly seen in the striking dichotomy of the eighteenth-century pathos of bondage—the eroticism of female vulnerability and the subsequent virtue of a redemptive modesty—and the nineteenth-century equivalent marked by a clear role-reversal—the disempowered male protagonist, helpless and hopeless, awaiting “deliverance at the hands of the all powerful female.” Finally, Dennis Porter asserts: “Emma’s suicide is the gesture of a révolte in which the means of death is particularly significant,” qualifying the act as having “in itself the force of an anti-Freudian, radical feminist gesture.”

My own argument is, in part, connected to all of these points of view. If Weissman believes that the nineteenth-century texts offer women a heroic vision of their own self, I believe the same can be said about Emma apropos of twelfth-century texts.
And I believe that this claim is sympathetic to Porter’s proclamation—that Emma’s suicide is an act of révolte—inasmuch as it argues that Emma finds in the tradition of troubadour passion a vision of her own best self, a radical self that grants her what society denies.

A different kind of reading

The central question which this thesis engages is this: How are we to interpret Emma Bovary? More specifically, how are we to understand 1) her unique vision of love, 2) her actions in love, and, ultimately, 3) her suicide? Are we to interpret it through one of the above-mentioned theories of fiction? If we take up Nussbaum on her charge that fictions increase our critical faculty for empathy, we may run the risk of taking sides depending on our own critical predispositions. Iser’s didactic readings and Carroll’s Clarificationalist view are useful only insofar as they seek to sharpen our already pre-existing identifications. Iris Murdoch’s emphatic claim that literature “teaches that nothing in life is of any value except the attempt to be virtuous,” and even the more moderate claims of Candace Vogler and Harold Bloom all seek, essentially, to remove a point from the text.\textsuperscript{51} And in a text like Madame Bovary, reading in order to extrapolate a singular point is, at best, misguided. What I am interested in is not this elusive point, the ignis fatuus that has continually divided critics. I do not believe, for example, that the message of the novel is “one of distilled hatred and disgust, for Romanticism, for the bourgeoisie, for provincial life, for orthodox religion: for nearly everything portrayed.”\textsuperscript{52} On the contrary, I believe that a claim such as this could not be further from the truth. I
would go so far as to venture to suggest that there is no point or message, nor did Flaubert intend there to be one. To insist that *Madame Bovary* is, in any sense of the word, a didactic novel, that there is a specific *raison d’être*, or that there is simply a lesson to be drawn from the text is to get caught up in a contemporary version of the novel’s trial. Rather, I am more inclined to side with critic Per Bjørnar Grande, who sidesteps any single categorization, choosing instead to describe Flaubert “as a writer vacillating between Romanticism and a Realism in its making,” and claims that, with *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert “creates a world where everything is strictly Realistic and, at the same time, heavily laden with symbolic meaning.” That said, as I argue in Chapter 1, I believe in taking this one step further: I believe that the employment of Realism is used for the express purpose of bolstering the overall Romantic tone. Of course, my goal is not to dismiss or discredit other or contrary interpretations; in fact, the ability to credibly posit an opposing or even antithetical understanding of what I am advancing is a crucially important element—one that I will argue in the subsequent chapters is built into the structure of the novel itself. However, I believe that any effort to dismiss the Romantic qualifications of the novel or to choose to see any of the Romantic topoi only in a negative light—as something, for example, to be scoffed at—is to ignore an indispensable element of the novel, one, I would argue, that is at the heart of the entire project. In fact, I would go so far as to say that the character of Emma Bovary is only fully intelligible under the auspice of a deep understanding of the Romantic qua Romantic. Emma Bovary is, perhaps, one of the most Romantic heroes of the nineteenth century, and in order to see her as such, one must understand the “heavily laden”
Romantic symbolism at play, symbolism that one can trace back to the troubadours of southern France. —This, in short, is my goal: to bring into sharp relief the traditions, philosophies, outlooks, and symbols that Flaubert employs in the *Madame Bovary* in order to see Emma as Flaubert did, to show why the rabid old Romantic famously decried, “Madame Bovary, c’est moi.”

Ultimately, the point I am trying to make is that a critical understanding of passionate love as understood by the troubadours changes the light in which Emma is all too often cast. In order to do this, my thesis sets out to show how Flaubert, in *Madame Bovary*, employs a uniquely twelfth-century idea of passion that finds its genesis in the Western world in the lyrical poetry of the troubadours. This specific form of love, I argue, is not simply a variation of love that is typified by a sort of intensity that is otherwise absent from other forms of love, but rather functions as an entire ideological construction. To be passionately in love, according to this twelfth-century dialectic, is to orient one’s entire life towards a single goal: to be completely and utterly consumed by this passion. Let me emphasize that an understanding of passion in this way is to conceptualize passion as an end in itself. Moreover, I will argue that this view of love, whose structure is built upon a Neoplatonist dialectic and expressed through a paradoxical antithesis reflects a level of agency and self-actualization in Emma that is either denied or papered over by the advances of existing criticism that advance the popular portrayal of Emma as naive and at the complete mercy of (dis)illusionment. An understanding of love in this way, I argue, effectually recontextualizes and reframes Emma’s Romantic sensibilities from the misguided musings of a sentimental girl into a
purposeful quest for transcendence, a quest that is ultimately realized through what I believe to be a heroic act of suicide. What is more, connecting Emma’s disposition towards love to a troubadour ethos provides an alternative perspective regarding the discourse surrounding the masculinity of Emma Bovary and the broader problematic of freedom in the feminine sphere in the nineteenth century.

In order to answer these questions concerning Emma’s vision of love and its consequences, some preliminaries must first be established. I need to clearly define what I mean by passionate love; and not only in the broad philosophical sense—how it differs, for example, from other kinds of love such as storge (familial love), philia (brotherly love), agape (divine love), or caritas (Christian love)—but its specific connotations, history, and employment. In order to fully understand how Flaubert employed passionate love as an end in itself, I must also differentiate between the ways in which the motif of passionate love has been used in nineteenth-century French fiction—its representation, its effects, and for what end was it employed.

III. The Myth of Passionate Love

“He ne connaissait pas encore l’amour. Peu de temps après, elle en souffrit, qui est la seule manière dont on apprenne à le connaître.”

—Proust, *Violante, ou la Mondanité*®

The blue flower

“Romanticism,” Isaiah Berlin writes:
is the primitive, the untutored, it is youth, the exuberant sense of life of the natural man, but it is also pallor, fever, disease, decadence, the *maladie du siècle*, La Belle Dame Sans Merci, the Dance of Death, indeed death itself...It is the confused teeming fullness and richness of life - *Fülle des Lebens* - inexhaustible multiplicity, turbulence, violence, conflict, chaos, but also it is peace, oneness with the great ‘I Am’, harmony with the natural order, the music of the spheres, dissolution in the eternal all-containing spirit...It is also self-torture, self-annihilation, suicide...It is strength and weakness, individualism and collectivism, purity and corruption, revolution and reaction, peace and war, love of life and love of death.  

Of all these characteristics, there is a single motif that rules them all: passion. And despite all the conflicting interpretations of Emma Bovary, there is one thing that is undeniable: Emma loves *passionately*. But what does this mean exactly? How is it any different, say, than the love Charles has for Emma? Or love in general? Moreover, does this difference matter? In short, yes, it does; it matters extremely. Let me explain why.

By way of introduction to my discussion on passionate love in nineteenth-century French fiction, I will take a step back and examine the singular motif of Romanticism that would come to define the period and the writing that resulted from it. This is *the search for the blue flower*: a trope that was born out of the need for sanctuary from the brutal reductionism of human sentiment by the new secular state of the eighteenth century. Isaiah Berlin identifies this motif as *nostalgia* - a nostalgia which is directly tied up with the notion of infinity: it is “the famous infinite *Sehnsucht* [‘Longing’] of the Romantics, the search for the blue flower, as Novalis called it. The search for the blue flower is an attempt either to absorb the infinite into myself, to make myself at one with it, or to dissolve myself into it.” The blue flower is a symbol of the Ideal: an intoxicating vision of perfection, a taste of the Absolute. To search for the blue flower is to experience in all
its fullness the pangs of passionate love, for it is, by definition, something that cannot be seized or realized in its full capacity in the mortal world. It is to court one's own destruction in the search for the infinite, the sacred—that which cannot be found here in the profane plane. To search for the blue flower is to align oneself with Baudelaire in his response to the critique of Emma Bovary being “ridiculous”:

Madame Bovary has been called ridiculous by some. Indeed, we meet her at times mistaking some species of gentleman—could he even be called a country squire?—dressed in hunting vests and contrasting dress for a hero out of Walter Scott! At another moment, she is enamoured of an insignificant little clerk who is not even capable of performing a dangerous action for his mistress. Trapped finally within the narrow confines of a village, this bizarre Pasiphae, now a poor exhausted creature, still pursues the ideal in the county bars and taverns. But does it matter? Even then, we must admit, she is, like Caesar at Carpentras, in pursuit of the ideal!

To align oneself with this quest is to walk hand-in-hand with Emma and lose yourself in what can only ever be a promise of happiness.

Differentiating passion in the nineteenth century

In De L'amour, Stendhal claims that there exists four different kinds of love:

Mannered Love: the kind of love dictated by etiquette and rituals which must be met and observed (nothing passionate or unpredictable); Physical Love: the kind of love whose only goal is bodily delights (fleeting, often nefarious); Vanity-Love: the kind of love dictated by what is fashionable (precarious, incumbent on an audience); and Passionate Love: which Stendhal defines simply by pointing to examples (the love of Heloïse for Abelard, for example).
Now, to provide an ample and thorough discussion of each of the various types of Love and their presentation would be a fool’s errand and, ultimately, one that is beyond the scope of this project. What I am here interested in, specifically, is Passionate love. It is clear by Stendhal’s failure to produce a straightforward definition that there is something amiss about this particular form of love. Obviously it exists, if just for the simple fact that we can point to examples; examples, moreover, that we all seem to agree on. But any attempt to locate it solely within language seems, at best, challenging, and, at worst, downright impossible. For Denis de Rougemont, “Passion means suffering. There we have the fundamental fact.”64 Victor Hugo, in a letter to Adèle Foucher dated March 20th, 1821, reflects a similar sentiment: “Alas! Adèle, do you know that passion means suffering?”65 And likewise for Proust, we only come to know love through suffering.66 Passion, then, clearly appears to be predicated on suffering. But one cannot do much with such a limited definition. The problem, however, is that it is of the nature of passion to be beyond expression, beyond intelligibility, and beyond language. Any time an author attempts to come up with a definition for passion, or to simply delimit it in some way, they are met with failure. The effort caused Stendhal, for example, to proclaim with indignation:

I seem to have given a remarkably poor idea of true love… I am at a loss to express what I can see so clearly; I have never been so painfully aware of my lack of talent. In what intelligible terms can I convey the simplicity of gesture and bearing, the deep earnestness, the look which expresses the precise nuance of feeling so exactly and so candidly, and above all, I repeat, the ineffable concern about everything but the woman one loves.67
Consider, too, Benjamin Constant, who in *Adolphe* writes, “The magic of love - who could ever describe it?...the magic of love that none who has ever known can ever describe!” Despite its elusive nature, what we can agree on is that passion is to be understood as a *distinct* form of love—one that exists in and of itself and with its own set of attributes. But we can take this a step farther. There is a singular quality of passionate love that sets it apart from other forms of love: “Happy love has no history,” writes Rougement, “romance only comes into existence where love is fatal, frowned upon and doomed *by love itself*.“ What separates passionate love from *philia, agape*, or any of the other forms of love, then, is precisely this fatal quality. In other words, there is a constant association between passion and death, an inseparability that borders on codependence. “Are not *passion and death* twin sisters?” writes Nietzsche. There is a paradoxical element insofar as passion is connected to death because passion is above all an explosion of life; to love something or someone passionately is to love with one’s whole existence, it is to feel life at its highest degree of intensity. But it is precisely in this quality of losing oneself that the condition of death comes into play. For example, in *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard writes:

> One should not think slightingly of the paradoxical; for the paradox is the source of the thinker’s passion, and the thinker without a paradox is like a lover without feeling: a paltry mediocrity. *But the highest pitch of every passion is always to will its own downfall…. The supreme paradox of all thought is the attempt to discover something that thought cannot think.*

For Kierkegaard, the very notion of passion is paradoxical, and it is only *in* paradox that passion is born. He continues:
Let us consider what happens in love, although it expresses the situation only imperfectly. Egoism is at the origin of feeling for another person, but when its paradoxical passion reaches its highest pitch, the lover wishes precisely his own downfall. This is also what love wishes, hence these two powers agree in the passion of the moment, and this power is indeed love.72

Death, it would appear, is more than just a condition or an end result; it is, rather, built into the very structure of passion; it is the foundation on top of which love is built. There is a magnetism whereby the lover feels pulled towards his own downfall. The wish to be utterly subsumed by the object of desire, the complete loss of will and subjectivity, the desire for complete union with the other, all of these are the desire for a single thing: the erasure of the self. It is this covert desire for death that De Rougemont believes categorizes the entirety of passionate discourse in the Western world:

To love love more than the object of love, to love passion for its own sake, has been to love to suffer and to court suffering all the way from Augustine’s *amabam amare* down to modern Romanticism. Passionate love, the longing for what sears us and annihilates us in its triumph—there is the secret which Europe has never allowed to be given away; a secret it has always repressed—and preserved!73

However, to say that passion and death are inextricably linked only serves us insofar as we are concerned with a categorical differentiation of passion from other forms of love. While De Rougemont boldly posits that this secret desire for death permeates the entire tradition of Western love, the truth of the matter is that there are undeniably different presentations of passionate love in the nineteenth-century Romantic corpus. Love a la Musset, for example, is radically different from love a la Chateaubriand, even if both have death in common; and love, as painted by Baudelaire or Rimbaud, is even more differentiated. In order to properly isolate which form of passion Flaubert in particular is engaging with, we must again go a step further.
The three branches of passionate love

It is no secret that passion became the dominating motif in nineteenth-century fiction; all of Europe seemed positively obsessed with the idea of a love that drives one to death. The sheer volume of French literature alone that deals with this topic is enough for one to question whether anyone in France in the nineteenth century experienced anything remotely akin to happiness in love. But to attribute the same definition of passion to all of these texts is to cast too wide of a net; and it is not every example of love ending in death that I am interested in—this would be to fail to separate the wheat from the tares. What we need to do, then, is attempt to categorize the different forms of passion that take place in nineteenth-century fiction.

Passion as edifying

For the sake of simplicity, and in order to more narrowly focus on the task at hand, I will categorize the use of passion in nineteenth-century French fiction into three main branches (or groups): passion as edifying, passion as sickness, and passion as an end in itself. In this first group belong the likes of Rousseau, Chateaubriand, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, and Lamartine, to name a few. These authors subscribe to a belief that characterizes passion as a test of one's strength of will. Passion, when controlled and redirected into or through moral means, that is to say from the body into the soul, would lead to edification. This dialectic of passion is concerned with a sort of consecration of the subject; in other words, salvation through purification. For this group, passion was a means to an end insofar as the end signified God. Thus we have a Julie d'Étange,
Rousseau's heroine who falls victim to her passion for her tutor, St. Preux, a man she later renounces (while never ceasing to love) in order to marry M. de Wolmar, a temperate man who prizes reason above the passions and is simply concerned with leading a simple and moral life—*all in the name of virtue.* A key element to the novel is that the passion between Julie and St. Preux never wavers; passion, here, is painted as the precondition for an exalted type of virtue. More precisely, it is the *denial* of this passion that acts as the necessary element. In other words, virtue is not a singular quality in and of itself; rather, virtue pulls its strength from the object it denies. The stronger the passion, the more virtuous the individual who can resist. It is, in a sense, an almost Kierkegaardian renewal of faith in which doubt plays a necessary component. Virtue cannot be taken as a given, it must be continually tested and thus continuously reaffirmed. And the greatest test is resisting *passionate-love.* The denouement of the novel is the scene of Julie on her deathbed, where we learn that Julie’s passion for St. Preux has never wavered. However, it is precisely *because of her resistance to it* in favor of virtue that she can die a happy death. Passion, here, is still linked to death - but the death is a beautiful one, a *redeeming* one, and all because it denies the consummation of passion. If passion is to be seen as the longing for the infinite, then this group characterizes this idea of infinity as particularly secular, that is, as a deceptive vision, one that must be overcome; thus the passion that leads one to long for it must be tempered. True everlasting life can only be granted through God, hence the religiously sacrosanct nature of resisting temptation. This set of beliefs is also visible in Chateaubriand's character of Atala, whom the “loving kindness of providence” provides with the strength to take her own life before she
succumbs to “worldly passions.” In this case, passion edifies not only the subject but the object as well: “Crushed with sorrow, I promised Atala that I would one day embrace the Christian faith.” With passion overcome and the conversion of the lovers complete, Atala’s sanctification is accomplished: “Raising my lowered head, I cried out as I looked at the vessel with the holy oil: ‘Father, will this remedy restore Atala to life?’ ‘Yes, my son,’ said the old man falling into my arms, ‘to life eternal!’ Atala had just breathed her last.” This savior motif is likewise seen in Chateaubriand’s novella *Rene* insofar as it is Amelia’s forbidden passion for René—which she is able to overcome—that elicits her death. —And it is this act of overcoming that, in effect, reserves her place next to God and ultimately leads her community to regard her as a “saint”:

> My sister had been at the gates of death, but God had reserved for her the supreme crown of virgins and chose not to call her to Him so soon. Her trials on earth were prolonged. Coming down once again into life’s painful path she went courageously forward as a heroine in the face of affliction; bent under the cross she saw in her struggles the certainty of triumph and overwhelming glory in her overwhelming woe.

Finally, for Bernardin de Saint-Pierre it is the trials of the modest Virginie in *Paul et Virginie*, whose resistance to the “mortal passions” and preservation of feminine modesty in the face of danger grants her the ultimate recompense from God—a virtuous death:

> “[Virginie’s] mind was fortified against the future by the remembrance of her innocent life; and at that moment she received the reward which Heaven reserves for virtue, - a courage superior to danger. She met death with a serene countenance.”

And, later on:
‘My son! God gives all the trials of life to virtue, in order to show that virtue alone can support them, and even find in them happiness and glory. When he designs for it an illustrious reputation, he exhibits it on a wide theater, and contending with death. Then does the courage of virtue shine forth as an example, and the misfortunes to which it has been exposed receive forever, from posterity, the tribute of their tears. This is the immortal monument reserved for virtue in a world where everything else passes away, and where the names, even of the greater kings themselves, are soon buried in eternal oblivion.  

Passion is characterized as a test of one’s virtue, and one is given divine recompense for this suffering so long as they resist. Death, for this group, is still seen as the final destination for those who love passionately, however, nb.: it is not a destination that the characters in the novel wish to end up at. These characters are thereby sacrificed by their authors for moral aims; this form of love is a didactic passion concerned only with ethical morality and virtuous superiority. These deaths are not heroic, nor are they tragic—they are, as Berlin observes, useless: a means to an otherwise uninspired end:

Werther died quite uselessly. René in Chateaubriand’s story of the same name dies quite uselessly. They die uselessly because they belong to a society which is incapable of making use of them; they are superfluous persons; they are superfluous because their morality, which is a morality superior, we are meant to understand, to that of the society around them, has no opportunity of asserting itself against the fearful opposition offered by the philistines, the slaves, the heteronomous creatures of the society in which they live.

Passion as sickness

The second group, those who saw passion as an inescapable sickness, make up a significant amount of the mid-nineteenth century Romantic corpus. This group boasts the likes of Prosper Mérimée, Madame de Staël, Stendhal, Alfred de Musset, and Benjamin Constant, to name a few—those who represent, in all its pervasiveness, the mal du siècle. For these writers, passion was an unavoidable malady that, once contracted,
unremittingly stripped its host of all reason, power, and judgment. Musset opens

_Confession d’un Enfant du Siècle_ by stating: “Having been attacked by a sickness of the spirit when I was still young, I set down here what happened to me over a period of three years.” This “sickness in spirit” is passionate love, and it has gone on to infect an entire century; and it is a torturous disease, the likes of which, bemoans the young narrator, Byron and Goethe, despite their characterizations of it, have never truly suffered: “Ah! I who speak to you now, who am only a callow youth, I have undergone torments which you never suffered…” These torments reflect an inescapability, an inability to wrestle oneself free from the tendrils of passion; they reflect a psychological state that warps perception to the point that one finds pleasure in pain:

She was infected by my fevered state. How many times did I hear her, ashen-faced with pleasure and love, say that she liked me just as I was; that our quarrels were her life; that these stormy ordeals were dear to her as if this was her reward; that she would never complain as long as one spark of love glowed in my heart; that she knew love would kill her but hoped it would be the death of me too; that everything that came from me was sweet and good, even the hurts and the tears; and that those earthly delights would be her tomb.

If Wordsworth believed that to dissect is to murder, then this is precisely what was to happen to passion; all attempts which labored under the illusion that passion may be understood vis-à-vis an almost scientific grounding took on precisely this cause.

Stendhal, for one, goes so far as to write a novel attempting to diagnose love, as though it were a disease whose cure was incumbent on a penetrative scientific understanding of its psychological and somatic symptoms. In his preface to _Love_, Stendhal writes:

One or two have had the patience to observe the successive phases of the disease of love in those around them who have been afflicted with it; because, to understand this passion which our fear of ridicule has been concealing so
carefully for the last thirty years, you must speak of it as a disease. Indeed this is sometimes the first step towards its cure.\textsuperscript{91}

Only, and perhaps here is the most important qualification of this group, knowing about and understanding passion is simply not enough to free oneself from its hold. Even if one was not blinded by it, \textit{understood} that it was groundless, abrasive, and only caused pain, it was not enough to escape from it: “What my head understood, it seems, my weak, terrified soul refused to acknowledge,” groans a frustrated narrator in \textit{Confession d'un Enfant du Siècle}.\textsuperscript{92} One cannot reason one’s way out of passion despite their most desperate and genuine protestations. This is because passion does not obey the laws of reason; to borrow a phrase from Schopenhauer, passion “speak[s] a language which reason cannot understand.”\textsuperscript{93} Passion remains indomitable, unbridled, unable to be circumscribed, and unable to be cured.

Another key characteristic of this group (though by no means apodictic) is the inconstancy of passion. In this sense—and in contradistinction to the first group—passion is not affixed to a single individual. Among these novelists there runs a common thread of “curing” passion by attempting to redirect it to another individual. Stendhal, for example, believes that the only way to cure passionate love, \textit{is to fall passionately in love with someone else}. And in Germaine de Staël’s \textit{Corinne, or Italy}, the protagonist, Oswald, attempts to cure his passion for Corinne by transferring it to her sister Lucile. That said, an important clarification must be made, namely, what is important is not the \textit{success} of this attempt—\textit{for it is rarely successful} (not until Proust do we see a convincing example of passion successfully transferred). What separates this group from
the first is the attempt itself; Julie d’Etange does not seek to replace her love for St. Preux in marrying M. de Wolmar - this is an unthinkable act for her; St. Preux can only ever be the sole object of her passion, and thus the attempt to transfer this love is never made. I make this distinction in order to show that passion loses the uniqueness that was so central to the first group. Consider, again, the narrator in The Confessions of a Child of the Century: “What you are suffering now, others have suffered before you. There is nothing in it unique to you.”94 This is a far cry from the singular, undying passion of Julie d’Etange, Atala, or Virginia. And while this group’s concept of passion also ends in death, it is by no means as an edifying act; it is, rather, a way of getting out of what Leonard Tancock terms a “psychological impasse.”95 One need only examine the denouement of some of the most famous works in this period to see the extent to which this is true: Merimee’s Carmen, for instance, is murdered in cold blood by her passionately jealous lover; Corinne dies from a sickness which comes as a direct result from an attack of passion—a passion that, try as she may, she simply cannot escape from; Musset and Constant, on the other hand, are not so lucky—they are stuck wishing for death. Passion, then, is not something you seek out; it is, on the contrary, something you catch; and it is certainly not something you overcome; it is that which overcomes you.

Passion as an end in itself

If we are to see the first group as those who were sacrificed to passion, the second group as those who, at the end of passion, wished for death, then what space is left for the final group? The third and final group, I argue, is composed of those strange sui generis
men and women who seek to court their own destruction - those who understand that passion inevitably finds its consummation in death but are nevertheless undeterred; in fact, it is precisely because of this fatal condition that they stay the course. Of this group, I add the likes of Nerval, Rimbaud, Baudelaire, and Flaubert. Few have courted passion in the way these poets and novelists have. They are not looking for a retreat or an escape, they are not seeking sanctuary nor are they interested in edification or a cure. What they are after is trans-cendence—transcendence into a new world, the infinite, the Absolute. Passion, in this case, is not a moral test, nor is it a disease insofar as a disease is deleterious; it is, rather, a truth characterized by “an obsession of the imagination by a single image.” It is imperative to understand that it is a single image that arrests the imagination, not a single person, for this is a key difference that affects to separate this group from the first two. This is exemplified by Gerard de Nerval in Sylvie, in which the narrator is in love with an image of an actress named Aurélia. The protagonist is haunted by this image, and as the story unfolds, the image is then traced back to the impossible passion of his childhood—a love for Adrienne, who ends up in a convent and dies an early death. Both of these are representatives of the same ideal, and it is through the attempt to recognize the ideal in the Real via Sylvie (another woman of his past, one whom, unlike the other two, is possible to “possess”) that the realization comes about that the two—the Ideal and the Real—are incompatible. In other words, the image which arrests the imagination, what comes to represent the Ideal in all its grandeur, is not the physical manifestation of the image (this will only ever be a disappointment), but the idea of the image, its abstract form—the phantom, the chimera, the blue rose: that which can
never be possessed. What is more, the very nature of infinity precludes its actualization in
the temporal; passion à la Nerval, then, means transfiguration—a movement beyond the
temporal. Nerval’s understanding of passion is shared, *mutatis mutandis*, by Rimbaud. As
Robinson notes, “Rimbaud sees the poet as literally creating a new reality out of his
visions. The effort to train the senses to perceive the world in a different way will end in
the perception of a different world.”

“Quelle vie! La vraie vie est absente. Nous ne sommes pas au monde,” writes Rimbaud: “Real life is absent. We are not in the world.”

What is real life for this group? It is precisely the totality of the idiosyncratic Ideal. For
Rimbaud, the Ideal is not found in the world we find ourselves occupying, it is *elsewhere*;
and one may arrive at this place only through a process of reinvention. The limitations of
the real world, of convention, of time, all these stand as an intolerable impasse; one must
break through these barriers, one must, in other words, constantly seek new experiences.

For Nerval, the Ideal is found in the escape of *dreams*:

Since the essence of an ideal is that it can never be possessed, the object of his
love *is at its most real* when embodied in the dream’s re-experience of the past
rather than when transferred into the substitute of the physical present. What
Nerval…sees in these non-rational experiences is ‘a new life…liberated from the
conditions of time and space, and similar perhaps to the life that awaits us after
death.’

Nerval finds liberation from these same limitations not, like Rimbaud, in a *physical*
escape, but via an inward escape. The world of dreams provides a world apart from the
Real, one in which the Ideal may be contemplated without incumbrance. Baudelaire longs
for a new universe, longs for the eternal, in the reinterpretation of what exists in the now;
how and where this comes about is of little concern to him:
Who cares if you come from paradise or hell,
Appalling Beauty, artless and monstrous scourge,
If only your eyes, your smile or your foot reveal
The Infinite I love and have never known?

Come from Satan, come from God - who cares,
Angel or Siren, rhythm, fragrance, light,
Provided you transform - O my one queen!
This hideous universe, this heavy hour?101

Baudelaire believes that there is a metaphysical truth to be found in Beauty, and it is only in the contemplation of Beauty that this truth makes itself intelligible. Moreover, one may only make contact with this truth that Beauty reveals through rigorous contemplation and with the doing away of convention, the mortal enemy of awareness.102 Lastly, for Flaubert the meaningful world is, as Robinson astutely puts forth, the inner world of the self—but it is only made intelligible via a specific process, namely, “its fulfillment can only be at the price of transcendent self-deception.”103 One must, for Flaubert, attempt to realize the inner world of the self at any cost. For despite the incompatibility of the two worlds—the Ideal and the Real—there nonetheless exists a plurality of perspectives that must be honored; reality, as such, becomes “a strictly relative concept.”104

It is this understanding of passion as a vision of the Ideal that is paramount to this thesis, for this conceptualization of passion rescues death from the immolation inherent in the Christian dialectic of the first group of Romantics and strips the negative connotation—that passion creates shackles which cannot be broken—that is at the heart of the second group. Death, for this third group of Romantics, becomes a stepping stone of sorts. It is not, in other words, a termination, but rather a movement towards an
alternative state of being, one that is more, in the Romantic sense of the term, sincere, more authentic.

According to Denis de Rougemont, this understanding of passion finds its genesis in the Western world in the lyrical poetry of the troubadours. In *Love and the Western World*, he argues that Courtly literature and, more specifically, the troubadours, conceived a passionate ideal that had at its heart a desire for transcendence infinity, which came only as a result of death. Speaking of the love of Tristan and Iseult, for example, he writes:

Actually, then, like all other great lovers, [Tristan and Iseult] imagine that they have been ravished ‘beyond good and evil’ into a kind of transcendental state outside ordinary human experience, into an ineffable absolute irreconcilable with the world, but that they feel to be *more real than the world*. Their oppressive fate, even though they yield to it with wailings, obliterates the antithesis of good and evil, and carries them away beyond the source of moral values, beyond pleasures and pain, beyond the realm of distinction—into a realm where opposites cancel out.¹⁰⁵

De Rougemont believes that this specific type of love—that ravishes and transports its subject—is at the heart of all Western love—but that it is taken up again, most directly, by the Romantics. Important to note is the emphasis on antitheses; passion, here, is as Kierkegaard affirms: paradoxical. In the following chapters, I will illustrate how Flaubert employs the use of antithesis for the direct purpose of illustrating this *specific* type of passion. However, the link between *Madame Bovary* and the troubadours does not end there. As Grande points out, “One of Emma’s heroes is Clémence Isaure, who in 1323 founded the first literary institution in the Western world (Academy of the Floral Games, which revived a game of verses among the troubadours.” “This linking of Emma’s
passion to troubadour’s love,” he writes, “makes De Rougemont’s critique of the concept of love…relevant to her romantic legacy.” More than just providing Emma with a language for love, the troubadour legacy is positively suffused into every aspect of her Romantic doctrine; the way she views and understands love, how she acts and interprets the desires of others—all the way down to how she values herself, is thanks to the troubadour ethos. The importance of understanding passion as dictated by the troubadours is therefore inestimable, for Emma sees the world through their eyes. Moreover, I believe that this explains why Emma seems to oscillate between masculine and feminine roles. If at times it appears that she takes on the role of male troubadour poet, it is because she is attempting to bring about the passionate Ideal: what, in effect, the poet attempts in his poetry to the lady. If, on the other hand, she appears to be in the receiving role, that is to say the role of the ‘lady,’ it is because she finds in this position a reflection of how she wishes to be treated and perceived—not as a provincial girl trapped within the socio-political and economic limitations of the nineteenth century, but as a venerated Madonna, subject to no one, with the freedom to live (so she believes) as she pleases. Important to note is that in either role, Emma is in control; she is at all times attempting to realize an Ideal: a movement away from the limitations of the real world into an infinity perfectible elsewhere.

Now, this understanding of the relationship between passion, death, and the troubadours becomes all the more pressing in any work of criticism pertaining to Madame Bovary for the simple fact that Emma’s suicide is often directly attributed to her engagement with Romantic literature. How Emma herself comes to understand the
Romantic ethos becomes, then, a primary concern for the very reason that the light in which these Romantic heroes and heroines are cast greatly changes depending on which view one takes. If Emma does indeed model her life after the literature she reads, then one must, in my opinion, attempt to understand passion in the very same way that she does; one must, in other words, see whether Emma understands passion as edifying, as sickness, or as an end in itself.

Outline of chapters

At the very least, this thesis will, I hope, promote a better understanding of how Flaubert’s usage of passionate love as conceived of by the troubadours may lead to a more positive prescription: one that sees Emma as a self-actualized, autonomous subject instead of a foolish girl corrupted by second-rate novels. Chapter 1 offers an in-depth analysis of the subject of the troubadours and the courtly lyric; in the process of this analysis, I identify aspects of form, content, usage, and explicitly shows how the nineteenth century took up these motifs once again and placed them at the heart of Romanticism. Chapter 2 takes up the role of language as it pertains to passion—how, for example, the inability to circumscribe passion into adequate forms of expression is, in fact, part and parcel of passion itself; and ultimately how this inability to articulate passion leads to the employment of certain symbols, the most prevalent being the Neoplatonic mirror. Additionally, this chapter outlines the exceptional scholarship of Frederick Goldin pertaining to the three particular stages of the mirror topos in medieval literature and begins to extend it to Madame Bovary, focusing primarily on the first stage:
that of the Idealizing mirror. This chapter details the genesis of Emma Bovary’s Ideal, as well as all of the individual fragments that make it up. Chapter 3 continues along this vein, focusing on the second stage of the mirror: the Material mirror. In this chapter, I showcase the process by which Emma comes to believe that the Ideal exists in the Real, and how this vision of perfection, now subject to the forces of the real world, ultimately begins to decline. Chapter 4 covers the final stage of the mirror: the Ambivalent mirror, whereby the recognition of the truth of the Ideal—that it cannot exist in the Real—comes about. This chapter follows Emma’s progression into this final realization and argues that Emma’s suicide is directly correlated to this epiphanic realization. Finally, the conclusion argues that the self-actualizing process of the mirror progression, which concludes with Emma’s suicide, is evidence not of cowardice or escape, but of Emma’s successful transcendence into the infinite.
CHAPTER 1: FLAUBERT AND THE TROUBADOURS

I. Fin’ Amor

“For two days now I have been trying to enter into the dreams of young girls, and for this have been navigating in the milky oceans of books about castles, and troubadours in white-plumed velvet hats.”

—Gustave Flaubert, from a letter to Louise Colet written March 3, 1852

Introduction

If we wish to build this argument atop a sturdy foundation, it becomes imperative to establish a direct connection between the Romantic tradition of the nineteenth century and the period of the troubadours. The Provençal lyric tradition begins in the twelfth century and extends into the mid-thirteenth century. This is otherwise known as the great Occitan period, where during a very specific time and in a very specific region—that of Provence—there existed a flourishing renaissance, appearing seemingly ex nihilo, whereby the creation of Western lyric poetry (and with it our conception of Western love) was born. Speaking of this tradition, Paul Zweig writes:

The real mystery of Provence is that it has come down to us as a civilization with no history. The values of the Joi d’amor, the graceful language of its poetry, the intricate stanzas and the conventional treatment of its main themes: all this appears full blown, with unhesitating mastery, in the four love poems by Guillaume IX de Poitiers, which mark the first date in the history of fin’amor.¹

These four surviving cansos, or poems and songs about romantic love, show an already established, intricately systematized form and a system of linguistic conventions. Fully
articulated within these *cansos* are what we would come to recognize as the characteristics of courtly love, or *fin’ amor* in the original Occitan. — A specific way of understanding and speaking about love, whose conventions would go on to inform the very perception of passionate love in the Western literary tradition. Passion is now commonplace to us; stories of forbidden love, of all-consuming passions, complete with spies and go-betweens, plots from jealous husbands or lovers, and secret trysts abound in the literature of every period and every genre. Our entire Western literary consciousness is completely entrenched and enmeshed in this specific story of love. But every subject—love included—has its genesis; and the catalyst for this conception of love may be traced to the eruption of courtly love in the twelfth century. Speaking on the influence of courtly love, C.S. Lewis suggests that:

We are tempted to treat ‘courtly love’ as a mere episode in literary history—an episode that we have finished with the peculiarities of Skaldic verse or Euphuistic prose. In fact, however, an unmistakable continuity connects the Provençal love song with the love poetry of the later Middle Ages, and thence, through Petrarch and many others, with that of the present day.

This assertion is shared by Alexander Joseph Denomy, who writes: “The content of love literature, a great deal of our etiquette that governs the relationship of the sexes, our very conception of romantic love—are an inheritance of the Middle Ages.” What is more, he goes on to affirm that our understanding of love “derive[s] from an institution that we have come to know as courtly love...introduced into literature by the troubadours of the South of France in the early decades of the twelfth century.” Likewise, Denis de Rougemont emphasizes that there is a continuity of *fin’ amor* that we can see throughout the development of the Western literary consciousness—from *Tristan* to Petrarch, from
Shakespeare to Racine, and into Madame Bovary,” and goes on to make the assertion that “[t]he whole of European poetry has come out of courtly love and out of the Arthurian romances derived from this love.” He suggests that this “is why our poetry employs a pseudo-mystical vocabulary, from which, quite unaware of what they are doing, persons in love still draw today their most commonplace metaphors.”

It is this concept of courtly love that I am interested in, and as I shall often have occasion to use this term, let me bracket for the moment my current efforts so that any ambiguity surrounding the term and its application may be removed.

Twelfth-century fin’amor in nineteenth-century Romanticism

The origins of the courtly love tradition are widely (and continue to be) critically debated. C.S. Lewis, for one, places the origin in Languedoc and claims that the tradition appeared “quite suddenly” at the end of the eleventh century; Roger Boase, on the other hand, points to Hispano-Arabic influences; Similarly, Alexander Joseph Denomy sees the key characteristics of courtly love as emerging specifically from Arabic philosophy; Dick Davis, renowned translator of Persian texts into English, draws extraordinary parallels between courtly literature—especially the story of Tristan and Isolde—and medieval (according to a western chronology) Persian literature, specifically between the story of Tristan and Isolde and Gorgani’s Vis and Ramin; while Denis de Rougemont makes an exhaustive case for placing the exigence of courtly love among the (dualist) Manichean beliefs of the Cathar heresy. As with its origins, a straightforward definition of courtly love continues to be debated; and not only in terms of semantic meaning, but whether the
concept ever existed at all. D.W. Robertson, for instance, rather infamously declared courtly love a modern invention (specifically the creation of Gaston Paris); while Paris was the first to use the term *amour courtois* (courtly love) in 1881, the term is unarguably part translation, part neologism, of the medieval term *fin’ amor.* In the broadest definitional sense, courtly love may be understood as “the prevailing literary topic of [the troubadour] period.” But as with a definition of passion as “suffering,” this limited definition only scrapes the surface and does little to further my line of inquiry.

To limit courtly love to a purely literary category would be a grand error on our part, and it would be an even *graver* error to suppose that it was simply a literary topic for the troubadours. Even the notion that courtly love existed solely as a set of rules (*cortezia* or *cortoisie*) to follow in love is severely limiting. The concept of courtly love is simply so much more; it is more accurate to describe it as an entire weltanschauung. Henri-Irénée Marrou gets closer to the reality of it when he proclaims courtly love as “un secteur du coeur, un des aspects éternels de l’homme.” Likewise, Frappier defines *fin’ amor* as “un composé indissoluble, un tout global, où fusionnent la chair, le coeur, et l'esprit.” Frederick Goldin encourages us to understand courtly love as an “ethical system, intended to perfect and justify the courtly class by depicting its ideal,” while De Rougemont believes it proper to conceptualize it as an entire religion. —A dramatic statement, but far from inaccurate, and, as it happens, one echoed by Ezra Pound: “The ‘Chivalric love,’ was, as I understand it, an art, that is to say, a religion.”

As O’Donoghue points out, courtly love, as treated by the troubadours, was highly systematized:
Broad similarities of theme, terminology, form and situation can be traced in all these streams of twelfth-century lyric love poetry... The lover sings the song; he is the lady’s inferior and her adoring votive; his love inspires and refines him; above all, he is totally possessed by love, and all he does is in response to it.\textsuperscript{15}

Across the entire corpus of the troubadours, as well as the later Trouvères of Northern France and the Minnesang of Germany and Austria, these themes and conventions remain consistent. The story is always the same. The poet falls in love, from afar, with an unobtainable lady who is at every level a vision of perfection. The poet becomes obsessed with the lady, and all his actions are in service to her. In fact, the \textit{very act of loving her improves him, and the song becomes a means to prove his worth by giving adequate expression to his love.}

Apropos of these literary conventions of courtly love, C.S. Lewis cites four markers that make up “the peculiar form” of courtly love: “Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love,” while emphasizing the role adultery plays as a precondition.\textsuperscript{16} More specifically, Denomy cites three basic elements as unique to the troubadours. These are (1) the conception of love as desire, (2) the ennobling force of love, and (3) the cult of the beloved.\textsuperscript{17} The conception of love as unfulfilled desire is a motif that is found consistently throughout the entire corpus of troubadour love poetry. The poet sings of a love not yet consummated and often of a love that is unreciprocated. The overwhelming desire for a lady who is at once the epitome of an idealized perfectibility becomes the dominating motif for the poetry, and in it, the poet strives to find adequate expression for his love—a love that, though erotic in nature, is sublimated into the realm of the divine. The poet, though he suffers in this state of unrequited love, at one and the same time
derives an equal, if not higher, sense of pleasure in this suffering. The poetry of Bernart de Ventadorn exists as the exemplar of this belief:

This love strikes me so graciously in the heart with a sweet taste. A hundred times a day I die of sorrow, and I revive with joy another hundred. Certainly my malady has a beautiful face, and my ill is worth more than another good. And since my ill pleases me so much, the good after the pain will be great.\(^{18}\)

Provençal lyric poetry does not use desire as a vehicle to encapsulate love; rather, it uses love as a means to intensify and extend desire. While purporting to be a wish (a prayer, a plea) to gratify desire, it is one that nevertheless postpones the gratification it sets out to obtain. The rhetoric of courtly love (apropos of desire) is, as Louis Mackey writes, “[o]stensibly a mode of discourse and a style of comportment aimed at gratifying desire, it is nevertheless so designed that it postpones gratification indefinitely and distances the immediacy which is its (ostensible) consummation.”\(^{19}\)

The next feature: “the ennobling force of love,” is likewise consistent throughout the tradition. It consists of a belief that in the very act of loving the lady, the poet betters himself. “What is new in the literature,” affirms Goldin, “…is that heterosexual love inspires a man to a life-long career of amelioration.”\(^{20}\) One such illustration is found in Arnaut Daniel’s “En cest sonet coind’e leri,” which runs as follows:

Every day I become better and purified, because I serve and honor the most noble in the world.\(^{21}\)

Because the lady in question is conceived of as perfect in every way—in virtue, nobility, morality, and beauty—the poem acts both as a means of praising her and a means of proving one’s self-worth. As such, the poet is inspired in his love to rise to the level of the lady in order that he may be worthy of her love. And it is \textit{in loving her} that he
becomes worthy. An example of this is found in the following declaration by Bernart de Ventadorn:

It is no wonder if I sing better than any other singer, for my heart draws me more towards love and I am better made for its command.\(^\text{22}\)

This element is especially important considering the fact that there is a rhetoric of transcendence attached to this ennobling. Alexander J. Denomy reads into this element a sacrosanct religious qualification, one that, despite the incompatibility of troubadour motifs (eroticism, adultery) with the doctrine of Christianity, nevertheless upholds the belief that the ennobling factor is indeed a virtuous one.\(^\text{23}\) In lieu of more secularized readings, such as that most famously taken up by Denis de Rougemont in *Love in the Western World*, the “metamorphosis of secular love into divine”\(^\text{24}\) is seen as the allegorization of the desire for *infinity*—the same motif that would be taken up *pari passu* by the Romantics 600 years later. However, regardless of which lens one takes up, the simple fact remains that for the troubadours this form of love moves beyond simple erotic desire. The lover finds in the object of their love a vision of the ideal—of the *Absolute*—and found it fit to dedicate their lives to becoming one with it.

From this, then, it is unsurprising to see why Denomy highlights the third element of courtly love poetry as the cult of the beloved, wherein the object of desire, as seen in the following poem by Bernart de Ventadorn, is elevated to the point of idolatry:

Good lady, nothing do I ask of you but that you take me as your servant, for I will serve you as I would a good lord, whatever I have in the way of reward. See me at your bidding, you who are a noble and modest person, joyful and courtly.\(^\text{25}\)
The lover, upon seeing the lady, becomes wholly absorbed in his love and becomes concerned for little other than seeming loveable in her eyes. With the elevation of the lady into the realm of the sublime, the quest to possess the lady becomes, in turn, the allegorized quest to possess the Absolute.

In addition to these motifs of courtly love is an important distinction made by O’Donoghue; namely, that in nearly all the cases of twelfth-century lyric poetry, “it seems that the poet is more concerned with his feelings and the form he gives to his expression of them than with the object of his love in herself.” This is a sympathetic reading given the immense stress on form over content. Zweig addresses this problematic in writing, “the ‘sincerity’ of the joi d’amour has often been questioned because of its accent on formal achievement. But the troubadours saw no difference between the formal ‘exploit’ of the poem and the sincerity of his emotion.” In a similar vein, Boase notes that “the danger of a purely formalistic literary approach is that it ignores the relationship between literature and life.” “Literature,” he notes, “is not a semi-autonomous universe.” He goes on to assert that “the term ‘Courtly Love’ should not refer merely to a literary constituent of medieval works, nor should it be limited to the stock of common themes and stylistic devices from which a poet could draw.” It is imperative to understand, however, that this is not an effort to dismiss the importance of form. As the following section will show, the contrary is true: that form, and in particular, its limitations, is inextricably tied to the understanding of passion itself. Aimeric of Bellinoi is one such troubadour who uses the limitations of form as a hermeneutical tool, citing the inability of adequate expression as part and parcel of passion itself:
No man can so utterly fulfill that which he hath
in his heart
But that so soon as it is spoken out or done, it
seemeth a little thing.\textsuperscript{31}

This much was understood in the recapitulation of the courtly lyric by the early German Romantics:

By emphasising Idealist philosophy’s inability to grasp the absolute securely within a method, the early Romantics credit art with the power of representing the unrepresentable, in other words, to imitate the absolute that eluded all reason…as Friedrich Schlegel famously remarked… ‘the absolute, because it is inexpressible, can only be expressed allegorically.’\textsuperscript{32}

In their mission to express the movements of the heart—which for them was analogous to the pursuit of the Ideal—the troubadours concentrated their efforts into the allegorization of the sublime as passion, doing so via form and symbol—an effort that Flaubert himself would attempt centuries later with \textit{Madame Bovary} by using the same symbols and motifs.\textsuperscript{33}

It is clear that the concept of courtly love evades simple definition. Its origin and use are fraught with ambiguity. But for the purpose of clarity, a line must be drawn in the sand, one that is sympathetic to the understanding that any single definition will never be entirely satisfactory. Therefore, for the purposes of this argument, courtly love is to be understood as \textit{a codified way of talking about love that combines passion and restraint in a lyrical form that is highly stylized, disciplined, and erotic; wherein the goal is to acquire an unnameable good which is bestowed by an unnameable lady, but rejects fulfillment via the employment of obstacles in order that desire embodies passion as an}
end in itself—an end, moreover, that is infinite, by nature of the (attempt at)
everlastingness of desire.

To further establish a link between the twelfth and nineteenth centuries, we might begin by noting perhaps the most remarkable aspect of fin’amor highlighted by Denomy: that it “has come down to us in an unbroken tradition that has survived the satire of almost every century.”34 One need look no further than Fichte, who describes a kind of love that is the mirror image of fin’amor, a “love in-essence-impossible—the true love that rejects any object whatever in order that it may launch into the infinite”; a kind of love that is, moreover, characterized by “a desire for something altogether unknown, the existence of which is disclosed solely by the need of it, by a discomfort, and by a void that is in search of whatever will fill it, but that remains unaware of whence fulfillment may come.”35 For Fichte, this was the kind of love that was at the heart of the Romantic ethos. And as De Rougemont articulates in Love Declared: Essays on the Myths of Love, fin’amor resurfaced in German Romanticism in a big way:

Having first appeared on the fringe of the medieval unconscious, announced under cover of symbol and myth, in the twelfth century, since then secretly animating poetry and the first novels and romances (which take their name from the Romania of the troubadours), eroticism reaches the level of Western consciousness only at the beginning of the nineteenth century: it is the great discovery of the romantics, who rediscover at the same time the lyricism of the troubadours and several dimensions of religious truth.36

The Romantics, in their quest for a “psychic revolution,” turned to the old.37 As C.S. Lewis aphorizes, “[w]hat is new usually wins by disguising itself as the old.”38

The lyricism of the troubadours provided the perfect conduit for the German Romantics who “adopted the old heresy of passion and sought to achieve the ideal
transgression of all limitations and the negation of the world through extreme desire,”
so much so that the *topos* of *fin’amor* began, once again, to be at the center of the
dominant literary tradition. Mme de Staël herself agreed that Romanticism was born out
of a modification of the Provençal troubadour verse. And considering Mme de Staël’s
role in establishing Romanticism in France, we can see how the great revival of
Provençal lyric poetry made its way back into the Western literary consciousness.

II. Conveying Message Through Form

Provençal lyric poetry and the linguistic impossibility of passion

I established earlier that the use of passion in European Romanticism appeared
under three forms: as edifying, as sickness, and as an end in itself. Now that we have
better oriented ourselves and have as our starting point the conception of *fin’amor*, these
various trajectories may be seen as stemming from various interpretations of the same
allegorical language. Those who, like Denomy, foreground the literal meaning and take
courtly love to be a religious affair, end up seeing in it an edifying quality—passion as
ennobling. Those who take Andreas’ message in *De Amore* seriously are no doubt likely
to see passion as a sickness—the book is, after all, driven by the plot to cure someone
suffering from a love that he cannot break free of. Arguably, it is the third group, those
that saw *fin’amor* as a religion all its own—those who believed that the promise of
infinity would present itself in the form of ultimate paradox—who have truly inherited
the *ethos* of the troubadours. And what is incumbent on those undertaking this quest for
infinity is precisely something that Flaubert understood: the understanding that (to borrow a phrase from Marshall McLuhan) “the medium is the message.” Now, if my thesis holds, we should be able to see reflected not only in content, but in the style itself, parallels between Madame Bovary and troubadour lyric poetry. I find it imperative to stress that these parallels extend beyond content. To focus solely on proving that Emma Bovary’s notions of love reflect an anachronistic parallel to that of the content of troubadour poetry is too precarious and ultimately accomplishes little. This would, at most, result in an ever so slightly modified version of what still stands as the dominant discourse: that Emma, “corrupted” by the novels she reads, attempts to make her real life coincide with the fictitious depictions of love that engross her; the failure of which engenders the Realist—and otherwise didactic—reading that heartily proclaims reality’s triumph over illusion. The goal of this thesis is to rescue Emma’s Romantic outlook from the naive musings of a sentimental girl into the purposeful quest for self-actualization and transcendence vis-à-vis the troubadour understanding of passion as an end in itself. Inherent in this goal is, likewise, the effort to show that the doctrine of passion that Emma takes up has, as a necessary part of its overall composition, its own denial or cancelation - as well as an incompatibility with the world around it. What this means, then, is that Emma’s failure to make reality coincide with fiction is not a dismissal of the Romantic ethos, but, rather, a contingent factor to its overall success.

By connecting form—something that Flaubert would obsess over during the entirety of the process of writing Madame Bovary—to content, the focus no longer becomes how does Romanticism get employed to bolster Realism, i.e., how Emma’s
understanding of love is foregrounded to show its incompatibility with reality, but the converse: How is Realism employed to buttress Romanticism? — How are the elements of the Real used as tools to propagate the broader philosophical quest of Romantic idealism? That being said, we must be careful not to systematize too quickly, that is we should be careful not to wholly subscribe to a single categorization and in the process dismiss evidence of the contrary. What is at stake is not a disavowal of a literary categorization—Romantic or Realist. What is involved here is an understanding of these two as distinct forms used in concert with each other in order to create a singularly troubadourian effect: the quest for the Absolute.44

What I am interested in is style, by which I mean the effect—the atmosphere or Stimmung—that choices made on the semantic level produce. Flaubert, it is known, cared a great deal about, as well as agonized over, form. (Perhaps it would be appropriate to say that he was obsessed with it—consumed by it).45 His letters to Louise Colet during the production of Madame Bovary abound with examples of the frustration of the project.46 The style that Flaubert was chasing was, in essence, a dual one—one of passion and restraint—whereby feeling would be transmitted through the form, not stirred up by the content in and of itself: “The entire value of my book, if it has any, will consist of my having known how to walk straight ahead on a hair, balanced above the two abysses of lyricism and vulgarity.”47 This effort is undeniably that of the troubadours: “In all languages the form of [courtly] poetry is of the first importance,” asserts O’Donoghue, “[m]uch of troubadour poetry…is about composition and its difficulties, with the love
theme apparently used only as a structure to contain the discussion.” And one, moreover, that reflects Flaubert’s own disposition:

There are in me, literally speaking, two distinct persons: one who is infatuated with bombast, lyricism, eagle flights, sonorities of phrase and lofty ideas; and another who digs and burrows into the truth as deeply as he can, who likes to treat a humble fact as respectfully as a big one, who would like to make you feel almost physically the things he reproduces. The former likes to laugh, and enjoys the animal side of man.

The successfulness of the message’s transmission, in other words, is incumbent on the proper vehicle of expression. As such, the two antithetical strains: passion and restraint, lyricism and vulgarity, Romanticism and Realism, must, at all times, remain equally matched—one never giving way to the other. This is because the presence of one form, then checked by the other, engenders the exigence of a third form of expression: one that captures the paradox of passionate love and at once makes it intelligible. Put simply, both modes of thought, in their cancelation, uncover the inexpressible. What cannot be spoken is then felt through the form, not the content. Stylistically, this method of transmission mimics a contrapuntal effect in which two independent but harmonically related lines are played simultaneously, an approach Albert Thibaudet coined Flaubert’s “vision binoculaire (a simultaneous perception of opposite poles of a subject which cancel each other out).”

What is it, exactly, that Flaubert can transmit the better with this removed, heavily formalized, and stylized prose? — Precisely what the troubadours were able to convey: the paradoxical transmission of passion vis-à-vis the linguistic (semantic) impossibility to do so.
To be sure, all of passion (*fin’amor*) is paradoxical: the lover finds pleasure in what is antithetical to his well-being, that is to say, what is harmful, and yet craves it all the more, moving towards it, relishing it in anticipation as does the starving animal deigned to be tossed a few scraps of food, only to reject the object of its affection as soon as it is able to be obtained. Courtly love speaks of something that cannot be spoken or heard. Above all, however, the most paradoxical element of *fin’amor* is that it exists *through* its cancelation; that is its ultimate paradox. Therefore, in order to capture it, one cannot use conventional means (the heavy reliance of the romantics on *das Ewig-Weibliche*—the eternal feminine—for example), for these fail to capture what passion is at its true core: the desire for the cancellation of the self. Such is, according to De Rougemont, the truth of the myth of passion: “So dreadful and unutterable is the real meaning of passion,” he writes, “that not only are those persons who undergo it unable to grow aware of its end, but also writers wishing to depict it in all its marvelous violence are driven to employ the *deceptive* language of symbols.” In order to depict the truth of passion, one must rely on more nuanced measures: enter Flaubert and the use of *counterpoint*.

*Madame Bovary* is filled to the brim with counterpoint. It is a novel suffused with a rhetoric of cancellation wherein everything (and everyone) is met with its obverse. Alternately, this may be expressed in formulaic terms where *A* is canceled out by its negative mirror image, *B*. In this clash of *A* and *B*, where one may substitute Romanticism and Realism, respectively, arises the birth of a third variable: *C*, where one may substitute the intelligibility of passion; that is to say, passion becomes articulable *only when* there is the mutual cancelation of these two antithetical elements: the ultimate
subjective and the ultimate objective. Hence Flaubert’s metaphor of balancing on a hair
above either side of lyricism (what is unique) and vulgarity (what is common). In the
pure expression of lyricism, passion remains abstract, unable to be seized; on the other
hand, in the base expression of the vulgar—of the bodily or the Real—passion is stripped
of its sublimity; it becomes trite, commonplace, *temporal*. Flaubert invests the entirety of
his novel on this formula. Flaubert ascribes certain repeating symbols to these variables. For the romantic A, we see
repeated the use of vertical distance markers: steeples, attics, the heavens, and
modes/mentions of ascension. In addition to these markers are anything that has to do
with the sublime, i.e., that which exists outside of spatial and temporal boundaries:
dreams, for instance, or poetic flights from reality. For the realist B, we see the obverse of
all of these poetic tokens. This includes, most notably, the idiosyncratic attention devoted
to boots/footwear—that which, for Flaubert, symbolizes what keeps us grounded to the
earth. Additionally, special attention is devoted to Time as a check to the sublime. Time
is, for Flaubert, an active agent; that is to say, it stands to make itself physically and often
aggressively felt. It is, in a way, a character all its own. A final note must be made on the
symbolic use of color, to which Flaubert likewise dictates a role according to each
variable. The Romantic is, rather appropriately, coded as blue—an aspect of the novel
picked up by Grande, who writes: “Color also plays an important role in representing
desire. For example, Flaubert uses the word “bleuâtre” (bluish) over fifty times, most
often to describe Emma’s fictitious Ideal of love.” The Real, on the other hand, is coded
yellow.
We may put this thesis and formula to the test by examining the following passage in *Madame Bovary*—a masterclass example of the linguistic impossibility of passion: one that urges us to rethink the relationship between passion and language, specifically in a way that harkens back to the lamentation of Aimeric of Bellinoi concerning the effort to put the ineffable nature of passion into words:

[Rodolphe] had so often heard these things said that they did not strike him as original. Emma was like all his mistresses; and the charm of novelty, gradually falling away like a garment, laid bare the eternal monotony of passion, that has always the same shape and the same language. He was unable to see, this man so full of experience, the variety of feelings hidden within the same expressions. Since libertine or venal lips had murmured similar phrases, he only faintly believed in the candor of Emma’s; he thought one should beware of exaggerated declarations which only serve to cloak a tepid love; as though the abundance of one’s soul did not sometimes overflow with empty metaphors, since no one has ever been able to give the exact measure of his needs, his concepts, or his sorrows. The human tongue is like a cracked cauldron on which we beat out tunes to set a bear dancing when we would make the stars weep with our melodies.59

In this exchange, we are once again faced with the paradox. Emma, wishing to make her feelings intelligible, does so by the only medium available to her: *language*. Only, and here is where our formula comes into play, the very medium she relies upon ensures the failure—the negation—of the message it affects to elucidate. Emma’s unique romantic feelings (A) are made vulgar, commonplace, by language (B), in effect canceling out the message. Through this rhetoric of cancelation, however, Flaubert will reveal, not the original sentiment (A), but the truth of it (C): that the “abundance of one’s soul” exists precisely in these “empty metaphors.” But this truth can only be illustrated by having it fail to be communicated. Whereby the paradox is fulfilled: passion explained by the failure to explain it—by the negation of a variable vis-à-vis its obverse. This is the central
message for Flaubert; one so important that he betrays his quest for complete objectivity by having his narrator intervene by way of the qualification of Emma’s language: "He was unable to see, this man so full of experience, the variety of feelings hidden within the same expressions." Thus the formula is proven true: Two forms of expression—each the mirror obverse of each other—collide, and in their resistance negate each other, allowing for the expression (the truth) of passion (fin’ amor): C, which here takes the form of authorial intervention. Romanticism, by itself, fails to capture the truth about passion because it does not have its apotheosis occupying the same space. It is for this reason that Romanticism and Realism, as forms, must be at odds with each other. This is visible in the novel itself via the simple fact of the incompatibility of Emma’s desires with the world she occupies. Emma, the pure Romantic, cannot, by definition, succeed in a world—the absolute Real—that denies the very elements that constitute her being. Flaubert understands that passion comes into being via the obstacle, but makes it singularly troubadourian by having the obstacle be passion itself. He uses Emma to demonstrate this through the incompatibility of her desires in the world she occupies along with the inability to give proper expression to them.

Notably, the use of fin’amor in Provençal poetry supplies an analogous trajectory; for, far from being an accepted mode or way of life, it was, according to De Rougemont, directly opposed to the society it occupied: “It is generally recognized today that both Provençal poetry and the notion of love which informs its themes, far from being accounted for by conditions prevailing at the time, seem to have been in flat contradiction to them.” We can see as much in Raimbaut D’Aurenga’s “Ars resplan la flors enversa.”
Complaining of a society that slanders the concept of love that swells in the poet’s breast,

Raimbaut repudiates the lot:

I am so wholly taken up in Joy that I can see nothing which is miserable in my eyes - but a stupid, inverted crowd of people (as if they had been nourished on the hills) whose effect on me is worse than frost! For each of them cuts with his tongue and speaks low and with whistles. And neither stick nor rod nor threats are any good. Indeed it is a joy for them when they do that for which they are called contemptible.62

Passion has so thoroughly taken over the poet that what was at first miserable to his eyes is now beautiful:

Because I invert things for myself, so that hills seem to me beautiful plains and I regard the frost as a flower, and the heat seems to me to cut through the cold, and the thunder is songs and whistlings for me, and the dry sticks are leaved to me.63

But this newfound outlook is incompatible with real life. Others are unable to see or feel what the poet now feels. The poet ends his canso with the following plea—one that affirms my thesis insofar as the intelligibility of passion is concerned:

May my poem go…to where no frost is felt and the cold has no power to cut. May someone who can sing nobly out of joy sing and whistle it clearly to my lady so that slips from it may enter her heart, for it is not appropriate to any mean singer.64

There is in this plea a criterion of exclusion: no ordinary singer, that is, no one belonging to the gens, can relay the song. In order for the message to be successfully transmitted, the singer must be attuned to the rhythms of the heart—initiated into the spirit of courtliness. Only those who are thus qualified are able to relay the message accurately, and even then only partially—“so that slips from it may enter her heart.” The common language of the gens “cuts” and “speaks low”; it is unable to speak properly, nor can it make intelligible, the type of love the poet is feeling. At most, the poet hopes that his
message may cut through language in order to be felt. This is an idea that Flaubert himself subscribes to, and we see evidence of it in the following disqualification of Léon’s heart later in the novel: “his heart, like the people who can only stand a certain amount of music, became drowsy through indifference to the vibrations of a love whose subtleties he could no longer distinguish.”

The attempt

What we are dealing with, then, is a particularly defiant strain of thinking, one that resists, or rather opposes, the common set of beliefs surrounding love. But one, above all, that nevertheless requires the existence of its opposition in order to get its message across successfully. And requisite to the dualism at play is the role of the attempt: the attempt to make oneself understood, the attempt to put words to feelings, and the attempt to court the other through language. For if the message is conveyed through form, then the vehicle of expression, that is to say language itself, must be particularly examined. And, as the critiques of Emma Bovary’s desire are, in large part, focalized on how they come to the fore, i.e., how they make themselves known, then this makes an analysis of the ways in which these desires are made intelligible all the more pressing. In a very real way it is Emma’s language that is the issue - both what she is able and unable to articulate. Let us take it one step further: it is the lack of individuality, the lack of uniqueness in her language that is the issue. Because Emma uses ready-made and otherwise trite phrases instead of waxing poetic, her desires are somehow delegitimized. They are relegated to the sphere of adolescent fantasy and foolish idealism. This could
not be further from the truth. In fact, I would go so far as to argue that it is the contrary
that is true. Passion does not deal in particulars; this much has been established—it is an
act of transcendence: a movement beyond the categorical. The act of individualization or
delimitation freezes expression to a certain time and place—it localizes it, temporalizes it.
Hence the categorical lack of individuality in the Provençal lyric form—that which stands
as the purposeful turn away from the particular in favor of the general.\textsuperscript{66} Note what Stone
writes concerning the cross-temporality of the language of the troubadours:

The language of troubadour love poetry does not permit the identification of its
speaker as a certain historical and singular individual: the time and place of the \textit{I}
is no particular time and no particular place. Grammar or the language of song
transcends the concrete historical situation; in Heideggerian terms, it is an
ontological rather than an ontic language; it expresses Being in general rather than
a certain particular being.\textsuperscript{67}

On a purely linguistic plane, language precludes pure individuality. This invariant
opposition between unique feeling and general (commonplace, banal) speech is the
mirror reflection of courtly love. “Language, so it seems, was invented only for what is
mediocre, common, communicable. In language, speakers vulgarize themselves right
away,” says Nietzsche.\textsuperscript{68} Again we are faced with the paradox. The spiritual quality of
passion—the will-to-infinity—is always outside of the profane (the temporal). To
localize it in the realm of language is to strip it of its sacred quality. Put in a different
way, passion precludes speech (depiction, definition) because speech exists on a purely
linguistic plane.\textsuperscript{69} This is what Stone is referring to when he notes:

“[s]peech or grammar is always the common property of the \textit{gens}, of a general
rather than a particular subject. \textit{I} cannot express \textit{myself}, not in a manner that is
uniquely and distinctly \textit{mine}, but rather can only express myself as \textit{they} express
themselves. “I cannot,” he concludes, “in speech, mark myself as being anything more than ‘average.’”

This is captured masterfully by Flaubert in the aforementioned passage in *Madame Bovary*. Practically every line in this exchange reflects the manifold consciousness of this necessary failure to communicate. Subsequently, Schor poses the all-important question: “How does one communicate difference by means of sameness, how does one give individual charge to words used by all?”—For the troubadours, and, by extension, for Flaubert, you don’t. And it is precisely in virtue of this nonexplanation that that the form brilliantly redirects our attention from this or that distinguishable aspect to the irreducible experience of the two of them together; passion, despite it being for the individual who feels it a feeling that is absolutely and irreducibly unique, nonetheless belongs to the language of the *gens*. In this way, the language of the troubadours perfectly captures this truth, for they employ a type language that:

expresses…the will or the desire of everyone and no one, and it thus always appears as an anonymous or universal language, as essentially identical to the language of others. The troubadour is always repeating the same rather than saying something different, repeating the *topoi*, the conventions of courtly love poetry.

The generality of the speech, its clichéd nature, becomes, in turn, part of the form.

Stone, again: “Troubadour love poetry does not simply *use* an anonymous language that belongs to no one in particular; it is, more significantly, *about* the anonymity of this language.” The troubadour ethos is about the unnamed good from the unnamed woman. By remaining abstract, the message remains a more honest expression—an expression that is true to form, unadulterated. Therefore, the very charge that Emma’s clichéd speech
somehow negates the reality of a legitimate subjective feeling is given the lie. Flaubert rescues the truth of pure expression by casting it into the abyss of banality where it escapes the profanation of temporalization - what is unavoidably indescribable, what necessarily must remain indescribable, remains untouched and intact.

III. The Narrative Structure of Passion

Introduction

How, then, are we to proceed with an argument regarding the use of passion as a vehicle for transcendence whose very basis is cloaked in anonymity and whose origin remains obscure? I propose the synthesis of three methods of analysis: 1) looking at passion as myth, 2) examining the specific employment of tropes found in this myth, and 3) the use of a new symbol: the Neoplatonic mirror as derived from the Narcissus myth. As such, one part of the answer is to look at passion from the viewpoint of myth. This is, in fact, what Denis de Rougemont has done in Love in the Western World, wherein he looks at what he terms the “passion myth,” tracing its origins to the troubadours and working his way into the contemporary sphere. In converting the story of Tristan into the example of the passion myth par excellence, De Rougemont breaks down the individual components of passionate love through an idea-oriented analysis with the ultimate goal of arguing that the archetype of passionate love as a particular form of love separate from others was created (in the Western world) in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and exhibited certain topoi that have continued to be recapitulated well into our contemporary
world. In Love Declared: Essays on the Myths of Love, De Rougemont terms this kind of work a “mythanalysis”:

[that] which can be applied not only to persons but to characters of art, and to certain formulations of life; the immediate objective of such a method being to elucidate the motives of our choices and their too frequently unconscious implications, spiritual as well as social.  

77 For De Rougemont, passion is an infinitely complex phenomenon; it is practically labyrinthine insofar as any simple understanding of its effects are concerned. Speaking of its nature, he argues that once probed, every reality we discover gives rise to more questions. Passion is an archetype that is at once recognizable and immediately propagated. Moreover, it is a phenomenon that has “[its] effects reach our senses before the causes have emerged in our consciousness.”  

78 For De Rougemont, the widespread permeation of this phenomenon into the very psyche of Western consciousness is paralleled only by that of the classic myth. And as such, one must treat passion as a myth in and by itself. For in so doing, we can come to understand the nature of passion, what it affects to divulge, and ultimately to explain its hold on us:

Great simple and organizing forms, active symbols and vehicles of the animistic powers of Eros, the myths can serve us as guides in the infernal, purgatorial, or sublime comedy of our desires, our passions, our love. When we are ignorant of their nature, they rule us pitilessly and lead us astray. But to identify them, to learn their language and the gestures habitual to them can permit us to find the scarlet thread in the labyrinth we are lost in, and to orient ourselves in the dark wood of our fantasies, toward an issue of light and our true desire.  

79 Since I am insisting that Madame Bovary is a novel that is above all engaged in a rhetoric of passion, it appears, therefore, that what must be conducted here is a mythanalysis of Madame Bovary—one that will provide a layout or set of blueprints with which to focus
on and zero-in on how exactly passion as an end in itself is on display in the novel. Looking at passion under the viewpoint of myth has an added benefit when applied to a text such as Madame Bovary insofar as “… myth makes it possible to become aware at a glance of certain types of constant relations and to disengage these from the welter of everyday appearances.”

Because Madame Bovary stands as a text that engages so deeply with the “everyday,” a mythanalysis becomes an invaluable way to probe the latent effects of passion in the world of Emma Bovary. With this goal in mind, I take as my starting point some observations of the passion myth that De Rougemont has produced.

To begin, a definition of what is meant by myth according to De Rougemont. He writes, “Speaking generally, a myth is a story—a symbolic fable as simple as it is striking—which sums up an infinite number of more or less analogous situations.” And what encompasses this definition more than passionate love? That feeling which is at one and the same time the most general, most widely understood phenomenon, as well as the most unique insofar as it casts the lover into a world of his of her own, outside of reality, a realm of solitude where one finds pleasure in pain, light in darkness, a feeling that others simply cannot share. Speaking of the passion myth more narrowly, De Rougemont highlights the singularly important outlet that this myth provides:

...a myth is needed to express the dark and unmentionable fact that passion is linked with death, and involves the destruction of any one yielding himself up to it with all his strength… The myth expresses those realities to the extent exacted by our instinct, but it also veils them to the extent that broad daylight and reason might imperil them.
As I outlined in the introduction, the point I want to make regarding passion in *Madame Bovary* is that Flaubert intends it to be a vehicle for transcendence. Though not immediately recognizable to her in terms of perfect clarity, and here I return to De Rougemont’s insistence that the “effects reach our senses before the causes have emerged in our consciousness,” to achieve transcendence is the raison d'être of Emma’s engagement and fascination with passion. However, how Emma recognizes that which she has formed such an insurmountable attachment has yet to be explained. Before Emma can engage in the broader telos of passion, passion must first be made recognizable—as La Rochefoucauld writes, “There are some who never would have loved if they never heard it spoken of.” And if myth gives expression to certain immutable phenomena, it does so by giving form to abstraction: by presenting it in narrative form.

**Breaking down the myth**

Looking at the form passion takes in narrative allows us to see the ways in which passion becomes identifiable. Tacking as axiomatic the proposition that Western passionate love was created by the troubadours, it is only logical to begin by examining the various topoi consistently found within their lyric poetry. Some of the most prominent are as follows: 1) *obstacle love*, 2) *the use of an intermediary*, 3) *the oblivious husband*, 4) *the gardador* (the evil watcher who threatens to expose the lovers), and 5) *an aversion to marriage*. The presence of these topoi signal to the reader that one is dealing with passionate works (that is works engaging with a understanding of passion that is consistent with our definition); and considering the arguments made by De Rougemont,
the presence of these topoi, by extension, work together in order to both expose and cover up a secret desire for death. Now, even a cursory reading of *Madame Bovary* provides sufficient proof of an engagement with the twelfth-century passion myth. And this is evinced by the presence of these specific topoi, which are all present in *Madame Bovary*, and of them I deal seriatim.

*Obstacle love:* Obstacle love is found consistently throughout the novel, but, the most important instance by far is Emma agreeing to marry Charles - quite literally termed “the obstacle to all happiness.” This instance is inherently necessary insofar as it acts as pretext for the entire passion myth. That Emma agrees to marriage should not come as a surprise. Emma has nourished herself on the Romantic, a genre where passionate love is closely tied with affairs and betrayal. As will be noted, Emma continues to set up obstacles for herself throughout the novel: acting the perfect housewife in front of Léon, acting overly sentimental with Rodolphe, even acting as an obstacle to her own desire. Inherent in this topos is the *reestablishing* of obstacles. This occurs when previous obstacles have been traversed, meaning there is no longer anything to suspend desire. The ultimate obstacle is, of course, death. In death we see the untraversable obstacle, an obstacle that ensures that desire remains everlasting.

*The use of an intermediary:* Directly tied to obstacle love is the use of an intermediary. Because of the obstacles set either by the self or by another, the lovers must rely on a third party. This is commonly a maid of longstanding, or someone close to both of the lovers. Without the intermediary there is no story, the third party essentially being the facilitator of love. In *Tristan*, for example, love comes exclusively because of an
intermediary, this happening in the form of Iseult’s maid accidently handing Tristan and Iseult the love philtre originally meant for Iseult and the king. — And it is this love philtre that causes the two of them to fall passionately in love with each other, not anything else. Without the third party, there is no love story. “… passion always presupposes, between subject and object, a third party…” writes De Rougemont. The use of an intermediary is commonly found in troubadour poetry, specifically in the form of a watchman, whose role it is to alert the lovers of the coming of danger. In Madame Bovary, the use of an intermediary occurs whenever the lovers, be it Emma, Léon or Rodolphe, establish a correspondence. These intermediaries vary, but, for all intents and purposes, the one who plays the most important role is Justin insofar as we are judging importance according to the passion myth. While the others are used solely for the exchange of letters, Justin, a mostly silent and backgrounded figure, plays the indispensable role of acting as intermediary between Emma and Death, i.e., the final courting. For it is through Justin that Emma learns of the existence of the arsenic, and it is Justin who guides her to its whereabouts.

The oblivious husband: This role undeniably belongs to Charles. As stated in the Introduction, there is no shortage of criticism pertaining to Charles’ ignorance. Rather than coming as a blessing, Charles’ obliviousness comes to haunt Emma. Furthermore, his unawareness of Emma’s escapades ironically limits his role as a necessary obstacle to desire. And while Lheureux’s hinted threats to Emma to reveal to Charles the extent of her expenditures—and by extension revealing her infidelity—still strikes fear into the heart of Emma, what pains her more is the knowledge that Charles will forgive her
instead of acting the part of the enraged husband, denying her even the fantasy of the narrative cliché: “She would have liked Charles to beat her, that she might have a better right to hate him, to revenge herself upon him.”\textsuperscript{86} Charles’ role will be expounded on in the fourth and fifth chapters.

\textit{The gardador}: The gardador is in many ways directly tied to the oblivious husband insofar as one side of the husband topos is concerned.\textsuperscript{87} The gardador in \textit{Madame Bovary} is none other than Lheureux. In medieval literature, the gardador, looking to gain some favor or enact some kind of revenge on the lovers, is usually closely tied with the husband. The role is more subdued in \textit{Madame Bovary}, but is nonetheless present. Rather than worshiping a king, Lheureux worships money. Emma’s rising debt and semblance of mind come crashing down when Lheureux, conscious of the reasons why Emma desires what she desires, slyly threatens the exposure of her affairs to her husband. Like the gardador of medieval narrative, Lheureux threatens to expose the existence of a passionate affair to the husband of the lover in order to exact revenge.

\textit{An aversion to marriage}: In the passion myth, the lover, caught unawares, learns in marriage the reality that “to possess her is to lose her.”\textsuperscript{88} It is in this realization—conscious or unconscious—that obstacles are needed the most, for without them desire quickly begins to wane. Explicitly, we see this at play in three different places in \textit{Madame Bovary}. Firstly, in the very beginning of the novel when Emma is reflecting on her feelings of marriage:

Before marriage she thought herself in love; but since the happiness that should have followed failed to come, she must, she thought, have been mistaken. And
Emma tried to find out what one meant exactly in life by the words bliss, passion, ecstasy, that had seemed to her so beautiful in books.”

Secondly, we see another case of aversion when Félicité attempts to console Emma by comparing her state of sadness to La Guérine, a woman who found a cure to her despair in marriage. Upon hearing this, we see the following response from Emma: ‘“But with me,’ replied Emma, ‘it was after marriage that it began.”’ Lastly, an aversion to marriage is on display while Emma is at the opera:

Emma dreamed of her marriage day; she saw herself at home again among the fields in the little path as they walked to the church. Why didn’t she, like this woman, resist and implore? Instead, she had walked joyously and unwittingly towards the abyss . . . Ah! if in the freshness of her beauty, before the degradation of marriage and the disillusions of adultery, she could have anchored her life upon some great, strong heart!

In all these cases, the supreme bliss that was thought to be found in marriage turns out to be a lie. Marriage is then blamed as an obstacle towards happiness.

More than simply situating Madame Bovary within the corpus of texts that engage with the myth of passion, the presence of these tropes, of which Emma has nourished herself on, become signifier: sign-posts with which to read the world she inhabits and the situations she finds herself in. That said, it is important to point out that the presence of these tropes do not ensure that the truth of passion comes to light. Oftentimes the characters themselves remain ignorant of the fact that passion is, above all, a desire for self-erasure. Tristan dies believing that the object of his love is Iseult and vice versa. Never is there the self-recognition on any of their parts that the external other is simply a vehicle for a deeper, darker desire. This kind of realization is seldom seen, but when it does occur there is a good chance that there will be present the addition of a different
symbol: the Neoplatonic mirror, the symbol that endowed the troubadours with a way to express the true desire of the passion myth in poetry and song.

**On Narcissus**

Through the employment of the mirror, the truth of the passion myth has the means to reveal itself. The symbol of the mirror allows for what the previous topoi fail to do: it allows for the *recognition*, vis-à-vis the reflection of the character’s own image, of the truth of the Ideal. As will become clear in the subsequent chapter, the symbol of the mirror has as its patron the figure of Narcissus, which is to say that the lover sees in the reflection of him/herself the image of the Ideal. There are three phases to this mirror phenomenon: an idealizing stage, a material stage, and a stage of recognition. As the remaining chapters will each deal with these various stages in depth, I present below only a simplified overview of the stages as they pertain to the Narcissus myth.

The combination of these three stages symbolizes the entirety of the passion myth. In *The Story of Echo and Narcissus*, one may see this at play from start to finish. The first stage is marked when Narcissus catches the reflection in the stream. Narcissus has no knowledge of the object being reflected back; all he knows is that he is captivated by it and must get a closer look. In this stream he sees reflected back the image of perfect beauty: “He looks in wonder, / Charmed by himself, spell-bound, and no more moving / Than a marble statue.” 93 He admires and contemplates the image until everything other than the image falls by the wayside: “No thought of food, no thought of rest, can make him / Forsake the place.” 94 What he finds in this image is the reflection of the Ideal.
From here, Narcissus slips into the second phase. He is frustrated by the fact that he cannot obtain the object of his desire: “Not knowing what he sees, but burning for it, / The same delusion mocking his eyes and teasing.” And this frustration comes from the fact that the image lacks an external embodiment: “Why try to catch an always fleeing image / Poor credulous youngster? What you seek is nowhere, / And if you turn away, you will take with you / The boy you love. The vision is only shadow, / Only reflection, lacking any substance.”

He laments his situation:

… He rises, just a little,
Enough to lift his arms in supplication
To the trees around him, crying to the forest:
‘What love, whose love, has ever been more cruel?
You woods should know: you have given many lovers
Places to meet and hide in, has there ever,
Through the long centuries, been anyone
Who has pined away as I do? He is charming,
I see him, but the charm and sight escapes me.
I love him and cannot seem to find him!

He continues in this way until he comes to the truth that is revealed in the third phase of the mirror: the recognition of the self in the Ideal: “I know / The truth at last. He is myself! I feel it, / I know my image now. I burn with love / of my own self; I start the fire I suffer.”

This recognition leaves Narcissus utterly distraught. A desperate cry ensues (“...if I could only / Escape from my own body! If I could only—”), revealing passion’s true destination: “The boy I love must die: we die together.” Only in death can lovers be united without hindrance. “[Language] betrays what it wishes to say without saying it,” writes De Rougemont. Herein we return to the usefulness of the symbol and the cliché together. Ensconced in this single myth is the truth of passionate love.
IV. A Clarification of Terms

On Lacan

In lieu of the fact that any critical employment of the word “mirror” conjures up, more often than not, immediate connections to the work of Jacques Lacan, one may be tempted—or perhaps cannot help—by virtue of the vocabulary used, to subject the critiques of this analysis to the critical framework of Lacan’s dialectic on the mirror stage. It is, therefore, necessary to set apart the two instances of mirroring, as well as draw parallels by which an understanding of Lacan's mirror stage may prove useful, in following the proceeding argument. Insofar as Lacan’s mirror stage may be understood as an “identification…namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes [assume] an image,” they are the same.101 To this “image,” Lacan gives the name of the “Ideal I…—an image that is seemingly predestined to have an effect at this phase.…”102 This “Ideal I” can be used to understand what is reflected in the first phase of the Neoplatonic mirror. Moreover, the dialectic by which Lacan argues for a predetermined self-hood is not only aligned with my own analysis of Madame Bovary, but with Jules Gaultier’s as well, for whom this idea stands as paramount in his seminal Bovarysm. In Bovarysm, Gaultier rightly brings attention to something that gets too easily ignored or discarded: the pathological idiosyncrasy of the individual. Critics tend to jump at the idea that Emma’s faults rest on her convent education, with blame specifically being addressed to the “cheap” novels she reads. Gaultier, while believing that the novels
play a great deal in the outcome, believes first and foremost in reminding the reader that Emma responds uniquely to her environment. The outcome of her tutelage—her outlook, desires, beliefs—is not, and never could be, a systematic one. In other words, her specific outcome cannot be reproduced in exactly the same way regardless of the individual receiving the tutelage. So long as there is the idea of a predetermined selfhood, Emma’s “poor” choice of novels and provincial surroundings, that is everything exterior to her, cannot be fully to blame for her loftiness; this, Gaultier claims, is not the full story. And in order to parse out the individual, to really understand why it is those kinds of novels and not others that captivate her, we have to try and see, through her own eyes, the image, the “Ideal I,” that is projected in the mirror.

Moreover, should one decide to carry over this idea of the “Ideal I,” they will find in my own distinction the same characterization—allowing, of course, for the major difference in that Lacan believes this identification occurs during infancy, prior to the social determination of the ego. However, in that this “Ideal I” constitutes that which the individual “projects himself” is one more commonality. This thesis argues that the symbolic mirror reflects an ideal version of the self that is subconsciously created by the self via a set of particular images. True recognition of what is being reflected comes not all at once, as in Lacan’s theory, but through three separate stages. There is one final word to be said regarding the difference and similarity of the two mirrors. Inasmuch as Lacan’s Mirror Stage acts as “a particular case of the function of imagos, which is to establish a relationship between an organism [Innewelt] and its reality [Unwelt],” one may also consider the two versions of the mirror the same, that is, so long as one makes a
distinction regarding the role of time. The Neoplatonic mirror, as used in this thesis, places no such emphasis on when identification occurs, just that identification has occurred, and that this identification may occur at any time after the “Ideal I” has crystalized (which is, moreover, a process of upheaval, and not biology) provided the subject first enters and passes through the first two stages.

**What has been ascertained so far**

In summary, there exists a “passion myth” whose desire for fulfillment is concurrently a desire for death. Since passion cannot be accurately expressed in language, this passion myth may be identified by certain topoi—symbols that point to what escapes language. The symbol of the mirror takes this recognition one step further in that it allows for the character himself to recognize that his desire for passion is a will to downfall. And lastly, while separate from Lacan’s employment of the mirror, what remains pertinent in his dialectic of the mirror is the understanding that what is reflected back by the mirror is the “Ideal I,” a form of the self by which the “real” self will model his behavior.
CHAPTER 2: VISIONS OF PERFECT BEAUTY AND THE CRYSTALLIZATION OF DESIRE

I. The Cult of the Mirror

“The novelist is a disseminator of the already-said, a transcriber of the codes of social discourse…Each code attempts to universalize its particular ideology, to reduce the infinite heterogeneity of nature to a culturally limited system of intelligibility. Flaubert attacks language’s claim to mimetic truth by problematizing the value of all codes…In Madame Bovary…the proliferation of clichés tends to negate language as a vehicle for the expression of being.”

—Vaheed K. Ramazani

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explored the role language plays in Madame Bovary; it is time now to expand. Ramazani is correct to say that Flaubert attacks language’s “claim to mimetic truth,” and that this is done, in large part, vis-à-vis “the proliferation of the cliché.” But the question remains: Why must Flaubert do this? What is it that can be shown only through the process of communicative breakdown? And if it cannot be said (i.e., through language), how can it make itself known? This is the question that will dominate the rest of this thesis.

I have, thus far, introduced the following key concepts: firstly, that there exists in Madame Bovary a subtending tension between the “Real” (i.e., the worldly, which consists of Time and the Material) and the “Ideal” (this being the final destination—the infinite, the sublime, the Absolute) of which passion is supposed to act as a vehicle. Secondly, that there exists a specific type of passion - one that finds its genesis in the
allegorical nature of troubadour lyric poetry and is chiefly concerned with transcendence: passion as an end in itself, or, in other words: passion as the vehicle to self-annihilation.

Thirdly, that the nature of this passionate Ideal precludes any linguistic attempt at definition or delimitation (I have termed this as the linguistic impossibility of passion); what is more, this limitation leads to a unique problematic: namely, how to find a way around language through language. And fourthly, that Flaubert engages this problematic by placing an emphasis on form over content, which is accomplished via a strategy of doubling, whereby the simultaneous occurrence of two antithetical elements collide and cancel each other out.

This chapter will introduce the final tool—a prevalent symbol appearing across medieval literature of all forms, whose purpose was to expose the true nature of the Ideal in a way that bypasses the limitations of language. This is the symbol of the Neoplatonic mirror, or, more specifically, the reflection of the mirror. I believe that the use of this symbol, in conjunction with Flaubert’s process of iconographic and semantic doubling, serves as the vehicle for making the truth of the passionate Ideal (according to Emma) known - both to herself and to the reader.

To begin, we ask: Why did the appearance of a single symbol spread ubiquitously across the medieval literary tradition? What purpose did it serve? What question did it answer? What did it reveal that was so important, and that seemingly only it was able to accomplish? Because the repetition of a single theme is, of course, part and parcel of the courtly lyric, does this mean that the symbol of the mirror is simply a casualty of the strict thematic structure? —a victim of the conventions of a genre in which the
appearance of certain elements precedes the actual poem itself? Put differently, is the mirror merely the consequence of a specific image-repertoire? Even if this were the case, each of the repeated elements in the courtly lyric, we have seen, serves an invaluable function. With respect to this question, Frederick Goldin sheds some light by revealing an invaluable idea about repetition in the same courtly literature in the middle ages: that “in this story [the age] must have recognized its own ideal image.” If this holds, then the symbol of the mirror begins to make sense apropos of *Madame Bovary*. —The passionate Ideal, via the mirror, finds a way to come into being without ever having to be defined in language. What this means is that Emma’s Ideal, i.e., the transcendence of the self, can make itself felt without having to be defined outright, thereby skirting around the problem of language regarding the inability to capture the absolute. What is more, Emma herself does not at first recognize the truth of what she desires. What the mirror allows for, then, is the generalization, and therefore the intelligibility, of the passionate Ideal. That is to say the idiosyncratic (the ultimate subjective, the unique), i.e., the ideal version of oneself, finds a way to come into being via the ultimate general—the cliché; for it is in the commonplace clichés of the characteristically Romantic and sentimental that she finds the authentic self.

Incumbent on this idea of finding a vision of one’s own perfection in an Ideal and the mirror symbol writ large is a pre-determination to love, which I previously alluded to in the previous chapter by invoking Gaultier’s postulation of an existing pathological factor: namely, a predisposition to the image. If we take this claim to be true, then the question worth asking is: What, exactly, does Emma see in the stories she reads during
her time at the Ursuline convent that is so appealing to her, specifically?—What is it that is worth devoting an entire life towards? The answer, I venture to suggest, may be found in Goldin’s hypothesis regarding courtly literature and the symbolic use of the mirror: that Emma has found (recognized) in the stories of “troubadours, ladies in mourning, and secret trysts” her own ideal image. And not only that, but the entire world of the ideal image, for in this reflection, there exists a coherent, cohesive, ethical, and practical system. Put simply, Emma sees in these stories a world that acts as a mirror which reflects back her own ideal (perfected) reflection.

The image vs. the Real

One important thing to note here is that this ideal image which Emma falls in love with begins as only that—an image. Like in the courtly lyric where the poet falls in love with a lady, the likes of which he has never seen, Emma falls in love with what Gaultier calls “an anticipated knowledge of realities.”5 Existing in a state of pre-experience, Emma is able to draw pleasure through contemplation. In other words, Emma is inspired by a necessity to love that, though not appearing ex nihilo, precedes any perceptible object. For Bourget, this is the “malady of Thought”: “Thought which precedes experience instead of being submissive to it, the evil of having known the image of reality before reality, the image of sensations and sentiments before sensations and sentiments.”6 From this point on, then, the quest will be to find a perceptible object that corresponds with the image: a material, tangible “cause of consciousness” that will enable “the lover to feel what is already in their heart.”7
Likewise in the courtly lyric, the nature of being inspired to love without a muse leads to a similar quest: “It is meaningless to say that the man is ‘given’ love,” writes Goldin, “often the man has to invent a lady as a recipient of his love, and then seek a real lady who will resemble the image in his mind.” An example of this can be found in Jaufre Rudel’s “No sap chanter qui so no di”:

I.

No one can sing where no melody is,
Or fashion verse with words unclear,
Or know how the rhymes should appear,
If his logic inwardly goes amiss;
But my own song begins like this:
My song gets better, the more you hear.

II.

Let no man wonder about me,
If I love one I’ve never known,
My heart joys in one love alone,
That of one who’ll never know me;
No greater joy do I welcome gladly,
Yet I know not what good it may be.

III.

I am struck by a joy that kills me,
And pangs of love that so ravish
All my flesh, body will perish;
Never before did I so fiercely
Suffer like this, and so languish,
Which is scarce fitting or seemly.

IV.

How often do I close my eyes
And know my spirit is fled afar;
Never such sadness that my heart
Is far from where my lover lies;
Yet when the clouds of morning part,
How swiftly all my pleasure flies.

V.

I know I’ve never had joy of her,
Never will she have joy of me,
Nor promise herself, nor will she
Ever now take me as her lover;
No truth or lie does she utter,

VI.

To me: and so it may ever be.
The verse is good, I have not failed,
All that is in it is well placed;
He whose lips it may chance to grace,
Take care it’s not hacked or curtailed
When Bertran in Quercy’s assailed,
Or, at Toulouse, the Count you face.

VII.

The verse is good, and they’ll be hailed
For something they’ll do in that place.⁹

The first stanza sets up the problematic of having a predisposition to love without any perceptible object: “No one can sing where no melody is, / Or fashion verse with words unclear, / Or know how the rhymes should appear”; that is to say no one can love where no object to love exists. Without an external embodiment, Desire cannot make itself intelligible—it remains an abstract feeling without form. “But,” Rudel says, “my own song begins like this.” Courtly Desire precipitates its own intelligible form. What is real is not the object of love but love in and of itself. Such is the subject of the second stanza: “Let no man wonder about me, / If I love one I’ve never known, / My heart joys in one
love alone, / That of one who’ll never know me.” This is not simply falling in love with a real person whom one has seen but has not had the pleasure of knowing, this is to fall in love with an aberration, an invention, a true unknown: it is loving one without form or place. And even in the immediate creation of an “external other,” the lover begins to suffer: I am struck by a joy that kills me, / And pangs of love that so ravish / All my flesh, body will perish; / Never before did I so fiercely / Suffer like this.” These invented ladies function in the same way that Emma’s Romantic and sentimental characters do: they fill an absence; and in the case of the courtly poet and Emma, this absence does not come as a result of something being lost—the loss of a loved one, for instance—but from the predisposition to love (“what is already in their heart”). This amalgamation of what is ideal and what is worldly, however, is bound to fail, as the Ideal always exists somewhere else, a Romantic axiom Baudelaire does well to capture in the poem “The Moon’s Favors”:

You shall be beautiful in my fashion; you shall love what I love and what loves me: the water, the clouds, silence and the night; the sea, immense and green; the waters without form and the multiform; the place where you will not be; the lover you will never know…

Moreover, the strength of the image of the love object is magnified by the fact that the predisposition to love is met with no objection. The invented lady is at once the perfect agglomeration of all that the lover desires. Love in this form is a phenomenon that supersedes any perceptible (i.e., that which has the quality of being real as opposed to existing in the abstract) form because any perceptible form contains the issue of unpredictable variance, which is to say, vitality. The image itself is predicated on an
impossible abstraction of love—one made up of multiple, freestanding snapshots of love compiled together to form a totality that appears, *in its very abstraction*, whole. As such, it is imbibed with a reality (a truth) that cannot possibly be competed with. The introduction of any element existing outside of the abstraction is enough to render the object of love as false. For this reason, the lover may only find the perfect love within oneself. Flaubert will have this be a recurrent motif throughout *Madame Bovary*, especially during the second phase of the mirror reflection. On numerous occasions, Emma will slip from the real into the imaginary in order to invent a lover that corresponds completely to the image; many times, this will come as a result of frustration with her current lover, or as a means of affirming moments of passion. Here is just one example:

> But while writing to [Léon], it was another man she saw, a phantom fashioned out of her most ardent memories, of her favorite books, her strongest desires, and at last he became so real, so tangible, that her heart beat wildly in awe and admiration, though unable to see him distinctly, for, like a god, he was hidden beneath the abundance of his attributes. He dwelt in that azure land where silken ladders swung from balconies in the moonlight, beneath a flowerscented breeze. She felt him near her; he was coming and would ravish her entire being in a kiss. Then she would fall back to earth again shattered; for these vague ecstasies of imaginary love, would exhaust her more than the wildest orgies.

That Emma consistently returns to the image is noteworthy. Commonly, it is used as evidence to support claims of Emma’s naivete—her inability to separate fiction from reality, her unrealistic standards, the poor quality of her lovers, etc. But *far more important* is that this example gives credence to two crucial details. The first detail is in regards to Emma’s Ideal - an aspect that Emma herself will not realize until the end of the
novel: namely, that her Ideal exists on a separate plane, one outside of the temporal. Emma’s Ideal is the quest for the Absolute—and as such, it exists outside of the Real. The second revelation is that Emma’s Ideal always takes precedence over every other aspect in her life. For her, the image reflected by the Ideal is not a fictitious creation but an authentic expression of truth.

Now, the advantage of the mirror is directly tied up in its ability to manipulate an image. Its strength and value lies in the fact that it “awakens our consciousness of the ideal by translating it into sensible images.” Therefore, like the courtly lover, Emma will spend her life looking for corresponding images, and the success of any of Emma’s exploits will, therefore, be predicated on how closely they align with her image-repertoire. This shift from pre-experience (her time in the convent) to experience (beginning with Charles’ courting and ending with the opera) marks the stage of Emma seeking her perfected image in the image of another. Accordingly, this is also the time in which Emma will begin, through a series of disappointments, to reject the Ideal as false before becoming aware of the truth of the reflection and of what exactly it is that she desires. —A process Flaubert carefully constructs via an interdependent relationship of elements of Romanticism—what comes to represent Emma’s Ideal—and Realism—what stands in the way of their realization.
II. The Role of the Mirror in Medieval Provençal Literature

The different stages of reflection

“The mirror,” writes Goldin, “appears in the writing of nearly every author of the Middle Ages, and it reflects all the preoccupation of that time.”¹⁷ In a vernacular tradition built on intricate, complex stanzas, difficult verse, and the perpetual rearrangement of the same durable motifs, one may be sure that each of these components carries with them an indispensable element. As mentioned previously, the repetition of the same story is revealing.¹⁸ There is, of course, an undeniable element of pure stylistic play—one which Flaubert, no doubt, would have appreciated. For, as Zweig points out, “The difficulty of their verse, the amazing complex stanza forms they chose to use, in particular the enigmas of the tróbar clus (that all but impenetrable form of poetic expression) appeared as part of a courtly game played not with arms but with words.”¹⁹ But what stands above each of these elements is the effect to which the mirror is used—sometimes overtly, sometimes covertly, but always carrying within it the immense role of self-actualization. The prevalence of the mirror in medieval literature is due in large part to the myth of Narcissus, which was for the troubadours an important mis au point, one that acted as an inquiry into an “indispensable human experience, the birth of self-consciousness through love.”²⁰ As O’Donoghue writes, “Narcissus is the inevitable figure of the courtly lover, since what he found in the woman’s eyes was the possibility of his own perfectibility. Attention is focused primarily on the heart and soul of the lover, and the unrealised lady who is hardly ever differentiated in any personal way, is incidental.”²¹ So too does Paul
Zweig mention the role of Narcissus: “There is also a powerful strain of self-delight and erotic individualism—so much so that Ovid’s figure of Narcissus seems at least as accurate a symbol for [the Provençal tradition’s] deepest experience as the White Goddess herself.”

Important to note is that while the mirror appears widespread over the 12th and 13th C. oeuvre, the actual moment of reflection and, more importantly, recognition of oneself in the reflection, follows various trajectories. The questions left by the Narcissus myth are all taken up vis-à-vis the mirror. And while they all share the same common literary source, different poets will use the mirror in different ways. Most germane to this inquiry are the various stages in which the recognition of the lover in the ideal image occurs.

According to Goldin, there are three phases of the mirror. First is the reflection of perfected beauty—the Idealizing mirror. During this time, the lover believes the reflection to be a completely autonomous entity, divorced in every way from him or herself. The image (reflection) exists purely in dream or fantasy and contains in itself every moral, aesthetic, worldly, and otherworldly good. This establishes a seemingly unsurpassable gulf between the lover and the image; regardless, the lover is content to devote his or her life to this image, concurrently believing that in doing so, they are making themselves better (usually in the sense of moral or ethical improvement).

Take the poetry of Arnaut de Mareuil, for example, wherein this kind of engagement with fantasy is foregrounded in the fifth stanza:
Lady whom worth and joy and youth guide, although you do not love me, I shall always love you, for Love wishes it, whom I cannot escape. And because he knows that I bear my heart truly and courteously toward you, he shows me a way in which I may have pleasure of you; and in my thoughts I kiss and fondle you and embrace you: to me this kind of courting is sweet and dear and good, and no jealous one can forbid it to me.

Admittedly, the erotic element of the stanza makes it difficult to see it as anything other than copulation by proxy, wherein the fantasy of the lady replaces the actual lady. But what is important here is how powerful the image can be; for one, it becomes a way to figuratively traverse the distance without actually putting oneself at risk for rejection. Furthermore, distance is practically demanded in the courtly lyric, to the extent that the “reality” of the image is preserved only insofar as the distance remains intact. For those occupying this stage, this is just fine—it is “sweet and dear and good.” The dream is preferred over reality, the image preferred over the real. This is also seen in Jaufre Rudel’s “Lanquan li jorn son lonc, en may,” specifically in the closing stanza:

The man who calls me anxious for and desirous of distant love is right. For no other joy pleases me as much as rejoicing in a distant love. But that which I want is so ill-disposed to me because my godfather made it thus, that I should love and not be loved.

The topos of “love from afar,” or “Amor de lonh” is a key indicator that the individual is still occupying the Idealized stage as it is the stage of pre-experience.

Goldin terms the second phase, the “Mirror of Matter.” This is a phase marked by a recognition of the duplicity of the mirror; that is to say it is marked by a recognition that the reflection is not of this perfect atemporal being in and of itself, but rather a material reflection of it, that there is a realness to it which, in the process of being made
flesh, strips it of its otherworldly perfection. Desire necessitates an external embodiment, and it is during this phase that the lover projects—to his or her eventual disappointment—his or her own ideal reflection onto somebody else. The lover enters this phase as soon as he or she finds a real (material) body to project the Ideal onto. The Ideal remains intact so long as the reflection of it exists in fantasy, but as soon as the image is transposed onto something that can actually be obtained, the Ideal slowly begins to crumble under the insufficiency of its external embodiment. To quote Goldin, “[the] act of turning from oneself to another leads to a critical moment in which the mirror of the ideal is exposed as the deceiving mirror of matter, to the horrifying discovery that the beautiful image with which one longs to be united is borne in a thing without qualities.”

This is a stage of complete and utter disillusionment; all that made the image ideal—perfect beauty, morality, etc.—is found out to be a lie; where once stood the testament of perfection now stands an aberration—“[n]either the real nor the ideal but a fatal mockery of both.”

Because of the rigid nature of courtly love—insofar as we understand it, first and foremost, to be a literary genre with strict conventions—troubadour poetry that engages with this collapse of the Ideal is more sparse. An exception comes in the form of Bernart de Ventadorn’s “Can Vei la Lauzeta Mover,” which runs as follows:

I.

When I see the lark move its wings with joy toward the sun, and forget itself, and let itself fall because of the sweetness that comes to its heart, alas, what envy comes to me then of those whom I see rejoicing! I marvel that straightaway my heart does not melt with desire.
II.

Alas, how much I thought I knew about love, and how little I know! For I cannot keep myself from loving her from whom I shall have no requital; she has all my heart, and me, and herself, and all the world; and when she has thus taken all from me, she leaves me with nothing but desire and a longing heart.

III.

Never have I had power over myself nor been my own from that moment, when she let me look into her eyes, into a mirror that pleases me much, till now. Mirror, since I beheld myself in you, my deep sighs have killed me, for I have lost myself as the beautiful Narcissus lost himself in the fountain.

IV.

I am in despair of all women; never more shall I trust in them, for just as I have been accustomed to protect them, so now I shall abandon them. Since I see that not one noble lady helps me against her who destroys and confounds me, I shall fear and distrust them all, for well I know that they are all alike.

V.

In this my lady makes herself seem a woman indeed, for which I reproach her; for she does not desire what one ought to desire; and what is forbidden her to do, she does. I am fallen in evil grace, and I have indeed acted like the madman on the bridge, and I do not know how this has happened to me, except that I climbed too high.

VI.

Mercy is lost, in truth, and I never knew it; for she who ought to have the most of it has none, and where shall I seek for it? Ah, to whoever sees her it does not seem that she would leave this longing miserable man, who shall have no good without her, to die, because she does not help him!

VII.

Since with my lady there is no avail in my prayers, nor in mercy, nor in the rights I have, and since it does not please her that I love her, I shall never say it to her. Thus I part from love and renounce it; she has given me death, and by death I shall answer her; and I go away since she does not retain me, a miserable man in exile, I know not where.
VIII.

Tristan, you shall have no song from me, for I, wretched man, depart, I know not where: I shall desist from singing, and I renounce it, and hide myself from joy and love.

This move from the first stanza into the second, “Alas, how much I thought I knew about love, and how little I know!” perfectly encapsulates the transition from the Idealized stage into the Material stage. The first stanza exists as the example of passionate love par excellence; and it is in the poet’s recognition of what the lark represents, and the subsequent envy that fills the poet, contrasted by the joy it brings to the other onlookers, that shows that what is on display is the move from pre-experience into experience. The onlookers still capable of rejoicing can do so because the Ideal (represented, not by the lark per se, but by the specific movement of letting itself drop) has not yet been defiled, made flesh, as it were. As the representative of the Material stage, the poet mourns the fact that he cannot go back to a state of pre-experience—a state in which the Ideal is able to stimulate desire. The poet recognizes that the Ideal image, alluded to in the line:

*when she let me look into her eyes, into a mirror that pleases me much, till now* is a deceiving one. Experience has taken away the pleasure that the ideal image once granted. This distress is so great that the poet denies any further contact with the ideal:

*I am in despair of all women; never more shall I trust in them, for just as I have been accustomed to protect them, so now I shall abandon them.*

What is more, the shattering of the perfected image is so cataclysmic that death becomes the only option left to the lover:

*she has given me death, and by death I shall answer her.*
However, this is not an actual desire for death, but a desire for death as a response. This response is replicated in *Madame Bovary* when Emma, distraught after reading Rodolphe’s goodbye letter, contemplates committing suicide by jumping out of the attic. In this respect, full recognition of the mirror has not yet been achieved. The Ideal is defiled, sure—it has been cast out from its place in the sublime and made worldly as a result of its projection onto someone real, but it still exists as someone or something else. By contrast, the lover who arrives at a state of full recognition realizes that the Ideal is a reflection of oneself.

The final phase, “The Ambivalent Mirror,” takes on two forms. The first is more closely aligned with the Narcissus myth insofar as the end result is concerned: The lover, after agonizing over his love for the loved object, recognizes the truth of the state of affairs: that the loved object is a reflection of his own ideal image. When this distance collapses (distance here represented by the distance from a state of pre-recognition to recognition) into nearness, the lover dies. This is famously foregrounded in the “biography” of Jaufre Rudel, whose vida runs as follows:

Jaufre Rudel of Blaia was a very noble man, a prince of Blaie; and he fell in love with the countess of Tripoli, without seeing her, through the good things which he heard said about her by the pilgrims who came from Antioch; and he composed many songs about her, with good tunes but poor words.

And, because of his wish to see her, he became a crusader and set to sea; and he became ill on the ship, and he was brought to Tripoli, into an inn, for dead. And this was made known to the countess, and she came to him, to his bed, and took him into her arms; and he knew it was the countess, and he recovered his sight and his sense of smell, and he praised God and thanked him for having sustained his life until he saw her; and thus he died within her arms. And she had him buried with great honour in the house of the Temple; and then the same day she entered a monastery, because of the sorrow which she had at his death.
Explicit in this pseudo-history is the singularly troubadorian idea of Amor de Lonh: desire which exists indefinitely as a result of distance and only insofar as distance remains intact. When the distance is traversed, the love collapses. In this case, as with the case of Narcissus, this simultaneously terminates the life of the lover. This is a death that eludes transcendence. It is, rather, a termination: a consequence of the lover’s inability to deal with the truth of the reflection.

The second form begins, as with the first, with the realization of the truth of the reflection: that it is a lie—only this is not enough to break the spell. Regardless of the fact that the lover now realizes the perceived ideal image can never be obtained because it does not exist, he or she will go on loving it. An example of this is found in Aimeric de Peguilhan’s “Si cum l’arbres que, per sobrecargar”:

I.

Like the overloaded tree which breaks and loses its fruit and itself, I have lost my fair lady and myself and have broken down my sense, by overmuch loving. However, although I am overcome, never did I wittingly do harm to myself. Rather I think that I do all that I do with sense; but now I recognize that folly overcomes it.

II.

It is not well for a man to be so sensible that at times he cannot follow his desire; and, if there is not a mixture of the two [sense and folly], one half alone is not good, for one becomes an imbecile by too much knowledge and goes about many a time acting foolishly. Therefore it is fitting that one should mix, sometimes, sense with folly, if one can remember that precept.

III.

Alas! I cannot control myself, but go searching and seeking my own harm, and prefer by far to suffer loss and bring about my own hurt with you, Lady, than to
prevail with another; for I always think to profit by this hurt and to act wisely by this folly. But, following the example of the faithful, foolish lover, you hold me the better when you treat me worse.

IV.

I know no “yea” for which I would give your “nay,” on account of which my laughs often turn into weeping; and I, like a madman, feel joy from my grief and my death when I see your face. Like the basilisk which went joyfully to its death when it was reflected in the mirror and saw itself, even so are you my mirror, for you slay me when I see you and look upon you.

V.

You care not when you see me die. Rather, you treat me as one does the child whom one causes to cease and put aside his crying with a penny; and then, when he has turned to rejoicing and one takes back and deprives him of what one had given him, then he cries twice as hard and has twice as much sorrow as he did at first.

VI.

King of Castile, may your fame not cease to grow, which is far more renowned today than yesterday.34

We might consider approaching this poem in two ways, one literal, and one in keeping with the allegorical nature of the genre. The literal explication consists of a sort of bargain made by the lover. This is the topic of the second stanza:

It is not well for a man to be so sensible that at times he cannot follow his desire; and, if there is not a mixture of the two [sense and folly], one half alone is not good, for one becomes an imbecile by too much knowledge and goes about many a time acting foolishly.

The lover knows that he loves an image but consoles himself with a rationalization: that the image does not have to be real for real effects (moral, ethical, etc.) to manifest. This coincides with the overall argument for the necessary presence of two resistant forces,
here presenting itself as a pronouncement for the most suitable life consisting of a marriage between idealism and pragmatism:

*Therefore it is fitting that one should mix, sometimes, sense with folly, if one can remember that precept.*

The allegorical explanation consists of a realization that the truth of what the lover sees is *in fact* the desire for his own death. This is showcased in stanzas three and four, beginning with:

*Alas! I cannot control myself, but go searching and seeking my own harm, and prefer by far to suffer loss and bring about my own hurt with you, Lady, than to prevail with another.*

The uniqueness of Aimeric’s poem is in its direct confrontation with the truth of the reflection. While other poets choose to operate within the realm of allegory, Aimeric alludes to the grim reality of the progression quite explicitly:

*Like the basilisk which went joyfully to its death when it was reflected in the mirror and saw itself, even so are you my mirror, for you slay me when I see you and look upon you.*

The truth (the effect) of the Ideal, what it represents and what it calls for, is a completely alienating experience. The poet is unable to continue living as before. In this respect, the rationalization of the ideal image is a useless one. As Goldin says, “For all his awareness of hopelessly courting his own destruction, he no longer has the power to withdraw.”

No amount of knowledge can undo the crystallization of the image that occurs in the first phase, even the knowledge that the image is a reflection of *his own* image. He will go on “courting his own destruction.” Thus the poet is faced with a choice: find a way to balance the pragmatic and the Ideal, or transcend.
Contrary to the life-ending termination of the first illustration of this mirror phase, that which arises out of a lack, to transcend is more accurately categorized as a conclusion; that is to say it is not an end insofar as to end means to cease being. To transcend is to continue in a new form. Consequently, one must understand that this act is in no way a negative one; to say that the lover “submits” to the ideal, or that he or she “allows themselves to be taken” would be to misread the progression of the mirror completely. The final act is one of self-actualization: an attainment of greater Romantic authenticity on the part of the lover. Furthermore, transcendence is not the gratification of desire, which is to say a termination of desire, but the allocation of desire into a state of permanence. To “prevail with another” is to ignore or reject oneself; it is to ignore what one has desired since the crystallization of the image—one’s own perfection.

The mythical beginnings of Madame Bovary

The allegorical and symbolic nature of the mirror extends far beyond the medieval period. Even a cursory reading of Flaubert’s letters is enough to reveal that he was, without a doubt, familiar with the symbolism of both ancient and medieval literature—especially those used to the effect of capturing the mythical nature of passionate love.36

The genesis of Madame Bovary itself may be traced to much loftier, mystical origins:

Flaubert seems to have first thought of the name “Emma Bovary” for the heroine of the earlier, ‘Flemish’ project, and then used it in the new novel…After the publication of Madame Bovary, Flaubert wrote to his faithful correspondent Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie: ‘The first idea I had was to make my heroine a virgin, living in the depths of the provinces, growing old in her sadness and so reaching the ultimate stages of mysticism and imaged passion.’37
While history seems to have cast *Madame Bovary* into sharp contradistinction to his more overtly mystical works (*La Tentation de saint Antoine, Trois contes*), *Madame Bovary* retains the mystical element that Flaubert had so longed dedicated his life to. As A. W. Raitt points out, “That Flaubert could identify the subject which was to evolve into *Madame Bovary* with one that dealt expressly with myth shows that he was well aware of a mythological dimension to his inspiration, a dimension hardly surprising in view of the immense study of myths he had undertaken for *La Tentation de saint Antoine*.38 To be sure, the mythological dimension far exceeds simple inspiration:39

Flaubert’s method is that of the *troubadour* he called himself, that is, the finder and re-teller of traditional tales. Behind each work we glimpse as substructure one major and many other ancillary literary and mythical themes or legends such as the poets—Classical, Romantic, ‘Orphic’ (‘car c’est tout un’)—have chosen immemorially for their power of evocation and their universal significance.40

Like the troubadours themselves, however, Flaubert strips his work of any overt mythological elements. *Madame Bovary* engages with myth in a way that would seem as if it didn’t engage with it at all.41 Such is all the more important when trying to prove the eternity of the myth itself. By writing a novel seemingly divorced from any overt mythical antecedent—a novel that engages solely with provincial life and the comings and goings of an “everyday girl”—Flaubert achieves what he sought to prove from the beginning: that “form gives rise to the idea.” For it is above all in the form and the style of language that we will find evidence of the underlying mythical motivation. However, as with the troubadour lyric, this is not to say that form is the only vehicle with which to engage with the novel; to get lost in the field of word-play is at the same time to deny an indispensable fact about Flaubert’s overall mission. To this, Margaret Lowe astutely
comments: “Flaubert being of an essentially allegorical and symbolist turn of mind, pursued by ‘allégories innombrables’ and devoured by ‘métaphores incongrues’ as he described himself, [his attitude] can indeed be fully understood only through them.”

Therefore we proceed, with one foot in language and the other in symbolic allegory, into the text itself in order to see how Emma Bovary undergoes the same process of self-actualization vis-à-vis the medieval mirror topos and its three phases of reflection—all of which will culminate with a final recognition of the Ideal, the truth behind it, and an action that will solidify Emma’s position as one ensconced within the troubadour ethos.

III. The Idealizing Mirror

Pre-experience and the birth of the Ideal in Madame Bovary

The first phase of the mirror may be summed up in a couple of sentences: The lover, equipped with a predisposition to love, comes across a reflection of perfect beauty and goodness. He then, from a safe distance, spends his time happily admiring, contemplating, and fantasizing about the image and its future promised pleasures. Such is a dangerously simple explanation of a very complex phenomenon, but it hits all the major points: a predisposition to love, necessary distance, the perfection of the reflection, observation and contemplation, and fantasy. In the previous section, I covered the predisposition to love. Accordingly, let us move on to the rest. In order to establish the solidity of the image, a necessary dichotomy is established between the lover and the
In the courtly lyric, the object of love (the image that is reflected back) is placed far above the lover. As we have seen, this is done through the valorization of the lady. Everything about the lady represents something that the lover does not have but wishes to obtain: universal esteem, supreme beauty, moral perfection—in short, every courtly virtue. As it stands, there is an abyss of distance between the two. But this is a good thing, for distance allows for safe contemplation; love at a distance circumvents the chance of rejection, of getting hurt, and above all of realizing that the image is not quite as perfect as once believed; for in the quality of being an image (a fantasy) the Ideal, the "lady," is more real than in any other form. —This is at the center of Arnaut de Mareuil’s engagement with the lady solely in his imagination. This idea is, of course, paradoxical insofar as the solidity of the image is incumbent on its immateriality: its perfect form exists in abstraction. As the key factor in this stage, distance, or, more specifically, love from a distance—*amor de lonh*—becomes the hallmark of the courtly lyric. With distance being foregrounded, it is clear to see that the stage of the Idealized mirror is a stage of observation, for observation requires no experience. Subsequently, observation done safely at a distance engenders contemplation. And contemplation, in turn, spurs the imagination. In this imaginative state of pre-experience, all joys are “joys of anticipation.” “Experience,” Goldin writes, “may yet occur, but apart from the growth of his passion there has so far been no trial, no confrontation, no opportunity for reward or refusal.” A crucial phenomenon happens as a result of this contemplation: the crystallization of the image. The object of love becomes the paradigm of excellence against which everyone else is measured. Every movement typifies grace, every word a
song; in beauty, there is no equal; even perceptible flaws become signatures of perfection. The loved object, or rather the *image* of the loved object, becomes indispensable to the lover. And so long as the distance remains intact, the image is frozen outside of time, frozen in its perfect beauty. “In such a state,” writes Goldin, “the poet turns to the consolation of the dream and the fantasy—an imaginary *mise-en-scène*, not yet an event but still enjoyed, less present than the real but more present than the merely possible. The fantasy replaces the thought of action.”

This explains, in part, Emma’s eventual, *and consistent*, disappointment in her lovers: none of them are able to measure up to the crystallized image. By the very nature of being real, they cannot compete with the image.

The stage of the Idealizing mirror in *Madame Bovary* is, of course, Emma’s time in the Ursuline convent in the town of Rouen, itself a striking parallel to the troubadours, for, as Ezra Pound points out, “[m]any of the troubadours, in fact nearly all who knew letters or music, had been taught in the monasteries.”

Interestingly, however, is the way in which we come to the discussion of Emma’s convent days; we are introduced to this time of pre-experience via a *dismissal* of experience: “Before marriage she thought herself in love; but since the happiness that should have followed failed to come, she must, she thought, have been mistaken.” This is important for two reasons. Firstly, it points to the fact that the image of the Ideal has, in fact, already crystallized. It shows that Emma has a predisposition to love that precedes any actual object to love. Secondly, it highlights something I touched on earlier: the status of the image as an authentic representation of love. That Emma jumps to the belief that she has made a mistake in
believing herself to be happy rather than discrediting the image as a false portrayal of love, points to the fact that Emma is still occupying a place in the first stage of the mirror despite having accrued experience in the act of getting married. For Emma, it is not the *image* that is false, but the external embodiment of it; the image of love—still abstracted—wins out over the experience of love. Because the Idealizing mirror reflects a perfected image, so long as Emma is fixed in this stage, the image constitutes Truth. If the feeling of happiness has failed to follow, it is because Emma was wrong to think she found the Ideal in Charles. Of course, this leads to the all-important question: What, exactly, *is* the Ideal? And from where does it arise?

**Fragments of the Ideal**

Because Emma still exists in a state of pre-experience, the Ideal exists only in feelings and fragments made up of various episodic images—religious, Romantic, sentimental, etc.; these form various tableaux (referents) that come together in an image-repertoire which constitute the ways in which Emma sees and interacts with the world. For this reason, the only way to formulate a cohesive whole of Emma’s Ideal is to break down each episode in which one of the various snapshots of passion are cited, and then to look for an underlying cohesiveness or common thread. In other words, when everything is stripped and boiled down, what is it that remains?²⁵¹

The first fragment comes to us in the form of a dream:

She had read *Paul et Virginie*, and she had dreamed of the little bamboo-house, the black man Domingo, the dog Fidele, but above all of the sweet friendship of
some dear little brother, who seeks red fruit for you on trees taller than steeples,
or who runs barefoot over the sand, bringing you a bird’s nest.\textsuperscript{52}

Taken at face value, this passage from \textit{Paul et Virginie} reveals little other than a pension
for “romance.” Those familiar with the plot of \textit{Paul et Virginie} will understand why I am
drawing attention to the setting: an island, not exactly untouched by the materiality of the
outside world, but, in many ways, free from its all-encompassing and abrasive nature;
one, moreover, that seems to be unaffected by time. It is fair to say that the island acts as
a space free from temporality. It is, to quote Nerval, a place “in between,” one that
“proposes the complementary value of the two states.”\textsuperscript{53} From this, then, we may
extrapolate one of the elements that make up the first fragment of the idealized image: \textit{the
arrested state}—a setting in which the presence of time is suspended, and where the force
of the outside world does not impose itself.\textsuperscript{54} The next element requires a concurrent look
at a few excerpts taken from letters addressed to Louise Colet during the writing of
\textit{Madame Bovary}. They run as follows.

\textit{In a letter dated Thursday night, 1 A.M. [October 23, 1851], Flaubert writes:}

Look at life from a loftier viewpoint, stand high on a tower (even though the
foundation may crack, have faith in its solidity); then all around you will see only
the blue ether. Sometimes the blue will change to mist: what matter, if everything
disappears, drowned in placid vapor?

\textit{Again on Saturday night [April 24, 1852], he writes:}

...we must (regardless of material things and of mankind, which disavows us) live
for our vocation, climb up our ivory tower, and there, like a bayadere with her
perfumes, dwell alone with our dreams.

\textit{And lastly, from a letter dated Sunday night [January 29, 1854]:}
Oh! Our ivory towers! Let us climb them in our dreams, since the hobnails on our boots keep us anchored here below!\textsuperscript{55}

What these excerpts reveal is an invaluable insight into Flaubert’s own image repertoire. Ever the enduring Romantic,\textsuperscript{56} Flaubert taps into the essence of Romantic philosophy’s quest for the Absolute and encapsulates the Idealistic yearning for the infinite in an antagonistic relationship between two symbols: the ivory tower and the footwear that keeps us nailed to the earth. The Romantic Absolute, existing just out of our reach, is able to be contemplated from lofty viewpoints; we are able to feel and become intoxicated by its vapors, but are ultimately unable to become one with it, affixed to the earth as we are by “the hobnails on our boots.” Flaubert will extend this metaphor into the very heart of \textit{Madame Bovary} by opening the novel with it,\textsuperscript{57} and having it follow, incessantly, throughout the entirety of the work. The ivory tower (or any symbol thereof that indicates height and makes implicit a feeling of vertical distance) remains the symbol of the Romantic pursuit, a place \textit{above} reality, but ultimately still existing within the earthly. That Emma dreams of a dear brother who seeks fruit on trees \textit{taller} than steeples is, then, highly significant. This place she desires is outside of reality, and as such, she requires another person (here the imaginary brother) in order to get a taste of what exists above the final threshold of the Real: \textit{the sublime}. In keeping with Flaubert’s image repertoire, what is equally significant is the fact that the brother is barefoot. The brother is able to reach the fruit \textit{because} he is not tied down to earth by the “hobnails on [his] boots.” — This, moreover, sets up the ongoing symbolic relationship between the Ideal and the Real for the rest of the novel, an element that will be examined, in detail, in the following
section discussing the Materiality of the mirror. For now, it will suffice to say that the barefoot description of the brother is directly tied to the subliminal quality of the intermediary. From this passage, we have, then, the first fragment of the Idealized image according to Emma: an atemporal sanctuary with access to the sublime via an intermediary—one who exists outside of reality.

The second fragment is at one and the same time our introduction to the complex interlacing of passion and religiosity:

Living thus, without ever leaving the warm atmosphere of the class-rooms, and amid these pale-faced women wearing rosaries with brass crosses, she was softly lulled by the mystic languor exhaled in the perfumes of the altar, the freshness of the holy water, and the lights of the tapers. Instead of following mass, she looked at the pious vignettes with their azure borders in her book, and she loved the sick lamb, the sacred heart pierced with sharp arrows, or the poor Jesus sinking beneath the cross he carried.

Here we must draw our attention to two specific images—the sacred heart pierced with arrows and Jesus sinking under the cross—and point out that they have pain as their common denominator. As a result, the Idealized image is infused with a rhetoric of suffering. (“Passion is suffering,” to re-echo De Rougemont and Victor Hugo). More importantly, this image is emblematic of a suffering that concludes in death—a death that is at its heart voluntary. Now, perverted as this idea may seem, it is, as well as her later religious experience, hardly grounds to dismiss Emma’s religiosity en masse. To be sure, Emma, though unbeknownst to her, is doomng herself in this equation of ideality and suffering. However, it is not because her beliefs are in any way suspect; that is to say that what is at stake is not the authenticity of her beliefs on an altogether moral plane. Emma’s religiosity is inextricably tied to the accompanying iconography. What seduces
Emma are the religious symbols because they are, in and of themselves, icons of passion. In the same way that desire requires an external other, Emma requires the image for the idea. Therefore what is authentic is the love of the sensuous elements—the pictures, the smells, etc. But again, hardly are these grounds to throw away her sentiments, for these are not one-off feelings. Emma will return, instinctively, again and again, to the church—including, most notably, on her deathbed. And if we choose to see this scene through courtly eyes, then the entire point is to show that there is an attempt, an attempt in which one of the singular motifs of troubadour poetry shines through: the ennoblement of the lover. Through an act of mimesis, Emma imitates the perfected image—an image of perfect beauty and therefore of perfect morality. Consequently, to charge Emma’s faith and religious engagement as misguided is erroneous. The reality of the situation is that she dooms herself by worshiping at the cult of Beauty, which for her is indistinguishable from Catholicism in and of itself; we may go so far as to say that, for Emma, these two are the same thing. That said, we have our second fragment: Beauty in or through (voluntary) suffering, pain, and death.

The next fragment comes shortly after the second:

The comparisons of betrothed, husband, celestial lover, and eternal marriage, that recur in sermons, stirred within her soul depths of unexpected sweetness… How she listened at first to the sonorous lamentations of romantic melancholy re-echoing through the world and eternity!

These four elements—“betrothed,” “husband,” “celestial,” “eternal”—are all part and parcel of the Ideal image as it so far stands. “Celestial” and “eternal” are all variants of infinity, while “betrothed” and “husband” are simply variations of the first fragment,
reclothed by a religious bent. Fragment 3: An otherworldly infinity promised or accessed through love.

The final fragment is, in many ways, the most important in that it introduces a critical qualifier to an otherwise commonplace Ideal: a predilection for the tempestuous.

Accustomed to the quieter aspects of life, she turned instead to its tumultuous parts. She loved the sea only for the sake of its storms, and the green only when it was scattered among ruins…. looking for emotions; not landscapes. What grips Emma are storms (no control, violence), ruins (devastation, destruction, deletion), and emotion. Consider Grande, who writes: “The very movement in Madame Bovary is a movement toward death and total undoing.” All of these very elements have at their center a sort of dismantling effect. An important clarification is warranted: namely, that the violent feelings must literally act upon her; they must, in other words, elicit a physical response. Emma sees in these descriptions and symbols a “satisfaction of her heart’s desires.” It is clear that these scenes are more than an aesthetic preference. There is something deeply personal—something felt—in them; there is yearning. And what this yearning does is effectively redirect the destruction, violence, and erasure onto herself; it is Emma who wants to be the subject of these sensations. Now, in addition to revealing the sort of self-effacing element of this fragment, this also explains (anticipates, really) why Emma marries Charles in the first place:

When Charles came to the Bertaux for the first time, she thought herself quite disillusioned, with nothing more to learn, and nothing more to feel. But the uneasiness of her new position, or perhaps the disturbance caused by the presence of this man, had sufficed to make her believe that she at last felt that wondrous passion...and now she could not think that the calm in which she lived was the happiness of her dreams.
Passion, for Emma, necessitates the presence of disturbance in the same way that the second fragment outlined the ways in which religion is tied to violent beauty. Fragment 4: violent erasure. With that we have the four fragments that make up Emma’s Ideal:

Fragment 1: an atemporal sanctuary with access to the sublime via an intermediary.
Fragment 2: Beauty in or through (voluntary) suffering, pain, and death.
Fragment 3: An otherworldly infinity promised or accessed through love.
Fragment 4: violent erasure.

Now, in terms of the actual content of the books she reads, nothing new is revealed. Nevertheless, there is one more passage that bears pointing out:

They were all about love, lovers, sweethearts, persecuted ladies fainting in lonely pavilions, postilions killed at every relay, horses ridden to death on every page, somber forests, heart-aches, vows, sobs, tears and kisses, little boatrides by moonlight, nightingales in shady groves, gentlemen brave as lions, gentle as lambs, virtuous as no one ever was, always well dressed, and weeping like fountains.71

All of the fragmented images in this passage add nothing new to what we have already established. What they do, however, is present us with a vital look into how Emma will recognize the perfected image of the Ideal: as an amalgamation of the four fragments vis-à-vis these scattered, disconnected tableaux, each encompassing one or more of the fragments.

As it stands, Emma is still in the first phase of the mirror. And as there is yet to be an external embodiment for the Ideal to be projected upon, this explains, in part, the disjointed nature of all these images. For this reason, these various tableaux act as signposts: signifiers for the Ideal image. —Here I align myself with Vaheed Ramazi, who
argues that as a result of this association (of signifier to signified), “the problem of illusion versus reality represents a crisis of language.”

“Emma,” he writes, “assumes a natural connection between the signs of popular romantic literature and the love that these signs connote. *For her, the images of fictional romance necessarily mean love.*”

And as the perfected image exists only as a reflection, Emma will, in turn, reflect the image onto a series of Romantic tableaux in order to begin the move away from pre-experience into experience: from the abstract into the concrete. It should be noted that it is not the tableaux themselves that she is interested in; they simply function as signifiers with which to grasp, however loosely, what has *really* captured her. Flaubert is here setting the stage for the necessary failure of language discussed in Chapter 1. In tieing Emma’s Ideal to popular Romantic literature (and here the keyword is popular), the unique quality of the Ideal, what is the pure subjective, is automatically understood by readers, not in its *sui generis* form, but in the broadest possible form, the broadest possible *generalization*. The lack of any authorial or narratorial intervention only heightens this. Like the perspectives of all the other characters, this generalization brings to bear all the reader’s own prejudices or ideas about the cliché. As Robinson points out, “*[i]n confining the reader within the perspective of one or more characters, what Constant and Flaubert have in common...is the emphasis they give to the distorting power of language. For language is the entity which, by appearing to identify common elements in all men’s experience, disguises the unique nature of individual perceptions.*”

By iconographically tieing Emma to clichéd imagery, Flaubert is at one and the same time linguistically tieing Emma to clichéd language. The effect of this is a grand
communicative breakdown on all fronts: Emma is doomed to fail because those around her are doomed (set as they are in their painfully material and earthly ways) into failing to see past the cliché, and into the unique nature of her desires.

Of course, this sort of breakdown plays a crucial role, for, as mentioned above, passion à la Flaubert comes into being in collapse. And in order to facilitate a collapse there must be a collision of two equally weighted forms. These two forms, mentioned earlier, are the Real (made up of the Material, and Time) and the Ideal (the Absolute, the infinite, the abstract). However, and this is vital, this collapse must be precipitated; hence why the relationship between the Real and the Ideal is so important: the one engenders the other. Notably, this idea is not strictly tied to Madame Bovary or even the greater literary imagination of the nineteenth century. Pound, as well as De Rougemont, cited earlier, rightly points out that “the living conditions of Provence gave the necessary restraint, produced the tension sufficient for the results, a tension unattainable under, let us say, the living conditions of imperial Rome.” Flaubert will use the living conditions of Yonville, Tostes, and Rouen in the same fashion, as producing unremitting tension and restraint. Gaultier provides a more physiological explanation of the phenomenon, arguing that this same divide—in this case termed “object” and “subject,” but referring to the same dichotomy—happens within one’s own self. And in this internal struggle, each “attitude” attempts to triumph over the other, the caveat being that the “absolute triumph” of, say, the subjective attitude, entails its own destruction—for the one can only exist through the tension provided by the other. To be sure, that Flaubert uses the same form of doubling as the troubadours is no coincidence. Hugo, a sort of literary guide for
Flaubert, writes about the “great spiritual experience” of the middle ages: “This religion, so [Hugo] affirmed, had taught man his double nature: ‘qu’il y a en lui un animal et une intelligence, une âme et un corps.’” This attention to the soul and body divide is only further evidence of our underlying theme. In any case, what is important to take away from this is that this tension between Emma’s Ideal and the Real is deliberate.

Apropos of the role of language—specifically the generality of the cliché—Flaubert will drive home the point that only in the most conventional, broad-reaching speech can the truth of the passionate Ideal come into being. We are given some subtle hints to this in the disconnected style with which we are presented (without any identifiable detail) the variegations of Emma’s image-repertoire. In order to show this, one final passage from Emma’s time in the convent bears quoting:

In the music-class, the ballads she sang were all about little angels with golden wings, madonnas, lagunes, gondoliers; harmless sounding compositions that, in spite of the inanity of the style and the vagueness of the melody, enabled one to catch a glimpse of the tantalizing phantasmagoria of sentimental realities. Emma looks with “dazzled eyes,” enamored with “the names of the unknown authors, who had signed their verses for the most part as counts or viscounts,” and with the unnamed “young man in a short cloak, holding in his arms a young girl in a white dress”; so too does she “tremble” over the “nameless portraits of English ladies with fair curls, who looked at you from under their round straw hats with their large clear eyes.” The generality forefronted by the lack of any specific quality or identification (they are all nameless) so as to make the image correspond exclusively with Emma is vital. For, at this stage, Emma requires of the mirror that it reflect a totality (she does not yet recognize
herself in the reflection). As Goldin posits: “[o]nly by means of a mirror can we talk of ‘the whole world,’ of ‘all ladies,’ and of every good’; for otherwise we are confronted with a vastness that we cannot visualize and to which we cannot respond.” This form of intelligibility is exactly what the clichéd nature of the Ideal allows for. In its extreme generality, there exists a composite in which the Ideal may be seen (contemplated, observed).

The first engagement with the Ideal

To recapitulate, Emma’s time in the convent has crystallized the image of her Ideal: what stands as the desire for the violent erasure of the self vis-à-vis passion. This comes to us through a combination of four distilled fragments pulled from recollections of her time at the convent: (1) an atemporal sanctuary with access to the sublime via an intermediary; (2) beauty in or through (voluntary) suffering, pain, and death; (3) an otherworldly infinite promised or accessed through love; and (4) violent erasure. However, at this point the Ideal is only available to her through a series of images and corresponding emotions. Due to their general (clichéd) nature, these images are bound to fail in providing a truly subjective reflection, a reflection wherein Emma will see the truth of the image (that it is, in fact, a reflection of herself and her ultimate desire: the self-effacement of the self). That said, the tableaux of images are still necessary in order to make the Ideal intelligible—to read it, to recognize it (in reality), to delineate it (however falsely)—as a coherent system. The same occurs in the courtly lyric, hence Goldin: “The courtly man and the class to which he claims adherence are defined by an
ideal that is often difficult to delineate and always impossible to fulfill. In the mirror, however, that ineffable courtly ideal is made visible down to the last detail, and is united with the knight’s own image there.83

What remains to be seen is how Emma will transition into the next stage of the mirror. Because the Idealized mirror stage is marked by distant contemplation, what effectively must be done in order to transition out is to close the distance; the abstract, as it were, must, in some way or another, become concrete. This is exactly what happens after Emma’s mother dies. The fact that this appears to be out of chronological order (the death of Emma’s mother happening before meeting Charles), is a moot point insofar as what is important is not the actual transition into the second phase—this will not be completed until much later at the opera—but that the efficacy, the reality of the Ideal is beginning to be felt. The entire process of disillusion will be an arduous one, but certain cracks will make themselves felt; this is one of the cracks. Upon learning of her mother’s death, Emma immediately runs through the entire gamut of emotions - crying for three days and choosing from her tableaux the corresponding images: “She had a funeral picture made with the hair of the deceased, and, in a letter sent to the Bertaux full of sad reflections on life, she asked to be buried later on in the same grave.”84 Success! The old Bertaux, worried that she may be ill, comes to see her. Emma has successfully been recognized as a reflection of the image: “Emma was secretly pleased that she had reached at a first attempt the rare ideal of delicate lives, never attained by mediocre hearts.”85 Overall, the success is brief, but it nevertheless marks the first intimations of experience. Here we must draw attention to a crucial verb: reached (“arrivée”). Emma has not yet
recognized the Ideal for what it is, but she believes that she has *closed the distance*. Now, Emma has not actually closed the distance—this would entail a full transition into the world of experience—but the belief that she has is sufficient enough to set her on the path to closing it. Emma now pictures herself among her heroes instead of simply observing from a distance: “She let herself meander along with Lamartine, listened to harps on lakes, to all the songs of dying swans, to the falling of the leaves, the pure virgins ascending to heaven, and the voice of the Eternal discoursing down the valleys.”

86 Hurrah for Emma! She is living the Ideal. Only, something awful happens shortly after: the introduction of time. Flaubert’s rhetoric of cancelation is employed, revealing time’s role as the obverse of the Ideal state: “She soon grew tired but wouldn’t admit it… and at last was surprised to feel herself consoled, and with no more sadness at heart than wrinkles on her brow.”

87 Now, we need only recall the leitmotif of the troubadours—the suspension of desire—to see what has happened. What the suspension of desire allows for is *continuous* engagement with the Ideal. The suspension of desire is, therefore, the concurrent suspension of time. All of Emma’s previous engagements with the Ideal have occurred in the abstract, that is to say *outside of time*; this is why, up to this point, Emma has been perfectly content. Now that the distance between the lover and the object has closed, Emma is on the verge of entering the Material stage of the mirror.
CHAPTER 3: REALIZATION, EXPERIENCE, AND THE MATERIALITY OF THE MIRROR

“Nothing is more curious than this suggestion…that the activity of desiring may include a pleasure intense enough to shatter the desiring self.”

—Leo Bersani

I. Chipping Away at the Ideal

Introduction

Of the three stages of the mirror, the Material stage is the most subject to change. Depending on the individual, this stage may consist of a single instance whereby the Ideal image is shattered. For others, such as Emma, the Ideal is so strong that it is able to withstand multiple attacks. Like a slingshot pulled to its limit and set free, it swings back to its original position without any damage done. The question then becomes: how to document the changes that are, in effect, working to chip away at the perfected image? The images that, by themselves, are at most minor bumps in the road, inconvenient but by no means enough to bring one to a halt?

The previous chapter revealed that it was a realization of Emma’s discontent with marriage that prompted the recollection of her time at the convent. This reflection, in turn, granted the reader a glimpse into the crystallization process whereby the formulation of the Ideal occurred. There remains a substantial question: What to make of Charles? If entry into the second stage of the mirror is marked by the accumulation of
real-world experience in love, why is the experience that results from Emma’s marriage not sufficient enough to prompt the entrance into the second stage of the mirror? To be sure, the roles of Léon and Rodolphe, in regards to the various phases of the mirror, are certainly available on the surface of the text. Charles’ role, on the other hand, remains harder to be seen. Therefore, let me first and foremost establish how Charles fits into this process of realization before moving on.

In and of himself, Charles is at no point a mirror for Emma. In order to act as a mirror, one must be able to stand as an external embodiment of desire; this is precisely what Charles fails to do. However one wishes to characterize Charles, the truth is that his outward appearance, i.e., how Emma sees and therefore interprets him, lacks the visible Romantic qualifications. Charles does not reflect the luxury, adventure, and passion that make up the image of the Ideal, but rather reflects “the vulgarity of village life.” His complacency in life, even temper, lack of drive, and (most importantly) his lack of expressive passion make him the poster child for a bourgeois mentality that is antithetical to Emma’s Romantic disposition. So why, then, does Emma agree to marry him? In actuality, the marriage of Charles and Emma is a combination of equal parts chance and inexperience (foudadz). It can be reasonably deduced that Charles is the first man (other than her father) to play a significant role in Emma’s life. This, coupled with everything we have just discussed—her predisposition to love, the purely sensory and iconographic qualification of her idea of passion—places Charles in a disproportionately positive light. Further proof of this mismatch lies in the fact that despite Emma’s obsession with the entire topoi of passionate love, from what we can see there is hardly any courting at all, a
process part and parcel of the Romantic and sentimental novel. Instead, the courting of
Emma by Charles reads far more like the nervous goings-on of two children, certainly not
the grandiose and explosive inflections of passion that Emma has nurtured herself on.
The primary reason for this lack of courting lies in Charles’ inability to articulate himself;
Charles, as it were, is always at a loss for words: “each time the fear of not finding the
right words sealed his lips.”

Even asking for Emma’s hand in marriage—if one may call it that—is conveyed through the words “Monsieur Rouault…Monsieur Rouault’,” words enough for her father to understand, but a far cry from the grand gesture Emma no doubt has dreamt of. Emma’s reciprocity is, instead, due solely to the “uneasiness” she feels. An uneasiness that, due to her inexperience, is coded as a preliminary sign of passion. I mentioned in the previous chapter that this uneasiness corresponds directly to one of the fragments that make up her Ideal; because she is operating strictly according to the Romantic code, Emma interprets this uneasiness as infallible proof that she must be in love. Therefore Emma, who subscribes wholeheartedly to this code, agrees to the proposal and becomes engaged to a man unable to reflect her Ideal image.

Instead, Charles serves a different purpose, one purely utilitarian with respect to twelfth and thirteenth century novelistic convention. He will become, through marriage, an obstacle. This status of obstacle is an absolutely necessary one, for without Emma’s status as a married woman, there is no groundwork from which to enact passion as it is portrayed in Emma’s mind. (Secret trysts are not so secret if there is no one being betrayed in the process). This role becomes all the more important considering the framework of courtly love quite literally has a set of rules (cortezia) and conditions that
must be followed in order for passion to come about. Of course, this is not to say that Emma sees Charles as a tool, nor is it correct to say that Flaubert inserts Charles solely as a means to advance the plot. The reality is that the myth of passionate love—and all its subsequent topoi, obstacle love being just one of these—is so embedded in her psyche that it follows to reason that Emma’s agreement to this marriage is done, on a subconscious level, in accordance with the conditions of the passion myth. What this means, then, is that in order to fully grasp or understand, to wit, Emma’s sense and sensibilities, the reader must attempt to see the world through her eyes. Now, this call-to-action extends far beyond a simple suspension of critique or disbelief. In order to properly follow Emma’s progression through the mirror stages, the reader must adopt a worldview that corresponds to Emma’s own reality, a reality that subscribes and adheres to novelistic conventions, conventions that are, however absurd or contradictory on the surface, seen as objectively true. With this consideration in mind, let us progress through the gamut of Emma’s disappointments, jubilations, and discoveries, in other words, all the experiences that guide Emma through to the truth of her Ideal image.

A taste of the Ideal

Motivated by the wish to find an embodiment for desire, the Material stage is conditioned by the projection of the abstract onto the concrete. This is no easy task, and due to the doomed nature of the endeavor, the lover occupying this stage will repeat this process ad infinitum, or until he or she is broken down and realizes that the Ideal is a lie. This sensation of circularity is certainly present in Emma’s own life, where a series
of attempts to project the Ideal are all met with catastrophic failure, each resulting in the gradual chipping away of the Ideal image. This process begins, as I have shown, with Charles’ failure to act as a proper embodiment of desire. It is not until the invitation to La Vaubyessard that Emma will successfully project the ideal onto another.

The success of this projection during her stay at La Vaubyessard is predicated on a successful concordance between the imagery she encounters there and her image-repertoire. For instance, earlier in the novel the reader is presented with Emma’s dream wedding setting: “a midnight wedding with torches,” a setting, moreover, that she is denied in reality.12 This denial is significant, for it further emphasizes the lack of the presence of the Ideal in the marriage to Charles. This dream setting is, however, present as the backdrop of the entrance into La Vaubyessard: “They arrived by nightfall, just as the lamps in the park were being lit to show the way for the carriages.”13 Additionally, there is present another allusion to a different element that is near and dear to Emma’s heart: the church: “[the vestibule] was paved with marble slabs and seemed very lofty; the sound of footsteps and that of voices re-echoed through it as in a church”).14 Present also are portraits that correspond to those that captivate Emma in her reading, portraits which have underneath them the titles: “Count,” “Baron,” and “Admiral,” titles that are synonymous with luxury and are therefore, for Emma, infused with Romantic pathos.15 At this point in time, Emma can only interpret her desires through the correct signifiers; that they are all present here is, therefore, a necessary condition to the successful projection of the Ideal onto an external other, as nothing less than a one-to-one correlation will suffice to bring the Ideal into full view. This assertion is likewise echoed
by Bersani, who notes, “love seems impossible to Emma unless it appears with all the conventional signs which constitute a code of love.”¹⁶ This perfect alignment is the first signal of her doom, for it prompts the belief that the ideal exists in a concretized form.

Emma’s entrance into La Vaubyessard proves a critical juncture: the meeting of the physical and the mental. In this meeting there occurs the beginning stages of the effacement of the separation between the illusory and physical reality. What this entails is an immediacy of experience, whereby the Ideal (what has heretofore existed in an abstracted form) is, for the first time, felt—felt as something existing in the tangible world and therefore as something that can be obtained. It is imperative to reiterate that in this great psychic event the entirety of Emma’s ideal must be present, for they make the Ideal intelligible. The absence of these signifiers, remember, is precisely the reason why Charles fails to act as a mirror for Emma.

The first fragments of the Ideal—the arrested state and atemporal sanctuary with access to the sublime via an intermediary—are made known thanks to a servant breaking some window panes:

At the crash of the glass Madame Bovary turned her head and saw in the garden the faces of peasants pressed against the window looking in at them. Then the memory of the Bertaux came back to her. She saw the farm again, the muddy pond, her father in his apron under the apple-trees, and she saw herself again as formerly, skimming with her finger the cream off the milk-pans in the dairy. But in the splendor of the present hour her past life, so distinct until then, faded away completely, and she almost doubted having lived it. She was there; beyond the ball was only shadow overspreading all the rest.¹⁷

The sudden recollection of the elements which make up her reality are necessary in order to put into perspective and make intelligible the recognition of the “splendor of the
present hour.” In this passage the Real breaks the reverie of the idealized moment by making time felt (here is another instance of the assertion that time stands as the antithetical obverse of the idyllic state). The intrusion, however, is not enough to break the reverie completely, for “[s]he was there; beyond the ball was only shadow overspreading all the rest.” These last lines must be duly noted as they act to separate La Vaubyessard from the rest of Emma’s life. As such, La Vaubyessard becomes an area outside of not only the rest of the world, but of time. This becomes an area similar to the island that houses Paul and Virginie, one unaffected by the rest of the world. Here, time doesn’t play by the rules; an hour suffices to efface an entire lifetime. This absence of time continues to play an indispensable role in the novel insofar as the recognition of the Ideal state is concerned; time becomes a token, an indicator. So long as time is felt, the Ideal cannot be experienced. It is also worth noting that in this world (La Vaubyessard), materiality, in this case riches and objects portraying wealth, is not antithetical to the Romantic qua Romantic, but a necessary component to it. It is the materiality—“the perfumed gloves,” “the diamond brooches,” and “painted fans”—that makes this unique world recognizable to Emma. The intelligibility of this state is thus predicated on the presence of wealth (material signifiers); luxury becomes, like the religious iconography before it, an icon of the Ideal.

The previous chapter cited Bernard de Ventadorn’s “Can vei la lauzeta mover” as the exemplum of the movement from the first stage of the Idealizing mirror into the second Material stage. Here I return to the first stanza of the poem in order to cast into
sharp relief the ways in which Emma’s time at La Vaubyessard stands as the vehicle for the Ideal’s movement into the Real:

When I see the lark move its wings with joy toward the sun, and forget itself, and let itself fall because of the sweetness that comes to its heart, alas, what envy comes to me then of those whom I see rejoicing! I marvel that straightaway my heart does not melt with desire.

To the role of the sun towards which the lark is moving, I assign the entirety of the setting at La Vaubyessard; to the lark, I assign Emma. For the lark, the sun symbolizes all of its desires. The lark has one goal, one impulse, a single drive: to satisfy its desire, to fly towards the sun. For Emma, La Vaubyessard is the conglomeration of all her desires; desires, moreover, that are made felt by specific physical feelings, just as the “uneasiness” caused by Charles signified the presence of passion. Upon her arrival, she is “wrapped around as by a warm breeze”; the candles in the candelabra “threw their lights,” and we see “pale rays of light” reflected across the entire scene. It follows therefrom that Emma is entranced by an artificial light which takes the place of the light of the sun, artificial being the key qualifier. As far as the realization of these desires goes, it is in the movement of the lark that this is expressed. The lark forgetting itself and allowing itself to fall is an act of complete surrender—willful surrender. It is a Rimbauldian deregulation of the senses where, for one precious moment, subject and object are one. This is passion manifested into a single image, a single act. This sensation, however, only ever lasts a moment. Like the lark, who must catch itself and again resume its flight towards the sun, Emma will continue the Sisyphean cycle of futile repetition: of falling and trying again, only to fall once more.
This moment whereby the fulfillment of desire is realized rests on the conflation of the Ideal and the Real. This is on display in the waltz:

One of the waltzers, however, who was addressed as Viscount, and whose low cut waistcoat seemed moulded to his chest, came a second time to ask Madame Bovary to dance, assuring her that he would guide her, and that she would get through it very well.²¹

It is no small detail that the Viscount remains anonymous. By being addressed simply as “Viscount,” he solidifies his place as a sign in perfect alignment with Emma’s image-repertoire.²² Moreover, anonymity is a vital requisite for the mirror insofar as the physical materiality of the mirror is concerned. This is because the materiality of the mirror must remain unseen; what must be seen is only the reflected image. Therefore, if the Viscount is to embody the entirety of the Ideal, he must, like the lady of the troubadour lyric, be stripped of any vitality; he must remain an image: a means to an end.²³ Anonymity also ensures that distance, another condition of the safeguarding of desire, is preserved. This is precisely why the image of the Viscount will endure; unlike Charles, Léon, and Rodolphe, the Viscount will remain for Emma the representation of the Ideal par excellence, a perfected beauty, forever remote.

The waltz itself is an expression of passion made manifest through both the purposeful exclusion of language and the collision between Ideal (Emma in her pre-experience state) and the Real (the Viscount and the obscene materiality surrounding Emma). All of the various elements that are present—the champagne, the food, the gossip, talk of horses (in short, signifiers that represent a luxury that Emma finds desirable)—as well as Emma’s gradual familiarity and increasing comfort in this setting...
that marks the ascent towards the sun: the inching closer and closer to the object of
desire. Correspondingly, both the ascent and the fall of the lark can be seen directly in the
dance itself. The ascent runs as follows:

They began slowly, then increased in speed. They turned; all around them was
turning, the lamps, the furniture, the wainscoting, the floor, like a disc on a pivot. On passing near the doors the train of Emma’s dress caught against his trousers. Their legs intertwined; he looked down at her; she raised her eyes to his. A torpor seized her and she stopped. They started again, at an even faster pace; the Viscount, sweeping her along, disappeared with her to the end of the gallery, where, panting, she almost fell, and for a moment rested her head upon his breast. And then, still turning, but more slowly, he guided her back to her seat.  

Then comes the fall:

She leaned back against the wall and covered her eyes with her hands. When she opened them again, in the middle of the drawing-room three waltzers were kneeling before a lady sitting on a stool.

Here the ascent begins again:

She chose the Viscount, and the violin struck up once more.

The entirety of the ascent is colored by an undercurrent of speed, what is essentially a kind of controlled chaos. It is impossible to read without feeling movement. All of the objects that captivate Emma’s attention—lamps, furniture, the wainscoting—are still present, but they are no longer imposing themselves on her as before; she is moving beyond them. A torpor seizes her, they begin again, this time faster, to the crucial point in time where she and the Viscount “disappear.” The waltz and the Viscount have literally transported Emma beyond the immediate into an unknown place. This is a disappearance that is in direct correlation to effacement of the self inherent in the ethos of the passion myth. In this single movement Emma no longer exists as an individual
occupying space; she has stepped outside of reality, moved beyond time. This disappearance is magnified in the following line: the dance over, Emma “cover[s] her eyes with her hands.” What follows is a crucial linguistic juncture whereby a complete revolution of perspective occurs:

“When she opened them again,”

(Surely we are talking about someone else?)

“in the middle of the drawing-room three waltzers were kneeling before a lady sitting on a stool.”

(We are no longer sure who we are talking about).

“She chose the Viscount, and the violin struck up once more.”

(is this Emma? or someone else?). Confronted by competing interpretations, Flaubert lays the stage for the way language can work to allude to passion by getting rid of any obvious referents, by taking away subjectivity, by creating purposeful dislocation. The dramatic shift into free indirect discourse does one very important thing: it highlights an absence, highlights the limitations of language. We are sure that it is not Emma sitting on the stool until the next line; now we are not so sure; is it, in fact, Emma on the stool? As readers we go back, re-read, only to find it just as ambiguous as the previous attempt. We are forced to stop, to question, and we are left no better than when we started. Regardless of who it actually is, the effect is the same. On the one hand, if it is Emma, then we are left with a missing chunk of time: the time between her leaning against the wall and being in the middle of the room. On the other hand, if it is someone else entirely, then we are nonetheless left
with the dramatic change of perspective prompted by the covering of Emma’s eyes. Either way, we come face-to-face with a moment of complete erasure: the abdication of reality. Emma, through the facilitation of another (an element found in two of the fragments of the ideal) transcends, for however brief a moment, time and space, into somewhere else entirely—a place left undefined, a place that is not even attempted to be captured or delimited with language. Quod erat demonstratum: here Flaubert captures the essence of the Ideal through linguistic absence.

Here, then, is Emma’s first taste of the Ideal, a moment of complete erasure: the falling of the lark. For a brief synchronic moment, all of the signs of the Ideal have lined up, allowing for an experience of the infinite. This will leave an indelible mark. What follows is a scene of equal importance. The next morning Emma, from the inside of her room, looks longingly at the setting in which her Ideal has just been realized: “Day began to break. She looked long at the windows of the chateau, trying to guess which were the rooms of all those she had noticed the evening before. She would have wanted to know their lives, to penetrate into them, to blend with them.”28 This desire to “penetrate into” and “blend with them” acts as further evidence of the truth of the Ideal in its tie to the waltz. Emma has just experienced, via the waltz, the singular element of passion as desire for self-erasure. In other words, the “disappearance” of Emma during the dance was the removal of the self from the Real. At this point, however, Emma still lacks the perspicacity to understand exactly what has occurred. What she is left with is the desire to repeat the act. What is more, Flaubert's dialectic of narratorial distance ensures that this desire is passed down to the reader in words that accord with Emma’s own understanding.
of the event. Emma’s will-to-downfall is thus articulated through the phrases “to penetrate into them” and “to blend with them.” Emma, like the courtly poet, sees in these people her own perfect image, and wishes to escape her own body in order to be one with the others.

There is a direct correlation between the taste of the Ideal and the second phase of the mirror in that directly after her encounter with the infinite Emma begins to project the ideal onto an external other. Emma, now with experience, has moved from the idealizing stage of the mirror to join Bernard de Ventadorn in the Material stage.

A slow decline

Now that Emma has had experience of her Ideal, there arrives the subsequent belief that the feat may be repeated. This is perfectly understandable, but Emma still lacks the knowledge to see past what was purely coincidence, what was ultimately the synchronic alignment of all the correct signs. Aside from experience, Emma has gained no further insight into what exactly she experienced with the Viscount. In spite of this fact, a great change has nevertheless occurred, namely the “great psychic event” that Goldin alludes to: the transference of the Ideal from a state of imagination into a state of reality. However, the chief problem remains: the Ideal cannot exist in the temporal plane, a plane affected by the predominating condition of time and the shortcomings of language. Ergo, Emma’s belief that her Ideal actually exists in reality and, moreover, that she can be a part of it, is completely flawed. To search for it is nothing less than a doomed endeavor.
This belief that the illusory exists in reality is precisely what initiates the long descent of the idealized image. For insofar as it now exists in the material plane, the Ideal is now subject to the same limiting forces. From this point on, a post-experience Emma will attempt to recognize this idealization through the only medium available to her: the Romantic code. Only now she will search for it exclusively through linguistic signs, instead of through images. This is because she is now attempting to actualize the Ideal in the real world, and therefore cannot rely on the abstract images in her head (she must, after all, communicate with real people). The only way left to her to communicate the Ideal is through the *language* of the Romantic code, which, because of the relationship between language and passion detailed in Chapter 1—namely, that passion is unable to be circumscribed with any degree of accuracy within language—can only fail. This is, for instance, taken up by Ramazani, who uses this idea to explain why the love between Emma and Léon is bound to fail, noting that “Léon and Emma love each other in and through the romantic code. Inasmuch as their love is a product of this code, it cannot survive.”

Likewise, this is taken up by Bersani as well, who, more broadly, writes, “[Emma] returns from literature with everything except the physical world in which the romantic existence might be lived.”

Most prominently, Flaubert himself accentuates this problematic when he laments:

> [A]nd then I had to descend from those sublime regions towards words,—and how can one reproduce in speech that harmony that rises up in the poet’s heart, and the colossal thoughts that make sentences give way?...By what steps can one descend from the infinite to the positive? By what process can poetry be lowered without breaking?
What is being stressed by all three is the *worldliness* of language. —And not only how it fails to capture the infinite, but why it fails to capture it. Furthermore, this brings up an important consideration, the role of what Bersani calls “ordinary time.”\(^{32}\) The reason why the night at La Vaubyessard remains a perfect image is precisely because, for Emma, this night seemingly appears *outside* of ordinary time; the effect of time during the first fragment, remember, occurs only when the state is interrupted by the breaking of the window pane. Likewise, the “disappearance” occurs as a result of moving beyond the temporal. This nullity of time points to the fact that what occurs during the night at La Vaubyessard occurs in an *arrested state*: a state in which ordinary time is absent. To exist entirely in the arrested state, such as the figures on Keats’ Grecian Urn, the flow of time must be eliminated. This is the “impossible demand” of the Ideal, why the Ideal is only ever felt momentarily.\(^{33}\)

The negative effect of ordinary time has an immediate effect on Emma upon her leaving La Vaubyessard. As soon as she is back in Tostes, she is amazed to find how quickly her memory of the night is fading:

> What was it that thus set so far asunder the morning of the day before yesterday and the evening of to-day? Her journey to Vaubyessard had made a gap in her life, like the huge crevasses that a thunderstorm will sometimes carve in the mountains, in the course of a single night.\(^{34}\)

This “gap in her life” is directly tied to the moment of self-effacement inasmuch as it reiterates the fact that the experience of this night occurred *outside* in a world all its own. What is more, it also ties into the necessity of the gulf of distance between courtly lovers. The gap ensures that desire will never be fulfilled by prolonging desire indefinitely. It is
this abyss that Emma will consistently allude to. To recall the lark, the gap is the
“motionless instant” in which Emma is unified, in the arrested state, with her desires.
Despite being only an instant, it is enough to completely shake the foundation of her life;
it has left, like the thunderstorm, an indelible mark on her soul. This is all the more
proven in the subsequent lines:

She devoutly put away in her drawers her beautiful dress, down to the satin shoes
whose soles were yellowed with the slippery wax of the dancing floor. Her heart
resembled them: in its contact with wealth, something had rubbed off on it that
could not be removed.  
The “something” that has rubbed off on her heart is experience, a signal depicting the
first phase being forever closed off. This sentence could very well be re-written to say: In
her contact with the Ideal world, the brief experience of passion has forever changed
Emma's point of view. But because Emma has not fully recognized herself in the
reflection, she cannot properly identify what exactly this “something” is. Flaubert is again
showing the uselessness of language to capture this great psychic event by having the
narrator express himself through the employment of Emma’s linguistic tableaux. It is not
“wealth” per se that leaves the indelible mark; but it is the only word available—for that
is exactly how it appears to Emma. It is the only word that correctly corresponds to the
moment, because in Emma’s version of reality, “wealth” is one more signifier with which
to interpret the Ideal. As such, she falls back on the signifier and begins associating
wealth and luxury with the feeling of desire fulfilled. This is how her obsession with
owning the newest and most valuable materials begins; this problematic of language is
the precursor to the mounting debt that will follow her up to her death.
A specific example of the material sign can be seen when Emma finds the cigar case. She immediately associates it with wealth, exuberance, luxury—all images directly connected with her stay at La Vaubyessard. Now, these are appropriate signifiers insofar as they work to encapsulate this undefinable “something” that has left a mark on her heart, but their true value lies in their revelatory nature, by which I mean they stand as objects which Emma infuses with further clues to the truth of her Ideal. Upon finding the case, Emma immediately believes that it could be the Viscount’s. —And if this is the case, *that it does in fact belong to the Viscount*, the object itself requires a further correlation to her Ideal. As such, Emma infuses the case with further Romantic signifiers, beginning with: “*Perhaps it was a present from his mistress.*” These signifiers include the following descriptions:

It had been embroidered on some rosewood frame, a pretty piece of furniture, hidden from all eyes, that had occupied many hours, and over which had fallen the soft curls of the pensive worker. A breath of love had passed over the stitches on the canvas; each prick of the needle had fixed there a hope or a memory, and all those interwoven threads of silk were but the continued extension of the same silent passion.

The case becomes saturated with Romantic significance; it is hidden from all eyes, secretive, like the Romantic trysts that captivate her imagination. The reader is told that the cigar case is embroidered; this is significant, since the act of embroidery has been tied to Emma since the beginning of the novel. If the pricking of the needle fixes “hope” and “memory,” it is a curious thing to have Emma introduced to the reader through an action of pricking *herself*. It may be bold to surmise, especially since the act occurs so early in the novel, but if the imagery holds, then in the action of pricking herself, that is to say in
the act of fixing a hope or a memory onto herself, Emma’s final destination is foreshadowed. For the final stage of the mirror entails the recognition that the mirror holds the reflection that is made of one’s own hopes and memory of the Ideal. It follows to reason, then, that what is being foreshadowed is the recognition of the self. Through the special attention given to the pricking Emma is not only inserting herself into the image, she is also fixing her own hopes and memories into the cigar case. Thus the cigar case becomes an emblematic token: proof of the reality of the Ideal, and of her experience of it. Since Emma is now firmly placed in the material phase of the mirror, desire needs some kind of embodiment, some kind of external other. Ironically, the Ideal image is projected onto a literal material object—the cigar case. This act unmistakably marks Emma’s descent into materiality. Notwithstanding this transfer, the Viscount will remain the ultimate emblem of passion (the ‘lady’ of the lyric), but with distance reinstated he can only ever remain an image—someone without vital qualities. The transference of the image onto materiality is therefore necessary insofar as it allows for the image to retain a quality of tangibility, a “something” that can be obtained.

The materiality of the mirror

Now that the Ideal image has been firmly placed into the material sphere, Emma will undergo a noteworthy change: she will no longer rely on sensation to make the Ideal intelligible, but will rely on her image-repertoire. What was first dictated by language and sensation (the emotion stirred by novels, the drinking of the champagne) has now been replaced, almost entirely, by its converse. From this point on, desire and passion will be
understood through the image. On the surface this may seem to be a subtle change, but it is a major one in how far away it will take Emma from recognizing the truth about the mirror. This change engenders a new way of thinking. What is more, it is at this point in time that Emma undergoes a new renaissance, one similar to the Ursuline convent renaissance. At this point, “Paris” becomes the symbol of the Ideal image: “What a boundless name! She repeated it in a low voice, for the mere pleasure of it; it rang in her ears like a great cathedral bell; it shone before her eyes, even on the labels of her jars of pomade.”

There is, however, a problem in consigning the Ideal to Paris, namely, that there exists a scarcity of images within the symbol for Emma to contemplate. When she is following the carts on their way to Paris, for example, there is, “[at] the end of some indefinite distance…always a confused spot, into which her dream died.”

Emma lacks the information necessary to envision a “Paris” that will align with the various signs she relies on. As it stands, “Paris” is too abstract of a notion. Now, this is as conducive as it is limiting. On the one hand, it is conducive insofar as it allows for the grand image of “Paris” to exist as a blank slate on which images may be projected upon (images, naturally, that correspond with the Ideal), an act that Emma has successful repeated in the past with the cigar case. What this allows for is Paris to exist as a successful proxy for the Ideal, should it be filled with the correct signifiers. On the other hand, this lack of initial information is limiting insofar as the reflection of Paris lacks a distinct nature; and an external other cannot successfully be an embodiment for the Ideal without specific characteristics, which, in turn, reflect back a totality. Therefore, rather than taking up a
revelatory character, “Paris” will lack depth, filled as it is with the wrong kind of imagery.

What, then, are the images of Paris that consume Emma Bovary? A few include the accounts of Parisian glitterati chronicled in *La Corbeille* and the *Sylphe de Salons*: “all the accounts of first nights, races, and soirees…the debut of a singer…the latest fashions, the addresses of the best tailors, the days of the Bois and the Opera.” Others include the work of Balzac and George Sand, wherein Emma “seek[s]…imaginary satisfaction for her own desires.” However, regardless of these images, Paris nonetheless remains “more vague than the ocean.” What it is missing is the necessary external other, *that which can be obtained*. What is more, it is important to note is that this newfound obsession with Paris is not actually anything new at all. The following paragraph is worth looking at in length, as it provides proof that what may appear at first glance as capriciousness and superficial, is actually just a recasting of the same Ideal world:

The many lives that stirred amid this tumult were, however, divided into parts, classed as distinct pictures. Emma perceived only two or three that hid from her all the rest, and in themselves represented all humanity. The world of ambassadors moved over polished floors in drawing-rooms lined with mirrors, round oval tables covered with velvet and gold-fringed cloths. There were dresses with trains, deep mysteries, anguish hidden beneath smiles. Then came the society of the duchesses; all were pale; all got up at four o’clock; the women, poor angels, wore English point on their petticoats; and the men, their talents hidden under a frivolous appearance, rode horses to death at pleasure parties, spent the summer season at Baden, and ended up, on reaching their forties, by marrying heiresses. In the private rooms of restaurants, where one dines after midnight by the light of wax candles, the colorful crowd of writers and actresses held sway. They were prodigal as kings, full of ambitious ideals and fantastic frenzies.
The role of the mirror is to make visible a *totality*, to make the Ideal legible by casting it into perceivable images. Goldin asserts that “in a mirror all existence is proportionally reduced, so that a vast extent, and all objects in it, are rendered in one image which the eye perceives at once.” The “two or three” “distinct pictures” that Emma perceives are the totality of Emma’s Ideal world reflected back to her in a reduced, and therefore intelligible, form; they represent in themselves “all humanity” while hiding all the rest. The distinct pictures are made up in the subsequent lines that reflect (despite this new renaissance) the exact same Ideal as before. “The polished floors in drawing-rooms,” for example can be easily connected to the dance with the Viscount; “anguish hidden beneath smiles” recalls suffering as a condition for passion; there are “poor angels” to represent the sublime and its connection to Emma’s religion; death is present in the line, “the men…rode horses to death at pleasure parties”; even the “marrying of heiresses” may be connected to the Duke de Laverdière, the man at La Vaubyessard who was rumored to have slept with Queen Marie Antoinette; after midnight by the light of wax candles” recalls Emma’s ideal conditions for marriage; and finally, the “ambitious ideals and fantastic frenzies” mirror the tumult that is directly tied up with Emma’s own ambitious Ideal. Absolutely nothing is new here. Instead, what is most revealing is the location of this drama:

They lived far above all others, among the storms that rage between heaven and earth, partaking of the sublime. As for the rest of the world, it was lost, with no particular place, and as if non-existent.

This passage clearly shows (*pace* James) that what Emma desires moves far beyond class or materiality qua materiality. If it appears that she focuses on these it is, again, because
of their roles as tokens of the Ideal; they are vehicles, a means to an end towards the greater, more authentic desire for infinity. With every new experience, every new revelation, the reader is getting closer and closer to the truth of what Emma desires. One such truth that this passage makes clear is that Emma’s Ideal exists outside of the temporal. In the previous chapter, I established that Emma’s religiosity—specifically the iconography attached to it—is conflated with the perfected image. That is to say that these symbols exist as signposts helping to express the inexpressible. This passage reveals that Emma desires the space in between, a place that cannot be named. And what is more, in this place there exists the raging storms and the partaking of the sublime that we have come to recognize as the initial fragments of the Ideal; fragments, moreover, that happen to be marked by a vertical distance marker: “they lived far above all others.”

The duplicity of the mirror

It must not be forgotten that through this framework experience is above all deceptive. While the truth of the Ideal may be becoming more explicit to the reader, the same cannot be said for Emma. The only thing that the night at La Vaubyessard does for Emma is act as a painful reminder that she is surrounded by everything but the sublime. What occurs is a state of disillusionment brought on by the materiality of the mirror. Sick of her “immediate surroundings, the wearisome countryside, the petty-bourgeois stupidity, [and] the mediocrity of existence,” Emma comes to literally look at herself in the mirror, at which these lines follow: “She longed to travel or to go back to the convent. She wanted to die, but also wanted to live in Paris.” In this distinct set of couplings,
there is a perfect example of Flaubert’s formulaic use of doubling and collision as a hermeneutic tool. The breakdown runs as follows. The first coupling consists of (a) the desire to travel and (b) the desire to return to convent. The second coupling is repeated in the same way in the following line, but as: (a) the desire to die, which is then paired with (b) the desire to live in Paris. This results in two sets of (a): the desire to travel and the desire to die; and two sets of (b): the desire to return to convent and the desire to travel to Paris. What appears to be two situations antithetical to each other, namely, the desire to die contrary to the desire to keep on living (as long as it means in Paris), in effect cancel each other out when put side-by-side (A met by its obverse B). The collision of the two variables engenders a third, the illuminating variable, which, in this case, is the fact that both of these are in fact the same desire. I may also explain this in the following way: The convent represents a state of pre-experience, a state in which the Idealized mirror still acts as a means to self-effacement by living in the abstract. The momentary experience of passion has made it impossible to return to this stage. Experience, in other words, has ripped Emma out of the Idealized state and into the Material. What she finds so enticing in the Ideal—action, frenzy, intensity, all those things that cause her to forget herself—are now subjected to an insignificant world, one lacking the “special soil” and “special temperature” which are conducive to its health. Her only options, then, are to give up the illusion (or, to borrow from Camus, commit “philosophical suicide”) (A), or to dive further into it; this is the desire to live in Paris (B). On the surface these appear to be different options. To be sure, Emma believes them to be different as well. But they are, in fact, the same desire. Both are a desire for death. Paris is simply the still-coded
placeholder for the Ideal, the allegorical desire for death. Therefore one is a desire for “real” death, while the other stands as a desire for allegorical death.\textsuperscript{54}

Up to this point I have managed to circumscribe the phenomenon of the Material mirror to discussions of time and language. But any attempt to properly situate this event within the wider framework of the entire mirror progression requires an examination of its real-time effects as they pertain to Emma, beginning with a bizarre episode wherein Emma, at her most despondent, witnesses a street performer outside of her window:

Sometimes in the afternoon outside the window of her room, the head of a man appeared, a swarthy head with black whiskers, smiling slowly, with a broad, gentle smile that showed his white teeth. A waltz began, and on the barrel-organ, in a little drawing-room, dancers the size of a finger, women in pink turbans, Tyrolians in jackets, monkeys in frock-coats, gentlemen in knee breeches, turned and turned between the armchairs, the sofas and the tables, reflected in small pieces of mirror that strips of paper held together at the corners. The man turned the handle, looking to the right, to the left and up at the windows. Now and again, while he shot out a long squirt of brown saliva against the milestone, he lifted his instrument with his knee, to relieve his shoulder from the pressure of the hard straps; and now, doleful and drawling, or merry and hurried, the music issued forth from the box, droning through a curtain of pink taffeta underneath an ornate brass grill. They were airs played in other places at the theatres, sung in drawing-rooms, danced to at night under lighted lusters, echoes of the world that reached even to Emma. Endless sarabands ran through her head, and, like an Oriental dancing-girl on the flowers of a carpet, her thoughts leapt with the notes, swung from dream to dream, from sadness to sadness. When the man had caught some pennies in his cap he drew down an old cover of blue cloth, hitched his organ on to his back, and went off with a heavy tread. She watched him going.\textsuperscript{55}

In this poor pastiche of all that entices Madame Bovary, Emma comes face-to-face with the reflection of her Ideal in its painfully material form. Here it exists as a debased reflection containing “neither the real nor the ideal but a fatal mockery of both.”\textsuperscript{56} If “in transmuting the object from substance to image, the mirror purifies it, fixes it,” then this
scene represents the ugly converse: the transmutation of the object from image to substance. Generally speaking, this is a tortuous moment for the lover, it may even stand to break the crystalline illusion. The fact that it is not strong enough to break the spell in Emma’s case, however, is a testament not only to how deeply embedded the crystallization of the Ideal is, but also an attestation of Emma’s tenacity; the Ideal is not simply a fantasy for her, it is reality. Emma grows despondent, sure, but she fails to attribute the despondency to the falsity of the image. Rather than respond negatively to the street performance, the opposite occurs; it sends her into melancholic reverie. The Ideal is still in control. Of course, this does not negate the experience she has heretofore collected. In what follows, there exists proof that some kind of identification with the Ideal has occurred:

She leant her head against the walls to weep; she longed for lives of adventure, for masked balls, for shameless pleasures that were bound, she thought, to initiate her to ecstasies she had not yet experienced.

She recognizes that the images of her Romantic image-repertoire are not the Ideal in and of themselves (such as they were during the Idealizing stage), but a vehicle towards it. Prior to these experiences, Emma believes that the Ideal rests within the symbols themselves. A change of perspective occurs insofar as she now comes to understand them as a means towards a greater state of being, a state of “ecstasies she had not yet experienced,” rather than being the end goal in and of themselves. The Romantic topoi—luxury, a life of adventure, etc.—therefore take on the form of aids, rather than destination.
Léon and the fall of language

Léon provides an interesting role insofar as the reader is able to see (and compare) the effectiveness of two very different modes of engagement through him. This is because a very different Léon factors into the story at two different points of the novel, each time engaging with a very different Emma Bovary. Emma and Léon’s first engagement, for instance, takes place completely within the linguistic plane. This reversion back to language from a reliance on imagery and sensation occurs, in part, because of the disappointment in the image to bring about nothing but melancholic sensations; however, this reversion is due mainly in part to the fact that, in Léon, Emma finds for the first time a perfect (linguistic) double. Emma is completely disillusioned prior to this engagement with Léon as she cannot find anything in her life that corresponds with the mirror. —Enter Léon. A series of Romantic sentiments exchanged throughout various evening gatherings hosted by Homais breeds a blossoming relationship. Discussions of the sea and mountains, which prompt such Romantic platitudes and exaltations as:

‘And doesn’t it seem to you,’ continued Madame Bovary, ‘that the mind travels more freely on this limited expanse, of which the contemplation elevates the soul, gives ideas of the infinite, the ideal?’

reanimate Emma. In the successful exchange of linguistic signs, the Ideal is once again able to be engaged. Desperate to find in Léon a new proxy for the Ideal, however, Emma makes a grave error: “In seeking to revitalize the illusion of a perfect adequation between linguistic signs and reality, Emma turns increasingly toward the matrix of language itself. But language cannot be made responsible for reality, can sustain only a fantasy that, in
order to survive, must progressively detach itself from the real,” writes Ramazani.61 As demonstrated in Chapter 1, language cannot sustain the exorbitant nature of passion. The cliché, one the other hand, can, however, capture it to a degree. This is because the clichés of Romantic language are first and foremost a conjuring up of images. Language, in this case, is picturesque rather than explicative. So long as Léon and Emma are operating within the same image-repertoire, they are able to simulate in real time what they are affecting in their oneiric imagination (i.e., the paradoxical prolonged arrest afforded by novelistic time). This is the reason for the following declaration by Léon after an instance of this successful simulation: “he had never till then talked for two hours consecutively to a ‘lady’. How then had he been able to express, and in such language, so many things that he could not have said so well before?”62 He is able to achieve this feat because he is speaking solely in ready-made generalities, i.e., through specifically literary linguistic signifiers—pellucid placeholders for the images they are based on, ones that are at once understood by the other party because all ambiguity is removed. Above all, this is successful precisely because Emma can follow the map; she understands what this weak language is actually saying. The weakness of the language, in turn, becomes a strength. As a result, Emma and Léon are speaking not with words, but with images.63

Nevertheless, the temporal cannot contain what exists in the atemporal. So, by logical extension, it makes sense that the success of this form of communication, while effective at first, quickly fades. As Ramazani affirms, “the surest symptom of love’s demise is linguistic.”64 Sure enough, the well of available clichés runs dry. Emma and Léon are left recycling trite phrases and tired Romantic maxims about love. While they
are effectively both using each other for the same reason (to live out the Romantic code),
Emma has already left the stage of the Idealizing mirror whereas Léon is only now
entering into it. In other words, Emma is for Léon (as she was for Charles) the ‘lady’ of
the courtly lyric. Consider the following lines: for Léon, “Emma stood out isolated and
yet farthest off; for between her and him he seemed to sense a vague abyss”; “he tortured
himself to find out how he could make his declaration to her, and always halting between
the fear of displeasing her and the shame of being such a coward, he wept with
discouragement and desire”; “She seemed so virtuous and inaccessible to him that he lost
all hope, even the faintest. But, by thus renouncing her, he made her ascend to
extraordinary heights. She transcended, in his eyes, those sensuous attributes which were
forever out of his reach; and in his heart she rose forever, soaring away from him like a
winged apotheosis.”65 All the courtly elements are present—the ennobling of the lady, the
lady as far above the lover, the virtuousness of the lady, the gulf between the two, the fear
of displeasing her, strength failing in her presence. There is even “the slight mark of a
sublime destiny.”66

Further evidence of this disparity lies in the lengths Emma must go in order for
Léon to represent (and remain) her Ideal image. Immediately after this first case of
boredom Léon’s vitality becomes a problem: “she sought solitude that she might more
easily delight in his image. His physical presence troubled the voluptuousness of this
meditation.”67 In prioritizing the image, Emma is attempting the impossible, to return to
the stage of pre-experience where the image takes the place of the real: “Emma thrilled at
the sound of his step; then in his presence the emotion subsided, and afterwards there
remained in her only an immense astonishment that ended in sorrow.68 In this reflection there is present the singularly troubadourian topos of desire fading when distance is closed.69 Léon’s presence acts as a reminder of the materiality of the mirror and the dubious nature of the reflection. The image, thus materialized (and subsequently defaced), can only be saved by a linguistic antithesis.70 Emma wants Léon to know that she loves him without using words. Emma thus returns to her sensory identification. Love, she asserts, must happen in accordance with the laws of passion as she has come to understand them: “Love, she thought, must come suddenly, with great outbursts and lightnings,—a hurricane of the skies, which sweeps down on life, upsets everything, uproots the will like a leaf and carries away the heart as in an abyss.”71 It follows therefrom that Emma directs the entirety of her focus into imagining circumstances that would facilitate this passion: “catastrophes that would make this possible.”72 These circumstances, however, never occur, and with that the first episode with Léon comes to a close, leaving the reader with a Madame Bovary who “thought herself now far more unhappy; for she had the experience of grief, with the certainty that it would not end.”73

Emma’s short liaison with Léon has set the preliminary stage for the second phase of the mirror, but the experience of it is still not strong enough to completely debase the Ideal. It will be her next lover, Rodolphe, who will bring about the fall.
II. Rodolphe and the Abolition of the Ideal

The entwining of the Real and the Ideal

The role Rodolphe plays apropos of Emma’s progression with the mirror is prefigured in the clothes he is wearing. If Léon represents the Ideal in its purely linguistic form, Rodolphe, with his “heavy boots” and “yellow gloves,” represents a materialized form of the Ideal: a halfway point between the pure linguistic and the purely material.\(^74\)

For footwear, as I have argued, is for Flaubert the symbol of the real (what ties us to earth), while the color yellow is a somewhat duplicitous symbol of the sublime.\(^75\)

Rodolphe’s two-fold role is further emphasized at the agricultural fair. Through a combination of contesting imagery, Flaubert will pit the Real against the Ideal, with every instance of the one being instantaneously checked by the other. One such instance is found at the beginning of the fair during some dialogue between Emma and Rodolphe. While the two of them are talking a walk, Rodolphe speaks to Emma in the language of the Ideal (“how many a time at the sight of a cemetery by moonlight have I not asked myself whether it were not better to join those sleeping there”) only for the pair to be separated by the gravedigger Lestiboudois, whose role as purveyor of the Real is forefronted by the following description: “He was so overladen that one could only see the tips of his wooden shoes…”\(^76\) The conversation resumes only for it to be interrupted again, this time by the National Guard and firemen “beating time with their boots.”\(^77\) In what follows, Rodolphe and Emma eventually “ascen[d] to the first floor of the townhall” (here again I cannot help but stress the presence of a vertical marker signaling the divide
between the earth and the infinite) in order to *get away* from all the gentlemen who have arrived for the fair, gentlemen, moreover, who all “looked alike” and wore “heavy boots”; gentlemen, in other words, who stand as paradigms of the Real. This back and forth between representations of the Ideal and the Real reaches its zenith in the intricate wordplay, that is to say specifically in *language*, wherein Rodolphe’s Romantic speech is interspersed with the agricultural affair’s award ceremony.

This scene is an example of Flaubert’s rhetoric of cancellation, enabled by his use of a doubling effect. With Léon, the linguistic referent was pushed to its limit, thereby revealing its shortcomings; as a result, Emma becomes disillusioned, and the Ideal feels further away than ever before. At this point in the story, Emma has carried these feelings of disillusionment with her; they are, so to speak, still fresh. This is very much evident in Emma’s dialogue with Rodolphe. Their discussions, or, to put it more specifically, Rodolphe’s *attempt at courting through language*, instantaneously fall flat. This is not because Rodolphe speaks poorly; on the contrary, the same phrases and Romantic topoi used by Léon that captivated Emma are present in everything Rodolphe says. There is no doubt that Rodolphe’s sentimental musings would have had the same effect on a *pre-experience* Emma as Léon’s own; only they don’t. What eventually comes to seduce Emma is, rather, something else entirely. It is a return of sorts, the return of the image of the Viscount:

She noticed in [Rodolphe’s] eyes small golden lines radiating from the black pupils; she even smelt the perfume of the pomade that made his hair glossy. Then something gave way in her; she recalled the Viscount who had waltzed with her at Vaubyessard, and whose beard exhaled a similar scent of vanilla and lemon, and mechanically she half-closed her eyes the better to breathe it in.
In this passage there is the beginning of the reinstatement of the Ideal. Immediately after this “mechanically” made motion there is another onslaught of imagery:

But in making this movement, as she leant back in her chair, she saw in the distance, right on the line of the horizon, the old diligence the Hirondelle, that was slowly descending the hill of Leux, dragging after it a long trail of dust. It was in this yellow carriage that Leon had so often come back to her, and by this route down there that he had gone forever. She fancied she saw him opposite at his window…

First and foremost we note the revelation that the carriage is yellow. It is no coincidence, then, that upon seeing the Hirondelle—alongside of course the powerful reinstatement of distance—Emma imagines Léon’s return. These images which are consubstantial with the Ideal then prompt a state of agitation, what stands as the most crucial part of this reflection:

then all grew confused; clouds gathered; it seemed to her that she was again turning in the waltz under the light of the lustres on the arm of the Viscount, and that Leon was not far away, that he was coming . . . and yet all the time she was conscious of Rodolphe’s head by her side. The sweetness of this sensation revived her past desires, and like grains of sand under a gust of wind, they swirled around in the subtle breath of the perfume that diffused over her soul.

In this state of unrest Emma recalls the Ideal via the Viscount; and in this single movement, the entirety of the Ideal comes bursting forth, reinstating itself anew. In his imagined re-appearance, Léon, newly revitalized via distance, reverses the damage done to the linguistic plane. Whatever damage language has done to the mirror is thereby erased. The line, “then all grew confused; clouds gathered; it seemed to her that she was again turning in the waltz” signals that Emma is again experiencing—in this synchronic
moment triggered by a Proustian stimulation of the senses—the fulfillment of all her desires.

Now that the damage to the linguistic plane has been effaced and the Ideal has been reinstated as something that can \textit{again} be felt in the Real, Rodolphe’s Romantic speech is no longer moot: it now reflects (successfully) the perfected image. Furthermore, now that the linguistic plane has been saved, the rhetoric of cancellation can once again be enacted in language. Flaubert is able to signal to the reader the ever-present antithetical roles of the Ideal and the Real through the intricately crafted agricultural award passage, which is done in such a way that the Ideal and the Material are consistently entwined; entwined, moreover, in a relationship where \textit{neither} one of them takes precedence over the other:

"Take us, for instance,” he said, "how did we happen to meet? What chance willed it? It was because across infinite distances, like two streams uniting, our particular inclinations pushed us toward one another.” And he seized her hand; she did not withdraw it.

“First prize for general farming!” announced the president.

“—Just now, for example, when I went to your home . . .”

"To Mr. Bizat of Quincampoix.”

"—Did I know I would accompany you?” “Seventy francs!” “—A hundred times I tried to leave; yet I followed you and stayed ...”

"For manures!”

"—As I would stay to-night, to-morrow, all other days, all my life!”

"To Monsieur Caron of Argueil, a gold medal!”

"—For I have never enjoyed anyone’s company so much.”

"To Monsieur Bain of Givry-Saint-Martin.”

“—And I will never forget you.”

"For a merino ram ...”

“—Whereas you will forget me; I’ll pass through your life as a mere shadow ...”

"To Monsieur Belot of Notre-Dame.”

"—But no, tell me there can be a place for me in your thoughts, in your life, can’t there?”
“Hog! first prize equally divided between Messrs. Leherisse and Cullembourg, sixty francs!”

Rodolphe was holding her hand on his; it was warm and quivering like a captive dove that wants to fly away; perhaps she was trying to take it away or perhaps she was answering his pressure, at any rate, she moved her fingers; he exclaimed.

“Oh, thank you! You do not repulse me! You are kind! You understand that I am yours! Let me see you, let me look at you!”

A gust of wind that blew in at the window ruffled the cloth on the table, and in the square below all the large bonnets rose up like the fluttering wings of white butterflies.

“Use of oil-cakes!” continued the president.

He was hurrying now: “Flemish manure, flax-growing, drainage, long term leases . . . domestic service.”

Rodolphe was no longer speaking. They looked at each other. As their desire increased, their dry lips trembled and languidly, effortlessly, their fingers intertwined.

“Catherine Nicaise Elizabeth Leroux, of Sassetot-la-Guerriere, for fifty-four years of service at the same farm, a silver medal — value, twenty-five francs!”

“Where is Catherine Leroux?” repeated the councillor.

She did not appear, and one could hear whispering voices:

“Go ahead!”

“No.”

“To the left!” “Don’t be afraid!” “Oh, how stupid she is!” “Well, is she there?” cried Tuvache. “Yes; here she is.”

“Then what’s she waiting for?”

There came forward on the platform a frightened-looking little old lady who seemed to shrink within her poor clothes. On her feet she wore heavy wooden shoes, and from her hips hung a large blue apron. Her pale face framed in a borderless cap was more wrinkled than a withered russet apple, and from the sleeves of her red jacket looked out two large hands with gnarled joints. The dust from the barns, washing soda and grease from the wool had so encrusted, roughened, hardened them that they seemed dirty, although they had been rinsed in clear water; and by dint of long service they remained half open, as if to bear humble witness of so much suffering endured. Something of monastic rigidity dignified her. No trace of sadness or tenderness weakened her pale face. Having lived so long among animals, she had taken on their silent and tranquil ways. It was the first time that she found herself in the midst of so large a company; and inwardly scared by the flags, the drums, the gentlemen in frock-coats, and the decorations of the councillor, she stood motionless, not knowing whether she should advance or run away, nor why the crowd was cheering and the jury smiling at her. Thus, a half century of servitude confronted these beaming bourgeois.
“Step forward, venerable Catherine Nicaise Elizabeth Leroux!” said the councillor, who had taken the list of prize-winners from the president; and, looking at the piece of paper and the old woman by turns, he repeated in a fatherly tone:
“Step forward, step forward!”
“Are you deaf?” said Tuvache, who was jumping around in his arm-chair; and he began shouting in her ear, “Fifty-four years of service. A silver medal! Twenty-five francs! For you!”
Then, when she had her medal, she looked at it, and a smile of beatitude spread over her face; and as she walked away they could hear her muttering:
“I'll give it to our cure at home, to say some masses for me!”
“What fanaticism!” exclaimed the pharmacist, leaning across to the notary.83

In this battle between the Ideal and the Material there is no winner. Both function perfectly well with or without the other. Nevertheless, this scene does in fact conclude with a winner in Catherine Leroux, a character unlike anyone else in the novel. It is, in fact, commonplace to cite Catherine Leroux as one of the only redeemable (truly good) characters in the novel.84 That she appears right after this exchange between Rodolphe and Emma is likewise highlighted as an extension of this fact. And while many see Catherine Leroux as the antithesis of Emma (as well as Rodolphe, for that matter), I myself side with Margaret Lowe, who puts forth the proposition that we look at Catherine not as the “complete converse of Emma,” but as someone very similar to her:

Catherine Leroux, whose chief preoccupation, despite her resemblance to the animals, is her source of transcendence, leading her to offer her gold medal to the priest in return for masses to be said for her soul (Catherine’s aspirations show her to be very like Emma, that is, another representative of an eternal characteristics, instead of her complete converse, as it is often thought.85

Seen in this way, the exchange between Catherine and the Councilor accomplishes two important things. One, it effectively parallels the simultaneously occurring exchange between Emma and Rodolphe. This is done by juxtaposing Catherine’s lifelong devotion
to the church to Emma’s own lifelong goal of transcendence, goals that end up being taken advantage of by men who see them as nothing more than a means to an end.

Secondly, this exchange showcases how the material, in this case a silver medal and twenty-five francs, is used to *realize* the goal of transcendence. Materiality, therefore, is not mutually exclusive with transcendence. But more important is the fact that one can still exist even in the presence of the other. Catherine Leroux is able to realize her goal of having some masses said for her *because* of the material afforded her. \( A + B = C \). The genius of Flaubert is in his showing that these two antithetical components come together in order to achieve a goal that is otherwise unobtainable.

**Consummation**

When Rodolphe returns after six weeks to wax poetic about how powerless he is in front of her, he will absolutely captivate her: “It was the first time that Emma had heard such words addressed to her, and her pride unfolded languidly in the warmth of this language, like someone stretching in a hot bath.”\(^{86}\) The success of the reinstatement of the linguistic plane, paired with Rodolphe’s manipulation of it, eventually leads to Emma and Rodolphe’s consummation. What is remarkable in the buildup to this is a string of symbols that will mirror the Narcissus myth itself, beginning with the setting, which in itself reveals a crucial piece of geography: the forest, where Narcissus undergoes his own mirror progression. Next is the fact that Emma is reluctant to continue on. She is adamant on this score: “She recoiled trembling. She stammered: “Oh, you frighten me! You hurt
me! Take me back!” Rodolphe, desperate to fulfill his aim, redirects his approach; he reverts back to language:

What was the matter with you? Why? I do not understand. You were mistaken, no doubt. In my soul you are as a Madonna on a pedestal, in a place lofty, secure, immaculate. But I cannot live without you! I need your eyes, your voice, your thought! Be my friend, my sister, my angel!88

The ennoblement of the lady, the virtuous Madonna, the desperation of the lover - these lines are undeniably troubadourian, and as such, Emma is sure to respond positively towards them. To be sure, Rodolphe is far from sincere; unlike the troubadours themselves, what Rodolphe desires above all is contact with the loved object. But sure enough he succeeds in his efforts. And it is the success afforded to Rodolphe through his manipulative abuse of language that I will have cause to return to, for it is precisely Emma’s recognition of this duplicity that acts as the grand catalyst for Emma’s final act of self-realization. For Rodolphe is a duplicitous lover, and it is through him that Emma will recognize the duplicity of the mirror. This revelation, however, is still some ways away.

After this sentimental exchange, Rodolphe leads Emma to a noticeably symbolic area:

He drew her farther on to a small pool where duckweeds made a greenness on the water. Faded waterlilies lay motionless between the reeds. At the noise of their steps in the grass, frogs jumped away to hide themselves.89

There seem to be certain crucial moments in the novel in which it appears that Flaubert thought it necessary to sacrifice the extreme subtlety of the symbol/image in order that certain indispensable motifs remain seen, rather than lose their luster. This is one of them.
The reader feels in these passages the guiding of a hand—not exactly into a specific interpretation, but as a signal that something important is afoot. Up to this point the mirroring has been subtle, especially in its relationship to the Narcissus myth itself. Flaubert now makes it impossible to ignore. Since Emma’s first intimations of disappointment with marriage we have been anticipating this moment. Narcissus catches and falls in love with his reflection in a spring. That Emma surrenders herself to the mirror in the presence of a pond in the forest is no coincidence. Even the small detail of frogs jumping away so that they may hide from the footsteps recalls Echo dashing away in order not to be seen. It is here that Emma will truly see herself in the image she has been chasing. And she will do this in a way that is markedly different than with the Viscount. For during the waltz, Emma experiences the Ideal in a completely abstract sense, that is to say she fails to see herself in it. She desires to penetrate the lives of those there at the hall, to blend with them. There is nothing in that experience that reflects a move towards greater authenticity (by which I mean an expression of subjective truth or sincerity), at least not a conscious one. This newfound experience will remedy that.

In this deliberately chosen setting, Emma completely surrenders herself to the mirror:

The cloth of her dress clung to the velvet of his coat. She threw back her white neck which swelled in a sigh, and, faltering, weeping, and hiding her face in her hands, with one long shudder, she abandoned herself to him.

Flaubert textures this surrender by adding a subtle layer, one that is consistent with the perversion of the troubadour lyric outlined in Chapter 1. This is the reversal of the alba—the dawn-song of the parting of lovers. The twelfth century alba, like the more
conventional troubadour lyric form, follows a distinct formula and has a specific, unchanging topic. In the alba, love is connected to the night; the sun, on the other hand, stands as the mortal enemy of love. In these songs, the lover slips away with his beloved under the cover of night towards a secret place so that they may surrender themselves to passion’s embrace. Another aspect of the song is the presence of a third person, one who enacts the crucial role of lookout, alerting the lovers of any danger—most significantly the encroaching sun, which signals the end of the lovers’ meeting. With this in mind, consider what directly follows the above quoted passage:

The shades of night were falling; the horizontal sun passing between the branches dazzled the eyes. Here and there around her, in the leaves or on the ground, trembled luminous patches, as if humming-birds flying about had scattered their feathers. Silence was everywhere; something sweet seemed to come forth from the trees. She felt her heartbeat return, and the blood coursing through her flesh like a river of milk. Then far away, beyond the wood, on the other hills, she heard a vague prolonged cry, a voice which lingered, and in silence she heard it mingling like music with the last pulsations of her throbbing nerves.92

Rather than the tryst occurring at night, Emma and Rodolphe make love while it is still day. The traditional role of lookout is present, but in an anonymous form: “she heard a vague prolonged cry, a voice which lingered”; instead of sounding the alarm as the day approaches, it is when “the shades of night were falling” that the voice makes itself heard. Accordingly, it follows therefore that what Emma has just experienced is not the passion of her Ideal (fin amor: true love), but a debased, perverted version of it (fals amor: impermanent or superficial love).93 True to Rodolphe’s character, he has ushered in a false love parading as passion. It is not until the end of the novel—right up to the
moment that she remembers the arsenic—that Emma realizes this. But, as it were, a
cracked mirror still reflects the face of the person who peers into the glass.

There finally arrives the point in the novel where Emma consciously notices her
own reflection in the mirror (an actual *material* mirror, no less). In a passage that echoes
an experience Flaubert had himself, Emma ruminates:

But when she saw herself in the mirror she wondered at her face. Never had her
eyes been so large, so black, nor so deep. Something subtle about her being
transfigured her.

She repeated: “I have a lover! a lover!” delighting at the idea as if a second
puberty had come to her. So at last she was to know those joys of love, that fever
of happiness of which she had despaired! She was entering upon a marvelous
world where all would be passion, ecstasy, delirium. She felt herself surrounded
by an endless rapture. A blue space surrounded her and ordinary existence
appeared only intermittently between these heights, dark and far away beneath
her.

Then she recalled the heroines of the books that she had read, and the lyric
legion of these adulterous women began to sing in her memory with the voice of
sisters that charmed her. She became herself, as it were, an actual part of these
lyrical imaginings; at long last, as she saw herself among those lovers she had so
envied, she fulfilled the love-dream of her youth. Besides, Emma felt a
satisfaction of revenge. How she had suffered! But she had won out at last, and
the love so long pent up erupted in joyous outbursts. She tasted it without
remorse, without anxiety, without concern.

In this passage, the first thing Emma notes is the change in her eyes (“never had her eyes
been so large, so black, nor so deep”). This is noteworthy as special attention has been
paid to the color of Emma’s eyes since the very beginning of the novel. For instance,
during Charles’ early days with her he will note that “he could see himself mirrored”
when looking into her eyes. Eyes, moreover, that seems to vary in their color: “Black in
the shade, dark blue in broad daylight, they had, as it were, depths of successive colors
that, more opaque in the center, grew more transparent towards the surface of the eye.”
Special attention to her eyes occurs again at La Vaubyessard, when Charles, sitting in a room with Emma, observes her through a mirror. Only this time, “[h]er black eyes [seemed] blacker than ever.” Later on Rodolphe, after first laying eyes on Emma, takes primary notice of her “black eyes.” What these multiple accounts procure, then, is a progression; or, more specifically, they signal Emma’s progression into the Ideal state. A “depth of successive colors” begins to turn blacker and blacker the more Emma begins to resemble the mirrored reflection. This being said, all of these accounts are of how others see her. It is only after consummating her love for Rodolphe that Emma now sees for herself how black her eyes have become. The blue has completely vanished; a blue, moreover, that has characterized not only Léon’s eyes during his occupation in the Idealizing stage, but the Romantic pursuit at large. Put in a different way, this is a progression from inexperience to experience.

This moment of self-reflection is monumental. Moreover, it is transformative: “Something subtle about her being transfigured her.” In this moment of reflection there occurs a physical change. In becoming one with the image, Emma has become a more elevated version of herself. In the same way that the courtly lover is ennobled by the Ideal the more he comes to represent her, so too has Emma taken a step towards her own Ideal. This moment is likewise a promise. I drew attention earlier to Emma’s state of despondency after witnessing the street performance. What she laments is a failure of initiation. She mourns the absence of that which is in essence a vehicle to “initiate her to ecstasies she had not yet experienced.” This problem has now been overcome: “So at last she was to know the joys of love, that fever of happiness of which she had despaired!
She was entering upon a marvelous world where all would be passion, ecstasy, delirium.”

Emma’s excitement is marked by “entering” into a different world, a movement that is consistent with the fragments of her Ideal, which reveal the sublime as always existing elsewhere. In this Dionysian world there is no room for “real” life; there is only “passion, ecstasy, delirium”—the rupture of the self through the deregulation of the senses. Even time, the one constant whose presence erodes this state, is anticipated and accounted for: “She found herself surrounded by an endless rapture.” Rapture: a literal “end-time.” What is more, the image of the rapture functions on two symbolic levels. In a purely linguistic sense, rapture signifies a feeling of intense pleasure or joy; on a theological level, it is an eschatological concept: the ending of days, an event where believers rise up (vertical marker) and leave the world behind (transcendence). This is an event that ends time, one that eliminates the natural enemy of the Ideal world. “A blue space surrounded her and ordinary existence appeared only intermittently between the heights, dark and far away beneath her.”

In the introduction of this thesis there was a discussion surrounding the symbol of the blue flower. As a symbol for the Romantic movement par excellence, it is significant, then, that this “space” which surrounds Emma, a space, no less, which effaces an “ordinary existence” and exists “far away between her,” is blue. The combination of all these elements—transfiguration, passion, ecstasy, delirium, endless rapture—is the blue rose: infinity, the sublime. Emma’s excitement comes from the belief that she is on the cusp of capturing what, by definition, cannot be captured. Now, there is a crucial distinction to be made here. Up until this point Emma has projected the Ideal onto others, believing that it is through someone else that her initiation into this exalted world rests.
What Flaubert does in this moment of actual self-reflection is shift the responsibility of transcendence back onto her - for it is her own reflection, not the reflection of someone else, that is now revealing the entrance into the Ideal world. Additionally, responsibility is shifted through the removal of Rodolphe’s subjectivity by Emma’s incantatory chant “I have a lover! A lover!” On this score, Ramazani comments that the phrase ‘I have a lover! A lover!’ acts as “a self-alienating specularity,” which not only “makes Emma’s adultery intelligible to her as the codified subject of an anonymous romantic intertext,” but also “depersonalize[s] [Rodolphe] as the referent for a Romantic cliché.” In other words, what is happening here is that Emma, who has been the courtly ‘lady’ for both Charles and Léon, is now, though still unbeknownst to her, seeing the ‘lady’ in her own reflection. One simply needs to return to the third stanza of Bernart de Ventadorn’s lark poem to see what is happening:

Never have I had power over myself nor been my own from that moment, when she let me look into her eyes, into a mirror that pleases me much, till now. Mirror, since I beheld myself in you, my deep sighs have killed me, for I have lost myself as the beautiful Narcissus lost himself in the fountain.

Upon returning from the mythical setting befitting of Narcissus’ own, Emma, beholding the image in her own eyes, has lost the power to do anything other than seek out that which will lead to her own downfall.

Rather than continue with the motif of seeing the Ideal in someone else, Flaubert is setting the stage for Emma’s imminent discovery of the truth of the mirror: that it is both self-annihilation that she desires and that it is she who has the means to transcendence. This in turn establishes that the interspersed instances of the sublime are,
in fact, more than just synchronic moments of coincidence; they are, rather, the build-up to a diachronic revelation.

The final portion of this grand revelation runs as follows:

Then she recalled the heroines of the books that she had read, and the lyric legion of these adulterous women began to sing in her memory with the voice of sisters that charmed her. She became herself, as it were, an actual part of these lyrical imaginings; at long last, as she saw herself among those lovers she had so envied, she fulfilled the love-dream of her youth.¹⁰⁵

There is a further transformation that is occurring here. Emma does not simply see herself reflected in these heroines, she becomes an actual part of them. Moreover, and this is crucial, this is not just her imagination or the desire to see herself in the reflection of the characters that constitute her Ideal. This is a phenomenon that is physically taking place. This is reinforced when Rodolphe later looks through his box of letters and finds a miniature of Emma: “from looking at this image and recalling the memory of the original, Emma’s features little by little grew confused in his remembrance, as if the living and the painted face, rubbing one against the other, had erased each other.”¹⁰⁶

Again, with each passing experience of the Ideal, the conflation of Emma and the image becomes more and more apparent, more and more real. With each passing experience Emma comes closer and closer to recognizing that the image of the Ideal is, in fact, her own reflection. What’s more, there is in this scene a powerful act of self-actualization that will forever change the way Emma sees herself. And certainly not only how she sees herself, but how others see her as well. Charles, for instance, will think Emma “exquisite and altogether irresistible, as when they were first married.”¹⁰⁷ This is altogether hardly
surprising considering Emma’s change in constitution and disposition following the
mirror scene:

Never had Madame Bovary been so beautiful as at this period; she had that
indefinable beauty that results from joy, from enthusiasm, from success, and that
expresses the harmony between temperament and circumstances. Her cravings,
hers sorrows, her sensuous pleasures and her ever-young illusions had slowly
brought her to full maturity, and she blossomed forth in the fulness of her being,
like a flower feeding on manure, on rain, wind and sunshine.  

It appears that Emma has found the “special soil” that passion needs to survive. And
she has found it within her own image. As a result of this, Emma will no longer compare
nor wish to mold her life to the lives of others. Reality, however, is not far behind.
Sure enough, Flaubert’s tried and true symbol of the incompatibility of the Ideal with the
Real foretells of this impossibility. On her way to see Rodolphe, “she went across
ploughed fields, stumbling, her thin shoes sinking in the heavy mud.” As one reads this
passage it is absolutely crucial to note that Flaubert has suspended any mention of boots
or heavy shoes in regards to Emma. Emma is always in slippers or else her light step and
“dainty” feet are highlighted. The sinking into the mud, therefore, is not something to
paper over. Emma, in seeing Rodolphe, has become unequivocally one with the worldly.
And as a result Emma, like Rodolphe, will now feel the entire weight of experience. She
will suffer from the hold of the very same shackles that imprison the Ideal to the Real, a
relationship that is beautifully illustrated by the gold-finch that is trapped and caged over
Homais, the incontestable ambassador of the temporal.
**Emma Bovary as obstacle**

Despite the ominous sign of sinking in the mud, Emma and Rodolphe’s relationship enjoys all of the topoi of the passion myth—letters exchanged (first in secret locations, then via a go-between), vows declared, plans of escape, trysts in the forest, and painful goodbyes. At the same time, however, another change is occurring, this time in Emma’s constitution. When the intoxication of love wears off (a consequence of passion in the temporal plane), Emma becomes utterly preoccupied with sustaining their love. This unrest stems from a lack of any perceivable obstacle. What affords all of these Romantic topoi the quality of being passionate is the fact that there is something to lose, that there exists, above all, a distinguishable aspect that characterizes the experience as fleeting or temporary. In the passion myth, lovers have constantly looming over their heads the knowledge that at any point they run the risk of being caught, which in turn would force an end to the affair. There is, as it were, a necessary element of danger incumbent on the passion myth. This conditional is indispensable. So much so that lovers, as arbiters of their own destruction, end up creating obstacles for themselves in an effort to instigate or prolong the passionate state, whatever the case may be. For if all of the desires of the lovers are granted, then there would be nothing left to procure, or, perhaps more importantly, to endure; passion will come to an end. It is precisely this categorical lack of obstacles that marks the beginning of the end of this chapter in Emma’s life.

The start of Emma’s affair with Rodolphe is rife with obstacles; none more important than her marriage to Charles, who by virtue of being married to her produces the ultimate obstacle. Only at this point in the novel, Charles no longer stands an
obstacle. Consider the following: when faced with the thought that she will have to confess to Charles about the state of their financial affairs, Emma becomes furious at the thought that Charles will undoubtedly forgive her:

‘Yes,’ she murmured, grinding her teeth, ‘he will forgive me, the man I could never forgive for having known me, even if he had a million to spare! . . . Never! Never!’

The thought of Bovary’s magnanimity exasperated her. He was bound to find out the catastrophe, whether she confessed or not, now, soon, or to-morrow; so there was no escape from the horrible scene and she would have to bear the weight of his generosity.\textsuperscript{114}

Charles' unbridled love elicits the opposite response from Emma. That Emma is to Charles perfect, no matter what, is infuriating to her. His magnanimity metaphorically castrates him. If there is no danger in getting caught, no repercussions or blame, then there is no obstacle to overcome. As a result, Emma does the only thing she can: she becomes an obstacle \textit{for herself}. This is done by exhibiting a newfound attitude towards Rodolphe, one that is categorized by the absolute preoccupation, the suffocation, of not upsetting him:

\begin{quote}
At first, love had intoxicated her, and she had thought of nothing beyond. But now that he was indispensable to her life, she feared losing the smallest part of his love or upsetting him in the least.\textsuperscript{115}
\end{quote}

Rodolphe, in turn, quickly loses interest in their affair:

\begin{quote}
No longer, did he, as before, find words so tender that they made her cry, nor passionate caresses that drove her into ecstasy; their great love, in which she had lived immersed, seemed to run out beneath her, like the water of a river absorbed by its own bed; and she could see the bottom. She would not believe it; she redoubled in tenderness, and Rodolphe concealed his indifference less and less.\textsuperscript{116}
\end{quote}

And Emma ends up matching this sentiment (or lack thereof) with “humiliation…turned into resentment.”\textsuperscript{117} What started out as the promise of “passion, ecstasy [and] delirium”
has, after six months’ time, ended up resembling the very thing that plunged Emma into despair in the first place: marriage (“they were to one another like a married couple, tranquilly keeping up a domestic flame”). It is worth reiterating here a point that Bersani himself makes, that it is Emma who ends the affair, just as she did with Léon, previously, and will do to him again. In order to keep the flame, the voracity, and the purity of the passionate Ideal alive, Emma must constantly reset it. Therefore, the only remedy for this lack of passion is to have yet another obstacle present itself, this time, one that unites Emma and Rodolphe against a common enemy. This obstacle happens to come in the form of Charles’ failure to cure Hippolyte. If there was a single redeeming quality in Charles for Emma it was in his potential to become an esteemed doctor and bring fame to the name Bovary, a potential that essentially engenders, for a short moment, a sort of love:

Emma had no reason to suppose he lacked skill, it would be a satisfaction for her to have urged him to a step by which his reputation and fortune would be increased…The evening was charming, full of shared conversation and common dreams. They talked about their future success, of the improvements to be made in their house…and she was happy to refresh herself with a new sentiment, healthier and purer, and to feel at last some tenderness for this poor man who adored her. The thought of Rodolphe for one moment passed through her mind, but her eyes turned again to Charles; she even noticed with surprise that he had rather handsome teeth.

However, the dream proves to be just that, a dream. Emma, furious at what she perceives to be irrefutable proof of his incompetence, returns with fervor to Rodolphe.
Face to face with death and the Ideal

The world promised in the mystical phrase “I have a lover!” never truly manifests itself with Rodolphe; Emma only experiences it in dreams and fantasies. To be sure, this is hardly a surprising development; everything about the novel up to this point seems to be in preparation for what seems like the inevitable failure of Emma’s Ideal coming to fruition. The problem lies in what Emma is after: the single moment of erasure which precedes entrance into infinity. The longer the love affair continues, the longer Emma is left to recognize the materiality, and therefore the duplicity, of the reflection. This is, after all, exactly what happens with Charles, who only becomes for her more and more odious the more time passes.\(^{121}\) To be sure, the cyclical nature of this endeavor is borderline Sisyphean (something Baudelaire picked up on and admired greatly), for there is no end to this journey; so long as Emma seeks the Ideal in the Real, she will fail. Despite this, I have argued that there have been moments in the novel in which the Ideal and the Real align, and that with every experience and its subsequent failure Emma does, in a sense, progress towards the realization, by which I mean knowledge or intelligibility, of her goal. This realization is at its most salient in the final night with Rodolphe, in which the following lines occur: “You are sad,” said Emma… ‘Is it because you are going away?’ she went on; ‘because you are leaving behind what is dear to you, your own life? I can understand that …’.\(^{122}\) In this question, we have, I argue, a perfect example of why the cliché is the “ideal form of expression.”\(^{123}\) With every amorous failure, every linguistic collapse, and every poetical shortcoming, Emma has reflected what it is she wants but cannot seem to find. This has provided plenty from which to
speculate, but these instances have lacked what Bersani believes is the “gratuitous clarity” that only the cliché can provide—absent as it is of experience. In Emma’s asking if Rodolphe is scared to go on this journey because it will consist of him leaving behind his own life, Flaubert presents to us the truth of Emma’s Ideal; for if this journey entails the leaving behind of life for Rodolphe, one can by logical extension assume that this journey necessitates the same sacrifice from Emma. Flaubert’s brief for the reality of the Ideal is judiciously nuanced. By using the cliché of leaving one’s life behind, Flaubert both keeps the verisimilitude of Emma’s simple speech and simultaneously uses its simplicity as a means of exposing the deepest truth of the passionate Ideal: that it desires the destruction of the self in order to transcend beyond life here on earth.

And it is the reassurance from Rodolphe in response to this inquiry, fake as it might be, which acts as the catalyst for the final moment in which the Ideal is felt with Rodolphe:

The moon, full and purple-colored, was rising right out of the earth at the end of the meadow. It rose quickly between the branches of the poplar trees, partly hidden as by a tattered black curtain. Then it appeared dazzling white, lighting up the empty sky; slowing down, it let fall upon the river a great stain that broke up into an infinity of stars; and the silver sheen seemed to writhe through the very depths like a headless serpent covered with luminous scales; it also resembled some monster candelabra from which sparkling diamonds fell like molten drops. The soft night was about them; masses of shadow filled the branches. Emma, her eyes half closed, breathed in with deep sighs the fresh wind that was blowing. They did not speak, caught as they were in their dream. The tenderness of the old days came back to their hearts, full and silent as the flowing river, with the soft perfume of the syringas, and threw across their memories shadows more immense and more sombre than those of the still willows that lengthened out over the grass.

All of the signs that were present during the first experience of the Ideal at La Vaubyessard reoccur in this passage: The first is the candelabra that “threw…lights,”
which appears here throwing “sparkling diamonds [that] fell like molten glass.” The imagery of the serpent, which first occurs in the hot house at La Vaubyessard, where strange plants hang “as from overfilled nests of serpents” occurs again, although this time headless. The absence of language (“they did not speak”) is likewise present as is the act of closing her eyes. As per usual, reality is close behind, only this time not in the usual form of footwear. Flaubert opts, instead, for a more poignant termination, one that illustrates, without a shadow of a doubt, the base nature of Emma and Rodolphe’s love affair. After a final embrace, Emma watches Rodolphe leave, to which the all-important line follows: “He did not turn around.”

As per usual, reality is close behind. With Rodolphe’s betrayal, the chipping away of the Ideal reaches its culmination. Crushed under the weight of the real world, the promise of infinity inherent in the Ideal is shattered and reduced to heartbreak. What is more, one cannot help but educe from Rodolphe’s failure to turn around and gaze back at Emma, a connection to Eurydice and Orpheus. While Orpheus cannot help but turn around for one final look, thus dooming his lover to an eternity in the afterlife, Rodolphe remains steadfast in his forward gaze. In this perversion of the Orphic myth Rodolphe does not sentence Emma to the afterlife, but rather dooms her to something infinitely worse: an eternity of the Real.
CHAPTER 4: THE RECOGNITION OF THE IDEAL

“Sometimes, in the brilliant light cast by some trivial circumstance and swept away by the reverberations the incident has provoked, I suddenly see myself caught in the trap, immobilized in an impossible situation: there are only two ways out (either or) and they are both barred: nothing to be said in either direction. Then the idea of suicide saves me, for I can speak it (and do not fail to do so): I am reborn and dye this idea with the colors of life, either directing it aggressively against the loved object (a familiar blackmail) or in fantasy uniting myself with the loved object in death (“I shall lie down in the grave, pressed closed to you”).”

—Roland Barthes

I. The Lover’s Choice

Introduction

The first stage of the mirror, the Idealizing stage, is a stage of creation. In it, the Ideal is formulated into a single image; this image is then contemplated and admired. This single image reflects a vision of totality, by which all of the elements of one's Ideal become consolidated, and by which the lover then orients the entirety of his or her life.

The second stage, the Material mirror, is a stage of recognition. The lover finds in the real world an embodiment of the Ideal in the presence of an external other; the image no longer exists as an abstraction, but as something real, something that can be obtained or apprehended. I have shown that this recognition is, however, deceptive. The reflection of the Ideal in the Real is seductive insofar as it presents the lover with a false understanding of the nature of the Ideal. The final stage of the mirror is, therefore, a stage of realization. In it, the lover comes to recognize the falsity of the material reflection, and in so doing
recognizes the ultimate truth of their Ideal: that it exists not as something that can be obtained (for it is not, in the first place, something external), but as a reflection of what is “in its essence invisible and inaccessible in this life.”

The realization that the Ideal is inaccessible in this life is a cataclysmic revelation; it is one that is hardly welcome, and in its unendurability, often fatal. The entirety of the myth of Narcissus, as it were, is predicated on this unendurable revelation and summed up in the words of Tiresias’s warning to Narcissus’ mother: that Narcissus will die should he ever come to know himself. Nevertheless, this realization is not entirely perilous. The fate of Narcissus represents only one side of the coin, which is to say that the lover, upon recognizing the truth of the Ideal, has a choice to make: succumb to the image or to leave it behind. “The soul,” writes Goldin, “looks into the mirror to see the promise and the task of its perfection, and the moment it turns toward its ideal it must study how to leave the mirror behind. For once enlightened, unless it passes beyond the mirror it will suffer the death that befell Narcissus.” The state of despondency that follows this recognition is based on the reaction to the belief that what has beguiled the lover is actually false, that what one loves does not, in fact, exist. This belief is not, however, entirely true. The Ideal remains just as real as it was during the Idealizing stage. This snap-judgment is therefore a judgment not on the inherent value or substance of the Ideal—its attributes still exist in a very real way—but on the existence of the Ideal in its falsified state. To put this in a different way, what is being mourned is not the Ideal in and of itself, but its state as a deceptive reflection. This second-order recognition becomes imperative insofar as it dictates the course of action of the lover. Narcissus completely fails to grasp at the truth
that the reflection of his image is not actually the totality it reflects. He fails to see the reflection as a reflection of something greater and therefore perishes along with the image. The unendurable truth, rather than an end, is an invocation, a call, an invitation, to get to know it better.

What this stage ultimately engenders, then, is a choice. For when faced with the realization that the Ideal image can never be embodied by an external other, nor, for that matter, exist in the real world at all, one must make the decision to continue living for the image or to know oneself as the image. To live for the image is to remain removed; it is to know that what one seeks cannot be realized in any other capacity than as a falsity, and yet choose to continue on loving it just the same; it is to resign oneself to one's doom, to remain living a torturous life as the lover rather than the loved. It is, in short, the choice that Narcissus makes for himself. The second choice is to strive to understand oneself as the image, which is to say that one takes an active, rather than passive, role to construct their life in the way of the Ideal. Inherent in this decision is the attempt to live an examined life. As Goldin points out, “[f]ollowing the way of St. Augustine, [the lover] would reform his love until it truly lighted upon himself, so that he loved not the reflection but the identity, the tu, the word that contains all of his consciousness.” This Neoplatonic understanding of contemplative love towards the Ideal becomes, in this case, transformative rather than hindering.

In this final chapter, I shall argue that Emma Bovary makes this second decision: to live life as the image. Tumultuous though the progression towards this realization is, it ultimately gives form to a process of self-actualization that gives rise to a state of
absolute clarity by which Emma’s entire life, progression, and destination is thrown into sharp relief. Despite her untimely end, Emma’s suicide is not to be taken as of a piece of Narcissus’ own demise, which is to say as a defeat or termination, but rather a purposeful movement forward, a transcendence, a conclusion. And finally, this state of lucidity ultimately comes as a direct result of Flaubert’s formulaic rhetoric of cancellation, that it is a final brilliant exchange between the Real and the Ideal that gives rise to this state of clarity, which stands, in accordance to the formula, as the heretofore unexpressed variable, C.

For the final stage of the mirror, I take as my point of departure the opera. This is done for the following reasons: Firstly, it must be acknowledged that the progression of the mirror is not always a straightforward process, nor is it always clear where one draws the line. This is all the more true as it pertains to Emma, whose ability to return to a state of hope apropos of the existence of the Ideal is second to none—again, like a slingshot pulled to its limit and set free, Emma’s Ideal swings back to its original position without any damage done. And as Madame Bovary is not a particularly psychological novel, we lack the interiority that is necessary in order to infer with gratuitous clarity the psychological progression of Emma’s state of mind. The second reason is tied to the first; namely, Emma is guilty of flip-flopping. Each instance of moving forward is just as likely to be followed by a regression. This makes it increasingly difficult to map out a clear progression. Despite this, I firmly believe that each movement, despite its direction, is formative. It was under the auspice of this belief that I chose to mark Emma’s encounter with the Viscount, rather than her marriage to Charles, as the birthplace of the
Material mirror stage. Likewise, it was for this reason that Emma’s initial disappointment with Léon’s inability to reflect the Ideal was not marked as the end of the Material stage, for Emma goes on to repeat the process *mutatis mutandis* with Rodolphe, shortly after. Arguably, then, one could propose the same be said about a post-Rodolphe life, where Emma seemingly goes on to repeat the same mistakes, only this time with the second coming of Léon. This would not be entirely wrong, but what this ignores is a crucial facet about how Emma engages. That although Emma engages in the same kind of behavior, there is a complete revolution insofar as the directedness of her conduct is concerned; after the experience at the opera, Emma is no longer a *passive* participant in her love affairs, she is the one driving them - a direct result, I argue, that comes from choosing to live *as*, rather than *for*, the Ideal. Emma, as it were, will attempt to fashion an opera out of her own life, with each character, herself included, assuming their proper role. I therefore see the experience at the opera as a line that, once crossed, can never be crossed again, one that, for all intents and purposes, marks the beginning of the final stage of the mirror. Moreover, it is in the process of living one’s life as, rather than for, the image, that the mirror concedes the knowledge that transcendence presupposes. As Goldin states, “...the soul may climb upon these images, leaving each behind as it learns to contemplate the reality they reflect. By the debased but visible image of its true desire the soul is inspired to begin its ascent.” It is by virtue and accordance with the belief that the ascent of the individual is conditioned by the debased image that I chronicle the following instances in the text, beginning with the opera and terminating in Emma’s final appeal to
Rodolphe, in an attempt to show both the ascent and eventual transcendence of Emma Bovary.

The shattering of illusion

Broadly speaking, the experience garnered by the opera is tripartite; it consists of a voyeuristic observation whereby the entirety of Emma’s Ideal is played out before her eyes, an admonition of the Ideal as something that cannot exist in the Real, and an immediate volte-face return to the belief of the existence of the Ideal, all within an incredibly short span of time. What I am interested in is this admonition and the indelible mark it leaves, despite a return to a previous mode of understanding.

At the suggestion of Homais (a small but nevertheless crucial detail, Homais being the representative of the Real), Charles and Emma head out to see an unmissable performance by a certain Legardy. Upon arrival, Emma is at once captivated by the surroundings. As with the setting at La Vaubyessard, the setting of the opera acts on all of those critical faculties of Emma that let alert her to the fact that the Ideal is present. Emma is captivated by the gilt and grandeur, the “yellow gloves” of the playgoers, “the golden knobs of canes,” etc.\(^7\) Sure enough, enchanted by the music and drowning in reverie, Emma is once again returned to the state of her youth:

She felt herself carried back to the reading of her youth, into the midst of Walter Scott. She seemed to hear through the mist the sound of the Scotch bagpipes re-echoing over the moors. Her remembrance of the novel helping her to understand the libretto, she followed the story phrase by phrase, while the burst of music dispersed the fleeting thoughts that came back to her.\(^8\)
These stimuli efface the presence of time, which in turn allows for a rare state of mind, one that allows the Ideal to be felt without the sobering incumbrance of experience. Emma, like Bernart de Ventadorn’s lark, completely surrenders to these feelings: “She gave herself up to the flow of the melodies, and felt all her being vibrate as if the violin bows were being drawn over her nerves.” Emma flies towards the sun and once again lets herself fall. Emma’s physical reaction, echoing that of the sensations she felt upon entering into La Vaubyessard, act as a reminder that, for her, the Ideal is more than a fiction or set of aesthetic predilections; it is something deeply moving, something substantial. Moreover, it is something present, here, now, and producing real effects: “Her eyes could hardly take in all the costumes, the scenery, the actors, the painted trees that shook whenever someone walked, and the velvet caps, cloaks, swords—all those imaginary things that vibrated in the music as in the atmosphere of another world.” All of these “imaginary things” are not so imaginary for Emma; they are as real as the atmosphere of this other world to which she aspires, and which the Ideal represents.

It is at this moment in the opera, however, that something strange happens. In all instances whereby the Ideal can be said to have been experienced, or, at the very least, teased, Emma loses herself in Romantic and sentimental reverie. After the waltz with the Viscount, Emma dreams of penetrating the lives of all those present so as to permanently feel the magnificence of the night; after finding in Léon a mirror of Romantic banality, Emma rejoices in the idea that she has found for herself the intimations of a grand romance; the simple act of viewing a street performer’s poor pastiche sends Emma into deep Romantic contemplation; and in her liaison with Rodolphe, Emma finds herself
literally transformed through contact with her Ideal. Each of these instances, it can be said, reinvigorates the Ideal. It would appear, at least on a cursory level, that this performance is no different: “Her heart filled with these melodious lamentations that were accompanied by the lugubrious moanings of the double-bases, like the cries of the drowning in the tumult of a tempest.” Melodious lamentations, lugubrious moanings, the cries of the drowning in the tempest—all of these are unmistakably tied to the Ideal, and all are operating on her at once. These, in turn, prompt reflections that the reader has come to expect from Emma:

She recognised all the intoxication and the anguish that had brought her close to death. The voice of the prima donna seemed to echo her own conscience, and the whole fictional story seemed to capture something of her own life…the lovers spoke of the flowers on their tomb, of vows, exile, fate, hopes: and when they uttered the final farewell, Emma gave a sharp cry that mingled with the vibrations of the last chords.12

So what has changed? For starters, Emma is no longer a passive observer, completely detached from the fiction being exhibited before her eyes. She recognizes her own story. In the past, Emma has been able to contemplate these images, recognizing them as promises of unknown happiness. And in virtue of their state as promises, they gave rise to the belief that Emma need only live her life according to these images in order to be initiated into the pleasures they hold. To live one’s life wholeheartedly in accordance with these promises, as Emma does, is to live with the ineradicable certainty that they will engender a life worth living. These promises no longer hold true. And it is the collapse of these sacred promises that are on display now. Emma has lived life according to these images; she has, after all, “recognised all the intoxication and the anguish,” and
feels her own conscience echoed in this display of the Ideal; and yet the pleasures that she sees being granted to those in front of her have somehow evaded her: “But no one on earth had loved her with such love. [Speaking of Rodolphe] He had not wept like Edgar that last moonlit night when they had said ‘Til tomorrow! Till tomorrow!... ’.”

Something fundamental about her conception of the Ideal has been disapproved. Consider now the effect that the opera performance has in contradistinction to these past experiences of hers:

Lucie came on, half supported by her women, a wreath of orange blossoms in her hair, and paler than the white satin of her gown. Emma dreamed of her marriage day; she saw herself at home again among the fields in the little path as they walked to the church. Why didn’t she, like this woman, resist and implore? Instead, she had walked joyously and unwittingly towards the abyss… Ah! If in the freshness of her beauty, before the degradation of marriage and disillusion of adultery, she could have anchored her life upon some great, strong heart! Virtue, affection, sensuous pleasure and duty would have combined to give her eternal bliss. But such happiness, she realized, was a lie, a mockery to taunt desire. She knew now how small the passions were that art magnified. So, striving for detachment, Emma resolved to see in this reproduction of her sorrows a mere formal fiction for the entertainment of the eye, and she smiled inwardly in scornful pity when from behind the velvet curtains at the back of the stage a man appeared in a black coat.

The opera does not reinvigorate the Ideal like the sentimental musings of Léon, the pastiche put on by the street performer, or her night of passion with Rodolphe. For one catalytic moment, it does just the opposite: it castrates it. “But no one on earth had loved her with such love.” These words echo in her ear and send Emma into a moment of painful reflection. A swift fulguration of despair crashes down, and the realization that eternal bliss is a lie fills her body. The happiness promised by passion is nowhere to be found, and she realizes that the combination of “virtue, affection, sensuous pleasure, and
“duty” produce nothing but unhappiness; worse still, that which stimulated her desires, that which promised a transcendence from a life that has doomed her to mediocre love and a mediocre existence. In short, that which was her life, is a lie: a fatal “mockery to taunt desire.” The realization that she fails to make after the street performance, that what is being performed is a fiction incompatible with the real world, is felt in full force.

This revelation is cataclysmic. It is a renunciation of her entire being. Succession after succession of incidents of disappointment consolidates Emma’s doubt of the reality of lived passion. Emma concludes that eternal bliss is a lie, and the thought of it leaves her cold. In this moment, it feels as if her life is nothing but a succession of losses, losses that result from the recognition that one is doomed to only grasp at the sacred, to feel it only long enough for it slip through one’s fingers, that the happiness it promises is deceptive, and any kind of belief in its permanence is a false one. It is this moment of recognition, I argue, fleeting as it is, that marks the introduction into the third stage of the mirror. In what follows, I will show how this painful realization causes Emma to redouble her efforts to lead an ideal life, and how the presence of the Real vis-à-vis the Material grows alongside these efforts, and ultimately how the two collide, resulting in Emma’s ultimate realization and the finale of the mirror progression.

Strategic self-deception and the reinstatement of the Ideal

Emma’s disavowal of the reality of the Ideal does not last for more than a moment. Almost immediately after she consigns this vision of life to a state of magnified fiction, the Ideal reasserts itself with fervor. The performance led by the man in the black
cloak, one rife with fury and vengeance and of volleys of “homicidal provocations” and “shrill lament[s]” (in other words, all those things that have come to represent ideality), completely and utterly captivates Emma. As a result, the moment of disillusionment is eradicated:

All her attempts at critical detachment were swept away by the poetic power of the acting, and, drawn, to the man by the illusion of the part, she tried to imagine his life—extraordinary, magnificent, notorious, the life that would have been hers if fate had willed it. If only they had met! He would have loved her, they would have travelled together through all the kingdoms of Europe from capital to capital, sharing in his success and in his hardships, picking up the flowers thrown to him, mending his clothes. Every night, hidden behind the golden lattice of her box, she would have drunk in eagerly the expansions of this soul that would have sung for her alone; from the stage, even as he acted, he would have looked at her.15

Emma does more than get swept up in the performance; she takes it a step farther. She believes herself to be an actual part of this ordeal. The anonymous man of her wildest fantasies whom she imagines at her lowest depths—the true addressee of her later letters to Léon16—not only exists but appears to be looking right at her:

A mad idea took possession of her: he was looking at her right now! She longed to run to his arms, to take refuge in his strength, as in the incarnation of love itself, and to say to him, to cry out, “Take me away! carry me with you! Let us leave! All my passion and all my dreams are yours!”17

I argued above that as one enters the third stage of the mirror, a decision must be made. It is at this critical juncture, in a paroxysm of envy and wonder, that Emma makes her decision. A new course set, Emma will from now on take fate into her own hands; she will no longer live life as the lover, she will live as the image, she will tempt the passionate Ideal herself and live life as the loved object.18 Instead of seeking a life that mirrors that of the troubadour ethos, she will take up, as it were, all the various positions
typified by the troubadour lyric. Not only will we find her, at times, in the position of the male troubadour—that is, as the one who longs, who displays affection—she will also, through various and carefully constructed acts, situate herself alongside the lady in the lyric—as the venerated object, the object of supreme desire. Additionally, she will also take up the role as obstacle, for all these various subjectivities ensure that the passion myth will come to fruition. Whether or not this decision is made consciously is of little importance and ultimately more suited to discussions of modern psychology. What is at stake is not a critical faculty of the mind in and of itself (at least not yet), but the course of events that this decision engenders. If I am interested in the mind, it is to the degree that there appears now in Emma’s thinking a degree of mediation that elevates what we can heretofore recognize as a phenomenon of self-deception into a higher-order critical faculty. In the decision to become an active participant in the passion myth, Emma’s self-deception takes on a new classification, one that is specifically goal-oriented; and I find this phenomenon to be best illustrated by what Joshua Landy terms “lucid self-delusion,” a term Landy uses in the effort to circumscribe the phenomena by which a sort of character self-fashioning takes place. This entails going so far as to employ “deliberate and conscious falsification” of one’s own story (life); it is, according to Landy, “a resolution to live life as if it made sense, even if this means forcing it to do so; to act as if one had a fixed essence, even if this means constructing one.” 19 “Lucid self-delusion,” he writes, “becomes a value to fill the vacuum.” 20 I make this distinction in order to reveal a crucial change apropos of Emma’s set of beliefs surrounding the passion myth: whereas during the first and second phase of the mirror the myth was considered to be “real” (i.e.,
believed to be able to be obtained) in every sense of the word, it is now recognized by
Emma as a falsehood. The distinction comes into play in the fact that, ensconced as she is
within the troubadour ethos, Emma nonetheless continues to believe in the reality of the
myth. Therefore, instead of searching for the Ideal in itself, that is to say, instead of
looking or waiting for a perfect correlative, Emma will now (re)construct her life in order
to make it coincide with the Ideal. She will not wait nor wish; she will act, as though the
conflation of the reality of the one with the other, regardless of how it comes to be
constructed or serendipitous), is the answer to her problem. Put differently, instead of
waiting for fiction to coincide with reality, Emma will make reality coincide with fiction.
She will, in short, set up for herself the circumstances requisite in the passion myth.

This new form of activity can be seen in the reintroduction of Léon. In keeping
with the opera metaphor, let me term this Act I. The same process occurs: desire, in need
of an external embodiment, finds its external other, once again, in Léon. But there is a
difference, for the spell with Léon has already been broken. In order to remedy this,
Emma must convince herself that a love that was not altogether real, was, in fact, real. So
she must conjure up a Léon that corresponds with the lover of the passion narrative. To
do so, she remembers only select details: “She remembered the card games at the
pharmacist, the walk to the nurse, the poetry readings in the arbour, the tête-à-têtes by the
fireside—all the sadness of their love, so calm and so protracted, so discreet, so tender,
and that she had nevertheless forgotten,” conveniently leaving out the moments of
silence, of boredom, and of the fact that she could only love Léon when he was not
physically present.21 Through lucid self-delusion, Emma re-establishes Léon as a possible
embodiment for the Ideal. Up to this point, Léon has figured as a character whose function is not the satisfaction but the abolition of desire - for this is exactly the role he plays in the first part of the novel. In simply teasing desire, Léon had fulfilled his role. Here the pendulum oscillates. Moreover, Léon is the perfect candidate for this new love affair because he and Emma already have a similar, if not same, understanding that they are both using each other to enact their own fantasies. This is best illustrated in a passage preceding their meeting at the cathedral. Léon, stopping to buy flowers for Emma, cannot help but feel pleased with what the act reflects about himself: “It was the first time that he had bought flowers for a woman, and his breast, as he smelt them, swelled with pride, as if this homage that he meant for another had been reflected upon himself.”

In the same way that Emma sees herself reflected in acts of passion, so too does Léon see himself in acts that present him as the Romantic lover. This is a distinct change insofar as the first part of their relationship consisted of an engagement with Romantic topoi not in a conscious way (conscious insofar as the manipulation of these images is concerned), but with a genuine believability—a naive believability in which one sought sanctuary in the other’s belief of the same image. Now, however, both are purposefully enacting this particular language in order to achieve a goal: Léon’s being to “possess her” and Emma’s being to facilitate passion.

Emma expatiated on the frailty of earthly affections, and the eternal isolation that stifles the human heart.

To show off, or in a naive imitation of this melancholy which stirred his own, the young man declared that he had been dreadfully despondent. He was bored by the law, attracted by other vocations and his mother had never ceased to harass him in all her letters. As they talked, they stated the reasons for their respective unhappiness with more precision and they felt a shared exaltation in this growing
confidence. But they sometimes stopped short of revealing their thoughts in full, and then sought to invent a phrase that might nevertheless express it. She did not confess her passion for another; he did not say that he had forgotten her.24

This is nothing other than an audition made up of verbal foreplay; each must be sure of the other in their capacity for the enactment of the passion myth. Moreover, Emma and Léon’s relationship always being of an oral nature, it makes sense that this is done on a linguistic plane; they are, like the troubadours, using language as competition, as a form of stylized play.25 That is to say, whereas before this kind of wordplay was used in earnest, it is now done with calculation. Both of them are attempting to gain the upper hand over the other; it is a game of who has been more miserable and therefore more deserving of the Romantic nomenclature. Léon establishes himself as a satisfactory candidate for the enactment of the passion myth in “winning” the competitive tête-à-tête: “congratulating himself at having surmounted the obstacle, Leon watched her face out of the corner of his eye. It was like the sky when a gust of wind sweeps the clouds away.”26

In the conclusion of this exchange, we see clearly how Emma has transgressed into the third stage of the mirror: “For this was how they would have wished to be, each setting up an ideal to which they were now trying to adapt their past life.”27 Both are conscious of the falsity of the Ideal in the real world, but enact their roles according to the myth nonetheless. Emma, in order to live as an image, must have the external other see in her the Ideal. Léon’s victory establishes his place as a successful actor in that Emma believes his entire fictitious account. This allows Emma to exist as an image precisely because Léon has established his position to live for an image.28 They have set up, as it were, a symbiotic relationship.
We now come to Act II, which consists of the buildup to, and the act of, consummation, along with the forceful reintroduction of the leitmotiv of Time. To begin, I want to establish that Emma and Léon’s new relationship is of a fundamentally different nature than their last in that it now includes a physical dimension. Rather than putting off desire (though Emma will “attempt” this nonetheless), which acted as the mainstay of their first encounter, desire is now fulfilled. And it is as a result of this distinction that Time—the natural enemy of the Ideal—finds itself, once again, explicitly introduced, beginning with the following moment of cognizance: “Madame Bovary, as she listened to [Léon], wondered that she was so old. All these things reappearing before her seemed to expand her existence; it was like some sentimental immensity to which she returned.” Immediately this awareness of time passing qualifies this newfound affair as existing outside of novelistic time, another way, of course, to say that it exists inside time. This is further augmented by the literal intrusion of time: “They heard eight o’clock strike on the different towers that surrounded the Place Beauvoisine…They no longer spoke…” This new affair with Léon is of an opposite nature to that of eternal desire; nevertheless, Emma presses on, and in so doing attempts, as in her conversation moments before, to make the Ideal coincide with her past. And in a way, she succeeds. After the interruption, she forces the narrative forward by correcting a failure of the past; she says to Léon: “How is it that no one until now has ever expressed such sentiments to me?” This statement is a direct response to what set off the dismissal of the passion narrative in the first place: the recognition at the opera that: “no one on earth had loved her with such love.” Emma is constructing not only the perfect actor but the perfect dialogue as well:
“She told him again that their love was impossible, that they must remain, as before, like brother and sister to each other. Was she speaking seriously? No doubt Emma did not herself know, absorbed as she was by the charm of the seduction and the necessity of defending herself…”33 In so choosing to fashion a life for herself that corresponds so completely with the passion myth, Emma is losing the distinction between reality and fiction. She really is beginning to resemble the image itself; even her eyes, which once stood as proof of her conflation with the image, now seem devoid of life, appearing “icy and distant.”34 This marks the beginning of a series of corrections to her past life, the next being place.

In choosing the cathedral for their next meeting place, Emma is constructing her perfect setting for the Ideal to take place. For the cathedral represents all of the grandeur of the Ideal; it is a place wherein all of the religious iconography of the Ideal exists, a place that will foreground her convent education—the site of crystallization. In so choosing this place, Emma denies Léon’s subjective reality in favor of a hermetically exclusive ethos that was consolidated during her time in the convent and consummated during the waltz with the Viscount. No part of this equation involves Léon’s subjectivity. So much is evidenced by the fact that the cathedral holds no symbolic importance to him; and this is, above all, a symbolic meeting. All that is required of him in order that she may act as image is his desire for her, which is perfectly satisfactory for Léon by virtue of the fact that he himself finds the Ideal not, like Emma, in the iconography of Catholicism, but in the very way he sees himself reflected in the possession of Emma.
In choosing the cathedral, Emma is once again forcing her past to coincide with the Ideal in the present. But a secret rendezvous is only a small part of the larger acting passion myth. Emma must construct the other elements as well. Therefore, upon returning home, Emma writes a letter that displays another act of lucid self-delusion:

In the evening Emma wrote the clerk an interminable letter, in which she cancelled the rendezvous; all was over between them; they must not, for the sake of their happiness, meet again. But when the letter was finished, as she did not know Leon’s address, she was puzzled.

‘I’ll give it to him myself,’ she said; ‘he’ll come.’

In her decision to hand-deliver the letter, Emma is, consciously or subconsciously—presumably she herself does not know which—hoping against hope that desire will not be fulfilled. Of course, Emma knows this will fail, but in order to enact the passion myth Emma must at least make the attempt to postpone the fulfillment of desire indefinitely. To use her own words, it is “for the sake of their happiness” that this meeting must not occur. Since there are no obstacles stopping them from meeting, she is attempting to act as one herself. There is in all of this a tint of Aimeric de Peguilhan’s dialectic, which proposes an admixture of sense and folly. Sense insofar as there is at least a subconscious understanding that to meet is to make certain their own demise, and folly insofar as it is precisely because of this sense of certainty that one proceeds nevertheless. Therefore, in so making the attempt to cancel their rendezvous, Emma frees herself to keep their appointment.

The progression of events in the cathedral showcases the intricate balance that Emma maintains between sense and folly. What is of utmost importance is the
maintenance of a verisimilitude as it pertains to the passion myth. Emma plays the part of the virtuous woman in her reluctance to move forward with Léon who, exacerbated by the obstacle of her interest in all the tour guide has to say, only adds fuel to the Romantic fire. Léon, as the lover, suffers in the unconsummated promise of fulfillment; Emma, as the loved one, succeeds in its postponement. Ultimately, Emma’s attempt at suspending desire indefinitely will “fail,” for when presented with the option to see the steeple, that place which, for Flaubert, symbolizes the Romantic ethos, Léon will hastily leave, forcing Emma along with him.  

In reality, however, this is exactly what Emma desires. Emma enacts a form of coquetry with which to instigate passion and that Léon buys into unremittingly: “‘Oh Léon! Truly ... I don’t know ... if I should …’ She simpered. Then, in a serious tone: ‘It’s very improper, you know, it isn’t done’.” Like the original attempt to disrupt their meeting, Emma is here enacting another form of lucid self-delusion in setting up the illusion of resistance; for all it takes is the evocation of the Ideal, the evocation of the magic word “Paris” (“‘Everybody does it in Paris!’ replied the clerk”) for all resistance to stop. The incantatory “Paris,” we know, is a very loaded signifier, and hearing it from her lover is confirmation that the script of passion has been properly followed: “This, like a decisive argument, entirely convinced her. She had made up her mind.” It would appear as though everything has gone to plan, that Emma is not only in complete control of this narrative, but that her goal of unremitting passion is there for the taking. But the creation of passion does not, and cannot, circumvent the limitations of the Real. I repeat: to subject the Ideal to the Real is to subject the Ideal to the limiting forces
of the Real. There remains, as it were, the single element she cannot control: the passage of time.

The intrusion of Time and the end of Léon

The apotheosis of this second Act, and of the relationship between Emma and Léon writ large, is their sexual encounter in the cab. All of the self-deception and specifically crafted lead-ups have built up to this moment. But Time already establishes itself as a nuisance by virtue of the fact that a cab cannot be immediately hailed. And its presence only increases. In fact, Emma and Léon’s cab ride consummation is furiously accompanied and ultimately characterized by Time. It runs as follows:

“Where to, sir?” asked the coachman.
“Anywhere!” said Leon, pushing Emma into the cab.
And the lumbering machine set out.
It went down the Rue Grand-Pont, crossed the Place des Arts, the Quai Napoleon, the Pont Neuf, and stopped short before the statue of Pierre Corneille.
“Go on,” cried a voice that came from within.
The cab went on again, and as soon as it reached the Carrefour Lafayette, set off down-hill, and entered the railroad station at a gallop.
“No, straight on!” cried the same voice.
The cab came out by the gate, and soon having reached the Mall, trotted quietly beneath the elm-trees. The coachman wiped his brow, put his leather hat between his knees, and drove his carriage beyond the side alley by the meadow to the margin of the waters.
It went along by the river, along the towing-path paved with sharp pebbles, and for a long while in the direction of Oyssel, beyond the islands.
But suddenly it turned sideways across Quatremare, Sotteville, La Grande-Chaussee, the Rue d’Elbeuf, and made its third halt in front of the Jardin des Plantes.
“Get on, will you?” cried the voice more furiously.
And at once resuming its course, it passed by Saint-Sever, by the Quai des Curandiers, the Quai aux Meules, once more over the bridge, by the Place du Champ-de-Mars, and behind the hospital gardens, where old men in black coats were walking in the sun along the ivy-covered terraces. It went up the Boulevard
Bouvreuil, along the Boulevard Cauchoise, then the whole of Mont-Riboudet to the Deville hills.

It came back; and then, without any fixed plan or direction, wandered about at random. The cab was seen at Saint-Pol, at Lescure, at Mont Gargan, at La Rouge-Marc and Place du Gaillard-bois; in the Rue Maladrerie, Rue Dinanderie, before Saint-Romain, SaintVivien, Saint-Maclou, Saint-Nicaise—in front of the Customs, at the Basse-Vieille-Tour, the “Trois Pipes,” and the Cimetiere Monumental. From time to time the coachman on his seat cast despairing glances at the passing cafes. He could not understand what furious locomotive urge prevented these people from ever coming to a stop. Time and again he would try, but exclamations of anger would at once burst forth behind him. Then he would whip his two sweating nags, but he no longer bothered dodging bumps in the road; the cab would hook on to things on all sides but he couldn’t have cared less, demoralized as he was, almost weeping with thirst, fatigue and despair.41

Instead of the passionate erasure that followed the extreme temporality of the waltz—what, in essence, moved past time, this scene will seem locked inside of time. This is an encounter so far removed from the passionate Ideal that what appears in these lines is more of an attempt of two fugitives trying to outrun time than the coming together of two lovers; an event, moreover, that Emma envisions as the rapacious coming together of two lovers, an event that stops time. Like Emma and Rodolphe’s encounter at the agricultural fair, which was intruded upon at every interval by the Real, this event is consistently intruded upon by time. Furious cries, lumbering machines, sudden turns, multiple comings and goings - there is nothing static in this encounter: everything is moving, and moving violently. What is felt is not so much the passionate Ideal or, more accurately, the exemption of passion (such as what succeeded the waltz), but its converse. The moment of transcendence that appeared after the climax of the waltz was hidden from us, for it existed outside of language. Here, on the contrary, the entirety of the movement is detailed to us in painful detail, down to the sweating of the horses. If we are to
understand movement as being equal to time, then its equal in speed can only be matched by the stasis of its converse. What is more, this second Act ends with another indication of its overall failure: the same perversion of the Orphic myth that occurred at the end of Rodolphe and Emma’s tryst; only this time, it is Emma who fails to look back: “Then, at about six o’clock the carriage stopped in a back street of the Beauvoisine Quarter, and a woman got out, walking with her veil down and without looking back.” This reversal is significant for two reasons. The first has to do with the fact that the entirety of Emma’s relationship with Léon post-opera has been a correction of Emma’s past, with the larger goal of attempting to make it coincide with the narrative structure of the Ideal. It is significant, then, that Emma mimics, rather than reverses, Rodolphe’s failure to turn around after their last encounter. The second piece of significance lies in what this decision reveals about Emma’s progression into the realization of the Ideal. She intuitively perceives that something about this encounter was wrong. Rather than feel elation, she appears to feel a sense of shame: “…in her heart she felt already that cowardly docility that is for some women at once the chastisement and atonement of adultery.” I do not draw attention to this to cast judgement, or to qualify the adulterous decision as wrong or right, but rather to highlight that there has been some form of knowledge gained. In order to leave behind the image, one must be able to contemplate it and recognize it for what it is. The presence of Time as antithesis has, therefore, revealed a chink in the image of the Ideal.

Time unremittingly continues to loom over and operate on Emma. I mentioned earlier the instance of Emma’s annoyance at the probability of Charles’ forgiveness
regarding the debt; it is worth revisiting the scene in detail in order to show how her exasperation is a direct correlation to the role of time. Time succeeds in the place where Charles fails, for what is at stake in the assumed forgiveness is more than a failed character role. Charles’ forgiveness signals that things will continue; that they will continue, moreover, exactly as they have been. And this inescapability, the thought that her life will progress in the same empty manner, is nothing less than anathema to Emma: “The thought of Bovary’s magnanimity exasperated her. He was bound to find out the catastrophe, whether she confessed or not, now, soon, or tomorrow; so there was no escape from the horrible scene.” That there is “no escape”—this is what exasperates Emma. Time locks Emma within an inexhaustible circularity. This fear is beautifully captured in the description of Binet working at his lathe:

He was alone in his garret, busily copying in wood one of those indescribable bits of ivory, composed of crescents, of spheres hollowed out one within the other, the whole as straight as an obelisk, and of no use whatever; and he was beginning on the last piece— he was nearing his goal!

The absolute futility and uselessness of life in Yonville is captured in this first section. Binet has been working tirelessly and throughout the novel at his lathe, creating something full of beautiful intricacies that will have “no use whatever.” Compare this to Emma’s own goal throughout the novel and the employment of intricacies and filigree that bring her no closer to her Ideal life than when she started. It is no great wonder, then, that Emma wishes to remove herself body and soul from not only the monotony of life here but the conditions that make it possible. The passage continues as follows:
In the twilight of the workshop the white dust was flying from his tools like a shower of sparks under the hoofs of a galloping horse; the two wheels were turning, droning; Binet smiled, his chin lowered, his nostrils distended.\textsuperscript{47}

Let me bring attention to the “galloping horse” and “turning wheels,” both motifs used to mark time passing. In this case, however, it is time and movement towards a useless goal. The ferocity of the sparks flying from the galloping horse is made moot by the realization that they are being used to describe two wheels locked in a circular motion. And it is this cyclical pattern that perfectly alludes to Emma’s own cycle of lovers - each starting off with pace, each running into the same obstacle, and each ending in the same way, only for the cycle to begin again. The passage concludes with:

He seemed lost in the state of complete bliss that only the most menial tasks can offer: distracting the mind by easily overcome obstacles, they satisfy it completely, leading to a fulfilled achievement that leaves no room for dreams beyond.\textsuperscript{48}

Here the “easily overcome obstacl[e]” is presented in sharp contradistinction to the ultimate obstacle in the passion myth. For the passion myth does not nourish itself on obstacles traversed but in their insurmountability. In searching for the insurmountable object—\textit{death}—that which is to suspend desire permanently, Emma’s life is filled with a hardship that Binet adroitly evades. Binet represents a life free from passion, free from “dreams beyond”—a life that is, in short, incompatible with Emma’s lot in life. Such is the realization that Emma moves closer and closer to realizing. She is completely aware of what may be termed the absurdity of her desire, but the power to deceive oneself is still holding a monopoly over Emma, and so long as Emma is in control of the passion narrative, the lucid self-delusion necessary to continue living as image may continue.
Emma’s efforts to self-fashion a narrative out of her life are simultaneously attacks against time. Remembering only certain details about people and places, correcting past failures, ensuring specific outcomes—all of these are attempts to create a world outside of the Real. So long as she remains the architect she can, to a degree, circumvent the limitations of the world she inhabits. This is why it is the passion myth, this time enacted by Léon, that brings her back to the sober realization that the sublimity of the Ideal is incompatible with the reality of life. When Homais interrupts Léon’s visit to see Emma, the pharmacist encourages Léon to leave the “meeting” be and join him in going to Bridoux’. In this moment, Léon is perfectly aware that to go with Homais is an unpardonable offense—an effrontery to Emma, who is waiting at the hotel. And yet he goes anyway—not out of spite, but “out of cowardice, out of stupidity, out of that undefinable necessity that leads us towards those actions we are most set against…”49 In performing his own act of obstacle love, Léon enacts a reversal of roles that has a shattering effect, for no longer is Emma in the position of the loved one, but rather in the place of the lover—waiting, wondering, out of control:

She had just left in exasperation. She detested him now. His failure to come as he had promised she took as an insult, and she looked for other reasons for separating from him: he was incapable of heroism, weak, banal, more spiritless than a woman, avaricious, and timorous as well.50 There is no limit to Emma’s self-deceit, but only insofar as she is in control. So important is the element of control that she even entertains the idea of having him followed.51 Once the illusion is broken, however, it cannot be repaired. “One must not touch one’s idols,” Flaubert writes, “a little of the gilt always comes off on one’s fingers.”52 What Flaubert
leaves out in this maxim is that one learns something in this act of divesting, and not only about one’s idol, but about oneself, as well. Emma’s admonition of Léon, like her earlier disavowal of the passion myth, marks another line that cannot be crossed. And it is because Emma was alone, left with time to contemplate her position, that she ultimately leaves behind another facet of the image’s reflection. Evidence of this occurs one day after they part company:

One day, when they had parted early and she was returning alone along the boulevard, she saw the walls of her convent; she sat down on a bench in the shade of the elms. How calm her life had been in those days! How she envied her first undefinable sentiments of love which she had tried to construct from the books she read.

The first months of her marriage, her rides in the forest, the viscount who had waltzed with her, and Lagardy singing, all repassed before her eyes . . . And Leon suddenly appeared to her as far off as the others.

“I do love him!” she said to herself.

No matter! She was not happy, she never had been. Why was her life so unsatisfactory, why did everything she leaned on instantly rot and give way? . . . But suppose there existed somewhere some one strong and beautiful, a man of valor, passionate yet refined, the heart of a poet in the form of an angel, a bronze stringed lyre, playing elegiac epithalamia to the heavens, why might she not someday happen on him? What a vain thought! Besides, nothing was worth the trouble of seeking it; everything was a lie. Every smile concealed a yawn of boredom, every joy a curse, every pleasure its own disgust, and the sweetest kisses left upon your lips only the unattainable desire for a greater delight.53

This passage reveals just how far Emma has come in recognizing her own goal. For one, she admits to the attempt to construct her first sentiments of love based on her reading. But the reflection of the Ideal still holds sway. There is another act of selective memory; she remembers only the first months of marriage, before the illusion was broken, for example, and the beautiful performance of Legardy while omitting the cry of the actress that causes her to recognize the incompatibility of the passions with her lot in life. This,
like times previous, paints Léon in a positive light once again. She convinces herself she actually loves him, but only for a moment. This selective memory is a false movement, and she now recognizes it. “No matter!” none of this is enough, the Ideal remains impenetrable. That is until she returns it to its abstracted form. The semi self-awareness of this act of self-reflexivity showcases the progress Emma has made apropos of the mirror progression, for only in the third stage can one both renounce and avow the existence of the Ideal in the same breath. Despite the fact that “everything she lean[s] on instantly rot[s] and give[s] way,” Emma still dreams of the unknown man who is to take her away from reality. Emma is aware that this kind of love is a “vain thought,” that “nothing was worth the trouble of seeking it,” and that “everything was a lie.” Moreover, there is a recognition that every pleasure is “only the unattainable desire for a greater delight.” Emma has finally recognized that no earthly lover can ever grant her what she desires. She is finally able to articulate exactly what it is she desires - not in fragments, as before, but with perfect articulation: “a man of valor, passionate yet refined, the heart of a poet in the form of an angel, a bronze stringed lyre, playing elegiac epithalamia to the heavens.” Emma’s Ideal lover is one who is able to transport her to the sublime and sings a lament for her crossing over. This poetic flight from reality is then broken by the convent bell, and time once again asserts itself as antithesis: “A coarse metallic rattle sounded around her, and the convent bell struck four. And it seemed to her that she had been sitting on that bench since the beginning of time. But an infinity of time can be compressed into a minute like a crowd of people into a small space.” Emma cannot escape reality, even by turning inward. Time is always present to check the Ideal.
Emma’s liaison with Léon draws to a close. It has ended with the same feeling that brought about the end of her relationship with Rodolphe, and that continues to constitute her relationship with Charles: “She was as sick of him as he was weary of her. Emma found again in adultery all the platitudes of marriage.” The circularity of Emma’s life is simply inescapable. There is no external lover that can inhabit all the particulars of the passionate Ideal. Emma thus returns to dreams, the in-between of reality and death, where one can still live, however fleetingly, in the Ideal. She returns to the imaginary man of her dreams:

...a phantom fashioned out of her most ardent memories, of her favorite books, her strongest desires, and at last he became so real, so tangible, that her heart beat wildly in awe and admiration, though unable to see him distinctly, for, like a god, he was hidden beneath the abundance of his attributes. He dwelt in that azure land where silken ladders swung from balconies in the moonlight, beneath a flowerscented breeze. She felt him near her; he was coming and would ravish her entire being in a kiss. Then she would fall back to earth again shattered; for these vague ecstasies of imaginary love, would exhaust her more than the wildest orgies.

As with the most recent iteration of the imagined lover, this one’s role is crystal clear: to “ravish her entire being in a kiss.” Emma, above all, desires the obliteration of the self. Her Ideal is in full view, and it is closer than ever. The phantom is the lucid conglomerate of all the elements that have pricked her desire. And this man, whose likeness mirrors the troubadourian unknown who bestows an unknown good, becomes so real that “[s]he would have liked not to be alive, or to be always asleep.” She feels him “near her,” which is appropriate considering how close we are to Emma’s suicide. Moreover, something to note: the verb “shattered,” which conjures up an image of a mirror. Emma is tantalizingly close to the realization that it is her own reflection that she
sees in the mirror, but she is not quite there. The mirror shatters before she has a chance
to “see him distinctly.” Time, as a constituent of the Real, is not, on its own, strong
eough to cause Emma to move past the image. It is not until the Material overburdens
Emma, an event, moreover, that is predicated upon coming face to face with a total
representation of the Real, that her self-deception will make way for revelation.

II. The Gratuitous Existence of the Material and the Movement Beyond the
Corporeal

The contemplation of the corporeal and the Real made flesh

To come to the realization that the image of the Ideal is false means nothing if one
cannot learn to move past it; even Narcissus was able to see past his solipsistic auto-
eroticism and recognize that the image he saw reflected back was false. I began this
chapter by stating that the realization of the impossibility of attainment is perilous. To
repeat Goldin, “once enlightened, unless [the lover] passes beyond the mirror [they] will
suffer the death that befell Narcissus.”59 The break from Léon has caused Emma to
retreat, wholeheartedly, into the image. She has foregone any hope to realize the Ideal in
an external embodiment, and has created for herself, like Narcissus, her own
phantasmagoria to which she devotes all her time. Unless Emma can successfully ascend
past this image, this spark of divine knowledge that she felt in the brief encounter with
the Ideal, she will perish.
Fifteenth century Florentine Platonist Marsilio Ficino evokes a different myth, that of Prometheus, in order to illustrate a phenomenon that mirrors Emma’s own: “the soul striving for truth but tormented by reason.” For Ficino, the titan Prometheus symbolizes “an image of the human soul striving for the supreme truth,” and the torture that this taste of supreme knowledge gives rise to. Speaking on Ficino’s employment of Prometheus, art historian Olga Raggio writes: “It is after having stolen one beam of the celestial light and having reached the heights of contemplation that the soul feels as if fastened by chains and ‘beset by the continuous gnawing of inquiry, the most ravenous of vultures.’” It is “only death,” she writes, that “can release [man’s] bonds and carry [man] to the source of all knowledge, where he ‘will be entirely filled with the whole light.’”

The burden of having come into contact with the Ideal and not being able to realize it in the external world casts into sharp relief the fact that we are imprisoned in our own material bodies. The corporeal, then, comes to represent the antithesis of the incorporeal—that which characterizes a higher form of knowledge. And it is only by coming to understand something that one may move beyond it. It is for this reason that I invoke Ficino, because according to his metaphysics, “contemplative knowledge is always connected with an internal overcoming of external things, i.e., with a separation of the soul from the body.” In order for Emma to overcome the image—the reflection in the pond—she must come face to face with it; she must overcome it through exposure and contemplation. Let me say also that Flaubert, like Ficino, found certain immutable truths within the myths of Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Apropos of this Lowe concludes that “[a]ll these medieval as well as Classical notations have been used by
Flaubert to deepen and enrich the narrative with motifs which appeal in secret to memories, fears, prejudices, superstitions, artistic traditions, and make their effect unknown to the reader. Flaubert’s employment of myth and troubadour motifs finds its zenith in the unmistakable mythical character of the blind man, a character who appears in sharp contradistinction to the verisimilitude of all the other characters in *Madame Bovary*, a character abrasively monstrous in his appearance:

There was a wretched creature on the hillside, who would wander about with his stick right in the midst of the carriages. A mass of rags covered his shoulders, and an old staved-in beaver hat, shaped like a basin, hid his face; but when he took it off he revealed two gaping bloody orbits in the place of eyelids. The flesh hung in red strips; and from them flowed a liquid which congealed into green scales reaching down his nose with its black nostrils, which kept sniffing convulsively. To speak to you he threw back his head with an idiotic laugh;—then his bluish eyeballs, rolling round and round, would rub against an open wound near the temples.

It is for a very specific reason that we are introduced to this creature via a foregrounding of his physical appearance. What this man represents is the body in its painful reality, that is to say a body which is bereft of any faculty of self-deception; it is the body in its singular material (that is, tangible), grotesque, and decaying state. To come into contact with this body is to be accosted by an overwhelming sensation of vulgarity and inescapability; it is in the very presence of the blind man that one is faced, or rather *reminded*, of a reality about the body: that we are all, despite our deepest illusions, imprisoned in something that is ultimately detached of any sort of mythical substance, subject to effects that we have no control over. The blind man, as it were, represents a totality, a physical embodiment of the Real within a single form. And being in contiguity with the Real to such a degree as she finds herself that day in the *Hirondelle* has a
visceral impact on Emma. There is something about this contact with the man that touches Emma profoundly:

His voice, at first weak and quavering, would grow sharp. It lingered into the night like an inarticulate lament of some vague despair; and, heard through the jingling of the horses’ bells, the murmuring of the trees, and the rumble of the empty coach, it had something so distant and sad that it filled Emma with dread.  

There is in the pathos-laden song he sings something prophetic, something that Emma recognizes—not so much in an outward, immediately recognizable sense, as with the aria sung by the opera prima donna, but in a more muted sense, as though something interior to her has been engaged, and engaged in a way that awakens a deep sense of dread. Like the blind prophet Tiresias (who not only bears a striking resemblance to the blind man insofar as he is blind, but also by virtue of the fact that they are both characteristically serpentine), the blind man offers up a warning. Like a seed, this warning takes root deep within Emma’s psyche, drawing nourishment from each successive failure and tended patiently by Time, its tendrils slowly weaving and taking hold of her. The unrest this encounter causes is even more marked during their second meeting where, watching him put on “his act,” Emma is overcome:

The blind man squatted down on his haunches with his head thrown back, and rolling his greenish eyes and sticking out his tongue, he rubbed his stomach with both hands while uttering a sort of low howl like a famished dog. Emma, overcome with disgust, threw him a five-franc piece over her shoulder. It was all her fortune. It seemed like a grand thing to her to throw it away like this.

Emma is face to face with a strain of the deeply human—the grotesque, the bodily. It is a sobering experience, to say the least, in that it does not present a way out—physical or mental. Emma is forced to see this presentation of a body that is completely bereft of any
Romantic signifier, she cannot see it for anything other than what it is; and in the act of throwing her last remaining “fortune” to this representation of what cannot last, i.e., the worldly, Emma’s final means of escape from the Real is exhausted. Emma, face to face with the blind man, is face to face with the reality of the futility of her entire endeavor.

What follows this second encounter with the blind man is the culmination of a phenomenon that has, like the seed, been steadily growing and making itself felt since the beginning of the novel; this is the presence of the Material. The presence of the Material, as I have shown, has been slowly infiltrating each of Emma’s Romantic endeavors. Whether the presence of the Material is explicitly tied to Emma’s Romantic ethos (such as during the night at La Vaubyessard), pervasive (as during the agricultural fair), or seemingly gratuitous (the countless descriptions of household objects), the presence of the Material is never wholly absent. Bersani calls this “a kind of nonstructurable randomness” in Flaubert’s writing, writing that gives “stylistic emphasis to dramatically ‘unnecessary’ passages.”69 The amount of attention given to the sheer indiscriminate existence of things—seemingly random and unimportant objects—in the novel is notable. For these objects do more than simply take up space: they play a role. Time has stripped Emma of the hope of finding an embodiment of the Ideal; the Real, finding its embodiment in the blind man, has stripped Emma of a means to escape by reminding her that she is trapped within a body; with all of Emma’s defenses down, all that is left before the final recognition of the mirror is for the Material to overburden Emma.
Clarity

I have heretofore outlined the necessary requisites for transcendence: liberation from the conditions of time and space, a form of lucid self-delusion whereby one escapes into the world of the self, the collision, and subsequent effacement of the thesis-antithesis dyad via the violent erasure of the one through the other, and a recognition of the Ideal as it pertains to the idiosyncrasies of the individual (this done through symbol and language in its most generalized form: the cliché). In order to achieve transcendence, the individual must successfully progress through each stage of the mirror and ultimately leave behind the mirror entirely. The first stage of the mirror saw the calcification of the Ideal: what is, in essence, an ideal way of being in an ideal world. Emma found this totality through a series of abstract Romantic and sentimental fragments and found their reality during a night at La Vaubyessard, during which she experienced, for herself, a moment wherein she was at one with the Ideal. Like Prometheus, she was able to steal away a moment of pure sublimity, one in which she experienced pure erasure. The second phase of the mirror saw Emma attempting to replicate this moment by projecting the Ideal onto an external other existing in the real world. The repeated failure of this endeavor caused her to lament her situation, citing the deceptive nature of the Ideal as the reason for this defeat and her misery. This, in turn, projected Emma into the third stage of the mirror, where one realizes the truth of the Ideal, namely, that it is inaccessible in this life. This realization first took shape during the opera, where Emma accused fictitious representations of the Ideal for giving rise to a false belief that they exist in the real world. Ultimately, this admonition was not enough to break the spell. Like the
troubadours, Emma made for herself a place wherein the Ideal is both believed and given the lie. Here she dwelt in the paradoxical in-between, a place of sense and folly, convincing herself that the Ideal, despite the harm it engenders, is nonetheless worth devoting her life to. In the attempt to procure for herself a version of the Ideal that is lasting, Emma took an active role and delved into a solipsistic world of lucid self-delusion whereby she attempted to orchestrate the passion myth on her terms. Ultimately, she was defeated by a tripartite onslaught of which I have thus far illustrated the effect of the two, Time and the Real, and began to hint at the role of the third, the Material.

I use the word “defeat” not without reservation. Although containing within it a negative connotation, it should not be viewed as an altogether negative phenomenon. Commenting on the theme of character progression in Flaubert’s work—more specifically, a kind of progression that is stultified by a world antithetical to the kind of progression the character seeks—Franco Moretti, channeling Lukáč, writes: “Defeat—being crushed by the brute force of reality—thereby becomes the precondition of subjectivity; of a subjectivity, needless to say, that no longer intends to objectify itself in the external world, since ‘when the interiority is like a cosmos, it is self-sufficient, at rest with itself.’ Emma has been doomed from the beginning. The vision she has for the world simply cannot exist in the temporality of the world she inhabits. And yet, she perseveres. “You must go on, I can't go on. I'll go on”71; perhaps Samuel Beckett says it best, for I can think of no better way to capture Emma’s tenacity. One final defeat awaits Emma, and with it, Emma’s realization of transcendent infinity.
This final defeat is the overwhelming presence of the Material, a defeat which is ushered in by the collapse of Emma’s grip on her financial affairs. The debt she has heretofore accrued has reached an all-time high, and it is time to pay back the money she owes. Unable to provide recompense, Maître Hareng, the bailiff, and two assistants are sent to Emma’s home in order to take inventory for the upcoming seizure of assets. The ransacking of her home sends Emma into a fit of terror. She sees her entire world, and all the things that make it up infiltrated before her eyes:

…they counted the plates, the saucepans, the chairs, the candlesticks, and in the bedroom all the nick-nacks on the wall shelf. They examined her dresses, the linen, the dressing-room; and her whole existence, to its most intimate details, was stretched out like a cadaver in an autopsy before the eyes of these three men.  

The sacred state of her inner world has been defiled. It no longer belongs to her; the ivory tower has been breached. Then the unthinkable occurs:

‘Ah! A correspondence!’ said Maître Hareng, with a discrete smile. ‘But allow me! for I must make sure the box contains nothing else.’ And he tipped the papers lightly, as if to let the napoleons fall out. This made her furious, to see this coarse hand, with red moist fingers like slugs, touching these pages against which her heart had beaten.

The Real has inextricably commingled with the Ideal through a defilement of the Material; no longer do these tokens of the Romantic exist in a world apart; they no longer belong to her alone: “Everything, within herself and without, was abandoning her.”

This sets off a chain reaction. In order to save her world, she haphazardly sets off to find the money she needs to pay off her debts. It is around this time that she runs into the blind man, whose grotesque appearance, I have argued, further calcifies the realization that she is trapped in a temporal world, devoid of the Ideal. Even Binet’s lathe makes a
reappearance, or so she thinks. When Mére Rollet begins to spin flax, an angered Emma tells her: ‘‘Please, stop that!’ she murmured, fancying she heard Binet’s lathe.’’ Most importantly, what this quest to save the material form of the Ideal does is bring her back to each of her lovers. And it is specifically in their failure to produce material (in this case, however many francs she needs) that the memories of their Romantic qualifications are completely erased. The Material is part and parcel of the Romantic ethos. Everyone has failed her. Her last remaining recourse is to return to Rodolphe.

In the buildup to seeing Rodolphe, Emma feels the presentiments of her first love rushing back: ‘‘And as she went on she recognized the thickets, the trees, the sea-rushes on the hill, the chateau beyond. All the sensations of her first love came back to her, and her poor oppressed heart expanded in the warmth of this tenderness.’’ Upon seeing Rodolphe, Emma is not fooled but rather allows herself to be taken in by his excuse for abandonment. She understands that in order to obtain her goal, she must play a role. And Emma, as image, is irresistible. Rodolphe is completely taken in, ‘‘Oh, forgive me! You are the only one who really pleases me. I was a fool, a wicked fool! I love you, I’ll always love you! What is the matter? Tell me…’’ This continues up until Emma asks for the money, a passage in which Flaubert cannot help but step in via the narrator’s intervention in order to remind us that the Material is the enemy of passion: ‘‘a demand for money being, of all the winds that blow upon love, the coldest and most destructive.’’ Because of Rodolphe’s denial, a denial coming not from Emma’s failure, but simply from the fact that he does not have the money, Emma begins furiously naming objects in the room along with their estimated value:
‘But when one is so poor one doesn’t have silver on the butt of one’s gun. One doesn’t buy a clock inlaid with tortoiseshell,’ she went on, pointing to the Boulle clock, ‘nor silver-gilt whistles for one’s whips,’ and she touched them, ‘nor charms for one’s watch. Oh, he has all he needs! even a liqueur-stand in his bedroom; for you pamper yourself, you live well. You have a chateau, farms, woods; you go hunting; you travel to Paris. Why, if it were but that,’ she cried, taking up two cuff-links from the mantelpiece, ‘even for the least of these trifles, one could get money . . . Oh, I don’t want anything from you; you can keep them!’

Love and materiality are enmeshed in a struggle for power; motions of love are being checked by materiality, apologies by fury, the sublime by the Real. To repeat Gaultier:

Whichever manifestation of reality one may consider, it will appear that this form, whatever it may be, owes its existence to a state of antagonism between two tendencies of one and the same force...thus reality is here indeed a compromise between two forces, of which one tends to convert into object—inanimate matter, unconscious spontaneity or automatism—the entire substance of Being or of the self, of which the other tends to transform into subject—mirror, eye, look, contemplation—all this same substance of Being or the self.

The simultaneity of these two modes of action, with no apparent winner, finally cancel each other out: the truth about passion—true mythical passion—the Kierkegaardian paradox, is about to emerge.

If on entering Rodolphe’s chateau Emma feels all of those presentiments of love enveloping her body, she feels just the opposite upon exiting. Leaving Rodolphe’s chateau, Emma is accosted, unremittingly, by the material world:

She went out. The walls trembled, the ceiling was crushing her, and she passed back through the long alley, stumbling against the heaps of dead leaves scattered by the wind. At last she reached the low hedge in front of the gate; she broke her nails against the lock in her haste to open it. Then a hundred paces beyond, breathless, almost falling, she stopped. And now turning round, she once more saw the impassive chateau, with the park, the gardens, the three courts, and all the windows of the façade.
Both worlds—Ideal and Real—are crushing her, and she can only feel herself alive through the machinations of her arteries: “She remained lost in stupor, and only conscious of herself through the beating of her arteries, that seemed to burst forth like a deafening music filling all the fields.”

Passion has given way to reality and reality to passion. Violence emerges:

The earth beneath her feet was more yielding than the sea, and the furrows seemed to her immense brown waves breaking into foam. All the memories and ideas that crowded her head seemed to explode at once like a thousand pieces of fireworks. She saw her father, Lheureux’s closet, their room at home, another landscape. Madness was coming upon her; she grew afraid, and managed to recover herself, in a confused way, it is true, for she did not remember the cause of her dreadful confusion, namely the money. She suffered only in her love, and felt her soul escaping from her in this memory, as wounded men, dying, feel their life ebb from their bleeding wounds.

The entire reality of the place vanishes, and Emma is stunned by the feeling of reality giving way. Night, the harbinger of passion, is falling around her as all the fragments of Emma’s Ideal make themselves violently felt: chaos, storm, madness. Emma’s reality has confounded itself with her fiction. All of the emotions she wished to feel throughout her life are coming upon her in a sort of “madness.” An eruption of homogeneity crashes over her, each memory and idea is felt at once. She recovers herself to find that all other worries have fallen to the wayside. A single thought remains: her suffering in love - what I have come to define, along with Hugo, Stendhal, De Rougemont, and others, as passion. Emma’s last remaining feelings are concerned only with the Ideal; and it is the Ideal world that her soul escapes to:

Suddenly it seemed to her that fiery spheres were exploding in the air like bullets when they strike, and were whirling, whirling, to melt at last upon the snow
between the branches of the trees. In the midst of each of them appeared the face of Rodolphe. They multiplied and drew near, they penetrated her.84

No longer is she wishing, as on that night at La Vaubyessard—where the passionate Ideal was first felt—is all its sublimity—to penetrate the lives of others; in this moment she has become the others: complete identification with the Ideal has occurred.85 And out of this chaos - sanguinity: nonpareil clarity: “Now her plight, like an abyss, loomed before her. She was panting as if her heart would burst. Then in an ecstasy of heroism, that made her almost joyous, she ran down the hill, crossed the cowplank, the footpath, the alley, the market, and reached the pharmacy.”86 Value A: the Material (at its zenith with the debt) has collided with value B: the Romantic (at its height in this chaotic moment) bringing about, in their mutual destruction, value C: recognition of the truth of the Ideal. This recognition appears to Emma as an epiphany. And I want to highlight that this is not simply an intuitive perception. There is a somatic element at play; something has quite literally acted upon her. She feels these fiery spheres (the pure Ideal) penetrate her, and she is left “panting as if her heart would burst.” Materiality and Time, as constituents of the Real, have come together in such a way as to procure a revolutionary change of perspective and state of Being in the world.87 Without the intervention of the Real, Emma, as I hope to have shown by now, would be perfectly content to continue in the way that she has within the limitations of the world; transcendence would not occur—she would continue, like Narcissus, to engage with the Ideal without ever coming to know it as more than a simple reflection, without knowing the truth of it. Emma now knows what she must do in order to transcend the limitations of this world. In order to obtain what is,
by nature, *inaccessible* in this world, Emma must transcend the limitations of the Real, of
the body. She has decided on suicide. And it is with a keen sense of clarity that she
moves towards Homais’ Capharnaüm, whose very name (meaning a disorderly
accumulation of objects) stands for the Material, par excellence. Upon reaching the
pharmacy, Emma finds Justin, who “looked at her, astonished at the pallor of her face,
which stood out white against the black background of the night. She seemed to him
extraordinarily beautiful and majestic as a phantom.” More than signaling the upcoming
death of Madame Bovary, her likeness to a phantom also points to a much larger
identification. The phantom that Emma imagines when writing to Léon—the abstract
form she gives to the Ideal—is now perfectly mirrored in Emma, who appears as a
phantom herself. Emma and the Ideal have merged into one consubstantial being. Emma
is no longer choosing to live her life for or as the image; she now *is* the image. Emma and
Justin enter the Capharnaüm in search of the “bottle of blue glass sealed with yellow wax,
that contains a white powder carefully marked Dangerous!” “The key turned in the
lock, and she went straight to the third shelf, so well did her memory guide her, seized the
blue jar, tore out the cork, plunged in her hand, and withdrawing it full of white powder,
she ate it greedily.” The Romantic blue of the jar sealed by the Material yellow of the
wax: all of the play of colors and of contrasting symbols are encapsulated in this single
container: blue and yellow—absolute Romance and absolute reality—together, with the
secret desire of passion, *death*, at its center.
A final look in the mirror

Emma, on her deathbed and past the point of no return, takes one last look at herself in the mirror:

In fact, she looked around her slowly, as one awakening from a dream; then in a distinct voice she asked for her mirror, and remained bent over it for some time, until big tears fell from her eyes. Then she turned away her head with a sigh and fell back upon the pillows.\textsuperscript{91}

Full identification with the Ideal leads her to recognize in her reflection what it is that instinctively prompted her to greedily devour the arsenic, a desire for what she has yearned for her entire life: death. This is not to say, however, that this is in some form or another the grand anagnorisis of the novel (the true nature of passion’s relationship to death has already been revealed to Emma outside of Rodolphe’s chateau), for nothing new is discovered. This is, rather, a moment of confirmation. Emma’s silent contemplation of her reflection means death is no longer abstracted, hidden, elusive; it is present, \textit{real}, and operating on her, and the only way for her to truly recognize death’s role in the Ideal is through the selfsame symbol that has led her through the various stages of progressions, a mirror. The greedy devouring of the arsenic thereby becomes situated among the larger looming narrative of Passion. Seeing the physical effects of the arsenic through the mirror becomes a way to unite the abstract and the Real. Moreover, as the previous Chapters have sought to iterate, the truth of passion completely evades language; as such, we are left with no description of what is mirrored back. The poison has begun to take effect:

Her chest soon began heaving rapidly; the whole of her tongue protruded from her mouth; her eyes, as they rolled, grew paler, like the two globes of a lamp that is going out, so that one might have thought her already dead but for the fearful
labouring of her ribs, shaken by violent breathing, as if the soul were struggling to free itself.\textsuperscript{92}

The transcendence that is about to occur is presaged by an acute description of the breakdown of the Real. What is more, an empirical observation of these symptoms recalls a scene witnessed earlier: that of the blind man’s act. The posture of Emma amid her convulsions, the protruding tongue, the attention to the ribs, the violent breathing, and the rolling eyes - both scenes mirror one another enough to stop and consider the connection, especially since the blind man appears just as the death rattle is at its strongest, making himself known, moreover, through wooden shoes: “Suddenly from the pavement outside came the loud noise of wooden shoes and the clattering of a stick; and a voice rose—a raucous voice—that sang.”\textsuperscript{93} “Un besoin classique de la symétrie,” writes Don Demorest of Flaubert in \textit{L’Expression figurée et symbolique dans l’œuvre de Gustave Flaubert}\textsuperscript{94}— Flaubert will make sure that the grotesque reality of the world is present until the very end, reminding Emma that passion cannot survive in this world. The song the blind man sings, Lowe suggests, “resumes Emma’s life.”\textsuperscript{95} The blind man, more than just a memento mori, therefore assumes his place as composer and singer of the troubadour \textit{vidas}. Emma’s life, at its end, shall be told in just the same way as those lives of Romantic heroes that she devoured at the beginning of her life: through lyric poetry—thus crystallizing her life as a reflection of her own Ideal. “Emma’s shriek of ironic laughter shows that she has understood the song,” affirms Lowe.\textsuperscript{96} And this affirmation, in turn, affirms the entire trajectory of Emma’s life as it pertains to the progression of the mirror phases:
Often the heat of a summer’s day
Makes a young girl dream her heart away.

Here is the first phase: Emma in the convent. The crystallization of the Ideal vis-à-vis her poetic flights from reality—those that have made a world of fiction more real than reality—takes root within the psyche.

To gather up all the new-cut stalks
Of wheat left by the scythe’s cold swing.

This second stanza reflects a young and naive girl gathering experience: the second phase of the mirror. She walks with blinders, eyes focused solely on what she believes is the manifestation of the Ideal, blind to the rest of the world and all its warnings and misgivings.

Nanette bends over as she walks
Toward the furrows from where they spring.97

The third phase: hard realization that she is stranded, stripped, and vulnerable. But, above all, it is the devastating realization—one that has been building—that Emma recognizes herself, not as a woman belonging to that class that she aspired to be a part of (ball gowns, fantastic waltzes, blinding ornamentation, all the luxuries that the color yellow comes to signify), but as wearing “the peasant garb worn by Nanette”; that the Ideal was never for the taking in this world, that her lot in life was inescapable.98

To hear Emma’s own vida sung exasperates her, and as the lyrical story ends, so too does her life.99 The cycle is complete; Emma, immortalized in song, in that form that allowed for the expression of passion in the first place, has transcended into that world that is beyond our own. “She has ceased to exist.”100
III. Conclusion

On novelistic death

I offer by way of conclusion a few closing reflections on death in the Romantic novel and how *Madame Bovary*, specifically, is situated within the greater context of death and the Ideal. Much of what is at the heart of Romantic philosophy is the discussion of the great Romantic chimera (chimère): the result of an emblematic struggle between two diametrically opposed forces, reality and the imagination. In a way, the entirety of *Madame Bovary* could perhaps be distilled into that very phrase: the struggle between self-deceptive imagination and reality. Bersani points out that there exists a state of indefiniteness in this relationship, and that this is a problem, for the battle between the two cannot go on indefinitely. What, then, is the solution? Or, at the very least, what is the solution in *Madame Bovary*? In the Introduction, I put forth a cursory analysis of three different types of Romantic death as a response to this problem, arguing that the set of circumstances surrounding the protagonist's death reveal, to a large degree, the set of beliefs surrounding the dialectic of passionate love writ large. In keeping with this analysis, I hereby conclude that it is the *how* of the death of Emma Bovary that is of utmost importance. It is how Emma dies that serves to dictate which category of Romantic ethos *Madame Bovary* belongs to. A redeeming death á la Julie, Virginie, or Atala? … A death of sorrow or escape that would seat her alongside Corinne, Werther, or even Anna Karenina? … Or maybe something else entirely? This may seem arbitrary and
without purpose, but in truth the nature of a character's death does much more than serve as a simple categorical aid; it reveals what stage of the mirror a character ends up in.

In Dickensian fashion, Emma encounters death a total of three times, each time revealing the essence of Emma Bovary. Moreover, each encounter reveals the ways in which Emma has progressed through the various stages of the mirror insofar as each death specifically reflects the Ideal death for each stage. Present in each of these encounters are all of the Romantic imagery that has heretofore been used to signal the presence of the Ideal; symbols, moreover, that typically characterize the subgenre of Romantic suicide. In the first encounter, spurred on by Rodolphe’s goodbye letter, Emma retreats to the highest point in the house:

The slates projected a heavy heat that gripped her temples, stifled her; she dragged herself to the closed window, drew back the bolt, and the dazzling sunlight burst in. Opposite, beyond the roofs, the open country stretched as far as the eye could reach. Down below, underneath her, the village square was empty; the stones of the pavement glittered, the weathercocks on the houses stood motionless. At the corner of the street, from a lower story, rose a kind of humming with strident modulations. It was Binet turning.¹⁰²

Present in this passage are the beating heart, the coruscating backdrop, and the idyllic blue that have been present at every instance of Romantic reverie. Then comes the first serious contemplation of death:

She looked about her wishing that the earth might crumble. Why not end it all? What restrained her? She was free. She advanced, looked at the pavingstones, saying to herself, “Jump! jump!” The ray of light reflected straight from below drew the weight of her body towards the abyss. The ground of the village square seemed to tilt over and climb up the walls, the floor to pitch forward like a tossing boat. She was right at the edge, almost hanging, surrounded by vast space. The blue of the sky invaded her, the air was whirling in her hollow head; she had but to yield, to let herself be taken.¹⁰³
Flaubert has taken great pains to create in Emma a character of uncompromising resolve, a character whose essential attributes have remained—through disappointment after disappointment—unaltered. To have her story end here would be a gross disservice. To recall Berlin’s words, a death like this would be _pointless_. So why include this scene? For one, it is not the death (problematic as it sounds) that Emma _deserves_, for it is not the death of the passionate Ideal according to herself; it is not tumultuous, there is no clarity, the list goes on. But, more importantly, it acts as a pivotal point of change within the recognition of the truth of the Ideal. Emma has brought up the idea of freedom multiple times throughout the novel. For instance, she wants a son so he can be free:

She hoped for a son; he would be strong and dark; she would call him George; and this idea of having a male child was like an expected revenge for all her impotence in the past. A man, at least, is free; he can explore all passions and all countries, overcome obstacles, taste of the most distant pleasures. But a woman is always hampered.¹⁰⁴

Later on at the agriculture fair, Emma tells Rodolphe:

‘Yet it seems to me,’ said Emma, ‘that you are not to be pitied.’ ‘Ah! you think so?’ said Rodolphe. ‘For, after all,” she went on, “you are free ….’¹⁰⁵

And when speaking to Léon, she says:

One should avoid getting used to inaccessible pleasures when one is burdened by so many responsibilities . . .’ ‘Oh, I can imagine . . .’ ‘No, you can’t, you are not a woman.’¹⁰⁶

At the moment that she is looking down at the earth contemplating suicide, she recognizes herself as free: “Why not end it all? What restrained her? She was free.”¹⁰⁷

The problem here is that she is not actually free—not yet. Hence the inability to jump.
She is still tied to the Real. Of course, this does not imply the selfsame freedom that she has outlined in the examples above, but it is a recognition of a (supposedly) newfound freedom. “She had but to yield, to let herself be taken.” The language here reflects the passivity that has instigated all the prior moments in which the sublime was *momentarily* experienced. Emma “surrenders” to Rodolphe in the forest; the episode with the Viscount is done exclusively through his lead; Emma allows herself to be guided. Even her marriage is facilitated through her father and Charles, while all of her own various visions and wishes are denied. To transcend is *active*—a Kierkegaardian leap of faith, not a fall from a house in Yonville. Even on a purely symbolic level, this kind of death is mismatched. In the Flaubertian world of allegory and symbolism, the tower symbolizes the place of the poets, where one is free to dream. Emma herself, in all her dreams of erasure, envisions a rising up into that space where all her heroes enact the dramas of passion. Therefore to jump and fall onto the ground (the Real), while surely befitting of a tragedy, would not befit the Ideal. In fact, a death like this is the *opposite* of the Ideal by virtue of the fact that it is a descent, a plunge into the Real, instead of an ascension. Thus Emma is (rightfully) denied a death that befits the character of the second group of Romantics, whose protagonists are sick of passion and seek escape.

The second encounter with death occurs shortly after and as a direct result of the first. Upon seeing Rodolphe leave, Emma suffers from brain fever. At the height of her illness, during her catatonic state, Emma is convinced that she is at death's door, and so requests to have the viaticum:
Once, at the height of her illness, she thought she was about to die and asked for
communion; and while they were making the preparations in her room for the
sacrament, while they were clearing the night table of its medicine bottles and
turning it into an altar, and while Felicite was strewing dahlia flowers on the floor,
Emma felt some power passing over her that freed her from her pains, from all
perception, from all feeling. Her body, relieved, no longer thought; another life
was beginning; it seemed to her that her being, mounting toward God, would be
annihilated in that love like a burning incense that melts into vapour. The bed-
clothes were sprinkled with holy water, the priest drew the white host from the
holy pyx and she fainted with celestial joy as she advanced her lips to accept the
body of the Savior presented to her. The curtains of the alcove floated gently
round her like clouds, and the rays of the two tapers burning on the night table
seemed to shine like dazzling halos. Then she let her head fall back, fancying she
heard in space the music of seraphic harps, and perceived in an azure sky, on a
golden throne in the midst of saints holding green palms, God the Father,
resplendent with majesty, who ordered to earth angels with wings of fire to carry
her away in their arms.

This splendid vision dwelt in her memory as the most beautiful thing that it
was possible to dream, so that now she strove to recall her sensation; it was still
with her, albeit in a less overpowering manner, but with the same profound
sweetness. Her soul, tortured by pride, at length found rest in Christian humility,
and, tasting the joy of weakness, she saw within herself the destruction of her will
opening wide the gates for heavenly grace to conquer her. She realised the
existence of a bliss that could replace happiness, another love beyond all loves,
without pause and without end, that would grow forever! Amid the illusions of
her hope, she saw a state of purity floating above the earth, mingling with heaven.
She wanted to become a saint. She bought rosaries and wore holy medals; she
wished to have in her room, by the side of her bed, a reliquary set in emeralds that
she might kiss it every evening. 108

Whatever one chooses to call this scene—a fever dream, an epiphany, divine
intervention—there is no denying that it engenders a return to her convent days, and thus
to the state of pre-experience. In this return to religion there is present once more,
although now with much greater force, all of the fragments of the Ideal: annihilation
through love, celestial joy, an area “floating above earth, mingling with heaven,” and the
act of being transported into the sublime. And a little later: “tasting the joy of weakness,
she saw within herself the destruction of her will opening wide the gates for heaven’s
grace to conquer her.” Compared with the first encounter, there is undoubtedly a marked change. This follows all the prescriptions of the “redeeming death” à la Chateaubriand or Rousseau. Emma now wishes to “become a saint”; she even buys all the saintly accoutrements: rosaries, holy medals, and even a reliquary so that “she might kiss it every evening.” Of course, this is beyond ridiculous, but that is precisely the point. Flaubert has adamantly declared his hatred for “amour éthéré” as well as objected strongly to “le culte de la mère.” And the delight of the priest (who has already proved his foolishness on more than one account) to this sudden transformation is testament to the fact. That Emma uses the same passionate language (“she addressed to the Lord the same suave words that she had murmured formerly to her lover in the outpourings of adultery”) should not affect to discredit the religious (re)encounter. At the very least, it affects to mimic the progression of the passion myth. More importantly, it signals that Emma’s transcendence will not be a religious one, but rather a secular one, one that is, most importantly, chosen and enacted by her.

**A heroic suicide**

Emma’s suicide does not reflect the disillusionment of the naive girl faced with reality, nor is it pastiche of the greater genre that marked her life’s outlook, the dilapidated self-sacrifice to a greater order of love; it is, instead, the greatest form of self-actualization and agency—perhaps the only one available—of her life. If Emma’s life were truly a result of the literature she consumed, as is the argument of so much of the criticism pertaining to *Madame Bovary*, self-sacrifice would appear in the form of the
supernatural stoic (à la Julie or Clarissa) or the brave martyr who passively lets passion consume her (what comes to characterize characters such as Corinne, Adolphe, and Werther). Instead, Emma fights all of nature, that is to say those instincts of self-preservation, in order to commit the single act that will grant her what she has always sought: transcendent self-actualization. For Emma’s decision to commit suicide is not a form of escapism, there being a great difference between termination and conclusion. To terminate is to cut short. The lives of Julie, Werther, Atala, Virgine, and countless other figures of the Romantic ethos, are lives that have been unmistakably cut short; this is, undoubtedly, part of their charm, but, at the end of the day, none of them truly transcend their situation; on the contrary, they remain locked in it as symbols of what could be if only fate allowed.

To conclude, on the other hand, is to successfully reach an end. Emma Bovary, in her suicide, reaches an end. Moreover, Emma’s decision to commit suicide should by no means be considered as a form of cowardice or escape. Emma’s last remaining feelings are concerned only with the Ideal—not with her inescapable debt. This much is told to us explicitly: “for she did not remember the cause of her dreadful confusion, namely the money. She suffered only in her love….”¹¹³ What we have, then, is an instance of a heroic suicide. Despite all odds, despite being placed into a world that has already doomed her, despite lacking the vehicle—communicative and physical (“Being inert as well as pliable, she had against her the weakness of the flesh and the inequity of the law”—to actualize her Ideal in the temporal, Emma has nonetheless displayed the heroic
feat of relentlessly committing to an ideal.114 And it is this, according to Berlin, that defines a true martyr:

The very notion of idealism, not in the philosophical sense, but in the ordinary sense in which we use it, that is to say the state of mind of a man who is prepared to sacrifice a great deal for principles or for some conviction, who is not prepared to sell out, who is prepared to go to the stake for something which he believes, because he believes it - this attitude was relatively new. What people admired was wholeheartedness, sincerity, purity of soul, the ability and readiness to dedicate yourself to your ideal, no matter what it was.

No matter what it was: that is the important thing.”115

In a similar vein, I invoke Nietzsche’s conception of virtue: “That virtue does not depend on what one does but on whether what one does is an expression of one’s whole self, of one’s ‘own will”116 In this regard, it truly does not matter that Emma is trying to emulate characters in second-rate novels, or that she hops from second-rate guy to second-rate guy. What is at stake is not the quality of the novels she consumes or the consistency of the love she engages in, it is the quality of her character, it is about the reality, the legitimization, of her being. And she is, without a doubt, expressing her entire being—her “own will.” For Nietzsche, the ideal character is uncompromising in their ideals, concerned simply with becoming who they are. In Emma Bovary we find precisely this uncompromising actor, whose sole goal in life is to recognize herself in the mirror of her Ideal—to become a wholly authentic version of herself, to become, in short, who she really is. Emma’s Ideal is at one and the same time her highest moral value. And to this idea Berlin writes:

Men are choosers of acts. To sacrifice a man, you must sacrifice him to something higher than himself. But nothing is higher than that which is to be regarded as the highest moral value. But to call a thing a high moral value is to say that some man
or other is prepared to live or die for it; unless somebody is prepared to live or die for it, there is no ‘it’ in the sense of a moral value. A value is made a value - at least a duty, a goal transcending desire and inclination, is so made - by human choice and not by some intrinsic quality in itself. Out there. Values are not stars in some heaven, they are internal, they are what human beings freely choose to live for, to fight for, to die for.117

There is nothing that can be said against the claim that Emma is prepared to live or die for her Ideal. Of course, everything about this kind of idealism screams incongruence when placed against the backdrop of Yonville, Tostes, or Rouen, but this is exactly what separates Emma from the other “Romantic” characters in the novel. Rodolphe only plays at passion long enough to possess whomever he has set his eyes on, guided as he is by his bourgeois sensibility and common sense; Léon, too, fails in comparison to Emma’s tenacity. For one, he is easily swayed by the intervention of his mother and employer:

Besides, he was soon to be head clerk; it was time to settle down. So he gave up his flute, his exalted sentiments, his poetic imagination; for every bourgeois in the flush of his youth, were it but for a day, a moment, has believed himself capable of immense passions, of lofty enterprises. The most mediocre libertine has dreamed of sultanas; every notary bears within him the debris of a poet. He was bored now when Emma suddenly began to sob on his breast; and his heart, like the people who can only stand a certain amount of music, became drowsy through indifference to the vibrations of a love whose subtleties he could no longer distinguish.118

Léon decides to give up the Romantic pursuit, but for Emma this is unfathomable. Her choice is the unending pursuit of a passion that effaces her entire being. Léon does not grow, does not progress, like all the other characters content to stay in place. Only Emma, and, as it happens, Homais (that other character whose Ideal exists in a perfected form of themselves) actually achieve what they set their mind to. It is as Gaultier says:
With the power given man to see himself other than he is, one therefore possesses the very rhythm of the process of life in so far as it takes cognizance of itself. The fact of conceiving oneself is the reflection of this reality which we imagine to be objective and which is constantly becoming different. To see oneself different is to live and progress.\textsuperscript{119}

Emma and Homais may have antithetical goals, but what they have in common is their tenacity to recognize, to take cognizance of who it is they \textit{really} are. “Every Bovaryc conception is a useful attitude for life, whether it serves a purely \textit{vital utility} or is the means of a \textit{utility of knowledge}.\textsuperscript{120} To see oneself as other serves, for Emma, a vital utility in so far as life for Emma, like Rimbaud, exists \textit{elsewhere}. Therefore Emma progresses via her decision to stop living. Emma achieves in death, \textit{by her own hand}, what she was denied in life. Homais, on the other hand, in seeing himself as he does (that is, as far better than he is) progresses via recognition of a utility of knowledge (the book ends, after all, in Homais being granted the Croix de la Légion d’Honneur). Therefore both are able to progress and achieve their ideals \textit{through} the decision to see themselves as “better” than they are. The self-actualization of the Ideal is, therefore, also a self-liberating act. Emma may not have been able to fully penetrate into the lives of the upper echelon, being painfully reminded of her class and status with every encounter of the Ideal, but she has found freedom, as Berlin would say, in the decision to commit herself, mind and body, to the Ideal: “You can commit yourself to a value or not, but the liberty is in the commitment, not in the status, rational or otherwise, of the value itself; in the fact that you do or do not, can but not need not, commit yourself to it.”\textsuperscript{121}

Even Charles, who is, as Landy convincingly posits, arguably the most Romantic character in the novel, is static.\textsuperscript{122} In so opening the novel with Charles, the readers’
expectations of him as protagonist are quickly dismissed by the complacency in which he accepts the denial of his Romantic pursuits. His “aimless hopes” and “vague happiness” are further signals into the stasis of his character. Instead, Charles chooses to live out his Romantic Ideal through Emma. This is crucial, for unlike Emma, who will never quite find the Ideal in the temporal plane, Charles at once finds his Ideal located in the Real, in *Emma*. We are even told as much: “For [Charles] the universe did not extend beyond the silky circumference of her petticoat.” Emma is the reflection of the passionate Ideal par excellence. In fact, Charles *literally* sees himself mirrored in Emma’s eyes: “His own eyes lost themselves in these depths [of her eyes] and he could see himself mirrored in miniature….” Additionally, when submitting a volley of names for their newborn, all of which allude to Emma’s Romantic heroes, Charles only wishes to name the child after Emma - the implication being that Charles finds in Emma the perfect Romantic character. Above all, however, Charles’ stasis is marked by his inability to move past the reflection of the mirror. Charles, more than anyone else in the novel, mimics the ethos of the troubadour ensconced within the first stage of the Idealizing mirror. Charles is the troubadour who is happy to remain in the first stage of contemplation—forever admiring the perfect quality of the Lady. Emma will always remain superior (in his eyes); he would rather die than disappoint her; he finds in her the ultimate perfection; and, notwithstanding physical distance, there will always remain a psychological gulf between the two that is never closed. Emma, through and through, remains for Charles a figure of perfect beauty and goodness. This, too, is why Charles falls apart after Emma’s death: he loses himself in the loss of his mirror. In adopting “her taste” and “her ideas,” Charles
attempts to reignite the passion that Emma, in life and now “beyond the grave,” still represents. In meeting with Rodolphe he enacts the ultimate act of desperation in order to catch a reflection of a reflection; for if Emma saw herself in these men, perhaps Charles can catch a small glimpse of her in them as well. In his final words to Rodolphe, Charles affirms what Emma ultimately chooses to defy: that “Fate willed it this way.” Contrary to Emma, Charles dies as Narcissus dies, unable to leave the reflection of the image behind.

Fate, for Flaubert, is just another word for the shackles that bind us to the earth. Nowhere else in the novel is this at its most painful than in the fate of poor Berthe. Berthe is the unmitigated symbol of the Romantic shackled to the real, and in the treatment of her life, Flaubert conducts an unanesthetized dissection of the Ideal left to the Real. The very idea of her begins as a realization of freedom by proxy. Should she be born a boy, she would be granted the freedom that has eluded Emma her entire life. This is immediately denied by virtue of the fact that she is born a girl. The desire to name her after various Romantic heroines is a further extenuation of the fact that she was supposed to represent the birth of the Ideal; so too is this idea denied by the rejection of these names. The name Emma and Charles do agree on, “Berthe,” is a compromise, a Romantic bluff, duplicitous like the reflection of the very environment in which her name arises. The name originates from something overheard at La Vaubyessard: the Ideal in the Real—a false glimmer of hope. Berthe, like Time and the Material, does not promise an Ideal life, but rather acts as a reminder that one is tied down to earth; she becomes, then, a grand allusion to Emma’s lot in life. And the ending that Berthe meets stands as a
stark reflection of what Emma escapes, or, rather, transcends, in her suicide. Berthe,
doomed to work in a factory and to live a monotonous, difficult existence: such is the
reality of the Ideal in the Real.

Tired of living a life that could have been idyllic “had fate willed it,” Emma, in
the act of committing suicide, takes fate into her own hands. With a self-effacing gesture
Emma ends her life so as to make it entirely hers. Here, then, is passion as an end in itself
- passion according to the troubadours, whose lyric poetry sought to give expression to a
thundering, tempestuous, and all-consuming type of love, which transports one into
infinity at the cost of the self; a type of love where one finds in the impossibility of
articulation the possibility of self-realization. In linking together Love and Death, where
one is the most sublime consummation of the other, Emma bids farewell to Day and
enters everlasting Night. Through the effacement of the self, Emma transcends into the
Elsewhere - into that “azure land where silken ladders swung from balconies in the
moonlight, beneath a flowerscented breeze,” existing “far above all the others, among the
storms that rage between heaven and earth,” and “partaking of the sublime.”[131] In the
infinity of death, Emma concretizes the ultimate obstacle to desire and realizes the
troubadour ethos of desire everlasting par excellence.
NOTES

Introduction


3. For Landy, there are certain texts that, “rather than providing knowledge per se... what they give us is know-how; rather than transmitting beliefs, what they equip us with are skills; rather than teaching, what they do is train.” *How to Do Things with Fictions* (Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 10.
4. “I defend the literary imagination precisely because it seems to me an essential ingredient of an ethical stance that asks us to concern ourselves with the good of other people whose lives are distant from our own”; and also: “literary works are...artificial constructions of some crucial elements in a norm of public rationality, and valuable guides to correct response.” Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Beacon Press, 1995), p. xvi, 78. Iris Murdoch takes this idea to its extreme in believing that literature (and art in general) “teaches that nothing in life is of any value except the attempt to be virtuous.” Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (Routledge & K. Paul, 1970), p. 87.


14. Auerbach, Turnell, Haig, Sainte-Beuve, Lubbock, Wartburg, Poulet, Henry James, and Eric Lawrence Gans are just a few.

15. The “style” that Nabokov is referencing here is the *counterpoint method*, which is essentially a method of parallel interlinings and interruptions of two or more conversations or trains of thought. Vladimir Nabokov, “Madame Bovary,” in *Lectures on Literature*, p. 147.

16. Eric Lawrence Gans, *Madame Bovary: The End of Romance* (Twayne Publishers, 1989), p. 43. Gans goes on to say: “By the end of the nineteenth century, Flaubert’s novels were spoken of by literary historians as the masterpieces of French realism...Madame Bovary is still described today as the exemplary realist novel.” Ibid.


20. “But here, in the case of the author of *Madame Bovary*, we come upon an altogether different manner, another kind of inspiration and, in truth, upon a different generation. The ideal is gone, the lyrical has died out; it can no longer hold us. Stern and implacable truth has entered art as the last word of experience.” Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, “Madame Bovary, by Gustave Flaubert,” in *Madame Bovary: Backgrounds and Sources*, p. 326.

21. Percy Lubbock: “Weighing every word and calculating every effort so patiently, [Flaubert] could not have been casual and careless over his method; he would not take one way rather than another because it saved him trouble, or because he failed to notice that there were other ways, or because they all seemed to him much the same.” Percy Lubbock, “The Craft of Fiction in Madame Bovary,” in *Madame Bovary: Backgrounds and Sources*, p. 350.

22. “[Flaubert’s] effort to achieve comprehensiveness and universality led to a primary emphasis on impersonality and impartiality; the serenity necessitated impassivity.” B.F. Bart, *Madame Bovary and the Critics*, p. 192.


26. “[Flaubert] believed in rejuvenating romanticism by a return to the long classical tradition. This is, in fact, his new esthetic.” B.F. Bart, “Madame Bovary After a Century,” in *Madame Bovary and the Critics*, p. 190.


29. As I am solely interested in the debate insofar as it represents the paradigmatic divide between Realism and Romanticism, what follows is an extremely consolidated explanation of a crucial debate. For a more elaborate analysis of the critiques of Sainte-Beuve and Baudelaire, I direct the reader to Margaret Gillman’s “Two Critics and an Author: Madame Bovary Judged by Sainte-Beuve and by Baudelaire” and John E. Gale’s “Sainte-Beuve and Baudelaire on Madame Bovary.”

30. Sainte-Beuve qtd. in Margaret Gillman’s “Two Critics and an Author: Madame Bovary Judged by Sainte-Beuve and by Baudelaire,” in *Madame Bovary and the Critics*, p. 42.


36. Baudelaire qtd. in Margaret Gillman’s “Two Critics and an Author: Madame Bovary Judged by Sainte-Beuve and by Baudelaire,” in *Madame Bovary and the Critics*, p. 45.


42. “Despite all his actor’s zeal,” Baudelaire writes, “[Flaubert] has not been able to avoid infusing a man’s blood into the veins of his creation,” and… “Madame Bovary, because of what is most energetic and ambitious and also most full of dreams in her, has remained a man.” Baudelaire qtd. in Margaret Gillman’s “Two Critics and an Author: Madame Bovary Judged by Sainte-Beuve and by Baudelaire,” in *Madame Bovary and the Critics*, p. 47. Sartre, conversely, attributes the masculinity of Emma to the femininity of Flaubert: “The masculine Emma is, for [Sartre], a mirror reflection of the feminine Flaubert.” Laurence M. Porter, *A Gustave Flaubert Encyclopedia* (Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 224.

44. There were, of course, feminist writings in circulation during the nineteenth century—most notably Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Olympe de Gouges’ *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen*, and, to some extent, the works of Rousseau—but as Naomi Schor cogently argues, the promised change and pro-feminist attitudes were quickly quelled by the aftermath of the French Revolution; this iconographic shift is most clearly seen in the fiction of the time. She writes: “...arguably the most lasting effect of the French Revolution on nineteenth century French representations of women from Chateaubriand’s virginal Atala to Zola’s courtesan Nana may well have been the powerful revolutionary conflation of the feminine and the state, the tendency for representations of woman in postabsolutist France to be collapsed with the stabilization and destabilization of the new social order instituted by 1789.” *Bad Objects: Essays Popular and Unpopular* (Duke University Press, 1995), p. 132. Cf., to some extent, Theresa M. Kelley, “Women, Gender, and Literary Criticism,” in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 328.


Margaret Lowe holds a similar belief; however, she believes that Flaubert, under the guise of Realism, is engaging with a much older tradition: “I propose to show that, on the contrary, Flaubert’s novel, a consciously contrived successor to epic poetry, aims at being equally allegorical but at expressing the allegory secretly, in ‘le dessous’ of the narrative, using various devices which we shall be seeing later.” The “various devices” she alludes to here pertain to the purposeful employments of classical myth. Margaret Lowe and A. W. Raitt, *Towards the Real Flaubert: a Study of Madame Bovary* (Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 31.

54. Denis de Rougemont, in his seminal *Love in the Western World*, would later term this the “myth of passionate love.”

55. Cf. Margaret Lowe, who writes: “That Flaubert was profoundly marked by Victor Cousin’s translations of Plato is a fact which we find him confirming in so many words to
George Sand: ‘Je parle en platonicien’ [I speak platonic]… Platonic, then, is Flaubert’s affirmation from an early date of “l’Idée”, its existence, blue and ineffable, a luminous truth; and later, “Thus, when starting on Madame Bovary, Flaubert needed to reconcile three motive forces: first, his Platonic idealism; secondly, his wish to debunk, as Aristophanes had, the exaggerated idealism of his contemporaries (the danger of which he was aware of in his own nature); and thirdly, his desire to learn from and put into practice (or reject as the case might be) Hugo’s formula for a tragic-comic, sublime and grotesque, ‘modern’ work of art.” Towards the Real Flaubert, p. 5, 11.

56. <<She had not as yet known love. A short time later she suffered from it, which is the only manner in which we get to know it.>> Marcel Proust, “Violante, ou la Mondanité,” in Les Plaisirs Et Les Jours.


58. By no means is this meant to be taken as axiomatic, nor am I proposing that everyone in the eighteenth century held this belief; this is, of course, the same time in which we have Hamann, Diderot, and, although Berlin believes his role greatly exaggerated, Rousseau. For more on the “true fathers of romanticism,” see Berlin, The Roots of Romanticism, pp. 54-78.

59. Berlin: “the nostalgia is due to the fact that, since the infinite cannot be exhausted, and since we are seeking to embrace it, nothing that we do will ever satisfy us.” Ibid., p. 120. Cf. Lasch, who rather infamously cites the nineteenth-century as the birthplace of a malady that would continue well on into the contemporary age: that of a trivialization of


61. See Berlin, who writes: “Friedrich Schlegel, the greatest harbinger, the greatest herald and prophet of Romanticism that ever lived, says there is in man a terrible unsatisfied desire to soar into infinity, a feverish longing to break through the narrow bonds of individuality.” *Ibid.*, p. 18.


64. De Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, p. 15.


69. De Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, p. 15; emphasis mine.


73. De Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, p. 50.

75. I am aware that I am anachronistically placing Rousseau in the nineteenth century, but, unlike Berlin, I side with De Rougemont in the belief that Rousseau—most notably with *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*—is an indispensable part of any discussion on Romanticism, *especially* with regards to this first category. This belief is, moreover, shared with Philip Stuart, who writes: “[Rousseau’s feelings and opinions] w[ere] going to affect profoundly the esthetic sensibilities of generations to come, besides reinforcing his social and political theories in ways that would permanently frame discourse about individuality, social organization, political power, and social control”; and with Irving Putter: “More powerfully than any other writer Rousseau contributed to and influenced this growing concern with feelings. He turned away from the iniquity of man to the consolation of nature’s mountains, lakes, and moonlight.” Philip Stuart, “Introduction,” in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, or the New Heloise: Letters of Two Lovers Who Live in a Small Town at the Foot of the Alps* (Dartmouth College Press, 2010), ix-xxi, p. ix; Irving Putter, “Introduction,” *Atala / René* (University of California Press, 1980), 1-13, p. 2.

76. The adage, “la nouvelle Héloïse,” dictates from the start how we are to read Julie. The story of the original Héloïse of which Rousseau’s novel takes its name comes to us
through the letters that she and Abelard exchanged. After a tumultuous and passionate love affair with her tutor, Abelard, Héloïse joins a convent at his request. (Unsurprisingly, St. Preux begins as Julie’s tutor as well). In both the cases of Julie and of Héloïse there is the reallocation of passion from the body (the temporal, the profane) to the spirit (the sacred). The love story of Abelard and Héloïse, remember, is for Stendhal the example of passionate love par excellence.

77. By beautiful I do not mean only in sentiment. More often than not, works of literature that have as their denouement the victory of virtue end up describing the body of the dead heroine as physically beautiful. Take, for instance, the death of Chateaubriand's Atala, whose dead body became the subject of Girodet’s painting “The Entombment of Atala,” presented at the Salon of 1808.


79. Ibid., p. 69.

80. Ibid., p. 70. There is, of course, a deeply polemical aspect to these works that is not lost on me with regards to what has been aptly termed by Naomi Schor, “the seemingly ritualistic sacrifice of the eternal female protagonist.” Bad Objects, p. 135. This should not go unnoted. Naomi Schor, for one, compellingly argues that Atala both “founds...the tradition of representing woman in nineteenth-century French fiction as sexually stigmatized,” and is “deeply implicated in the struggle to recontain the female energy briefly unchained by the Revolution and to ward off the dangers represented by a too palpably embodied female cult figure.” Ibid., p. 140. For more on this topic, see Hunt,

81. “Merciful God, let me never again rise from this deathbed, and may thy blessings be lavished on my brother, who has never shared my forbidden passion.” Chateaubriand, Atala / René, p. 108.

82. Ibid., p. 109.

83. Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Paul and Virginia (Wildside Press, 2004) pp. 118-119; emphasis mine. To show the extent to which the ubiquitous religious dimension subsisted, consider Chateaubriand's commentary in The Genius of Christianity: “We may even go still farther and assert that it is religion, in fact, which determines the catastrophe. Virginia dies for the preservation of one of the principal virtues enjoyed by Christianity. It would have been absurd to make a Grecian woman die for refusing to expose her person; but the lover of Paul is a Christian virgin, and what would be ridiculous according to an impure notion of heathenism becomes in this instance sublime.” Chateaubriand qtd. in Naomi Schor, Bad Objects, p. 188.


87. Ibid., p. 15.

88. Ibid., p. 197.

90. See Stendhal, *De L'amour* (Éditions Hypérion, 1936) *passim*.


93. Schopenhauer qtd. in Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, p. 150. Schopenhauer here is speaking of the role of the composer: “The composer reveals to us the intimate essence of the world; he is the interpreter of the profoundest wisdom, speaking a language which reason cannot understand.” *Ibid*.


95. Benjamin Constant, *Adolphe* (Penguin Books, 1964), p. 20; emphasis in original. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that death is simply the only way out. This idea is buttressed by Leonard Tancock’s introduction to *Adolphe*: “A uniquely French expression of this ideal…[usually] deal[s] with a tragic love-affair, tragic because the stark facts of human nature cannot logically be worked out and death must be called in to end an impossible situation.” *Ibid.*, p. 7; emphasis mine.

96. This can, interestingly enough, also take place through complete inward regression: “Such is ecstasy, a flight inward from all created things.” De Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, pp. 145-146. Interestingly, Rousseau almost makes Julie succumb to this very secular ideal before the sacred edification takes place: “The land of illusions is on
this earth the only one worth living in, and such is the void of things human that, with the exception of the Being who exists in himself, the only beauty to be found is in things that are not.” Rousseau, *Julie, or the New Heloise*, p. 569. While it is quickly checked, the inclusion of it is useful to see how the ideals have reversed from the first group to the third.

97. De Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, p. 145. De Rougemont reinforces the alienating effect of passion by later stating: “In the face of the assertion of [passion’s] power, the world dissolves; ‘the others’ cease to be present; and there are no longer either neighbours or duties, or binding ties, or earth or sky; one is alone with all that one loves. ‘We have lost the world and the world us.’” *Ibid.*, pp. 145-146.


102. For more on this idea, see Robinson, *French Literature in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 131.


107. Naturally, this proves to be a double-edged sword, for in Emma’s whole-scale compliance with this idea of love, she is at the mercy of those who are able to manipulate it, as in the case with Rodolphe and his romantic turn of phrase—but more on this later.

108. Cf. Naomi Schor, who, speaking of Emma, writes: “Emma seeks a lover not only to become a novelistic character, but especially to become an author…What she lacks in order to write are neither words nor pen, but a phallus.” *Breaking the Chain*, pp. 16-17.

Chapter 1


2. Scholars have long debated on the proper distinction between *amour courtois, amour chevaleresque, courtoisie*, and *fin’amors*, arguing that the failure to differentiate the terms from each other has led to much of the confusion surrounding the understanding of courtly love. In *L’érotique des troubadours* (1963), René Nelli defines *amour chevaleresque* as “a love based on fidelity and reciprocity, which inspired the knight with courage in the tournament or the battlefield,” while defining *amour courtois* as “a love, forever unappeased, between a humble suitor and a lady of noble birth.” Nelli ctd. in Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love: a Critical Study of European Scholarship* (Manchester University Press; Rowman and Littlefield, 1977), p. 48. In *Amour courtois et ‘fin’amors’ dans la littérature de XIIe siècle* (1964), Moshé Lazar
defines fin’ amors as “the technical term for the amatory ideal of the early troubadours, an ideal which was incompatible with Christian charity, and which was, from the church’s point of view, devoid of morality” (82), avoiding the term amour courtois “except as a possible designation for the more idealised and conventional lyric which was written after the twelfth century.” Roger Boase, The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love, p. 49. For a more complete review of this debate, I direct the reader to the aforementioned works. Seeing as how the differentiation between amour courtois and fin’ amor is negligible, the rest of this thesis will be using the terms “courtly love” and “fin’ amor” interchangeably, depending on the historical context.


5. Denis de Rougemont, Love in the Western World, p. 151.

in O’Donoghue, *The Courtly Love Tradition*, pp. 11-12; De Rougemont, *Love in the Western World, passim*.

The parallels between how love is treated in medieval Persian literature and Provençal lyric poetry are truly astounding—most notably in the motifs of denying the satisfaction of desire and love as an avenue to an alternate reality. Nizami’s narrative poem *Layla and Majnuun*, for instance, follows two lovers who are forbidden to be together; after years of separation, the lovers are reunited producing the following denouement:

She saw Majnuun, but stopped before reaching the palm tree against which he was leaning...only ten paces separated her from her beloved, but he was enveloped by a magic circle which she must not break. Turning to the old man at her side, she said: ‘Noble sir! So far I am allowed to go, but no farther. Even now I am like a burning candle. If I approach the fire, I shall be consumed. Nearness brings disaster, lovers must shun it. Better to be ill, than afterwards to be ashamed of the cure…Why ask for more? Even Majnuun, he, the ideal lover, does not ask for more.”


*I am so drowned in love that I can find
No thought of my existence in my mind.
Her worship is sufficient life for me;
The quest for her is my reality.*

Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār and Dick Davis, *The Conference of the Birds* (Penguin Books, 2011), p. 46. Time has foregrounded some of these theories while relegating others to the background, but I forego any discussion on the historical origins. For one, even the best argument can be no more than speculation; and two, I prefer siding instead with Smith and Snow who write, “[t]he proper subject of literary criticism and literary history is
literature not society, and the reality which this volume deals is, at the very least, literary.” Smith and Snow, *The Expansion and Transformations of Courtly Literature* (University of Georgia Press, 1980), p. 4.


10. “A sector of the heart, one of the eternal aspects of man.”


13. “It becomes possible to say that the passionate love which the [courtly] myth celebrates actually became in the twelfth century—the moment when first it began to be cultivated—a religion in the full sense of the word, and in particular a Christian heresy historically determined.” De Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, p. 137.


16. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, p. 12. This condition of adultery has become something of a misdirection. There are numerous reasons for the prevalence of the adultery *topos* in Provençal lyric poetry, the most pragmatic being that, since the troubadours were spokesmen and spokeswomen for the seigneurial courts, only married women were allowed in the public sphere—hence the need for secret trysts and go-betweens. However, as William Calin elucidates, there have been plenty of scholars who have listed a number of works where the lovers get married, and that many scholars “do not consider adultery to be the keystone of medieval literature.” “Defense and Illustration of Fin’ Amor: Some Polemical Comments of the Robertsonian Approach,” in *The Expansion and Transformations of Courtly Literature*, p 34. Arguably, the stubbornness of the trope can be accredited to three main sources. The first being that the two works which have come to define the courtly love genre—*Tristan* and *Lancelot*—are, at their core, tales of adultery. The second lies in the fact that, until recently, critical medieval scholarship has notoriously taken Andreas Capellanus’ *De Amore* at its word, and, therefore, as a source of irrefutable proof. The book—one that lays out all the qualities and rules of *fin’amor*—cites adultery as a necessary component; this is because love, being at its core something that must be freely given, precludes marriage - which, because it is a contract, therefore suggests that love and desire cannot exist in it. P. G. Walsh and Andreas, *Andreas Capellanus on Love* (Duckworth, 1982), p. 233. To this claim, O’Donoghue quite rightly asserts that “Andreas (who was not even a poet in form) should not be cited as the principal exemplar of courtly love poetry. But that is precisely what has happened in much courtly love criticism, particularly since C.S. Lewis.” O’Donoghue, *The Courtly
The third reason is what has been alluded to earlier: that much of the surviving troubadour lyric has, as its backdrop, the theme of adultery. However, what both Denis de Rougemont and William Calin convincingly argue is that it is not adultery in and of itself that is the necessary component. It is, rather, what the married status of the woman presents: an obstacle: “Essential to fin’amor is the notion of the obstacle—which may or may not be embodied in a gilos [the jealous husband]—and of highly intense, passionate, personal involvement between people of opposite sexes. Whether either is married and whether or how often the sex act occurs are not essential matters but only, to employ medieval jargon, mere ‘accidents’.” William Calin, “Defense and Illustration of Fin’ Amor,” p. 35.


22. Ibid., p. 113.

23. Of this qualification, Denomy writes: “The morality or immorality of courtly love for those who taught it rests not on the commandments of God, the teachings of Christ or of his church, but simply in this: Does love further a man in virtue or does it affect a regress; does it ennoble him or degrade him?” Denomy, *The Heresy of Courtly Love*, p. 28.


26. *Ibid.*, p. 5. Roger Boase goes into considerable detail regarding this thesis in his work *The Origins and Meaning of Courtly Love*, and therefore I direct the reader to his work for more on this subject.


33. One cursory example which extends beyond the scope of this project is Flaubert’s use of irony, of which plenty has been written. For the German romantics, Schlegel, in particular, irony was a useful tool insofar as it brought attention to opposition. Irony was “a play between the finite and the infinite and destruction and creation, where one thing cleaves to its opposite. Like life itself, irony is dialectical and represents the authentic contradiction of ourselves, thereby revealing the innermost mystery of critical philosophy.” Schlegel ctd. in Saul, “What is Romanticism,” p. 17. As will become
apparent, Flaubert will rely heavily on a rhetoric of opposition to achieve what Saul eloquently captures in the following declaration: “Ultimately, irony and allegory represent a creative liberation from the prison of the merely phenomenal world and the representational limitations of philosophical language.” Ibid., p. 17.


35. Fichte ctd. in De Rougemont, Love in the Western World, p. 240, 220.

36. De Rougemont, Love Declared, pp. 11-12.

37. “‘Love has to be reinvented,’ Rimbaud said, this kind of psychic revolution has only one precedent in the history of Western culture: it is located, in the most precise manner, in the twelfth century.” Rimbaud ctd. in Denis de Rougemont, Love Declared, p. 30.

38. C.S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love, p. 11.


40. “There is no need to bring forward every piece of evidence for the statement that without exception all of the German romantics revived the courtly theme, the theme of unhappy mutual love.” Ibid., p. 220.

41. August Wilhelm Schlegel and Mme de Staël agree that Romanticism comes from the Romance nations, or at least the Romance languages, that it really comes from a modification of the verses of the Provençal troubadours…” Isaiah Berlin, The Roots of Romanticism, p. 19.

42. “The French literary system was breached by the discovery of England (Voltaire, 1734), Germany (Mme de Staël, 1813), and Asia (Burnouf, Renan).” Ernst Robert

43. “I know by the clear evidence of personal experience that the man subject to Venus’s slavery can give really earnest thought to nothing except the perpetual attempt to achieve by his actions the possibility of being further enchained in her fetters. He believes that the only happiness worth having is that which must bring deep contentment to his love.” Andreas Capellanus on Love, p. 31. Compare this to what Musset writes in The Confessions of a Child of the Century: “Throw off your chains, though they are strong, for it was your hand that forged them.” p. 262.

44. In a similar vein, Per Bjørnar Grande highlights the interplay between these two modes, writing: “In order to reveal desire, Flaubert, as a writer vacillating between romanticism and a realism in its making, creates a world where everything is strictly realistic and, at the same time, heavily laden with symbolic meaning.” “Desire in Madame Bovary,” p. 76.

45. “One achieves style only by atrocious labor, a fanatic and dedicated stubbornness”; “...Last night I began my novel. Now I foresee difficulties of style, and they terrify me...”; “In the midst of all this I am advancing painfully with my book. I spoil a considerable quantity of paper. So many deletions! Sentences are very slow in coming. What a devilish style I have adopted! A curse on simple subjects! If you knew how I was torturing myself you’d be sorry for me.” Flaubert and Steegmuller, The Letters of Gustave Flaubert, p. 184, 145, 152. Although Flaubert was very vocal about how he was tortured by his obsession with style, he nonetheless had dreams of producing a work
whose sole purpose was to reflect the capabilities of style on its own: “What seems beautiful to me, what I should like to write, is a book about nothing, a book dependent on nothing external, which would be held together by the internal strength of its style.” *Ibid.*, p. 154.


50. Cf. Dominick LaCapra, who says: “Flaubert's actual practice in a novel such as *Madame Bovary* may be approached in terms of a notion of dual style or double inscription. On one level, he seems to conform to ordinary social and literary conventions or departs from the expectations they create only in ways that may plausibly be perceived as standard deviations. On other levels, however, conventional norms and expectations are tested and contested in more subversive fashion, at times with a force sufficient to bring about a radical reworking of problems and possibilities.” "Dual Style," in *Madame Bovary on Trial*, 118-25, p. 118.

51. This has the added benefit of denoting a musical element—which is key in Provençal lyric poetry.

53. “To express things that are beyond words, a look is enough. Exhaustions of the soul, lyricism, descriptions—I want all that to be in the style.” The Letters of Gustave Flaubert, p. 165; emphasis in original.

54. De Rougemont, Love in the Western World, p. 46.

55. So much so that it led Grande to proclaim: “The very movement in Madame Bovary is a movement toward death and total undoing… One can say that the symbols coincide with a certain death wish, a wish to vanish or be absorbed by a greater whole.” “Desire in Madame Bovary,” p. 76.

56. The cancellation motif is one that has been studied in depth by scholars primarily interested in how Madame Bovary operates on a semantic level. Nabokov, for example, puts forth the assertion that Homais functions as Emma’s double. Vladimir Nabokov, “Madame Bovary,” in Lectures on Literature, p. 142. So too does Naomi Schor, who writes: “If, however, we follow the thread of the thematic paradigm speech/writing, we find that the structuring opposition of the novel is neither Emma vs. Rudolphe nor Emma vs. Charles (nor is it the commonplace of traditional criticism, Homais vs. Bournisien); the privileged doublet is none other than Emma vs. Homais, a fundamental opposition half-expressed, half-concealed by their names, which should be read ‘Femm(a) vs. Hom(ais)’—Femme (woman) vs. Homme (man).” Naomi Schor, “For a Restricted Thematics: Writing, Speech, and Difference in Madame Bovary,” in Breaking the Chain, 3-28, p. 12. See also Rene Girard, commenting on Flaubert’s style: “Ideas and systems, theories and principles confront each other in opposed pairs, which are always determined negatively. Oppositions are devoured by symmetry; their role is now merely


66. Apropos of this generalization, Zweig comments: “Yet something is troubled in this worship of the lady. A curious vagueness comes over the poet when he turns his skill
outward toward the beloved, giving the kind of conventional praise that led one critic to wonder, ironically, whether the troubadours were not all in love with the same lady, a rather anonymous lady at that.” Zweig, The Heresy of Self-Love, p. 95.

67. Stone, The Death of the Troubadours, p. 5.


69. “This state, in which true lovers, poets, mystics, and creators desire to remain once they have experienced it, while recognizing that they cannot survive in it, is described by all of them as indescribable. Sometimes it plunges those who suffer it into plaintive silence, sometimes it excites them to an inexhaustible loquacity—love fetters, mystical treatises—that generally proceeds by antithesis and paradoxes. For there will never be enough words and metaphors and reinvented clichés and interlacing symbols to fix this indescribable reality that one tries so futilely to communicate.” De Rougemont, Love Declared, p. 74; emphasis mine. See also Girard, who writes: “The novels of Stendhal, Flaubert, Proust, and Dostoyevsky are so many stages along the same road—they describe for us the successive states of a disorder that is constantly spreading and growing worse. But since these novelists have at their disposal only the one language which is already corrupted by metaphysical desire and, by definition, incapable of being used to reveal the truth, the revelation of this disorder presents complex problems.” Deceit, Desire, and the Novel, p. 139.

70. Stone, The Death of the Troubadours, pp. 4-5; emphasis in original.

72. “I would show that in literature, mediocrity, being within the reach of everyone, is alone legitimate, and that consequently every kind of originality must be denounced as dangerous, ridiculous, etc. I would declare that this apologia for human vulgarity in all its aspects—and it would be raucous and ironic from beginning to end, full of quotations, proofs (which would prove the opposite), frightening texts (easily found)—was aimed at doing away, once and for all, with all eccentricities, whatever they might be.” _The Letters of Gustave Flaubert_, pp. 175-176.

73. Stone, _The Death of the Troubadours_, pp. 5-6; emphasis in original.

74. “To compose a courtly love song is to _find_ a song, to come upon a language that is already there. The song does not emanate from or originate within an individual subject, but rather the subject appropriates a song whose origin is elsewhere and that is not, properly speaking, the singer’s own property.” _Ibid._, p. 6; emphasis in original.

75. _Ibid._, p. 6.

76. This is to say nothing of the fact that Emma comes from the provinces and leads, for lack of a better word, a simple life. To expect from her anything _other_ than the clichéd language picked up from novels would simply be too much to ask. Rousseau himself, anticipating a similar charge for his heroine, addresses the issue in the preface to _Julie:_

R: Do you believe that really impassioned people have those intense, strong, colorful ways of speaking that you admire in your Dramas and Novels? No; passion wrapped up in itself expresses itself with more profusion than power; it doesn’t even try to persuade; it doesn’t even suspect that anyone could mistrust it. When it says what it feels, it does so less to explain it to others than to unburden itself. Love is depicted more vividly in great cities; is it better felt there than in hamlets?
N. In other words, weakness of language proves strength of feeling?
R. Sometimes it at least reveals the truth...a letter from a truly passionate Lover will be desultory, diffuse, full of verbose, disconnected, repetitious passages...Nothing salient, nothing remarkable; neither the words, nor the turns, nor the sentences are memorable; there is nothing in it to admire or be struck by…but those who feel nothing, those who have only the fancy jargon of the passions, are unfamiliar with beauties of this kind and disdain them.

Rousseau, *Julie, or the New Heloise*, p. 10.


87. The oblivious husband on the one hand, and the enraged husband eager to catch the lovers in the act, on the other.


92. “If...emotion, in its impulse toward marriage, is blocked by insurmountable objects...it either exalts itself and denies them—or renounces them and hates them...marriage is condemned...[and] therefore [love-as-passion] opposes duration with an angelic eternity.” De Rougemont, Love Declared, p. 147.


94. Ibid., p. 71.

95. Ibid., p, 70.

96. Ibid., pp. 70-71.

97. Ibid., p. 71.

98. Ibid., pp. 71-72.

99. Ibid., p. 72.

100. De Rougemont, Love in the Western World, p. 47.


102. Ibid., p. 94.


104. Another way of looking at (understanding) this crucial distinction between what can be seen as an argument of nature vs. nurture is through the employment of Barthes’ considerations of studium and punctum. The totality, that is to say the picture (in this sense the picture of the Romantic or sentimental novel and all of the corresponding elements) of the Romanesque is for Emma the studium. This is the purposefully coded imagery (landscapes, secret trysts, go-betweens, etc.) that garner a certain response (ah! so this is love! This is passion!), one which Emma devours unhesitantly and
unremittingly. The punctum, however, is, as Barthes writes, something deeper - “at first unknown, even to the viewer.” The punctum is unique to the individual; it is the unique predilection for seeing in the whole a detail of the self. This is the reason for seeing this as the specific Ideal. Romanticism writ large as the studium, and passion as an end in itself (erasure, deletion) as the punctum. See Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, (Hill and Wang, 1981), pp. 26-28.


Chapter 2


2. The use of the word “Material,” unless otherwise stated, refers to the opposite of the Ideal and is used, therefore, interchangeably with the “worldly,” the “natural.”


4. Where I depart with Gaultier is in his belief that this predisposition is not, in fact, the “essence” or the truth of the being: “Thus, while they [Flaubert’s personages] are endowed with a variable intensity of definite attitudes, while they are predisposed to certain ways of feeling, thinking and willing, destined to such a special manifestation of activity, here they are disavowing or scorning these aptitudes or these tendencies and identifying themselves with a different being.” That said, he will then go on to say that “[Emma’s] need to see herself as other than she is constitutes her true personality.” *Bovarysm*, p. 4, 14.
5. Gaultier, *Bovarysm*, p. 11.

6. Bourget qtd. in *Bovarysm*, p. 11.


10. Bersani expands this idea and goes so far as to say that literature both creates desire (the absence) and explores it: “Literature has an even more profound relevance…It is not merely instructive *about* desire; in a sense, desire *is* a phenomenon of the literary imagination. Desire is an activity within a lack; it is an appetite stimulated by an absence.” *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (1st ed., Little, Brown, 1976), p. 10. Again, this explains why Emma jumps into marriage with Charles despite really knowing him.


12. After having made love with Rodolphe, Emma will launch herself into a reverie made up of all the images which have crystallized the ideal; Emma will fantasize (dream) about her future with Rodolphe according to these same set of images; After failing to convince herself that she loves Léon Emma will again fantasize about the same imaginary man—one who encompasses all the traits of the Ideal. *Madame Bovary: Contexts, Criticism*, p. 131, 158, 223.


18. To take the time to outline/recount the full force of the ‘mirror’ vis-à-vis a historical and literary account would be redundant in light of other work on the subject. As such, I will be focusing solely on a few select examples of the mirror in the courtly love lyric—those which I believe prove examples of the phenomena par excellence. For a complete and comprehensive account dealing with the subject, see: Goldin, The Mirror of Narcissus, and Zweig, The Heresy of Self-Love: a Study of Subversive Individualism.


23. “Better” insofar as they believe that in imitating or attempting to become worthy of the ‘lady’ (the exemplar of perfect moral and ethical goodness), they themselves are moving closer to this perfection.


28. Ibid., pp. 51-52.

29. N.b., the poet does not use the word *passion* but instead alludes to it through the line “*I marvel that straightaway my heart does not melt with desire*”; this is passion expressed through general, unspecified “desire.”

30. Speaking of passionate love, Barthes captures this desire to return to the state of pre-experience (as well as images a scenario that is in keeping with the final phase of the mirror). He writes: “There might be the possibility of an innocent suffering in this kind of love, of an innocent misery (if I were faithful to the pure Image repertoire, and if I were to reproduce within myself only the infantile dyad, the suffering of the child separated from its mother); I should then not accuse what lacerates me, I might even affirm suffering.” Roland Barthes and Richard Howard, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (Hill and Wang, 1978), p. 118.

31. This scene will be looked at in detail in the following chapter.

33. “The most interesting lyric poets never forget that courtly love is a lie, a precious and fruitful lie that can in fact enhance our nature, a falsehood that brings true rewards.”


36. “Is there anyone who loves antiquity more than I, anyone more haunted by it, anyone who has made a greater effort to understand it?” *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert*, p. 166.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 144. Sartre highlights this as well: “I learn that the ‘father of realism’ during his trip through the Orient dreamed of writing the story of a mystic virgin, living in the Netherlands, consumed by dreams, a woman who would have been the symbol of Flaubert’s own cult of art.” “Flaubert and *Madame Bovary*: Outline of a New Method.” in *Madame Bovary: Backgrounds and Sources*, p. 302.


42. Lowe, *Towards the Real Flaubert*, p. 4.
43. This is, of course, paradoxical insofar as the solidity of the image is incumbent on its immateriality; its perfect form exists in abstraction.

44. “She is what he wants to become—what he can never be, but, what he can recognize and aspire to.” Goldin, The Mirror of Narcissus, p. 75.

45. Here is where a common contention with the courtly lyric arises: the dehumanization of the woman. It would appear that perfection arises as a result of the stripping of all vitality. This will be addressed further on.


47. For more on the process of crystallization, see: Stendhal, Love, p. 45 and passim.

48. The Mirror of Narcissus, p. 83.

49. Ezra Pound, The Spirit of Romance, p. 91. What is more, the connection that Emma draws between passion and the religion likewise reflects the trajectory of the troubadours insofar as elements of Christianity were invoked in order to make passion intelligible.

50. Flaubert, Madame Bovary, p. 30.

51. When examining these fragments, it is worth recalling Margaret Lowe’s consideration that only through careful consideration of allegory and metaphor can Flaubert be fully understood. Additionally, I would urge the reader to keep in mind a comment from François Mauriac regarding the “biographical approach to literature”: Un écrivain ne se confie ni à sa Correspondance ni même à ses journaux intimes. Seules ses créatures racontent sa véritable histoire.” << “A writer does not confide in his Correspondence or even in his diaries. Only his creatures tell his true story.” >> François Mauriac qtd. in Lowe, Towards the Real Flaubert, p. 15.
52. Flaubert, Madame Bovary, p. 30.

53. Nerval qtd. in Robinson, French Literature in the Nineteenth Century, p. 127. The two states naturally being the temporal/Real and the Ideal/infinite.

54. This is not to be equated with Gaultier’s use of the term, wherein the arrested state is equated with the material/temporal. I find his discussion of the arrested vs. movement to be very poignant, but disagree completely with the designation of terms. As will become clear, this paper will use the arrested state to signify moments or encounters with the Ideal; and since the Ideal equates to transcendence/infinity, this precludes time, hence the “arrested” state: a state in which time has no effect. Movement, on the other hand, will come to signify materiality and the Real: the antithesis of the Ideal, just as movement is the antithesis of arrest. Cf. Jules de Gaultier, Bovarysm, p. 153 and passim.

55. The Letters of Gustave Flaubert, p. 150, 159, 214.


57. The novel opens with a description of Charles, and in this description, we learn that “he wore ill-cleaned, hob-nailed boots.” Flaubert, Madame Bovary, p. 7.

58. In order to avoid confusion, I am refraining from using the term “other.” By “intermediary,” I simply mean the person who is supposed to act as the means to reach the Ideal.

59. Contrary to Virginie, Paul will never leave the island, thus solidifying his emblematic role.
61. “This is the very thing that the socialists of the world, with their incessant materialist preaching, refuse to see. They have denied suffering; they have blasphemed three-quarters of modern poetry, the blood of Christ that stirs within us.” *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert*, p. 169.
62. Explicit within all this religious symbolism is the *choice* to opt into a state of suffering. The Jesus who is sinking under the cross has chosen, of his own accord, to die.
63. “She tried, by way of mortification, to eat nothing a whole day. She puzzled her head to find some vow to fill.” Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, p. 30.
64. Cf. Grande, who asserts: “[Emma’s] childhood tendency to merge religious and romantic feelings develops into a lifelong obsession, and part of her tragedy derives from her inability to distinguish between these emotions.” “Desire in *Madame Bovary*,” p. 77.
67. Virginie will, of course, die in a violent storm on her way back to the island (i.e., the infinite).
68. Grande, “*Desire in Madame Bovary*,” p. 76.

75. “In the rhetorical play of antithesis the poet’s intention is carried forward.” Goldin, *The Mirror of Narcissus*, p. 29.

76. “As Jean-Pierre Richard has brilliantly shown in his essay on Flaubert in *Littérature et sensation*, a fundamental theme of Flaubert’s ‘material’ imagination is that of a fusion between the self and the world, as well as among all the elements of consciousness. Contours are blurred, boundaries disappear, and the great danger in Flaubert’s imaginary world is that of being drowned in a kind of formless liquid dough, in a sea of thick, undifferentiated matter.” Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax*, p. 94.


78. *Bovarysm*, pp. 147-150. Likewise, Pound, speaking of the restraint that the troubadours had to operate under, writes: “The electric current gives light where it meets resistance.” *The Spirit of Romance*, p. 97. Cf. Sartre, who writes: “The most concrete significations are radically irreducible to the most abstract significations. The ‘differential’ at each signifying plane reflects the differential of the higher plane by impoverishing it and by contracting it; it clarifies the differential of the lower plane and serves as a rubric for the synthetic unification of our most abstract knowing.” “Flaubert and *Madame Bovary*: Outline of a New Method,” p. 305.

79. “that there is in him an animal and an intelligence, a soul and a body.” >> Hugo qtd. in Lowe, *Towards the Real Flaubert*, p. 9.


84. Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, p. 34.
85. Ibid., p. 34.
86. Ibid., p. 34.
87. Ibid., p. 34.

Chapter 3

2. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Flaubert tells us as much before Charles ever meets Emma: in the very first paragraph, even *before we learn his name*, he is characterized by the following line: “He wore stout, ill-cleaned, hob-nailed boots.” Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, p. 7. Not to mention that his trousers are “yellowish”—emphasis on *ish*.
4. In Provençal, foudadz signals “foolish and immoderate behaviour in love, not governed by *mesura* [moderation] or *sen* [sense, understanding]”. For a complete list of troubadour terms and their definitions see the glossary in O’Donoghue, *The Courtly Love Tradition*, pp. 311-314.
6. Ibid., p. 23.
7. There are countless examples of what De Rougemont terms “obstacle love”: a literary convention wherein a character, in order to prolong the effects of passion, creates obstacles for him or herself which prevent the gratification of desire (done, for the most part, subconsciously). Barthes, commenting on a specific employment of this trope in Balzac’s *Sarrasine*, captures with perfect eloquence what is, at this point, a purely automatic impulse: “The pleasure the subject plans to take in his object is more hallucinatory than real; he therefore postpones the actual undertaking and first establishes conditions propitious to an hallucinatory manipulation, and as an excuse for this very purposeful impulsiveness he creates the obstacle of difficulties, which he exaggerates because they are useful to his ‘dream,’ which alone interests him and which the difficulties excuse.” Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 124. Emma, filled as she is with Romantic dreams and desires, has most likely internalized marriage to a man one does not love as a precondition to the pursuit of passion.

8. Cf. Andreas Capellanus, *De Amore, passim*.

9. While this claim may appear to be tenacious, the fact of the matter is that there is little-to-no evidence to support the claim that Emma indeed chooses to marry Charles because of love. In fact, most of the information fed to the reader is done through the perspective of Charles; what we do know is that Charles can hardly speak to Emma, the marriage appears to be arranged quickly, and immediately after Emma is disappointed with her decision. Arguably, then, I believe it is fair to say that Emma rushes into the marriage not out of love for Charles, but out of love for love—as a way to enter into the world of passion that she desires above all else.
10. Gaultier, who brings attention to the problematic of one’s reality, writes: “In all these cases truth proves an arbitrary principle which is expressed in the faith which it inspires and whose virtue consists in gainsaying a contrary force which contradicts it. This contradiction and this resistance delineate in their points of equilibrium the contours of reality, but in order that the real be formed and become perceptible one condition is indispensable, namely a certain duration of the state of equilibrium which has been established by the two antagonistic forces. If this equilibrium is broken too soon or too frequently, if the force of arrest and of association contradicting the power of movement and of dissociation is exerted too feebly, heed a series of avatars which fail to be formulated, and never attain that degree of fixity where a state of consciousness notes them.” Gaultier, *Bovarysm*, p. 171.

11. “The instant the courtly man sets himself the task of fulfilling the ideal reflected in the mirror, he must make of his life one endless labor, without rest and ultimately without rewards. For it is a hopeless task, and every achievement is an injunction to go further.” Goldin, *The Mirror of Narcissus*, p. 82.


19. This conflation is not an entirely tendentious one. On more than one occasion Emma will be described as “bird like”: Léon, ruminating about the impossibility of obtaining Emma for himself, describes her as “soaring away from him like a winged apotheosis”; much later we get this description of her leaving Leon, “She answered with a nod, and vanished like a bird”; Later still, we get this, “She would have liked to take wing like a bird, and fly off far away to become young again in the realms of immaculate purity.” Moreover, Emma’s own conception of passion is conceptualized as “a great bird with rose colored wings, hung in the splendor of poetic skies.” Flaubert, Madame Bovary, p. 89, 189, 232, 55.

20. Ibid., p. 41.

21. Ibid., p. 46.

22. “Emma looked with dazzled eyes at the names of the unknown authors, who had signed their verses for the most part as counts or viscounts.” Ibid., p. 33.

23. “Moreover, the exaltation of the lady is really a denial of her humanity.” Goldin, The Mirror of Narcissus, p. 82.

24. Flaubert, Madame Bovary, p. 46.

25. Ibid., p. 46.

26. Ibid., p. 46.

27. This is especially pertinent considering what Jean Rousset and Gérard Genette have labeled “dead moments” in the novel. Rousset and Genette qtd. in Bersani, A Future for Astyanax, p. 99. There exists, to quote Bersani, “descriptive passages which seem to have no dramatic function but merely interrupt or suspend the novel’s action...
detail often seems to be given for its own sake; suddenly the story is no longer “moving,” and we have an almost detachable literary *morceau.*” Ibid., p. 99.

28. Flaubert, *Madame Bovary,* p. 47; emphasis mine. Ironically, this motif of the desire to “penetrate” into the life of another will return, this time reversed, prompting the decision for suicide. See: *Madame Bovary,* p. 248.

29. Ramazani, *The Free Indirect Mode,* p. 82.


32. As opposed to novelistic time. Apropos of time, Bersani extends this to include the manipulation of novelistic time. Because the novel eliminates dead time, all is action or drama all of the time; this is problematic as “Emma’s thrilling excitements are quickly submerged in ordinary time, and it is the shattering absence of drama which weens her out.” Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax,* p. 98.


34. Flaubert, *Madame Bovary,* p. 49.

35. *Ibid.,* p. 49. The color yellow will appear throughout the novel. It is like the boot, a symbol of the worldly; however, it is a little more complicated than that, for if we were to truly see the world according to Emma’s point of view and adopt it ourselves, then yellow is a symbol for the Ideal. All of the objects and clothing conscribed to the color yellow are those things that act as vehicles for Emma’s transcendence. Just some of the examples include: the yellowing of the sole of the shoe after the dance, Rodolphe’s gloves, and the yellow carriage (the Hirondelle). Moreover, considering that the only
other color that is used to this extent and more is the color blue (the color belonging to the Romantic), it is significant that these two are to be looked at together. Therefore, the color will represent gilt—a deceiving form of the Ideal wherein its true significance, like the boot, is to point to the worldliness of a thing.

36. It is one of the commonplaces of criticism since the novel’s release to see Emma’s materiality interpreted as folly. This is a perfectly sympathetic reading, since for the rest of the novel (and especially in Book III) Emma will be wrapped up in the latest trends to the point of debt beyond repair. This is true, but to say, as Henry James does, that what Emma actually has a passion for is “luxury and elegance” is, I think, unjustified by the evidence. It is, at best, correct only on a surface level. See: Henry James, “Gustave Flaubert,” in Madame Bovary and the Critics, 55-64, p. 60. In other words, even if someone is adamant in establishing a direct causation between her debt and her suicide, what is at the root of this is still the will to infinity.

37. Flaubert, Madame Bovary, p. 49; emphasis mine.

38. Ibid., p. 49.

39. “As she sewed she pricked her fingers, which she then put to her mouth to suck them.” Ibid., p. 16.

40. Ibid., p. 49.

41. Ibid., p. 50.

42. Ibid., p. 50.

43. Ibid., p. 50.

44. Ibid., pp. 50-51.


47. *Ibid.*, p. 51. This is almost exactly what Emma feels during her stay at La Vaubyessard.

48. This, of course, echoes Nerval’s words regarding a place in between the worldly and the space of dreams.

49. Emma’s reaction to this night is a distinct product of the second stage. Had Emma been in the third stage, she would have realized, like Nerval, that “Since the essence of an ideal is that it can never be possessed, the object of his love is at its most real when embodied in the dream’s re-experience of the past rather than when transferred into the substitute of the physical present.” Robinson, *French Literature in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 127


51. Or, as Bersani notes, what is especially disastrous for Emma is that she “can’t really return to literature.” Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax*, p. 99.


54. This still-coded desire and the sustained subcurrent of will to downfall is likewise noted by Margaret Lowe: “Throughout [Emma’s] life she has longed to be exalted, transported, utterly and entirely ‘dans un grand baiser’ [in a grand kiss]; her illusion and belief in the love of a man who should also be a God, her desire for transcendence, for
release from the flesh, for a ‘volupté plus haute’ [higher pleasure], have not dimmed.”

Lowe, Towards the Real Flaubert, p. 50.

55. Flaubert, Madame Bovary, pp. 55-56.


57. Ibid., p. 77.

58. Flaubert, Madame Bovary, p. 57.

59. Aside from assuring Emma that he will guide her through the dance (this, moreover, being relayed to us through the narrator's voice), there is no dialogue between Emma and the Viscount—he appears and remains a silent force: the pure image.

60. Flaubert, Madame Bovary, p. 69.

61. Ramazani, The Free Indirect Mode, p. 103. Homais, on the other hand, proves the exception as his Ideal is found precisely in language: “…Good day, doctor” (for the pharmacist much enjoyed pronouncing the word “doctor,” as if addressing another by it reflected on himself some of the grandeur of the title).” Flaubert, Madame Bovary, p. 136. In as many ways the antitheses and double of Emma, language, belonging to the temporal, is the perfect mirror for him. Cf. Gaultier who writes, “Homais imagines that he shares in the dignity of human learning by imitating the language of men of science, by crudely reproducing their attitudes and feigning their concerns.” Gaultier, Bovarysm, p. 21.

62. Flaubert, Madame Bovary, p. 72; emphasis mine.

63. Bersani notably reinforces this idea in his analysis of Emma’s language use by likening this form of language to a tableau that “recharges literary language by retaining
only its inspirations for visual fantasies.” *A Future for Astyanax*, p. 95. He goes on to say: “These desirable tableaux could be thought of as halfway between verbal narrative and the hallucinated scenes of intense sensations.” *Ibid.*, p. 95.

64. Ramazani, *The Free Indirect Mode*, p. 103.

65. Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, p. 80, 84, 89.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 89. The “birdlike walk” paired with the “soaring away” make it increasingly difficult not to draw a connection to the lark poem, especially considering that Emma has already experienced the complete fulfillment of desire with the Viscount.


69. The converse is, of course, true as well. After Léon has left, he “reappeared, taller, handsomer, more charming, more vague.” With distance reinstated, desire has reignited: “Ah! he was gone, the

70. “She threw herself at his image, pressed herself against it; she stirred carefully the dying embers, sought all around her anything that could make it flare; and the most distant reminiscences, like the most immediate occasions, what she experienced as well as what she imagined, her wasted voluptuous desires that were unsatisfied, her projects of happiness that crackled in the wind like dead boughs, her sterile virtue, her lost hopes, the yoke of domesticity,—she gathered it all up, took everything, and made it all serve as fuel for her melancholy.” *Ibid.*, p. 102.


74. *Ibid.*, p. 104. Moreover, Rodolphe, as discussed in chapter 1, has lost touch with the state of pre-experience. In this regard, he is the antithesis of Léon. Léon, existing in a state of pre-experience, could only ever see Emma as the ‘lady,’ the image of perfection; Rodolphe representing, on the other hand, the state of experience, will only ever see Emma in a debased state—someone “like all his mistresses.” *Ibid.*, p. 154.

75. Another interesting parallel is found in the name of Rodolphe’s current mistress: Virginie (the eponymous heroine of Paul and Virginie; a character that Emma bases part of her ideal on. This is the second time that Flaubert chooses an unmistakably Romantic name for the woman that Emma will replace, the first being Charles’ first wife, Heloïse. A further degree of intertwining passionate imagery is found in a piece of Emma’s dialogue to Rodolphe: “I am your servant, your concubine! You are my king, my idol! You are good, you are beautiful, you are clever, you are strong!” *Ibid.*, p. 154. Cf. *The Love Letters of Abelard and Heloïse*, in which Heloïse says the following in a letter to Abelard: “The name of wife may seem more sacred or more binding, but sweeter for me will always be the word mistress, or, if you will permit me, that of concubine or whore.” Scott-Moncrieff, C. K., et al, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* (Cooper Square Publishers, 1974), p. 114.

76. Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, p. 112, 113; emphasis mine.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 113; emphasis mine.


80. Emma will have a similarly automated response when she moves “unconsciously” towards the church: “The image awoke a tender emotion in her; she felt limp and helpless, like the down of a bird whirled by the tempest, and it was unconsciously that she went towards the church…” *Ibid.*, p. 92.


84. Grande, for one, believes that Catherine Leroux is the only character in the novel that does not conform to desire: “Actually, all the characters in Madame Bovary lack depth of insight. All with the exception of a little old woman named Catherine Leroux, who receives a medal for fifty-four years of hard labor, are under the spell of desire, nurturing some kind of deceit about others and themselves.” Dominick LaCapra believes that the only characters one may deem “positive” play a frustratingly small role, namely, “the adolescent Justin, the old servant Catherine Leroux, and the good doctor Lariviere.” Bernard Doering echoes LaCapra’s claim inasmuch as he believes that Justin, Catherine Leroux, and Dr. Lariviere are the only characters who inspire pity. Speaking of Catherine Leroux, specifically, he writes: “Catherine Leroux is described with delicacy and compassion… Flaubert protects her from his irony because she appears as the antithesis of the self-righteous bourgeois complacency that surrounds her, and of which she is the victim.” Grande, “Desire in *Madame Bovary,*” pp. 91-92; Dominick LaCapra, *Madame Bovary on Trial* (Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 176; Bernard Doering, “Madame

85. Lowe, *Towards the Real Flaubert*, p. 49.

86. At least until they are interrupted by “a sound of wooden shoes.” Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, p. 125.


89. Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, p. 130.

90. Note that this is the same gesture Emma makes with the Viscount to signal the initiation of passion: “She leaned back against the wall and covered her eyes with her hands.” *Ibid.*, p. 46.


94. “Irony…seems to me to dominate life. How is it that, often, upon shedding tears, I have gone to look at myself in the mirror so as to observe myself? This tendency to watch oneself from above is possibly the fount of all virtue. Far from confining you to subjectivity, it distances you from it.” Flaubert qtd. in Ramazani, *The Free Indirect Mode*, p. 113.


98. Ibid., p. 106.

99. Note that Emma’s eyes begin with a shade of black. This is one of the many signs of Emma’s doomed future, a sign of a sort of predestined failure or sign of inevitability.

100. For a different reading of Emma’s eyes changing color, see B.F. Bart’s “Flaubert's Documentation Goes Awry or What Color Were Emma Bovary's Eyes?” in Romance Notes, vol. 5, no. 2, 1964, p. 138.

101. There will always be conflicting accounts in any translated work. But to decide on “transfiguration” is, I believe, an accurate rendering, for it retains a religious connotation that is crucial to Emma’s thinking.

102. Flaubert, Madame Bovary, p. 57. I direct the reader to page 26 of this thesis for the initial discussion of the passage.

103. There is substantial scholarship on the use of the color blue in the novel, especially: Stirling Haig, The Madame Bovary Blues, passim.


105. Flaubert, Madame Bovary, p. 131.

106. Ibid., pp. 161-162.


109. Ibid., p. 51.

110. Chapter 4, for example, will explore the upcoming opera scene where Emma is completely captivated by the performance because she recognizes herself in it. However, and this is crucial, it is not a recognition of what she wishes to experience, but of what
she has *already* experienced: “She recognised all the intoxication and the anguish that had brought her close to death. The voice of the prima donna seemed to echo her own conscience, and the whole fictional story seemed to capture something of her own life” *Ibid.*, p. 179. Rather than Emma having her life reflect the story, the story is now reflecting Emma.


113. “A slightly pockmarked man in green leather slippers, and wearing a velvet cap with a gold tassel, was warming his back at the chimney. His face expressed nothing but self-satisfaction, and he appeared as calmly established in life as the gold-finch suspended over his head in its wicker cage: he was the pharmacist.” *Ibid.*, p. 62.


120. “Emma had no reason to suppose he lacked skill, it would be a satisfaction for her to have urged him to a step by which his reputation and fortune would be increased…The evening was charming, full of shared conversation and common dreams. They talked about their future success, of the improvements to be made in their house…and she was happy to refresh herself with a new sentiment, healthier and purer, and to feel at last some
tenderness for this poor man who adored her. The thought of Rodolphe for one moment passed through her mind, but her eyes turned again to Charles; she even noticed with surprise that he had rather handsome teeth.” Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, p. 142, 144.

121. So, too, do her reasons for hating him become more and more ridiculous as time goes on.


126. *Ibid.*, p. 47. The serpent will appear multiple times. It will appear again when Emma is out alone in the garden and spots a vine that is like “a great sick serpent” (105). Likewise, the serpent will prove to play a large symbolic role apropos of the blind man.


Chapter 4


Upon the recognition of the truth—that the one Narcissus yearns for is himself—

Narcissus asks: “*Should I be sought or seek?*” Ovid and Mandelbaum, *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, p. 96; emphasis mine.


18. Whether or not this decision is made consciously is of little importance and more suited to discussions of modern psychology. What is at stake is not a critical faculty of the mind in and of itself, *at least not yet*, but the course of events that this decision sets off.

20. *Ibid*.


25. This is, of course, only one facet of troubadour poetry, but one which perfectly encapsulates what is at stake in this *specific* exchange between Emma and Léon. Roger Boase, speaking on this particular understanding of troubadour poetry, writes: “Courtly Love was a manifestation of the play element in culture, comprising contest, chance, divination and make-believe, which constituted an aesthetic and socially acceptable ritual for the expression of nostalgia, passion and anxiety.” *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love*, p. 102. For more on the argument of troubadour poetry as a play phenomenon, see Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love*, esp. pp. 102-107.


28. Really, the entirety of this scene could be posed in Kantian terms: under what conditions is the ability to exist as an image possible.


31. Ibid., p. 187.

32. Ibid., p. 179.

33. Ibid., p. 188. To “remain as brother and sister” again harkens back to Emma’s initial fascination with the story of Paul et Virgine.

34. Ibid., p. 189.

35. Ibid., p. 189.

36. This is best illustrated in the third stanza, to which Aimeric de Peguilhan sings:

   “Alas! I cannot control myself, but go searching and seeking my own harm, and prefer by far to suffer loss and bring about my own hurt with you, Lady, than to prevail with another; for I always think to profit by this hurt and to act wisely by this folly. But, following the example of the faithful, foolish lover, you hold me the better when you treat me worse.” Translation taken from Goldin, The Mirror of Narcissus, pp. 89-90.

37. “‘Monsieur! The steeple! the steeple!’ ‘No, thank you!’ said Leon. ‘You are missing the best! It is four hundred and forty feet high, nine less than the great pyramid of Egypt. It is all cast iron, it . . .’” Ibid., p. 192.

38. Ibid., p. 193.


40. Ibid., p. 193.

41. Ibid., pp. 193-194; emphasis mine.

42. Ibid., p. 194.

43. Ibid., p. 195.

44. See: Chapter 3 of this thesis, p. 155.


51. “She would have liked to be able to watch over his life, and the idea occurred to her of having him followed in the streets.” *Ibid.*, p. 223.


60. Dennis Geronimus, *Piero Di Cosimo: Visions Beautiful and Strange* (Yale Univ. Press, 2006), p. 120.

by a profound inquietude, leaves the field of external activity and lifts itself to higher and higher degrees of contemplation, by which the higher ‘intelligible’ fields of being are opened to it. This process finds its end and last achievement in the supreme act of contemplation, in which consciousness reaches an immediate intuition of God. This highest act of contemplation, being the most perfect among all possible acts of man, is also the starting point for a philosophical interpretation of human existence as a whole, in so far as that act itself is considered as the final goal of life, and since in relation to it all other kinds of knowledge and action appear as mere preparatory degrees. ‘It is our goal to see God through the intellect and to enjoy the seen God through the will’ (307). But the final goal, in which the meaning of the whole of human existence is represented, is reached, as experience teaches, only by a few persons and even by them only for a short time.” Paul Oskar Kristeller, “The Theory of Immortality in Marsilio Ficino,” in Journal of the History of Ideas, vol. 1, no. 3, 1940, 299–319, pp. 304-305.

62. Ibid., p. 54.


64. Lowe, Towards the Real Flaubert, p. 93.


66. Ibid., p. 211.

67. In the story of Tiresias, Tiresias comes upon two serpents mating in the woods. Upon striking them, Tiresias is transformed into a woman and, striking them again seven years later, turned back into a man. Serpents are mentioned on five different occasions in


85. See the previous chapter of this thesis: “She looked long at the windows of the chateau, trying to guess which were the rooms of all those she had noticed the evening before. She would have wanted to know their lives, to penetrate into them, to blend with them.” *Ibid.*, p. 47.


87. I mean this along the Heideggerian lines of *Dasein*—a way of being in the world. What ensues after this revelation is a clarity, or an attunement to the world, by which Emma understands, completely, her role in relation to everything around her. The blinds, so to say, have been lifted from her eyes.


94. << “A classic need for symmetry.” >> Don Demorest qtd. in Lowe, *Towards the Real Flaubert*, p. 48

95. Lowe, *Towards the Real Flaubert*, p. 91.


101. Bersani writes specifically about this indefiniteness as it pertains to *Madame Bovary* in *Balzac to Beckett*, p. 159.


112. See Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World, passim.*


122. Landy draws attention to the fact that Charles quite literally dies of grief: “Charles has accomplished a feat that, within the Flaubertian fictional world, is almost inconceivable: whereas his wife succumbed to the most brutally material causes imaginable - the ravaging of her insides from arsenic poison - Charles has actually managed to die of grief. It is not, then, just his ideas that have become romantic: his very being has, too.” Landy, “Passion, Counter-Passion, Catharsis: Flaubert (and Beckett) on Feeling Nothing,” in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature*, edited by Garry Hagberg and Walter Jos, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, 218–38, p. 219.

Of course, we do not need to wait until Emma’s funeral to see that Charles is a Romantic. In keeping with Flaubert’s chosen symbol of the Romantic pursuit—that of vertical distance—our introduction to Charles, where we see in the church wishing to be hoisted up by the bells (“at great fetes [he] begged the beadle to let him toll the bells, that he might hang all his weight on the long rope and feel himself borne upward by it in its swing”), shows him to be unmistakably Romantic. Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, p. 10.
There is also the less than subtle hint of his previous wife’s name: Heloïse, which places him, at least marginally, in the role of Abelard—Abelard and Heloïse being the representative couple of passionate love for Stendhal.


127. Even after learning of her infidelity he reacts, not with anger, but with perverse admiration: “Charles was lost in reverie at the sight of the face she had loved. He seemed to find back something of her there. It was quite a shock to him. He would have liked to have been this man.” *Ibid.*, p. 274.


129. “‘It is a girl!’ said Charles. She turned her head away and fainted.” *Ibid.*, p. 74.

130. “At last Emma remembered that at the château of Vaubyessard she had heard the Marquise call a young lady Berthe; from that moment this name was chosen.” *Ibid.*, p. 75.

WORKS CITED


