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Costume and Propriety in *Madame Bovary*: la "Culture de Lin"

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by

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Abstract

Costume is analyzed as a semiotic system in *Madame Bovary*. An analysis of mid-nineteenth-century costume and its relationship to propriety precedes a detailed examination of references to Emma Bovary's costume in the novel. It establishes an understanding of the central role that costume played in regulating women's propriety. The analysis of the text itself illustrates how Flaubert used this knowledge to infuse the novel with references to Emma's costume that would have held readily recognizable semiotic connotations to contemporary readers in terms of their relationship to the character's descent into debauchery. An analysis of two filmic interpretations of the novel that establishes the extent to which relevant costume details have been preserved in reinterpretation of Flaubert's work follows.

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Introduction

My thesis explores the semiotics of costume in *Madame Bovary*. Within the area of French literature, Flaubert is a canonical figure whose work continues to provide much opportunity for scholarly study. *Madame Bovary* in particular, as one of the most widely known and read works of the nineteenth century, has been the topic of much research exploring the realist style of the work, the astute characterization of provincial life it offers, or the character Emma and Flaubert's motives for creating her. Indeed, the work has even been the subject of some research in the area of semiotics. However, within such a rich and complex narrative, certain semiotic systems have necessarily gone unexamined. I propose to undertake an analysis of costume within the work, which is one such system.

I hypothesize that references to costume within the text function as indicators of Emma Bovary's descent into debauchery that would have been readily accessible to the nineteenth-century reader, but which may not be to the contemporary reader. This analysis is warranted, I believe, by the lack of a clear denouncement of Emma by Flaubert, which, given the outcry against the novel at its publication, would seem to suggest that the public created negative interpretations of the character on other bases. The treatment of costume within the work may be one such basis.

In order to execute this analysis, I will first assemble the population of references to costume within the novel. Then I will determine to what extent the specific references to costume contribute to an overall sense of Emma Bovary as immoral, specifically as sexually deviant or adulterous. This decision will be made in each case within the framework of my costume historical analysis and with attention to the possible artistic motivations for such details.

I anticipate finding that references to costume in *Madame Bovary* do function as a

semiotic system mirroring the progression of Emma Bovary's character in the narrative. It seems obvious that Flaubert would include only those details that contribute meaningfully to the work as a whole; thus, it is unlikely that references to costume will be found to be unimportant within the structure of the novel. Achieving a better understanding of how costume functions specifically will enhance the existing literature by providing information on an additional facet of the structure of *Madame Bovary*, a goal that I believe is valid in light of the continuing scholarly interest in this text.

Literature Review

My project is primarily one of literary analysis; however, since significant portions of it are also dedicated to costume historical and semiotic analysis, it seems necessary to review pertinent literature from these areas as well. Thus, I will begin by discussing several pieces of literary criticism consistent with my research. I will then briefly address semiotic theory with regard to costume, as well as the relevance of costume historical studies of literary texts.

Ippolito's article, "Flaubert's Pearl Necklace: Weaving a Garland of Images in the Reader's Memory" effectively conveys the idea that *Madame Bovary* is a work that relies upon symbolic detail, beginning with the scene in Rouen Cathedral, which, as the author demonstrates, symbolically foreshadows the coach incident that follows it (Ippolito 169-170). Ippolito actually states a central assumption of my project in a rather elegant way: "[w]hat appears ... at the level of one sentence seems all the more relevant at the level of a narrative in its entirety" (170). Thus, details the reader might bypass as simply stylistic idiosyncrasies are actually significant. Indeed, Ippolito continues, "comparisons, images, and metaphors ... have to be incorporated in the memory of the narrative ... they are *signs* of its order, of the fullness of the text's elaboration and, as such, they discharge a rich mnemonic function" (173, emphasis added).

The ideas presented in this article are indicative of the starting point in my logic. Given the abundance of descriptive details in Flaubert's work, and the abundance of detail specifically related to costume in *Madame Bovary*, it seems worthwhile to undertake to examine costume specifically. The descriptions of costume can generally be characterized as imagery, and as signs that rest in the reader's memory, as such they may indeed form a semiotic system of visual memories that, if Ippolito's ideas are to be given any credence, is significant in the overall narrative structure.

"Stylized Ethnography? Emma Bovary's Wedding(s)," an article by Jeffrey Spires, examines Flaubert's "scientific" (exhaustively descriptive) style in two passages of the novel, the wedding ceremony and the ball at Vaubyessard (346). His assertion is that the actual wedding ceremony is essentially devoid of predictable details, that is to say that, although the passage is very detailed, it lacks descriptions typical of accounts of weddings while the ball scene is replete with such details, causing him to label it as a sort of alternative wedding scene (Spires 346, 354). This analysis concentrates on the preponderance of (and the differences between) descriptive language that occurs within these two scenes, and indeed, throughout the novel, suggesting that detailed descriptions of seemingly banal elements are actually crucial to Flaubert's project (Spires 346-347). Spires does point out that costume is a central element of the description in the wedding scene; indeed, that "people [are] reduced to clothing and body parts frozen in space" (347).

However, his analysis simply includes description of costume as one among several strategically placed details meant to emphasize the wedding as a "mundane experience" (Spires 353). It does not contemplate the possibility that clothing might have been chosen for emphasis from a wide range of sign systems for a specific purpose. This is no doubt due to the fact that

Spires simply wishes to explore how, stylistically, Flaubert reduces the importance of Emma's wedding; it is not his goal to explore any supplemental meaning the details that are presented are meant to evoke.

A similar analysis occurs in "Sur la signification mytho-poétique du motif des 'trois cercueils' de Madame Bovary," an article by Jane E. Kairet. Here, the focus is on the symbolic importance of the three separate caskets that Charles Bovary requests for the burial of Emma (Kairet 676). As in the previous article, what is emphasized is not the progress of the plot, but specific details that seem to serve a less than obvious function in it; in this case, what is important is not that Emma has died and must be buried, but the detailed description of how she must be buried. Kairet proposes that the three caskets named near the end of the novel by Charles are actually a clue that clarifies the entire structure of the novel and of Charles's life (677). She links the three materials used in the construction of the three caskets to the three "Mesdames Bovary," Charles's mother, his first wife, and Emma, pointing to previous instances in the text where each of the three materials is linked to one of these characters (Kairet 677-679).

This analysis is closely related to the one I will carry out because it specifically focuses on what is signified by the details of Emma's burial, which do not seem immediately relevant to the novel. Kairet follows these three details, occupying no more than a few lines of text, throughout the entire course of the novel. This suggests that, within a detailed and carefully constructed narrative structure, nothing should be dismissed as unimportant.

Lawrence Rothfield, in "From Semiotic to Discursive Intertextuality: The Case of *Madame Bovary*," challenges a reading of the novel using adultery as the basis for a semiotic analysis, choosing instead hysteria as his starting point (58). By way of a definition of hysteria found in a nineteenth century medical dictionary, he proceeds to explain some of Emma's

various “hysterical” fits by way of the four step progression of the condition offered therein (Rothfield 65, 67, 69-71, 73). Prior to each of these attacks of hysteria, Emma is in a state of “hyperexcitability” precipitated by the influx of sensory stimuli, and it is precisely the detailing of these stimuli by Flaubert that causes Rothfield to identify hysteria, and its associated precursors, as a semiotic system within the work (73).

This article exemplifies the semiotic analytical process, and, since it also deals with *Madame Bovary*, I believe it is an important model for my own inquiry. It is also remarkable in its use of very simple passages from the novel to make sophisticated arguments concerning its underlying meaning structure. Because the references to costume that I wish to examine are generally straightforward, rather than poetically stated as with the burial instructions discussed by Kairet, this article does much to inform my research’s design and goals.

Costume historians have long sought to provide a better understanding of all aspects of culture, including art, through the study of costume. In her now classic work, *Seeing Through Clothes*, Anne Hollander explains that “[d]ress is a form of visual art, a creation of images with the visual self as its medium” (311). Of course, the images created by costume necessarily occur within a social context; thus, “such images in art are acceptable as models because they are offered ... as renderings of the truth. ... Art ... monitors the perception of clothing” (Hollander 350). Moreover, “[c]lothes can suggest, persuade, connote, insinuate, or indeed lie, and apply subtle pressure when their wearer is speaking frankly and straightforwardly of other matters” (Hollander 355).

These remarks seem generally to support the aims of my project. Indeed, my research attempts to explain how costume fulfills all of these functions: Investigation into how Emma Bovary is a “rendering of the truth” of mid nineteenth century society, and thus, of how she so

effectively caused scandal, and into the connotative nature of clothing, is central to the project.

This connotative dimension of costume is also widely known within the field of semiotics. Costume is “used all over the world ... for the purpose of constructing socially meaningful messages” (Danesi 142). Indeed, “[c]lothes ... constitute a non-verbal sign system and thus are of obvious relevance to semiotic inquiry” (Danesi 142). Specifically, costume “is a sign system that is interconnected with the other social codes of a society through which social variables such as attitudes, gender ... [and] class status ... can be encoded” (Danesi 143).

My project is chiefly concerned with deciphering the meaningful messages encoded within references to costume in *Madame Bovary*. Thus, it is supported by a firm foundation in semiotic theory. The information I have presented here gives me reason to believe that my endeavor to analyze the semiotics of costume in this novel is both supported by previous research and called for by the lack of an existing analysis of costume within this particular work.

It seems wise, at this point, to discuss semiotics. This analysis, although it will proceed based upon the theoretical principles of semiotics, will not proceed by way of complex charts or matrices evaluating signs. Instead, it seeks chiefly by way of costume historical, literary and filmic analysis, to provide the reader with an increased appreciation for the subtlety, complexity, and meaningfulness of references to costume in *Madame Bovary* with the intention to show that costume functions as a semiotic system in the novel. Thus, this short overview will sufficiently familiarize any reader now unfamiliar with the tenets of the semiotic discipline to comprehend this analysis fully.

A Brief Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Semiotics

Put simply, semiotic inquiry is the search for meaning in signs; semiotics can be described as “the science of meaning” (Danesi 11). Semioticians work to understand how it is

that signs come to have specific, recognizable meanings. Every sign is composed of two parts, the signifier and the signified (Danesi 20). Any word is a sign. Let us take for example the word “book,” and then imagine its meaning. Clearly, “book” suggests something rather specific, that is, a three-dimensional object comprised of a cover surrounding pages inscribed with words or images. In this case, the physical sign “book” is the *signifier* of the meaning “book,” which is the *signified*. Given that an infinite number of signifiers and signifieds exist, in order for focused semiotic inquiry to take place, a specific sign system must be selected for study. Language is a very popular choice because it is commonly regarded as “the most complex and universal” sign system (Danesi 9).

The meaning that can be drawn from larger samples of language like novels is virtually infinite. From a novel one can gain a simple understanding of the plot or a more sophisticated comprehension derived from understanding of symbolic language. Examined at its most basic level, a narrative can follow a simple pattern such as “a subject ... desiring an object ... encountering an opponent ... finding a helper ... getting an object ... giving it to a receiver ... leading to a conclusion” (Danesi 107-108). *Madame Bovary* can be described at this simple level as having Emma as its subject, happiness as the desired object, and Charles, Yonville, Rodolphe, Homais, and Lheureux as opponents, for example (Danesi 108).

This project’s focus extends beyond comprehension of the plot though. Indeed, I wish to examine how one subsystem of signs within the language of the text, references to costume, functions (in conjunction with the other sign systems in the novel) to allow the reader to create a specific meaning, in this case, a judgment regarding Emma’s moral status. In order to place more formally this analysis within the realm of literary analysis, let us now turn to an examination of Barthes who, in addition to being a premier literary critic, is a prominent semiotician. His work

The Fashion System offers invaluable insight into the significations of costume. In it, Barthes proposes that clothing can exist on three distinct levels: “technological, ... iconic ... [and] verbal” (5). That is to say that a garment, created by technological processes, becoming a physical representation, can also be expressed verbally (Barthes 5-7).

These are important possibilities for this analysis because both verbal representations of costume and visual (re)representations will be under consideration. Barthes offers a very simple, yet very useful, summation of the difference between “real clothing” and “represented clothing”:

“Real” clothing is burdened with practical considerations (protection, modesty, adornment); these finalities disappear from “represented” clothing, which no longer serves to protect, to cover, or to adorn, but at most to signify protection, modesty, or adornment ... written clothing has no practical or aesthetic function: it is entirely constituted with view to signification” (Barthes 8).

If written clothing is important in terms of what it signifies, then it is to be expected that references to costume are only included in a literary work insofar as they are able to contribute meaningfully to the whole as signifiers.

However, Barthes’s work purposely focuses on fashion magazines to the exclusion of literature. He rejects literature as a source of semiotic discourse on fashion on the grounds that “descriptions [of costume] from literature proper, although important in a number of great authors (Balzac, Michelet, Proust), are too fragmentary, too variable historically to be of use” (Barthes 10). While literature may not include enough written clothing to facilitate a semiotic analysis of costume applicable to society in general, I hope to demonstrate that costume is a formidable semiotic force in *Madame Bovary* and, indeed, that costume in literature may be deserving of more attention than Barthes extends to it. To this end, let us begin our analysis with

a brief overview of mid-nineteenth-century costume and its meanings.

Historical Realities of Costume and Propriety

In the nineteenth century, costume played an important role in the lives of the bourgeoisie. It was one resource that this emerging class could use to demonstrate its increasing social status, but the bourgeoisie was not well acquainted with the intricacies of dressing well and often made mistakes that revealed its lack of pedigree to the upper class. Because it was so important for the bourgeoisie to establish itself within society, “etiquette handbooks ... proliferated in the nineteenth century” (Perrot 87). The purpose of these manuals was to inform middle class citizens of aristocratic norms and practices; there was no ideal bourgeois moral code per se; instead, bourgeois propriety rested in the ability of its members to successfully emulate the aristocracy. “Only in high society did decorum find its supreme expression; only there was the supreme model of propriety developed and defined, always negatively in relation to the rising classes for whom it served as a unique reference” (Perrot 87). These handbooks then, were an invaluable resource: they could instruct their readers by imparting to them *savoir-faire* and through them the bourgeoisie could ostensibly achieve mastery over life “*comme il faut*” (Perrot 88).

Costume was a major aspect of normativity at this time. Indeed, it was written, “[c]lothing is to the body what education is to the mind. Clothing consists of similar elements for everyone, yet it varies according to the taste, attitude, order, care, elegance, and distinction everyone brings to it” (Perrot 87). Dressing becomes an art form under such circumstances; it is impossible to hide the deficiency in quality of one’s garments when cut and construction are uniform and quality is the only variable. This attitude functioned to maintain the distinctions between classes, and the cultural dominance of the upper class, on several levels. First, the upper

class enjoyed relative security because few within the bourgeoisie would have had the means to truly adopt aristocratic dress in general. Second, the middle class always understood that, to truly gain access to society, they needed more than money; they needed to look the part. Third, because etiquette manuals cannot hope to teach their readers every nuance of high culture, even those members of the bourgeoisie who did possess the means to finance an extravagant lifestyle would surely fail in their endeavor by committing some faux pas.

An error involving one's costume was every bit as indicative of low breeding as a lack of skill in conversation for example.

'Just as a single word is enough to betray someone's origins or reveal a dubious past or present, so to the eyes of a discerning man or woman a clumsy piece of lace, a flounce, a feather, a bracelet, and especially an earring or any pretentious ornament can reveal social status or assign a particular level in the social scale. Affectations in dress are breaches of elegance, just as certain expressions are incompatible with cultivated language' (Perrot 89).

Such "affectations" were virtually unavoidable for the bourgeoisie because they had not had the lifelong exposure to aristocratic norms that true propriety necessitated. They were, put simply, *nouveau riches*. The desire to participate in high society and the means to do so coupled with a lack of savoir-faire produced complete symbolic failure. "Vestimentary propriety implied an investment of time and energy, but its symbolic profitability stemmed from its financial unprofitability, reflecting the aristocratic ideology that considered idleness and conspicuous consumption as a vital necessity" (Perrot 89).

The elite were very aware of the difference between themselves and the bourgeoisie; however, the bourgeoisie seemed to remain tragically unaware of it. "To be *fashionable*,"

Balzac noted, ““one must enjoy leisure without having worked for it: or else hold four winning numbers in the lottery, be the son of a millionaire, a prince, a sinecurist, or a pluralist”” (cited in Perrot 90). Noticeably absent from this list is any mention of membership in the bourgeoisie. Indeed, the most hope it offers to that class is that its offspring, if its members are very successful, will perhaps gain entry into high society as the “son[s] of millionaire[s].” Perhaps the general difficulties faced by the bourgeoisie as it attempted to assimilate into the aristocracy might be better understood if the complexity of the specific problem of costume were clearer. As we have seen, much information could be gleaned from clothing alone; however, it may not be evident exactly why this was so. An explanation of mid-nineteenth-century costume is in order. Since this analysis will ultimately focus on Emma Bovary, it seems wise to concentrate our attention on women’s costume.

* * *

Absolutely every detail of a women’s costume was chosen according to a strict etiquette. In general, aristocratic and bourgeois women would have adhered to the same protocol in dress, but probably aristocratic women enjoyed more success with it. Beginning with the fabrics used in dress construction, the specifics of each kind of outfit, for every season, time of day, or occasion were dictated by the exacting standards of the day. “The seasons called for a range of specific colors and fabrics ... [and] the colors of fabrics were also chosen for the way they looked in daylight, gaslight, and candlelight” (Perrot 99, 103). Indeed, a well-dressed woman would have required a “delicate education in textiles” as, by this time, the possibilities for textile production had increased markedly so that the “[f]abrics of the 1850s and 1860s were varied in pattern and texture” (Perrot 103; Payne, Winakor, and Farrell-Beck 510). To give some indication of the extent to which fabric choice was important, some of the fabrics used for

various outfits were “lawn, chambray, gingham, chintz, and piqué ... among the summer fabrics. Winter wear called for cashmere, merino, challis, flannel, foulard, taffeta, brocade, velvet, and moiré, a ribbed silk with wavy marks” (Payne et. al. 510). In terms of eveningwear, “[t]hin, crisp gauze; stiff, transparent tarletan; and fine-netted tulle” were mainstays (Payne et. al. 510). Accessory fabrics such as lace and Kashmir shawls woven in paisley designs predominated (Payne et. al. 511).

Considering the variety of fabrics and colors used in clothing, it is not surprising that the toilette went through several daily transformations. Truly, a well-dressed woman would have had to change her attire multiple times during a single day; it went well beyond dressing for dinner.

‘A society woman who wants to be well dressed for all occasions at all times needs at least seven or eight toilettes per day: a morning dressing gown, a riding outfit, an elegant simple gown for lunch, a day dress if walking, an afternoon dress for visiting by carriage, a smart outfit to drive through the Bois de Boulogne, a gown for dinner, and a gala dress for evening or the theater. There is nothing exaggerated about this, and it could be more complicated still at the beach, in summer, with bathing costumes, and in autumn and winter, with hunting and skating costumes, if she shares these wholesome activities with men’ (Perrot 91-92).

Clearly, only the wealthiest women, with the most leisurely lifestyles would be able to follow such a regiment. However, it is important to remember, that to participate in such activities would have been a goal of bourgeois women, and even of those without the means to do so.

Each phase of the day required a different dress, and each dress conformed to certain etiquettes. The peignoir worn in the morning in the home was elegant, “made of muslin or nainsook, trimmed with bows, lace, and crimped ruffles” but allowed for more comfort than any

other costume a woman would wear during the day (Perrot 92). Even during this informal period, a half-corset was worn, which would be replaced by a much more rigid “full corset” for all subsequent costumes, and fashionable footwear was de rigueur (Perrot 92-93). Curly hair was the fashion, so women with straight hair had to wear curlers at night. In order for the style to last until the evening though, these could not be removed right away, so morning attire also called for “a little batiste bonnet” (Perrot 93). This attire was appropriate only for wear around one’s house, and it could *never* be revealed to anyone but family members and household staff as such a revelation would have constituted a serious breach of modesty (Perrot 93).

For the afternoon, a woman had to dress elegantly without being too showy. Day dress, of any of the several varieties was characterized by “simplicity and restraint.’ Thus, day décolletage was in bad taste, as was wearing too-ample skirts or showy jewels before evening” (Perrot 93). However, it was possible, and very important, to show one’s high status even in such restrained costume. Different activities though, called for varying degrees of restraint. A visit to a close friend could be accomplished in a dress featuring a short walking skirt (“short” denoted a length roughly equal with the high ankle) while a dress “with a train [was needed for] a ceremonious call” (Perrot 93). Similarly, if a woman was to visit a “friend in mourning and sorrow” her clothing should have been “somber and plain so as not to contradict [her] expressions of sympathy” (Perrot 94).

One exception to the “restraint for daywear” rule was riding in a carriage. “Riding in a carriage, a woman was no longer restricted to the sober dress expected in the afternoon; in the Bois de Boulogne sobriety was banished” (Perrot 95). Indeed, daily rides through this park offered an opportunity to women of style to compete with one another. Of course they did this at balls and other formal functions, but to do so in the Bois, in broad daylight, was a rare treat. The

practice of flaunting one's most extravagant dresses during these afternoon rides might seem somewhat bizarre in the context of nineteenth-century society given our discussion so far, but, somehow, the semi-privacy of a carriage afforded protection to a woman's modesty. "Clothes that no woman on foot could have worn without attracting a crowd of passers-by and being thought unseemly and provocative, she could flaunt in all dignity and glory leaning against the cushions of an emblazoned, luxuriously appointed carriage" (Perrot 95). (In our analysis, we shall have occasion to examine at some length the extent to which sobriety was banished in the semi-privacy of a carriage.)

Evening dress could vary as much as afternoon dress based upon the specific circumstances of the woman. If she dined at home, her costume would be considerably less elaborate than if she attended an important reception for example. In general, "costumes became increasingly complicated and richer as the hours passed, [and] they also progressively revealed certain parts of the body. ... At night a woman could openly expose what would have violently offended her modesty in the morning" (Perrot 96). In fact, evening attire was thought to "metamorphose women by etherealizing them" as this description of typical ball attire reveals:

'When her shoulders stunningly emerge from her bodice, when her trailing gown undulates behind her as she walks, when the brilliance of the silken folds enveloping her attracts everyone's gaze and displays her beauty, her only concern is the effect she is producing. This is the moment of her triumph. She is aware of it and has spared no expense to create it. Everything must contribute to the effect. Shimmering silvery fabrics, magnificent fabrics like those intended for queens, light gossamer fabrics, materials made of impalpable threads, like those worn by sylphs, golden brocaded cloth, twinkling like stars sown in the dark nocturnal heavens— these are the marvels that industry must create

for her' (Perrot 97).

The importance of formal dress is also evident when one considers that formal events provided unmarried women with the opportunity to attract husbands and married ones with the opportunity to display the wealth they had attained. For example, "only married women were supposed to wear diamonds ... [and] 'a young lady ... must ... utterly disdain expensive jewels and diamonds ... until she finds a good husband'" (Perrot 99, 101). (Spires' article has already given us some indication of how important the Vaubyessard ball scene in *Madame Bovary* is, and we will treat the same passage later in our analysis.)

Until now, we have not discussed the most important aspect of costume in the nineteenth century in terms of its implications for morality and propriety, and that is undress.

Undergarments during the nineteenth century were plentiful and restrictive; they were also the objects of much fetishistic attention. At the time, "underwear was accompanied by a ribald mythology with recurring themes that [reflected the] period's favored representations of the body and its erotic postures" (Perrot 143). Indeed, the vast array of undergarments necessary for propriety and modesty suggest the general obsession with covering up what was perceived as vulgar. "[T]he obsession of covering, enveloping, carpeting, padding, or burying at any cost a nudity that seemed, like emptiness, threatening" gripped the bourgeoisie (Perrot 144). This proclivity for covered surfaces extended from the home to the body; just as a teapot required a cozy, so a woman required a corset, pantaloons, crinolines, and cages (Perrot 144).

Foremost among the undergarments with an erotic appeal, though, was the corset. However, the "corsets" of today provide little insight into the corsets of the past. Today, a fashionable woman might wear a gown with a mock corset, lightly boned bodice, but in the nineteenth century, even bourgeois women would have been constrained by the most tightly

fitted, heavily boned corset they could afford on a daily basis. The corset has changed considerably over its history. At times it has been relatively small or even relatively unstiffened, but around 1830, the corset began to grow and stiffen, becoming comparatively large, and very rigid (Perrot 150-151). By mid-century, the corset had decreased back to a more manageable size; it was “shorter, and its neckline was lowered” although it remained quite rigid (Perrot 152). No matter its shape, though, the corset never ceased to greatly reduce the size of the waist, emphasizing the fullness of the bust and hips.

It was this effect that made the corset such a singularly appealing garment. The contrast between the small waist and larger hips and bust was sought after for two principal reasons. First, the silhouette created by corseting was desirable because it signified the status of the wearer. Like the other elements of bourgeois and upper class costume we have discussed, a well-corseted figure was an indication of status (Perrot 157). However, the corset became so sexualized over the course of the nineteenth century that, eventually, its very goals became its scandal. The tiny waists sought by women of quality attracted more than praise, indeed, they were the subject of much sexual desire (Perrot 157). This paradoxical characteristic of the corset is illustrated by this advice:

‘Put your corset on early, accustom yourself to not being able to do without it, for it will be equally useful to your health and good posture,’ declared a guide to comportment, which nevertheless noted that ‘if decent women knew that a slim waist and a crinoline please men only because they arouse secret images of shameful debauchery, they would give them up’ (Perrot 157).

Clearly, the relationship between costume and morality in the nineteenth century was complex. On the one hand, being dressed properly was central to a woman’s life if she had any hope of

maintaining her social status as an upper class woman or of improving it if she were bourgeois. On the other, fashionable costume carried with it its own risks. A bourgeois fortune could be squandered in an attempt to keep up with the trends or acquire a husband for a daughter, and even those who could spare the expense constantly risked misinterpretation and ostracism.

Yet, what we have discussed so far was written mainly in reference to those women who lived in Paris, or at least in other major cities. The reality of costume for rural women was undoubtedly different. Just as today more rural areas gain access to fashion trends more slowly than those at the centers of the fashion world, so it was in the past. However, this does not mean that country women lacked an interest in fashion. We will have occasion to see how Emma Bovary's costume has much in common with this dominant model. For instance, many of Emma's "odd ideas" of romance lead her to make costume choices that ultimately evoke the suspicion of the townspeople around her. Similarly, her desire to dress fashionably provides the motivation for her relationship with Lheureux, the merchant. The debt acquired in these dealings ruins Charles, and it is one motivating factor in her eventual suicide. Costume is indeed mentioned frequently throughout the work, and given its importance in the society of the mid-nineteenth century, this cannot be the product of chance. Presently we will examine how Flaubert's writing style also supports the characterization of the detailed reference to costume in the novel as meaningful ones.

Flaubert's Scientific Style

Flaubert is known for his extremely detailed writing; apparently, every detail was important to him as he composed. Reportedly, he even had a dedicated room where he would go to shout each sentence aloud as he wrote it for "he sought the perfect cadence for his sentences" (Kraus xxv). For Flaubert, the exercise of writing meant more than its ultimate product. "In

contrast with the majority of writers, apt to make false pretence of facility, it is of his labour that Flaubert boasts” (Pater 35). He is now a well-respected author, but even so, literary critics’ one remaining criticism of him is the one he so harshly imposed upon himself; it was not easy for him to write. “Un seul mérite lui manqua peut-être, l’aisance, la facilité heureuse du travail”¹ (*Le Dix-neuvième Siècle* 357). Although he may have had to work diligently, he maintained a positive attitude about his labor: “encore en souffrit-il plus que son lecteur n’en souffre”² (*Le Dix-neuvième Siècle* 357).

Importantly, Flaubert often expressed his views on writing in scientific terms; for instance, in his correspondence he notes, “style as it will be realised some day ... would be ... precise as the language of science” (Pater 37). For Flaubert, “*Madame Bovary* ... was a tribute to science; and [he] had no dread, great hopes rather, of the service of science in imaginative literature” (Pater 36). Although the two may at first seem inconsistent, Flaubert was dedicated to the notion that he could reconcile them in his art. His attitude was that an artist could be truly impersonal with regard to his art: “Impersonality in art ... [was] the literary ideal of Gustave Flaubert” (Pater 36). He wrote, “[i]n proportion as it advances, art will be more and more scientific, even as science will become artistic. The two will rejoin each other at the summit, after separating at the base” (Pater 39).

However, Flaubert, despite his efforts, was not always able to keep himself out of his work. In *Madame Bovary*, “he transpires, clearly enough, from time to time; and the morbid sense of life, everywhere impressed in the very atmosphere of that sombre history, came certainly of the writer himself” (Pater 36). From his personal writings, it is evident that Flaubert struggles to maintain the “artistic distance” he craved. Disappointment over this inability to

¹ He lacked one merit only perhaps, the ease, the happy facility of work (my translation)

² He suffered so that his reader would not (my translation)

completely remove himself from his work, though, was only secondary to his cognizance of what he considered to be technical errors. For example, one major regret he had about the completed novel was the phrase “Une couronne *de fleurs d’oranger*” in which “deux génitifs se gouvernant l’un l’autre”³ (*Le Dix-neuvième Siècle* 357). In a novel of over three hundred pages, the existence of one such “error” might seem unimportant, however, for Flaubert it obviously was not.

Such attention to detail reveals Flaubert’s desire for perfection in his work as well as a propensity for detail. Knowledge of Flaubert’s scientific style will be helpful in this analysis. Because we are mainly concerned with details, specifically references to costume, we must be certain that those details which are the focus of the analysis are not inconsequential. Each detail present in *Madame Bovary* is meaningful; otherwise, a writer like Flaubert would never have included it in the novel. Indeed, with a different author, this type of analysis might not be possible. However, costume can legitimately be called a semiotic system contributing to the reader’s understanding of Emma Bovary’s character in this novel, where detail is obviously of great importance.

Costume in Madame Bovary⁴

The semiotic system formed by costume in *Madame Bovary* operates on a chronological basis. There is a clear progression in Emma’s costume from the beginning of the novel until her death at its end. The wedding is the first scene where costume plays a major role. Later, costume is referenced at key moments in the text, for example during Emma’s two affairs with Rodolphe and with Léon, as well as during her initial “illness” and all of her subsequent depressions. As Emma is dying, too, her boudoir costume is described and Charles’s eventual plans for her burial are focused on her dress as well.

³ A crown of orange blossoms ... in which two genitives govern one another (my translation)

⁴ All translations are Marx Aveling’s, except where noted.

The wedding sets the tone for the rest of the novel in terms of its inclusion of references to costume. Arriving guests are characterized specifically in terms of their costume as they arrive for the ceremony, a detail that supports the notion of dress as the major tool used to classify people within their social categories. Flaubert even asserts that the different social positions of the male guests are defined in this way:

Suivant leur position sociale différente, ils avaient des habits, des redingotes, des vestes, des habits-vestes ; — bons habits, entourés de toute la considération d'une famille, et qui ne sortaient de l'armoire que pour les solennités ; redingotes à grandes basques flottant au vent, à collet cylindrique, à poches larges comme des sacs ; vestes de gros drap, qui accompagnaient ordinairement quelque casquette cerclée de cuivre à sa visière ; habits-vestes très courts, ayant dans le dos deux boutons rapprochés comme une pair d'yeux, et dont les pans semblaient avoir été coupés à même un seul bloc par la hache du charpentier. Quelques-uns encore (mais ceux-là, bien sûr, devaient dîner au bas bout de la table) portaient des blouses de cérémonie, c'est-à-dire dont le col était rabattu sur les épaules, le dos froncé à petits plis, et la taille attachée très bas par une ceinture cousue⁵ (Flaubert 25).

The careful consideration given by Flaubert to these details of costume indicates its importance, even in the rural countryside, in France during the nineteenth century. As we will see, this attention is concentrated throughout much of the novel on Emma Bovary.

⁵ According to their different social positions they wore tail-coats, overcoats, shooting-jackets, cutaway-coats: fine tail-coats, redolent of family respectability, that only came out of the wardrobe on state occasions; overcoats with long tails flapping in the wind and round capes and pockets like sacks; shooting-jackets of coarse cloth, generally worn with a cap with a brass-bound peak; very short cutaway-coats with two small buttons in the back, close together like a pair of eyes, and the rails of which seemed cut out of one piece by a carpenter's hatchet. Some, too (but these, you may be sure, would sit at the bottom of the table), wore their best blouses — that is to say, with collars turned down to the shoulders, the back gathered into small plaits and the waist fastened very low down with a worked belt (Flaubert, EMA 28-29).

It is during this scene that Flaubert's focus shifts to Emma, where it will remain until her death. In terms of her wedding costume, "[I]a robe d'Emma, trop longue, traînait un peu par le bas ; de temps à autre, elle s'arrêtait pour la tirer, et alors, délicatement, de ses doigts gantés, elle enlevait les herbes rudes avec les petits dards des chardons"⁶ (Flaubert 26). Here, Emma appears innocent and pure; she is the embodiment of a young girl who is at once anxious to be married and yet still very much a child. She is willing to enter into womanhood as a wife; however, she neither looks nor acts the part during this scene, as her too long dress and childish fidgeting on her way to the altar show. The wedding scene is atypical in that we see Emma dressed properly, but without pretension of fashion or romance. Perhaps this is due to the lingering influence of her father, which he asserts for the last time in organizing a traditional wedding and feast rather than the "à minuit, aux flambeaux"⁷ spectacle that Emma requested (Flaubert 24).

Once she becomes more comfortable in her married status, Emma will assert herself more openly in general, but also in her dress. However, in order to do this, she requires inspiration in the form of exposure to the ways of the aristocracy (the source of all fashion), which she acquires at the Vaubyessard ball. As Emma arrives at the ball, she is taken aback with the beauty and spectacle of upper class life. She is only the wife of a humble country doctor, and so, she must rely on others to help her prepare her toilette for the event, which she does "avec la conscience méticuleuse d'une actrice à son début. Elle disposa ses cheveux d'après les recommandations du coiffeur"⁸ (Flaubert 46). By taking the advice of those used to aristocratic modes, Emma acquaints herself with fashion trends, but also develops an immediate fascination with the

⁶ Emma's dress, too long, trailed a little on the ground; from time to time she stopped to pull it up, and then delicately, with her gloved hands, she picked off the coarse grass and the thistle-downs (Flaubert, EMA 29).

⁷ A midnight wedding with torches (Flaubert, EMA 27)

⁸ Emma made her toilette with the fastidious care of an actress on her debut (Flaubert, EMA 49).

lifestyle to which they are connected.

Emma is an attractive woman, and so, even though she has to improvise in terms of her costume for the ball, she approaches a “comme il faut” appearance: “Ses bandeaux, doucement bombés vers les oreilles, luisaient d’un éclat bleu ; une rose à son chignon tremblait sur une tige mobile, avec des gouttes d’eau factices au bout de ses feuilles. Elle avait une robe de safran pâle, relevée par trois bouquets de roses pompon mêlées de verdure”⁹ (Flaubert 47). Nonetheless, she feels humbled at the sight of the other fine ladies in the ballroom.

Sur la ligne des femmes assises, les éventails peints s’agitaient, les bouquets cachaient à demi le sourire des visages, et les flacons à bouchon d’or tournaient dans des mains entr’ouvertes dont les gants blancs marquaient la forme des ongles et serraient la chair au poignet. Les garnitures de dentelles, les broches de diamants, les bracelets à médaillon frissonnaient aux corsages, scintillaient aux poitrines, bruissaient sur les bras nus. Les chevelures, bien collées sur les fronts et tordues à la nuque, avaient, en couronnes, en grappes ou en rameaux, des myosotis, de jasmin, des fleurs de grenadier, des épis ou des bluets. Pacifiques à leurs places, des mères à figure renfrognée portaient des turbans rouges¹⁰ (Flaubert 47).

From this description of their costume, we can clearly see how, for upper class women, costume serves a variety of social functions. For example, the idea of the bouquets hiding the smiles on the women’s faces is consistent with what we have heard before, that is to say, reminiscent of the

⁹ Her hair, undulating toward the ears, shone with a blue luster; a rose in her chignon trembled on its mobile stalk, with artificial dewdrops on the tip of the leaves. She wore a gown of pale saffron trimmed with three bouquets of pompon roses mixed with green (Flaubert, EMA 50).

¹⁰ Along the line of seated women painted fans were fluttering, bouquets half-his smiling faces, and gold-stopped scent-bottles were turned in partly-closed hands, whose white gloves outlined the nails and tightened on the flesh at the wrists. Lace trimmings, diamond brooches, medallion bracelets trembled on bodices, gleamed on breasts, clinked on bare arms. The hair, well smoothed over the temples and knotted at the nape, bore crowns, or bunches, or sprays of myosotis, jasmine, pomegranate blossoms, ears of corn, and cornflowers. Calmly seated in their places, mothers with forbidding countenances were wearing red turbans (Flaubert, EMA 50).

practice of using one's dress to conceal what is inappropriate, and to enhance what is virtuous in one's appearance. Everything in the passage suggests that these women are at the height of propriety; the younger women, both married and single, are accessorized accordingly as are the old mothers in their turbans.

However, the preceding discussion of Emma's costume does not give the same impression. Flaubert's description of Emma gives the reader an impression of her as a young, fresh beauty, but it in no way hides her less affluent status. Emma herself is very aware that what she has been exposed to is not the norm for her social status; immediately after the ball, she reflects on the experience noting, "[s]on voyage à la Vaubyessard avait fait un trou dans sa vie"¹¹ (Flaubert 52). However aware Emma had previously been of the fact that appearances matter a great deal for a woman, the ball only serves to further engrain this knowledge within her. In fact, "[e]lle s'abonna à la *Corbeille*, journal des femmes, et au *Sylphe des Salons*. ... Elle savait les modes nouvelles, l'adresse des bons tailleurs, les jours du Bois ou d'Opéra"¹² (Flaubert 54). Thus, her interest in fashion becomes very similar to that of a bourgeois *parisienne* at this point in the novel, and the eventual manifestations of this increased interest are tragic.

Indeed, Emma descends into malaise very shortly after she becomes fascinated by society life. She loses interest in her life quickly because it is so unlike that of the social class she wishes to emulate. This minor depression is the precursor to several more severe episodes she will experience throughout the novel and so exposes the reader to the key signs that consistently mark her entry into one of these periods. Many of these indicators have to do with costume. During

¹¹ Her journey to Vaubyessard had made a hole in her life (Flaubert, EMA 55)

¹² She took in "La Corbeille," a lady's journal, and the "Sylphe des Salons." ... She knew the latest fashions, the addresses of the best tailors, the days of the Bois and the Opera (Flaubert, EMA 57).

this time Emma often went “des journées entières sans s’habiller, portait des bas de coton gris”¹³ (Flaubert 62). In this description of her behavior, we see Emma’s first real lapse in propriety, that it, failing to dress at all during a day. As we know, not dressing properly for each part of the day was indicative not only of a misunderstanding of the norms of dress, but also, with regard to undress, a sort of indirect indication of sexual promiscuity.

Emma shows herself to be particularly unaware of the etiquette associated with undress. Her apathy during this period of her life, evidenced by her rejection of all her former hobbies (especially reading), and her subsequent infatuation with what she believes are upper class habits, reflect this unawareness. For example, rather than remaining in a state of discreet undress during the morning hours, Emma “portait une robe de chambre tout ouverte, qui lassait voir, entre les revers à châle du corsage, une chemisette plissée avec trois boutons d’or”¹⁴ habitually (Flaubert 56). Odd habits accompany this carelessness; Emma “s’obstinait à ne pas sortir, puis elle suffoquait, ouvrait les fenêtres, s’habillait en robe légère”¹⁵ (Flaubert 62). At this point, it is clear that she has become entirely dissatisfied with provincial bourgeois life. Her unkempt, undignified costume and eccentric behavior are in some part indicative of the romanticized conception of the ideal lifestyle she will hold throughout the rest of the novel.

Indeed, Emma continues to make provocative adjustments to her costume after her initial caprices. In one instance, she is seen tending to the fire,

[d]u bout de ses deux doigts elle prit sa robe à la hauteur du genou, et, l’ayant ainsi remontée jusqu’au chevilles, elle tendit à la flamme, par-dessus le gigot qui tournait, son

¹³ Passed whole days without dressing, wore grey cotton stockings (Flaubert, EMA 63)

¹⁴ She wore an open dressing gown, that showed between the shawl facings of her bodice a pleated chemisette with three gold buttons (Flaubert, EMA 58).

¹⁵ Often she persisted in not going out, then, stifling, threw open the windows and put on light dresses (Flaubert, EMA 64).

pied chaussé d'une bottine noire. Le feu éclairait en entier, pénétrant d'une lumière crue la trame de sa robe, les pores égaux de sa peau blanche et même les paupières de ses yeux qu'elle clignait de temps à autre. Une grande couleur rouge passait sur elle, selon le souffle du vent qui venait par porte entr'ouverte¹⁶ (Flaubert 74).

This description very clearly possesses sexual undertones; both the visibility of Emma's legs, a very erotic sight in this time period as we have seen, and the red glow the fire is casting upon her contribute to the overall mood of the scene (red being suggestive of wantonness). That Emma is sexually attractive in this moment is revealed by Léon's reaction to her: "De l'autre côté de la cheminée, un jeune homme à chevelure blonde la regardait silencieusement"¹⁷ (Flaubert 74). He is obviously drawn in by this unusual visual spectacle.

In fact, in their early, more innocent encounters, it is often Emma's dress that Léon notices first. While she is still at the *Lion d'Or* shortly after her arrival in Yonville, Léon is engaged in conversation with her and is intrigued by "une petite cravate de soie bleue, qui tenait droit comme une fraise un col de batiste tuyauté ; et, selon les mouvements de tête qu'elle faisait, le bas de son visage s'enfonçait dans le linge ou en sortait avec douceur"¹⁸ (Flaubert 79). His fascination with her movements stems from the glimpses he is catching of her face when it is not hidden in her lacy collar. Again, this calls to mind the concealment associated with mid-nineteenth-century clothing and thus the increased interest in what is revealed by it. This is even more noticeable during a passage recounting a card game wherein Léon is distracted by typical

¹⁶ With the tips of her fingers she caught her dress at the knee, and having thus pulled it up to her ankle, held out her foot in its black boot to the fire above the revolving leg of mutton. The flame lit up the whole of her, penetrating with a crude light the wool of her gown, the fine pores of her fair skins, and even her eyelids, which she blinked now and again. A great red glow passed over her with the blowing of the wind through the half-open door. (Flaubert, EMA 78).

¹⁷ On the other side of the chimney a young man with fair hair watched her silently (Flaubert, EMA 78).

¹⁸ A small blue necktie, that kept up like a ruff a gauffered cambric collar, and with the movements of her face gently sunk into the linen or came out from it (Flaubert, EMA 82).

components of Emma's costume that send very sexually charged messages:

Debout et les mains sur le dossier de sa chaise, il regardait les dents de son peigne qui mordaient son chignon. À chaque mouvement qu'elle faisait pour jeter les cartes, sa robe du côté droit remontait. De ses cheveux retroussées, il descendait une couleur brune sur son dos, et qui, s'apâissait graduellement, peu à peu se perdait dans l'ombre. Son vêtement, ensuite, retombait des deux côtés sur la siége, en bouffant, plein de plis, et s'étalait jusqu'à terre. Quand Léon, parfois, sentait la semelle de sa botte poser dessus, il s'écartait comme s'il eût marché sur quelqu'un¹⁹ (Flaubert 92).

Moreover, Léon sometimes sees her in costume that calls her virtue into question. One morning, for example, "elle aperçut le clerc sur la place. Elle était en peignoir. Il leva la tête et la salua"²⁰ (Flaubert 80). Although Emma "fit une inclination rapide et renferma la fenêtre,"²¹ the damage is essentially done (Flaubert 80). From this point on, Léon generally reacts to Emma's costume in a certain way; he has trouble not seeing her as sexually attractive. Emma becomes increasingly obsessed with her own desire for romance and love, and Léon tends to receive these signals clearly. One day when Emma is wandering around her unkempt garden, Léon is able to see her from his window and he notices how out of place she looks there, "il lui semblait étrange de voir cette belle dame en robe de nankin tout au milieu de cette misère"²² (Flaubert 87). He seems to be thinking much the same thoughts as Emma does, namely that she is an ethereal

¹⁹ Standing up with his hands on the back of her chair; he saw the teeth of her comb that bit into her chignon. With every movement that she made to throw her cards the right side of her dress was drawn up. From her turned up hair a dark colour fell over her back, and growing gradually paler, lost itself little by little in the shade. Then her dress fell on both sides of her chair, puffing out full of folds, and reached the ground. When Léon occasionally felt the sole of his boot resting on it, he drew back as if he had trodden upon some one (Flaubert, EMA 95).

²⁰ She saw the clerk on the Place. She had on a dressing gown. He looked up and bowed. (Flaubert, EMA 84).

²¹ She nodded quickly and reclosed the window (Flaubert, EMA 84).

²² It seemed strange to him to see this beautiful woman in her nankeen dress in the midst of all this poverty (Flaubert, EMA 90).

beauty unfit for the monotony of rural life as a wife and mother.

Similarly, when the two take a walk together in the evening, Léon is again fascinated by the “frôlement de la robe d’Emma qui bruissait tout autour d’elle”²³ as much as by the conversation they are having (Flaubert 88). Emma’s costume is a clear indicator of her attitude. During this scene, she seems more like a flirtatious girl than the wife of a country doctor. For example, as they walk, Emma occupies herself by “[faisant] s’égrenier en poussière jaune un peu de leurs fleurs flétries ; ou bien quelque branche des chèvrefeuilles et des clématites qui pendaient au dehors traînait un moment sur la soie”²⁴ of her dress (Flaubert 89). This activity is very reminiscent of wedding day. Of course now the flowers are withered, much like Emma’s hopes for her married life, which she thought would be filled with all the romance she dreamed of during her convent years. However, her fledgling relationship with Léon also seems to be giving her new hope.

At this point, Emma is actually beginning two fateful relationships. One with Léon, the other with Lheureux, the merchant. Out of her excitement over the possibility of new love and subsequent need to be desirable, Emma begins to purchase clothing in excess. She does this partly to enhance her appearance, which she now has a reason to maintain, and partly because Lheureux appeals to her vanity. He says “[u]ne humble boutique comme la sienne n’était pas faite pour attirer une *élégante*”²⁵ like Emma (Flaubert 96). Because Lheureux is such an effective salesman, Emma begins to buy many articles of clothing from him at great expense, and on credit (Flaubert 97).

²³ The sound of Emma’s dress rustling round her (Flaubert, EMA 92).

²⁴ [Making] some of their faded flowers crumble into a yellow dust, or a spray of overhanging honeysuckle and clematis in its fringe and dangled for a moment over the silk (Flaubert, EMA 92).

²⁵ A poor shop like his was not made to attract a “fashionable lady” (Flaubert, EMA 100).

However, despite her efforts, the relationship between Emma and Léon does not flourish. Léon decides to leave Yonville for Paris in hopes of furthering his career, a plan that does much damage to Emma. Perhaps his decision is motivated in part by his lingering perception of Emma as a virtuous woman. Léon does feel some apprehension about entering into an affair with a married woman, but Emma has also succeeded admirably in creating an image of herself that necessarily leads to such apprehension. On the one hand, she often appears to Léon in costume that is less than appropriate to her station; however, on the other, Léon is almost as romantically inclined as Emma herself and so experiences a certain confusion about her: He does not know whether to accept what might be advances on her part as such or simply to write them off as attractive manifestations of her charming personality. At this point, Léon views Emma as being “si vertueuse et inaccessible que toute espérance, même la plus vague, l’abandonna”²⁶ (Flaubert 100). Whatever his reasoning, his decision to leave Yonville plunges Emma into another depression, although she does not give outward indication of the fact: her “robe aux plis droits cachait un cœur bouleversé”²⁷ (Flaubert 100). Quite typically, her costume serves as much to conceal her body as her emotions.

Emma, disappointed for the second time, becomes even more eccentric. Though she is still concerned with trends, this concern carries over from fashion into other aspects of life. Emma reveals a tendency throughout the novel to first become interested in something, whether it is love or fashion or anything else, and then to quickly expand that interest into obsession, and this tendency manifests itself during her second depression. Emma retains her interest in clothing as well as adopting other interests. At first, Charles appeals to this interest by “ [réservant] une

²⁶ And thus she seemed so virtuous and inaccessible to him that he lost all hope, even the faintest (Flaubert, EMA 103).

²⁷ That dress with the narrow folds hid a distracted heart (Flaubert, EMA 103).

surprise sentimentale ... à sa femme ... son portrait en habit noir”²⁸ (Flaubert 109). However, such simple amusements soon fail to satisfy her. Instead, “[e]lle voulut apprendre l’italien ... [et e]lle essaya des lectures sérieuses”²⁹ in order to preoccupy her mind (Flaubert 116-117). At the same time though, her restlessness is evidenced by the costume choices she makes.

[E]lle écrivit à Rouen, afin d’avoir une robe en cachemire bleu ; elle choisit, chez Lheureux, la plus belle de ses écharpes ; elle se la nouait à la taille par-dessus sa robes de chambre ; et, les volets fermés, avec un livre à la main, elle restait étendue sur un canapé, dans cet accoutrement. Souvent, elle variait sa coiffure ; elle se mettait à la chinoise, en boucles molles, en nattes tressées ; elle se fit une raie sur le côté de la tête et roula ses cheveux en dessous, comme un homme³⁰ (Flaubert 116).

This description reveals both her dissatisfaction with her life as it is, and her desire to make it more exotic. She necessarily attempts to accomplish this goal through costume as dress is one of the few aspects of her life of which she has control. She is not at liberty to travel the world, but she does have access to style manuals that inform her of the customs and fashions of faraway lands, which she can then emulate.

Of course this particular depression, like the one before, is relatively short-lived as Emma soon makes Rodolphe’s acquaintance. Not surprisingly, what Emma notices about him immediately is his costume, which identifies him as a member of the upper class that she idolizes. While looking out her window, Emma “aperçut un monsieur vêtu d’une redingote de

²⁸ A sentimental surprise he intended for his wife, a delicate attention— his portrait in a frockcoat (Flaubert, EMA 111).

²⁹ She wanted to learn Italian ... She tried serious reading (Flaubert, EMA 118).

³⁰ She wrote to Rouen for a blue cashmere gown; she chose one of Lheureux’s finest scarves, and wore it knotted around her waist over her dressing-gown; and, with closed blinds and a book in her hand, she lay stretched out on a couch in this garb. She often changed her coiffure; she did her hair *à la Chinoise*; in flowing curls, in plaited coils; she parted it on one side and rolled it under like a man’s (Flaubert, EMA 118).

velours vert. Il était ganté de gants jaunes, quoiqu'il tût chaussé de fortes guêtres"³¹ (Flaubert 119). Emma's dress on this occasion is obviously complimentary to Rodolphe's as "sa robe (c'était une robe d'été à quatre volants, de couleur jaune, longue de taille, large de jupe), sa robe s'évasa autour d'elle sur les carreaux de la salle ; et, comme Emma, baissée, chancelait un peu en écartant les bras, le gonflement de l'étoffe se crevait de place en place, selon les inflexions de son corsage"³² (Flaubert 120). The green velvet and the color yellow are signs that will reoccur with some frequency. The fact that the two both wear yellow at the time of their first meeting certainly seems to be a kind of foreshadowing detail that causes the reader to connect Emma to Rodolphe. As soon as Rodolphe reflects on his meeting with Emma though, the sexual nature of their future relationship becomes clear. He thinks about her costume and remembers it in vivid detail. "[I]l revoyait Emma dans la salle, habillée comme il l'avait vue, et il la déshabillait"³³ (Flaubert 122).

The next time the pair meets, they are in a public location, a local festival in honor of the agricultural industry that sustains the village. It should be clear that public gatherings afforded a woman certain liberties that other circumstances denied her. For example, in a crowd of people, a married woman might converse rather freely with a man under pretense of friendliness whereas in her own home such conversation would have been scandalous.

At first, this scene continues in the same vein as the previous one wherein Emma and

³¹ She saw a gentleman in a green velvet coat. He had on yellow gloves, although he wore heavy gaiters (Flaubert, EMA 120).

³² Her dress (it was a summer dress with four flounces, yellow, long in the waist and wide in the skirt) spread out around her on the flags of the room; and as Emma, stooping, staggered a little as she spread out her arms, the stuff here and there gave with the inflexions of her bust (Flaubert, EMA 122).

³³ He again saw Emma in her room, dressed as he had seen her, and he undressed her (Flaubert, EMA 123-124).

Rodolphe first meet. Emma, for instance, “à un chapeau vert,”³⁴ a detail that recalls the colors mentioned in the preceding passage (Flaubert 126). Details about Rodolphe’s dress on this occasion are also reminiscent of descriptions of Emma’s costume from earlier in the novel, when she was viewed through Léon’s eyes. Rodolphe is described as wearing a “chemise de batiste à manchettes plissées [qui] bouffait au hasard du vent, dans l’ouverture de son gilet”³⁵ (Flaubert 129). How similar to the description of Emma’s dress swirling in the wind as she stood in her desolate garden. Yet, this passage quickly loses any trace of the innocence associated with Emma and Léon’s initial flirtation.

Rodolphe, in his eagerness to be alone with Emma, manages to remove her from the crowd and get her to “la *salle des deliberations*”³⁶ (Flaubert 132). Here, he begins his seduction of Emma, which, although she resists at first, soon proceeds rather smoothly because she has such a strong desire for romantic love. Importantly, Emma resigns herself to Rodolphe’s advances by way of her clothing. Rodolphe is trying to affect Emma by increasing her awareness of his physical proximity to her and, indeed, she is enticed by him. The scent of his beard, for example, draws her in, and soon after Emma removes her gloves (Flaubert 137-138). Rodolphe is so pleased by this small victory that, later, he remembers “les plis de sa robe descendaient le long des murs, et des journées d’amour se déroulaient à l’infini dans les perspectives de l’avenir”³⁷ (Flaubert 142).

Rodolphe does not have to wait long for that future to begin. In fact, very soon after the

³⁴ Wears a green hat (my translation)

³⁵ Thus his cambric shirt with plaited cuffs was blown out by the wind in the opening of his waistcoat of grey ticking (Flaubert, EMA 130).

³⁶ The “council-room” (Flaubert, EMA 133)

³⁷ The folds of her gown fell along the walls, the days of love unrolled to all infinity before him in the vistas of the future (Flaubert, EMA 142).

festival, he and Charles plan for Emma to take up riding, which Charles thinks will help her out of her lingering depression. Of course, he could not have foreseen the consequences of arranging for Rodolphe to give Emma riding lessons, a venture that necessitates a riding habit for Emma's use. "Quand le costume fut prêt, Charles écrivit à M. Boulanger que sa femme était à sa disposition,"³⁸ a remark that Charles means only as a nicety actually reveals much more about the developing situation (Flaubert 147). Of course the costume is necessary for Emma to go riding, to put her into Rodolphe's "disposition," but the riding costume itself also becomes an instrument of her entry into a sexual relationship with him.

From the beginning of the excursion, it is clear that this riding lesson is anything but innocent. Emma is taken with Rodolphe's polished appearance in his own riding habit of "longues bottes molles ... son grand habit de velours et sa culotte de tricot blanc"³⁹ (Flaubert 147). As the scene continues, Emma's clothing becomes a burden to her. It is almost as if, under Rodolphe's expectant gaze, her costume serves, in her mind, as a barrier to the pleasure she hopes to experience in love: "[S]a robe trop longue l'embarrassait, bien qu'elle la portât relevée par le queue, et Rodolphe, marchant derrière elle, contemplait entre ce drap noir et la bottine noire, la délicatesse de son bas blanc, qui lui semblait quelque chose de sa nudité"⁴⁰ (Flaubert 149). This barrier is soon breached. As Emma finally finds herself unable to resist Rodolphe, their first adulterous embrace is described not in terms of their emotions, their bodies, or even their minds, but in terms of their two costumes merging, "[l]e drap de sa robe s'accrochait au

³⁸ When the riding habit was ready, Charles wrote to Monsieur Boulanger that his wife was at his command (Flaubert, EMA 147).

³⁹ High soft boots ... in his great velvet coat and white corduroy breeches (Flaubert, EMA 147)

⁴⁰ But her long habit got in her way, although she held it up by the skirt; and Rodolphe, walking behind her, saw between the black cloth and the black shoe the fineness of her white stocking, that seemed to him as if it were a part of her nakedness (Flaubert, EMA 149).

velours de l'habit ... elle s'abandonna"⁴¹ (Flaubert 150).

Shortly after the incident, Emma goes to visit Rodolphe early in the morning and creeps into bed with him. Already the evidence of her misjudgment is visible through her clothing as he tells her "[sa] robe est mouillée"⁴² (Flaubert 153). The dress looks disorderly for a very practical reason, because Emma has been running through the meadow that separates their two homes, but there is clearly a deeper signification of the wet, ruined dress. Until this point of the novel, Emma has always been characterized as a delicate, beautiful woman. Certainly, she has been noted for her eccentricities in dress, but through it all, she has seemed to be a charming young woman. Here, for the first time, her appearance is sullied, as she hurries to return home before she is discovered, "elle enfonçait, trébuchait, et empêtrait ses bottines minces"⁴³ in the ground of the field (Flaubert 153). Whereas before, her tiny boots were always a source of great fascination to men, now they are soiled by the damp, morning ground.

During their affair, Emma spares no expense to make herself appealing to Rodolphe. C'était pour lui qu'elle se limait les ongles avec un soin de ciseleur, et qu'il n'y avait jamais assez de *cold-cream* sur sa peau, ni de patchouli dans ses mouchoirs. Elle se chargeait de bracelets, de bagues, de colliers. Quand il devait venir, elle emplissait de roses ses deux grands vases de verre bleu, et disposait son appartement et sa personne comme une courtisane qui attend un prince⁴⁴ (Flaubert 175).

⁴¹ The cloth of her habit caught against the velvet of his coat ... she gave herself up to him (Flaubert, EMA 150).

⁴² Your dress is damp (Flaubert, EMA 153)

⁴³ She sank, stumbling, and clogging her thin shoes (Flaubert, EMA 153)

⁴⁴ It was for him that she filed her nails with the care of a chaser, and that there was never enough cold-cream for her skin, nor of patchouli for her handkerchiefs. She loaded herself with bracelets, rings, and necklaces. When he was coming she filled the two large blue glass vases with roses, and prepared her room and her person like a courtesan expecting a prince (Flaubert, EMA 174).

In her desire to be the beautiful *maitresse*, Emma buys clothing frequently. For example, when “l’étouffe [des bottes] n’était plus fraîche, [elle] les ... abandonnait”⁴⁵ (Flaubert 176). Freshness does indeed seem to be an issue as mention of Emma’s soiled boots continues. As her domestics clean them, they notice how they are “tout empâtées de crotte”⁴⁶ (Flaubert 176). Of course, the word *crotte* can simply connote mud, or it can have a less wholesome meaning. Here, although the most obvious one is presumably the most appropriate, the possibility for degree in the word’s meaning should not be ignored. At this time, the merchant Lheureux takes note of Emma’s increased spending and worries over the repayment of her debt to him; Charles though, does not permit himself “la moindre observation”⁴⁷ (Flaubert 176).

Emma proposes to Rodolphe that they should escape from Yonville together and live out the rest of their lives without the secrecy which their relationship currently entails. Of course Rodolphe, who is not at all serious about continuing their relationship, is not exactly taken with this idea. For him, “la charme de la nouveauté peu a peu [tombe] comme un vêtement, lassait voir a nu l’éternelle monotonie de la passion”⁴⁸ (Flaubert 178). Emma dreams of going to a foreign land where she and Rodolphe can enjoy an “existence ... facile et large comme leurs vêtements de soie, toute chaude et étoilée comme les nuits qu’ils contemperaient”⁴⁹ (Flaubert 183). For this purpose, she again visits Lheureux in order to purchase a new wardrobe to accomodate her new life with Rodolphe. She orders a heavy coat and other pieces of clothing

⁴⁵ The stuff of the boots was no longer fresh Madame handed them over to her (Flaubert, EMA 174)

⁴⁶ All covered with mud (Flaubert, EMA 174)

⁴⁷ The slightest observation (Flaubert, EMA 174)

⁴⁸ The charm of novelty, gradually falling away like a garment, laid bare the eternal monotony of passion (Flaubert, EMA 177).

⁴⁹ Existence would be easy and large as their silk gowns, warm and star-spangled as the nights they would contemplate (Flaubert, EMA 181).

that he again sells to her on credit bringing her one step closer to her eventual (financial) downfall.

However, Rodolphe, although he convinces Emma that he is ready to begin a new life with her, has no intention of leaving Yonville, or indeed of remaining with Emma. The novelty really has worn thin in his opinion. The night before they are to leave together, Emma busily clarifies every detail of the coming voyage while Rodolphe thinks equally as impatiently of a way to extricate himself from the situation. As they part for the night, a characterization of Emma is offered that contrasts starkly with previous ones; it is analogous to the description offered by Léon of Emma in her garden, although it produces quite the opposite effect. As Emma disappears from his view Rodolphe notices how she has changed, “il la vit avec son vêtement blanc peu à peu s'évanouir dans l'ombre comme un fantôme, il fut pris d'un tel battement de cœur qu's s'appuya contre un arbre pour ne pas tomber”⁵⁰ (Flaubert 187).

Rodolphe finally writes Emma a letter explaining that they will not be leaving together and that their affair must end. This rejection hurls Emma into the most serious depression of her life. Contributing to its seriousness, M. Lheureux makes a point of delivering the now useless clothing to Emma during the initial stages of her “illness,” at the first opportunity, he “avait vite apporté le manteau, le sac de nuit, deux caisses au lieu d'une, quantité d'autres choses encore”⁵¹ (Flaubert 197). Aside from this first episode though, Emma's costume seems to take a secondary role in this phase of her life; she instead finds religion, or at least a romanticized version of it.

As she mourns the loss of Rodolphe, she becomes preoccupied with the idea of

⁵⁰ He saw her with her white gown gradually fade away in the shade like a ghost, he was seized with such a beating of the heart that he leant against a tree lest he should fall (Flaubert, EMA 185).

⁵¹ Had hurriedly brought the cloak, the travelling-bag, two trunks instead of one, and a number of other things (Flaubert, EMA 195)

saintliness. For Emma, to be saintly connotes purity, which she now feels she has lost during the illicit affair. Her interest in religion is largely focused on adornment though, and so, bears some resemblance to her relationship with costume. Emma's interest in religious artifacts is vast. Emma "voulut devenir une sainte. Elle acheta des chapelets, elle porta des amulettes ; elle souhaitaient avoir dans sa chambre, au chevet de sa couche, un reliquaire enchâssé d'émeraudes pour le baiser tous les soirs"⁵² (Flaubert 199). This description shows how important it is to Emma to look the part, no matter what the endeavor is. Even though she was educated in a convent, Emma spent most of her time there reading romances; thus, there is no reason to suspect that she is suddenly ready to become a truly pious woman. Indeed, Emma reacts to God in much the same way as she would react to a lover. "[L]a religion d'Emma ... pût, à force de ferveur, finir par friser l'hérésie et même l'extravagance"⁵³ (Flaubert 199).

After some time though, an opportunity presents itself for Emma to extricate herself from her current arrangement. Charles is advised to take Emma into Rouen to see a performance in hopes that this little trip will be beneficial to her. Immediately, Emma begins again to concentrate her attentions on her appearance. Disregarding the supposed health benefits of the excursion, Emma "s'acheta un chapeau, des gants, [et] un bouquet"⁵⁴ for the occasion (Flaubert 206). When she arrives in Rouen, too, she is most taken with overall appearance of the theater itself and, later, with the costumes in the opera.

Un battement de cœur la prit dès le vestibule. Elle sourit involontairement de vanité, en voyant la foule qui se précipitait à droit par l'autre corridor, tandis qu'elle montait

⁵² She wanted to become a saint. She bought chaplets and wore amulets; 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 (Flaubert, EMA 198).

⁵³ Emma's religion, he thought, might, from its fervour, end by touching on heresy, extravagance (Flaubert, EMA 198).

⁵⁴ Bought a bonnet, gloves, and a bouquet (Flaubert, EMA 204)

l'escalier des premières. Elle eut plaisir, comme un enfant, à pousser de son doigt les larges portes tapissées ; elle aspira de tout sa poitrine l'odeur poussiéreuse des couloirs, et, quand elle fut assise dans sa loge, elle se cambra la taille avec une désinvolture de duchesse. ... Elle n'avait pas assez d'yeux pour contempler les costumes ... les toques de velours, les manteaux, les épées, toutes ces imaginations qui s'agitaient dans l'harmonie comme dans l'atmosphère d'un autre monde⁵⁵ (Flaubert 207-208).

Clearly, Emma has not broken her old habit of keeping up appearances. Naturally, the appointments inside an opera house, as well as the elements of the spectacle are meant to produce exactly the effect that they have produced on Emma; however, only a woman so strongly attracted to the world of fashion as she would regard these details as the most important. The other bourgeois women in attendance would notice the same things. As we have seen, bourgeois fashion during the nineteenth century was nothing more than an emulation of upper class fashion, and so, it behooved any *bourgeoise* to observe empirically the society around her at such a function as this.

Beyond these initial excitements though, Emma is of course drawn into the performance by its characters and romantic plot. The lead female role attracts Emma's attention; she notices her "couronne d'oranger dans les cheveux, et [qu'elle est] plus pale que le satin blanc de sa robe. Emma rêvait au jour de son mariage ; et elle se revoyait là-bas, au milieu des blés, sur le petit

⁵⁵ Her heart began to beat as soon as she reached the vestibule. She involuntarily smiled with vanity on seeing the crowd rushing to the right by the other corridor while she went up the staircase to the reserved seats. She was pleased as a child to push with her finger the large tapestried door. She breathed in with all her might the dusty smell of lobbies, and when she was seated in her box she bent forward with the air of a duchess. She had not eyes enough to look at the costumes, the scenery, the actors, the painted trees that shook when any one walked, and the velvet caps, cloaks, swords— all those imaginary things that floated amid the harmony as in the atmosphere of another world (Flaubert, EMA 205-206).

sentier, quand on marchait vers l'église"⁵⁶ (Flaubert 209). What is more though, Emma reflects on her wedding day with a great deal of remorse. She wonders why she married so willingly "sans s'apercevoir de l'abîme où elle se précipitait"⁵⁷ (Flaubert 209-210). Thus, she equates the innocence projected by the white gown in the opera with that conveyed by her own gown at her wedding as well as revealing with certainty that this same innocence is now absent from her person after having fallen victim to the "désillusion de l'adultère"⁵⁸ (Flaubert 210).

The admission of her fall though, in no way limits her insofar as future liaisons are concerned. Emma permits herself a brief fantasy concerning an ideal hypothetical life with the lead actor wherein the two would travel Europe together enjoying not only fame, but a great deal of romance as well; however, this pleasantry being an absolute impossibility, she quickly abandons it (Flaubert 210-211). Really, there is no need for it as Emma is about to encounter Léon again and to enter into what will be her last and most serious affair. It is Charles, in fact, who brings the pair together again as he happens to encounter the young clerk at the opera house and so obliges him to greet Emma. The surprise of meeting Léon again has a very noticeable effect on Emma's nerves. Although she chats amicably with him as there is no doubt that she genuinely shares a bond of friendship with him, it is equally certain that romantic longings have remained barely concealed in the guise of friendship. Soon, Emma can no longer contain herself explaining that she finds the opera house stiflingly hot and that she is smothering whereupon the three continue their conversation outdoors after Léon "posa délicatement sur ses épaules son

⁵⁶ 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 amid the corn in the little path as they walked to the church (Flaubert, EMA 208).

⁵⁷ Without seeing the abyss into which she was throwing herself (Flaubert, EMA 208)

⁵⁸ The disillusion of adultery (Flaubert, EMA 208)

long châle de dentelle”⁵⁹ (Flaubert 212-213).

Léon has grown considerably during the time he has been away from Yonville. He is no longer the melancholy, shy person he was as a youth. Rather, he has become a man who is reasonably confident in himself, enough so to engage Emma right away in conversation pertaining to their former relationship as well as to a proposed future intimacy. Having gained some exposure to city life living in Rouen, Léon considers himself to be in a better position to make Emma his mistress than he previously was.

Auprès d’une parisienne en dentelles, dans le salon de quelque docteur illustre, personnage à décorations et à voiture, le pauvre clerc, sans doute, eût tremblé comme un enfant ; mais, ici, à Rouen, sur le port, devant la femme de ce petit médecin, il se sentait à l’aise, sûr d’avance qu’il éblouirait. L’aplomb dépend des milieux où il se pose : on ne parle pas à l’entresol comme au quatrième étage, et la femme riche semble avoir autour d’elle, pour garder sa vertu, tous ses billets de banque, comme une cuirasse, dans la doublure de son corset⁶⁰ (Flaubert 215-216).

Based upon Emma’s bourgeois status, Léon feels free to court her, apparently, there are no visible bank notes guarding her virtue.

Indeed, Emma seems to Léon to be somewhat less virtuous than before, that is to say, whatever virtue he perceives in her is tempered by lapses in propriety that have become relatively perceptible. In Rouen, Emma’s costume is on occasion singularly inappropriate. For

⁵⁹ Put her long lace shawl carefully about her shoulders (Flaubert, EMA 211)

⁶⁰ By the side of a Parisienne in her laces, in the drawing-room of some illustrious physician, a person driving his carriage and wearing many orders, the poor clerk would no doubt have trembled like a child; but here, at Rouen, on the harbour, with the wife of this small doctor he felt at his ease, sure beforehand he would shine. Self-possession depends on its environment. We don’t speak on the first floor as on the fourth; and the wealthy woman seems to have, about her, to guard her virtue, all her bank-notes, like a cuirass, in the lining of her corset (Flaubert, EMA 215).

instance, Léon, having discovered that Emma is staying at the Croix Rouge, calls upon her and she receives him “vêtue d’un peignoir en basin, appuyait son chignon contre le dossier du vieux fauteuil ; le papier jaune de la muraille faisait comme un fond d’or derrière elle : et sa tête nue se répétait dans la glace avec la raie blanche au milieu, et le bout de ses Oreilles dépassant sous ses bandeaux”⁶¹ (Flaubert 217). This passage is reminiscent of the earlier one in which Léon sees Emma in a similar state of undress through her window, but even surpasses it because Emma now allows a man into her room and proceeds to have a lengthy conversation with him in the same state. Léon too, is reminded of the Emma he knew before as he recalls “les robes qu’elle avez portées, les meubles de sa chambre, toute sa maison”⁶² (Flaubert 219).

Emma is easily drawn in by Léon’s kind words and romantic gestures as evidenced by her agreement to meet him “demain, à onze heures, dans la cathédrale”⁶³ (Flaubert 221). Before the meeting, Léon imagines Emma’s appearance. Clearly, even though Emma is just a country doctor’s wife, to Léon, she is a rather imposing mistress as well; he sees her “avec sa robe à volants, son lorgnon d’or, ses bottines minces, dans toutes sortes d’élégances dont il n’avait pas goûté, et dans l’ineffable séduction de la vertu qui succombe”⁶⁴ (Flaubert 223). When Emma finally does appear, Léon recognizes her at first by her costume, “un froufrou de soie sur les dalles, la bordure d’un chapeau, un camail noir... C’était elle”⁶⁵ (Flaubert 224). Léon perceives Emma according to society’s accepted conventions. He is not so much contemplating the

⁶¹ A dimity dressing-gown, leant her head against the back of the old armchair; the yellow wall-paper formed, as it were, a golden background behind her, and her bare head was mirrored in the glass with the white parting in the middle, and the tips of her ears peeping out from the folds of her hair (Flaubert, EMA 217)

⁶² The dresses she had worn, the furniture of her room, the whole of her house (Flaubert, EMA 218)

⁶³ ‘To-morrow at eleven o’clock in the cathedral’ (Flaubert, EMA 221)

⁶⁴ With her flounced dress, her gold eyeglass, her thin shoes, with all sorts of elegant trifles that he had never enjoyed, and with the ineffable seduction of yielding virtue (Flaubert, EMA 223)

⁶⁵ But a rustle of silk on the flags, the tip of a bonnet, a lined cloak— it was she! (Flaubert, EMA 223)

possibility of romantic love stemming from an affair with her as the possibility of an affair with a sophisticated woman, a possibility revealed by her adherence to the norms of bourgeois (upper class) dress.

Yet, Emma's general outward propriety is immediately challenged by her actions once the pair hires a carriage. As we know, carriages afforded some freedom to women because of their relative privacy. Of course, the main objective of carriage rides through the Bois de Boulogne for upper class Parisian women was in essence to "see and be seen" by their (women) peers; the object of Emma and Léon's carriage ride is quite different. Indeed, the pair makes use of its seclusion to consummate their illicit relationship. When Léon pushes Emma into the carriage a hurried, animalistic tone is set for the entire incident (Flaubert 227). As the driver is told again and again to continue on his present, aimless course, he wonders what might be occurring inside the coach, but when he consults with his passengers, he only meets with "des exclamations de colère"⁶⁶ (Flaubert 228). People are confused at the sight of this wandering carriage, "les bourgeois ouvraient de grands yeux ébahis devant cette chose si extraordinaire, une voiture à stores tendus, et qui apparaissait ainsi continuellement, plus close qu'un tombeau et ballottée comme un navire"⁶⁷ (Flaubert 228). The onlookers are even more scandalized once "une main nue passa sous les petits rideaux de toile, jaune et jeta des déchirures de papier"⁶⁸ (Flaubert 228). Hours later, "la voiture s'arrêta dans une ruelle ... et une femme en descendit qui

⁶⁶ Exclamations of anger (my translation)

⁶⁷ The good folk opened large wonder-stricken eyes at this sight, so extraordinary in the provinces, a cab with blinds drawn, and which appeared thus constantly shut more closely than a tomb, and tossing about like a vessel (Flaubert, EMA 227).

⁶⁸ A bared hand passed beneath the small blinds of yellow canvas, and threw out some scraps of paper (Flaubert, EMA 227)

marchait, le voile baissé sans détourner la tête”⁶⁹ (Flaubert 228). The reappearance of yellow in these last two scenes is noteworthy.

This episode further clarifies the contradiction between Emma’s costume and her actions. Even more than similar instances in the novel up to this point, the carriage ride establishes Emma as an improper woman in relation to her bourgeois status. Some characters have voiced their doubts about her, but never before has she so publicly (even semi-privacy has its element of publicity) revealed herself as a woman of questionable virtue. Carriage rides for respectable women, like all other outings, required proper outerwear to be worn, the nude hand seen passing through the curtains is one violation as gloves were always a component of “comme il faut” dress. As Emma descends from the carriage, she is seen wearing a veil covering her head but here, although head coverings were equally expected as gloves, the veil seems to signify shameful rather than modest concealment.

Around this time, Emma’s financial troubles with Lheureux resurface as the merchant pays her a visit after the death of Charles’s father. The merchant appears to “offrir ses services, *eu égard à la fatale circonstance*”⁷⁰ just after the tragedy, much as he did after the rupture between Emma and Rodolphe (Flaubert 235). Although Emma resists his initial efforts to outfit her in new clothing during this time of mourning, after a private discussion during which the merchant “se mit, en termes assez nets, à féliciter Emma sur la succession,”⁷¹ presumably to determine if some portion of the inheritance will go toward Emma’s rather sizeable debt, Lheureux finally determines that he will send Emma “un barège noir, douze mètres, de quoi faire

⁶⁹ The carriage stopped in a back street ... and a woman got out, who walked with her veil down, and without turning her head (Flaubert, EMA 227).

⁷⁰ Offer his services ‘under the sad circumstances’ (Flaubert, EMA 234)

⁷¹ In sufficiently clear terms began to congratulate Emma on the inheritance (Flaubert, EMA 234)

une robe”⁷² (Flaubert 236). As grave as Emma’s financial difficulties are, she still is having no trouble keeping up appearances with Léon.

When Emma is in Rouen, Léon always notices her clothes; she always seems in some sense imposing. On one occasion, “[s]a robe noire, dont les draperies s’élargissaient en éventail, l’amincissait, la rendait plus grande”⁷³ (Flaubert 239). The exaggerated silhouette of the costume of this period is no doubt the motivating factor in Léon’s perception of Emma. She is almost constantly dressed in black, whether because she is mourning her father-in-law or due to her own eccentric sense of style, which also supports Léon’s often dramatized perceptions. However, Emma is certainly not revising her habits in any serious sense. For instance, one day as she is ready to get off the coach, Emma “mettait d’autres gants”⁷⁴ indicating that the gloves she had been wearing for her trip either were not good enough to wear to greet Léon, or they were somehow to recognizable (Flaubert 245). Of course Emma, ever the actress, never dispenses with her custom of wearing “son voile noir”⁷⁵ around Rouen to prevent her identification (Flaubert 245).

Despite her efforts to maintain a low profile in Rouen, no such effort is made in the privacy of their rented room. The two seem rather to have created a very domestic situation in which they seem relatively at ease.

Ils disaient notre chambre, notre tapis, nos fauteuils, même elle disait mes pantoufles, un cadeau de Léon, une fantaisie qu’elle avait eue. C’étaient des pantoufles en satin rose, bordées de cygne. Quand elle s’asseyait sur ses genoux, sa jambe, alors trop courte,

⁷² A black barège, twelve yards, just enough to make a gown (Flaubert, EMA 235)

⁷³ Her black dress, whose drapery spread out like a fan, made her seem more slender, taller (Flaubert, EMA 238).

⁷⁴ Put on other gloves (Flaubert, EMA 244)

⁷⁵ Her black veil (Flaubert, EMA 245)

pendait en l'air ; et la mignarde chaussure, qui n'avait pas de quartier, tenait seulement par les orteils à son pied nu. Il savourait pour la première fois l'inexprimable délicatesse des élégances féminines. Jamais il n'avait rencontré cette grâce de langage, cette réserve du vêtement, ces poses de colombe assoupie. Il admirait l'exaltation de son âme et les dentelles de sa jupe. D'ailleurs, n'était-ce pas *une femme du monde*, et une femme mariée ! une vraie maîtresse enfin⁷⁶ (Flaubert 246).

The illusion apparently has succeeded. Léon's characterization of Emma as a "woman of the world" reveals that all of her efforts to appear sophisticated through her dress and manner have paid off. However, the web of lies enabling her affair is quickly becoming unmanageable. For instance, when Charles speaks to Emma's supposed piano instructor and discovers that the woman does not know Emma, it becomes clear to her that "son existence ne fut plus qu'un assemblage de mensonges, où elle enveloppait son amour comme dans de voiles, pour le cacher"⁷⁷ (Flaubert 251). The secrecy with which Emma has conducted business with Lheureux too, begins to be very problematic; the merchant is growing restless over a debt "don't la valeur se montait à la somme de deux mille francs environ" for "plusieurs robes et divers articles de toilette"⁷⁸ (Flaubert 252).

Nonetheless, Emma continues with her life as if her mounting debt were not a problem.

In order to satisfy Léon, Emma maintains her toilette; her costume is as luxurious as it always

⁷⁶ They said 'our room,' 'our carpet,' she even said 'our slippers,' a gift of Léon's, a whim she had had. They were pink satin, bordered with swansdown. When she sat on his knees, her leg, then too short, hung in the air, and the dainty shoe, that had no back to it, was held in only by the toes to her bare foot. He for the first time enjoyed the inexpressible delicacy of feminine refinements. He had never met this grace of language, this reserve of clothing, these poses of the weary dove. He admired the exaltation of her soul and the lace on her petticoat. Besides, was she not 'a lady' and a married woman—a real mistress, in fine (Flaubert, EMA 246).

⁷⁷ Her existence was but one long tissue of lies, in which she enveloped her love as in veils to hide it (Flaubert, EMA 250-251).

⁷⁸ Several dresses, and divers articles of dress, the bills for which amounted to about two thousand francs (Flaubert, EMA 251)

has been. Quite necessarily so as we see Léon dining with Homais whose admission that “[c]e qui le séduisait par-dessus tout, c’était le *chic*. Il adorait une toilette élégante dans un appartement bien meublé”⁷⁹ seems to transfer itself neatly to Léon himself (Flaubert 260). Although Léon continues to be under Emma’s spell in terms of her appearance, he has a premonition about her. One evening,

[e]lle se déshabillait brutalement, arrachant le lacet mince de son corset, qui sifflait autour de ses hanches comme une couleuvre qui glisse. Elle allait sur la pointe de ses pieds nus regarder, encore une fois si la porte était fermée, puis elle faisait d’un seul geste tomber ensemble tous ses vêtements ; — et, pâle, sans parler, sérieuse, elle s’abattait contre sa poitrine, avec un long frisson. Cependant, il y avait sur ce front couvert des gouttes froides, sur ces lèvres balbutiantes, dans ces prunelles égarées, dans l’étreinte de ces bras, quelque chose d’extrême, de vague et de lugubre, qui semblait à Léon se glisser entre eux, subtilement, comme pour les séparer⁸⁰ (Flaubert 262).

However, any worry that Léon has about Emma’s mental condition vanishes upon consideration of the ennui that is beginning to creep into their relationship, “il se révoltait contre l’absorption, chaque jour plus grande, de sa personnalité”⁸¹ (Flaubert 262-263). Yet as much as he resents Emma for trying to make their love the foremost priority in his life, it is difficult for him to break ties with her because, after all, “[e]lle ne manquait point ... de lui prodiguer toutes sortes

⁷⁹ What seduced him above all else was *chic*. He admired an elegant toilette in a well-furnished apartment (Flaubert, EMA 259).

⁸⁰ She undressed brutally, tearing off the thin laces of her corset that nestled around her hips like a gliding snake. She went on tiptoe, barefooted, to see once more that the door was closed, then, pale, serious, and, without speaking, with one movement, she threw herself upon his breast with a long shudder. Yet, there was upon that brow covered with cold drops, on those quivering lips, in those wild eyes, in the strain of those arms, something vague and dreary that seemed to Léon to glide between them subtly as if to separate them (Flaubert, EMA 261-262).

⁸¹ He rebelled against his absorption, daily more marked, by her personality (Flaubert 262).

d'attentions, depuis les recherches de table jusqu'aux coquetteries du costume”⁸² (Flaubert 263).

Although he tires of her company, Léon remains attracted to her as a visual spectacle. As with Rodolphe, Emma's relationship with Léon has become little more than an exercise in dressing appealingly.

Léon's desire to end his affair with Emma though, will soon be fulfilled without him having to take any action at all. Emma's financial problems have reached the crisis level. Her desperation is beginning to show as “[p]our se faire de l'argent, elle se mit à vendre ses vieux gants, ses vieux chapeaux”⁸³ instead of adhering to her past strategy of purchasing new gloves and hats and letting the older articles fall to her domestics (Flaubert 267). Emma clearly realizes how delicate her situation has become. Yet she is basically powerless to rectify it because her debt is so great. This realization, along with the mounting strain in her relationship with Léon, precipitates another one of her depressions, although it is obviously short-lived.

Her finances and her lackluster romance cause her to lose interest in life in general, and also any remaining interest she may have had in propriety. In her depression, in Yonville, “Madame était dans sa chambre ... Elle resta là pendant tout le long du jour, engourdie, à peine vêtue, et, de temps à autre, faisant fumer des pastilles du sérail qu'elle avait achetées à Rouen”⁸⁴ lapsing again into her habit of not dressing at all (Flaubert 268). While during one of her trips to Rouen, “elle alla le soir au bal masqué. Elle mit un pantalon de velours et des bas rouges, avec une perruque à catogan et un lampion sur l'oreille. Elle sauta toute la nuit, au son furieux des

⁸² She did not fail, in truth, to lavish all sorts of attentions upon him, from the delicacies of food to the coquetties of dress (Flaubert, EMA 262).

⁸³ To get money she began selling her old gloves, her old hats (Flaubert, EMA 266)

⁸⁴ Madame was in her room, which no one entered. She stayed there all day long, torpid, half dressed, and from time to time burning Turkish pastilles which she had bought at Rouen (Flaubert, EMA 267).

trombones”⁸⁵ (Flaubert 270). Although Emma wears this costume on the occasion of a masked ball, it is nonetheless revealing in terms of her real life. First, dressed as a man, she chooses velvet pants. We have seen how frequently articles of clothing in velvet have contributed to Emma’s deviance, especially in her first affair with Rodolphe. Second, she chooses red stockings. As noted above, red advertised wanton sexuality, especially red undergarments or hosiery, and since these stockings are not even concealed by a dress, their impact is intensified. By appearing publicly in such revealing costume, Emma in essence confirms the suspicions her unusual costume choices have elicited up to this point.

Not long after this night of revelry, Emma’s debt is finally called in, and because she is unable to pay it, her possessions are repossessed. Interestingly, although most of the Bovary possessions are seized, when the repossessors come to Emma’s clothing “[i]ls examinèrent ses robes, le linge, le cabinet de toilette ; et son existence, jusque dans ses recoins les plus intimes, fut, comme un cadaver que l’on autopsie, étalée, tout du long aux regards de ces trois hommes”⁸⁶ (Flaubert 274). Although autopsy is not so much the goal of their operation as much as it is the effect their invasion of Emma’s private space produces on the reader, these men can gain any knowledge they might require about Emma from the examination of her clothing. At this point, the web of lies metaphor that compared Emma’s lies to a veil in which she hides herself is again pertinent as her clothing is shown to be a superficial structure concealing the woman within (Flaubert 251).

All of this has become too much for Emma to bear when she wanders to the home of

⁸⁵ In the evening went to a masked ball. She wore velvet breeches, red stockings, a club wig, and three-cornered cocked hat on one side. She danced all night to the wild tones of the trombones (Flaubert, EMA 269).

⁸⁶ They examined her dresses, the linen, the dressing-room; and her whole existence, to its most intimate details, was, like a corpse on whom a post-mortem is made, outspread before the eyes of these three men (Flaubert, EMA 273).

Mère Rolet and implores the woman “j’étouffe ! délacez-moi”⁸⁷ (Flaubert 285). Far from being an example of the charming shortness of breath valued in women in the nineteenth century, this demand is an indication that the constraints of propriety have grown too imposing. Emma must be removed from the confines of her corset (society) and she soon develops a plan to accomplish this extrication. Emma, once resolved to poison herself, “prétendit avoir besoin de tuer les rats qui l’empêchaient de dormir”⁸⁸ in order to obtain a quantity of arsenic sufficient to kill her (Flaubert 292).

Although Emma’s exorbitant debt, accrued largely because of her continual purchasing of clothing, may be seen as an indirect cause of her own death, and certainly as the cause of Charles’ ruin, after her death he turns to costume to make everything right again just as she has tried to do throughout her life:

Il s’enferma dans son cabinet, prit une plume, et, après avoir sangloté quelque temps, il écrivit :

*Je veux qu’on l’enterre dans sa robe de noces, avec des souliers blancs, une couronne. On lui étalera ses cheveux sur les épaules ; trois cercueils, un de chêne, un d’acajou, un de plomb. Qu’on ne me dise rien, j’aurai de la force. On lui mettra par-dessus toute une grande pièce de velours vert. Je le veux. Faites-le*⁸⁹ (Flaubert 304).

The first time Emma wore her wedding gown, she was an innocent, if precocious peasant girl. By returning her to this costume, Charles is effectively returning her to the state of innocence in which she came into his life. However, it is clear to the reader how unaware Charles really is,

⁸⁷ ‘I am choking; unlace me!’ (Flaubert, EMA 283)

⁸⁸ Pretended that she wanted to kill the rats that kept her from sleeping (Flaubert, EMA 290)

⁸⁹ He shut himself up in his consulting-room, took a pen, and after sobbing for some time, wrote— ‘I wish her to be buried in her wedding-dress, with white shoes, and a wreath. Her hair is to be spread out over her shoulders. Three coffins, one of oak, one of mahogany, one of lead. Let no one say anything to me. I shall have strength. Over all there is to be placed a large piece of green velvet. This is my wish; see that it is done’ (Flaubert, EMA 303).

how much his love for Emma has blinded him to the woman she had become. He wishes to have her be the picture of innocence in white, but to spread her flowing hair out around her and cover her with a green velvet cloth. Clearly, the semiotic importance of the undressed hair, which would have been readily accessible to the nineteenth-century reader, and the also remarkable repetition of the green velvet detail at this crucial point in the novel, has not made any impact on this blissfully ignorant man.

Reinterpretation of Costume in two Film Versions of Madame Bovary

We now understand how the presence of detailed references to costume contribute to the narrative as a whole, and see how contemporary readers could be unaware of the function of these references. Let us now examine two filmic interpretations of the novel in order to determine the extent to which the details are effective in this more overtly visual medium. The 1949 film *Madame Bovary* as well as the 1975 BBC miniseries of the same name will be considered.

In the 1949 version of *Madame Bovary* starring Jennifer Jones in the title role, the sign system of references to costume in the novel is not preserved. There are two practical reasons why this is so. First, the film is in black and white, making all the costumes look either white or black even though they might actually be made from variously dark and light colored fabrics. This condition allows some of the progression of color that exists in the novel to be preserved in the film, but all of the other important color cues (for example the green velvet and yellow fabrics so frequently present in the text) are lost. Second, the plot has been altered, presumably for reasons of time and “entertainment.” Thus, the linear progression of Emma’s costume is effectively eliminated.

However, another reason why the significant references to costume in the novel are not

present in this film version is that the film (like any other film) is subject to the aesthetic ideals of the period in which it was produced. The costumes, although they basically conform to the conventions of mid-nineteenth-century fashion established above, have a distinctive 1950s look (which was already in fashion by 1949 due to the introduction of Dior's New Look two years earlier). This fact is not as detrimental to the integrity of the film as it might have been if the film had been made in another decade of the twentieth century though, because the fifties silhouette emphasized the same feature as the fashions of a century earlier: the waist.

Yet, certain details of mid-twentieth-century clothing that are incongruous with mid-nineteenth-century clothing appear in the film. For example, at the Vaubyessard ball, Emma wears a white gown with a strapless bodice. While eveningwear could have very minimal sleeves and could reveal the shoulders and décolletage, gowns certainly were not strapless. What is more, three stuffed, black birds are attached to the bodice whereas, if period conventions were observed, such a decoration would have been reserved for hats. In addition to outlandish embellishments, a variety of obviously synthetic, shimmery fabrics are used for eveningwear in the film. Although fabrics could be treated in certain ways to produce specific effects as we have seen, the fabrics used in this scene have none of the subtle refinement characteristic of the mid-nineteenth century and as much glitter as could possibly have been superimposed upon them. A final anachronism of the film is the frequent use of zipper closures. Many gowns that button in the front clearly do so only decoratively, being secured in reality with zippers in the back.

Taking into consideration the often questionable detail work of many of the costumes, as well as the much changed progression of the plot, I can only conclude that whatever vestige of the original semiotic implications of costume in the novel that remain in this film are purely coincidental. For example, as in the novel, Emma wears white early in the film, but of course the

wedding scene is retained and, since wedding dresses were still generally white at the time, the connotation of innocence persists, but perhaps does not produce a strong effect because it is expected in this particular context. At Vaubyessard, Emma still wears white, but the aforementioned modifications to period dress eradicate the connotation of innocence that Emma's costume according to Flaubert conveyed at this early stage in her marriage despite its presentation in a lighter color. With the riding habit, Emma's costume turns black, and remains so throughout the rest of the film, which is rather consistent with the novel. However, by this point in the film Emma has already been unfaithful although she had not been so in the original progression of the story and so, if any semiotic signification remained for these costumes it would surely have lost its effect as a foreshadowing mechanism. When Emma dies, Charles's orders for her burial are not mentioned as they are in the novel and so Charles's attempt to return Emma to her former state of innocence and purity is unknown to the viewer.

Importantly, undress is almost entirely absent from this film. We have seen how undress is a prominent semiotic indicator in many crucial scenes throughout the novel; however, in this film, not one of these scenes survives. Léon never sees Emma in her peignoir on screen, and Emma is only seen in her corset for brief moments. Even at such times, she is generally alone, and so, such scenes lose the shock value with which Flaubert infused them. Rather than spending a great deal of her time languishing around in various states of undress, the Emma of this film is most often a somewhat modernized, fully dressed, diluted version of the original.

On the other hand, in the 1975 BBC miniseries version of *Madame Bovary*, Emma's costume is almost perfectly accurate. The longer length of this series as compared with the earlier film (almost four hours) allows for the maintenance of the complete plot of the novel. Practically nothing has been cut out of this version, a fact that noticeably enhances it. This film is

also in color, so that many of the important color distinctions, though not all, have been preserved in this version. A great number of the key references to costume in the novel are retained, and some aspects of the costume seem even to have been enhanced— reflecting an understanding on the part of the filmmakers of their importance.

From the time of Emma's wedding, the costume choices in this film are very reminiscent of the novel and carry similar significations. Her wedding dress is white and relatively plain, and when she first arrives in Tostes her costume remains so for a short time. This detail enhances her later transition(s). First, she is a country girl with high hopes, then she is a somewhat better off wife quickly becoming acquainted with the acquisition of goods on credit. Soon, her dresses are satin and taffeta rather than cotton and linen. Accurately, her costume is not too dark in the beginning; she wears either earth tones or lighter jewel tones. For the Vaubyessard ball, her costume is in keeping with the novel's description as she wears a yellow gown. Of course, we have seen the importance of yellow in the work.

The carriage scene not only exists in this version, but is also carried out very accurately. Later, when Emma has become fully engaged in her affair with Léon, she wears black and is veiled during her visits to Rouen. This film makes the viewer aware of the family dynamics and practical reasons for Emma's costume. The death of Charles's father is announced making Emma's acquisition of two black dresses for the mourning a necessity. Moreover, the pleasure Emma wishes to enjoy but yet to conceal beneath a veil is quite clear, enhancing the confusion of the situation. The degradation of Emma's propriety to a state of nonexistence is effectively illustrated by the subtle changes to her costume as the mourning period proceeds.

First, she wears a black dress that is relatively plain, but soon after, the other dress is revealed, complete with sparkling, beaded bodice panels. Clearly, what was at first a very typical

mourning costume has been transformed into something else. Certainly, lavish decoration on mourning costume was not appropriate, and so, Emma's modification to the normative costume for her situation has a double effect for the viewer; this is the first of two choices in the film that seem to give it a more modern impact than the novel might have. First, the idea of mourning is familiar enough to most viewers that the decoration of this costume should reach them as a violation of costume norms. Second, the modern association of black, sparkly clothing with nightclubs and other sexually charged recreational activities is commonplace in the eyes of modern viewers in the same degree as many of other details of costume it would have been unusual to the novel's contemporary readership. Thus, the effect on the viewer should be a noticeable one.

The second instance of enhancement, which I have alluded to, has to do with undress. Whereas in the first film it was almost completely absent, in this film it is present at the crucial moments as well as at some others. Even early in the film, Emma's innocent-but-not exposure in her peignoir at the open bedroom window makes an appearance in this film. During the affair with Rodolphe, the effect is amplified when, in the aftermath of the carnal meetings between the two, piles of clothing are visible on the floor. Of course the undergarments involved in women's costume in the nineteenth-century were such that encounters between lovers were rare and ill-advised; here though, they are (accurately) undertaken with abandon.

Later, with Léon, Emma undresses in a way very similar to the one we have discussed. At this point, all of the proper undergarments are revealed to be in use in the film, which only contributes to the atmosphere of total impropriety in a way that is very accessible to modern viewers accustomed to similar scenes in films. As Emma removes each layer of white undergarments quickly and without shame, the viewer necessarily becomes attentive, and as the

process continues, he must become equally aware that the time involved in this undertaking is an important factor in its semiotic implications, even if he is more focused on the story than on Emma's costume.

Excepting a few minor flaws in the costume, for example, rather slim skirts for the 1850s look and the use of some fairly synthetic looking fabrics, this version of *Madame Bovary* does what the novel does at the level of costume: It makes costume noticeable and accessible to the viewer while maintaining its subtlety as a literary/visual device. The film makes Emma's costume stand out at the right times so that modern viewers get practically the same sense of costume as it relates to propriety that contemporary readers must have gleaned from the novel itself.

Conclusions

References to costume in *Madame Bovary* are not accidental. Flaubert has infused the novel with an unparalleled richness of detail and meaning. We have seen that details pertaining to Emma's costume are no exception to this rule. His references to costume evidence an intimate comprehension of the peculiar norms surrounding dress in the mid-nineteenth-century that translates into a recognizable system of signs within the novel. Emma's costume throughout the novel complements and enhances her actions. The contemporary reader, while probably shocked by her indecorous behavior, was no doubt sensitive to the semiotic implications of Emma's clothing as well.

Our discussion of mid-nineteenth-century costume revealed the semiotic importance of dress with regard to propriety. It should be clear that one's dress was not merely self-expression. Clothing reveals much to the trained eye, and, indeed, reveals something even to the untrained one. A well-dressed woman of the 1850s might have had to change ten times a day to be dressed

properly because every eye would notice inconsistency in her costume. A poorly chosen color or a too low neckline could have spelled ruin for her reputation in much the same way as bad behavior could. Is it any wonder then, that Emma Bovary appalled readers?

There is no doubt that women were unfaithful even within the repressive confines of nineteenth-century society. Yet, it is doubtful that any of them advertised their wanton tendencies with such frequency or such flair as Emma. The idea of leaning out a window clad in a peignoir would have given many respectable women fits whereas Emma feels no compunction about it whatsoever. Similarly, even modish women would not have taken so much liberty with trends as Emma. We can remember how, during her religious phase, she often changed the style of her hair and costume until it conformed to her Romanesque whims. Women who lacked such a naïve husband as Charles, or even those with a proper circle of friends, would have been openly ridiculed for such behavior. Emma though, persists in her whimsical attitude toward costume until the end, advertising to the world her barely hidden sexuality.

The web of semiotic clues Flaubert offers his reader by way of Emma's costume would have given his contemporaries more than enough material to condemn her, even without the sordid details of her sexual liaisons. We have systematically analyzed many details about Emma's costume and seen how, taken together, they constitute a complete rejection of the "rules" of costume for middle and upper class women. While real women worried about whether or not their jewelry confirmed their status appropriately, Emma stumbles home in the early morning in boots covered in mud from an expedition to her lover's chateau. Despite the rigidity and repressiveness of normative costume, most women passively accepted its restrictive influence. Emma did not. Rather than live a life of conjugal monotony, Emma detaches herself from convention in the same way as she releases herself from the laces of her corset before a

romantic encounter, in both cases she is being smothered but gasps for air.

Although by our analysis we have seen how clearly Emma's costume parallels her descent into debauchery, it is not certain that any twenty-first-century reader, without knowledge of costume's role in nineteenth-century life, would do the same. Rather, he would likely draw his conclusions from interpretation of the events of the novel. Marital infidelity, lack of domesticity, and disregard for outdated mores remain common features of social life, and, in the case of women, they remain improper and condemnable. Thus, any reader may see how Emma might be considered shocking, he simply may not see how costume could contribute to this impression.

Through filmic interpretation though, Emma's universe becomes a visual reality. In black and white, with no special attention paid to costume, the effect is virtually unchanged from that of the novel. The viewer expects to see Emma in some sort of period costume, but still forms his impression of her through observation of what she does. In a full-color production, with virtually every original reference still intact, the effect is remarkable. Emma seems out of place in her surroundings, she looks odd just as she behaves oddly. Costume enhances the character rather than simply covering her, it offers the viewer the semiotic cues that Flaubert originally extended to his readership. On film, what we have discovered through careful analysis is obvious: Emma is what she wears.

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Note on special symbol:

Footnotes in the chapter “Costume in *Madame Bovary*” are Eleanor Marx Aveling’s translations except where noted. The symbol “EMA” appears in these citations.

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