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HOPELESS ROMANTICS: REALITY VERSUS IMAGINATION IN GUSTAVE FLAUBERT'S *MADAME BOVARY* AND JOSEPH CONRAD'S *LORD JIM*

Nil Korkut-Naykı[1]

ABSTRACT

Although Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary (1856) and Joseph Conrad's Lord Jim (1900) are highly distinct novels in many respects, they are strikingly similar in the way they portray their protagonists. Both Emma Bovary and Lord Jim are hopeless romantics with a major tendency to set up highly unrealistic dream worlds for themselves. Both novels are widely interpreted as seriously critical of their protagonists, whose wide capacity for imagination eventually causes their ruin. This paper acknowledges the validity of this reading but argues further that these novels have a highly ambivalent approach towards the dichotomy between reality and imagination. The paper first looks at the similar characterization of the protagonists in both novels. It then proceeds to an analysis of the distance between the narrator and the protagonist in each novel in order to demonstrate the undecidedness marking the narrators' attitude towards the protagonists. In doing all this the paper aims to show how both novels leave the problem of reality versus imagination unresolved, pointing perhaps to the possibility of a third alternative involving the reconciliation of these opposing forces.

Keywords: *Reality, imagination, romantic, bovarysme, distance between narrator and protagonist, Flaubert, Conrad*

UMUTSUZ ROMANTİKLER: GUSTAVE FLAUBERT'İN *MADAME BOVARY* VE JOSEPH CONRAD'İN *LORD JİM* ROMANLARINDA HAYAL VE GERÇEK KARŞITLIĞI

ÖZ

Gustave Flaubert'in 1856 tarihli Madame Bovary'si ve Joseph Conrad'in 1900 yılında yayımlanan Lord Jim'i oldukça farklı iki roman olmalarına rağmen bir konuda önemli bir benzerlik barındırırlar. Her iki romandaki ana karakterler, hayal dünyasına fazlaca kapılıp gerçekliği kolayca görmezden gelebilen bireylerdir. Bu romanlara genel yaklaşım, bu hayalci başkarakterlerin ciddi eleştirisi yönünde olmuştur. Bu çalışmada böyle bir okuma bir yere kadar anlamlı görülmektedir, fakat asıl vurgulanmak istenen, her iki romanın da bu konuya dair önemli kararsızlıklar içerdiğidir. Çalışmada öncelikle her iki romandaki başkarakterlerin nasıl benzer özelliklerle çizildiği üzerinde durulacaktır. Sonrasında ise romanlardaki anlatıcı-başkarakter mesafesi incelenecek ve anlatıcıların başkarakterler

[1] Middle East Technical University, Faculty of Education, Department of Foreign Language Education, nkorkut@metu.edu.tr

hakkında net bir tavır oluşturamadığına dikkat çekilecektir. Tüm bu incelemeler ışığında her iki romanın da, hayal ve gerçek çatışması sorunsalına bir çözüm getirmediğine dikkat çekilecek ve bunun da karşıtlığı uzlaştırıcı bir olasılığa işaret edebileceği üzerinde durulacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Gerçek, hayal, romantik, bovarizm, anlatıcı-başkarakter mesafesi, Flaubert, Conrad*

In his seminal work, *The Political Unconscious* (1981), Fredric Jameson devotes a chapter to the discussion of Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* and draws attention to "Jim's *bovarysme*" (211), suggesting significant parallels between Conrad's protagonist and Flaubert's. Indeed, although *Lord Jim* (1900) and *Madame Bovary* (1856) are highly distinct novels in many other respects, it is possible to argue that Conrad's novel includes some important signs of a Flaubertian influence. As Yves Hervouet explains, Conrad was actually re-reading *Madame Bovary* "in 1892 with 'respectful admiration'" – a novel "of which by 1898 he knew 'immense passages by heart'" and "from which he borrowed massively during the first decade of his writing career" (1990: 169). It can, therefore, be suggested that in creating his protagonist Jim – an adventurous young sailor who has to deal with a wounded pride and shattered self-image following his act of cowardice on his first maritime post – Conrad consciously or unconsciously had Flaubert's heroine, Emma Bovary, at the back of his mind. Both Jim and Emma are romantics whose tendency to confuse reality and imagination eventually lead to their ruin. Both novels, therefore, are widely read as precautionary tales against the extremes of imagination and idealism. This paper looks further into this issue and argues that, while this kind of reading is justifiable to a certain extent, both *Lord Jim* and *Madame Bovary* are also characterized by a significant degree of ambivalence in their attitude towards the world of the imagination. The paper first looks at characterization in both novels to enable a better understanding of the shared qualities of the two protagonists. It then proceeds to explore the ambivalence in the general attitude of both novels mainly through an analysis of the relationship between the narrator and protagonist in each.

Being avid readers of romantic novels and setting up dream worlds similar to those of the heroes and heroines are characteristics common to both Emma and Jim. Emma is a young, married woman

seriously bored with her life in the dull, provincial French town she is living in. Describing Emma's life prior to the first narrative, the narrator of *Madame Bovary* explains how Emma had read and was fascinated by *Paul et Virginie* (1787), a highly influential work of French pre-romanticism by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, which "describes the close friendship between two French children ... a friendship which grows into adolescent love in the exotic world of the Indian Ocean and which ends in tragedy" (Overstall, 1981: 343). This is, indeed, a theme perfectly suited to Emma's romantic reveries. Emma's thinking of real life events in terms of the fictional lives she has read about in books is a quality that never deserts her. Right after the beginning of her adulterous relationship with Rodolphe, for example, she is so happy that her own life is approximating those of the heroines she has so often admired:

> Then she called to mind the heroines of the books that she had read; the lyrical legion of those adulterous ladies sang in her memory as sisters, enthralling her with the charm of their voices. She became, in her own person, a living part, as it were, of that imaginary world. She was realizing the long dream of her youth, seeing herself as one of those great lovers whom she had so much envied (1981: 154).

Although Emma's reveries are mostly related to romantic love, there are also a few instances in the novel where she makes use of maritime metaphors while dreaming of romantic love affairs ("If only ... she could have anchored her life to the solid rock of a loving heart" [1981: 216]) or where, in her dreamy exultation, she is reminded of the adventurous life of the sea: "[At the opera] Her heart drank its fill of his [the tenor's] melodious lamentations which ... resembled the cries of shipwrecked mariners in the tumult of a storm. She recognized all the intoxicating delights, all the agonies of which she herself had almost died" (1981: 215). Conrad's Jim, himself being a young seaman, also dreams of "shipwrecked manners", greatly influenced by the adventure novels he has read:

> On the lower deck in the babel of two hundred voices he would forget himself, and beforehand live in his mind the sea-life of light literature. He saw himself saving people from sinking ships, cutting away masts in a hurricane, swimming through a surf with a line; or as a lonely castaway, barefooted and half naked, walking on uncovered reefs in search of shellfish to stave off starvation. He confronted savages in tropical shores, quelled mutinies on the high seas, and in a small boat upon the ocean kept up the hearts of despairing men – always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book (1989: 47).

In Jameson's words, "Nowhere in Conrad are the Flaubertian accents stronger than in such a passage [as the above], which reproduces at a lower level of verbal intensity the great cadences of the Flaubertian lyric illusion, as in Emma's youthful dreams of romance" (1981: 212).

This adherence to a world of dreams leads both characters to enjoy an illusionary sense of superiority. As Ramazani argues ironically, "Emma certainly views herself as temperamentally superior to the petit bourgeois of her milieu. The rare quality of love of which she believes she is capable, the luxurious and exotic decor that she thinks this love demands, are indeed 'superior' to any reality" (1988: 67). Similarly, Jim displays an attitude of looking down on others even in his training days before becoming first mate of the *Patna*. During the gale which causes the collision of a coaster with a schooner – a foreshadowing of the more important incident of Jim's jump from the *Patna* – Jim can do nothing but watch what is going on, let alone act "heroically". He then overhears the "hero" of this incident describing how he rescued a person on board. Jim's immediate reaction is to think of the man's story as "a pitiful display of vanity". To Jim, "The gale had ministered to a heroism as spurious as its own pretence of terror" (1989: 49). On the *Patna*, too, his attitude is again that of indifference and superiority. For example, right before the *Patna* crashes into an unknown object, Jim is on watch, and he is at the same time overhearing the quarrel between

the skipper and the second engineer. The quarrel, instead of worrying him, leads him to complacent self-reflection: "Jim went on smiling at the retreating horizon; his heart was full of generous impulses, and his thought was contemplating his own superiority" (1989: 59-60).

Emma and Jim also experience a continual sense of dissatisfaction with everyday life, which they find highly mediocre and in sharp contrast with their romantic and adventurous dreams. After her marriage to Charles, for example, Emma is greatly disappointed to experience the monotony of married life: "'Oh why, in heaven's name, did I ever get married!'" (1981: 41). Living in "a tedious countryside, a half-witted middle-class society" and "an unceasing round of mediocrity" (1981: 55) with a husband whose talk is "flat as a city pavement trodden by all men's thoughts dressed in the clothes of everyday" (1981: 38) is not easy for a highly imaginative and romantic woman like Emma. The same goes for Jim as well. As the narrator explains, "After two years of training he [Jim] went to sea, and entering the regions so well known to his imagination, found them strangely barren of adventure. He made many voyages. He knew the magic monotony of existence between sky and water" (1989: 50). Later on, while Jim is working as a water-clerk following the *Patna* incident, Marlow makes a similar comment about him: "'I don't know how Jim's soul accommodated itself to the new conditions of his life ... but I am pretty certain his adventurous fancy was suffering all the pangs of starvation. It had certainly nothing to feed upon in this new calling .... He had loved too well to imagine himself a glorious race horse, and now he was condemned to toil without honour like a costermonger's donkey'" (1989: 154).

Self-deception is one essential way of coping with the mediocrity of everyday existence for both characters. In his study of Conrad's major phase, Jacques Berthoud makes a significant observation revealing a lot about Jim's personality and self-deception: "[Jim] … betrays an unusual incapacity to learn [during his training days and later]. The reason is that he regards the code not as something to be obeyed, but as something to be used. His concern is not with what it demands – steadiness in the face of danger – but with what it sometimes provides – glory at danger overcome" (1989: 71). Although Jim believes that he is interested in "a vocation for the sea" (Conrad, 1989: 47), this vocation is actually a means for him to attain his dreams of glory and heroism. In other words, what is given

priority is his dreams and imagination rather than the essential task of training to become a seaman. A similar misplacing of priorities can also be observed in Emma even during her convent days. Like Jim's incapacity to learn, she shows an inaptitude for convent education and leaves school: "Her spirit ... that had loved the church for its flowers, music for the words of ballads, and literature for its sentimental thrills, revolted when faced by the mysteries of faith .... When her father removed her from the school, no one was sorry to see her go" (1981: 37). This time we see Emma using the essentials ("church", "music", and "literature") as a means to attain another end: experiencing profound and exalted emotions and satisfying her imaginative needs in this way. Later on when she devotes herself to religion following her breakdown caused by the ending of her affair with Rodolphe, she again exhibits similar qualities. Here, too, it is as though religion is simply another tool for her to experience the elevated emotions of her dream world. This is evident mainly in how Emma uses the language of physical, earthly love while worshipping the Lord: "When she knelt at her gothic prie-dieu she addressed the Lord in the same sweet words which once she had murmured to her lover in the ecstatic transports of adultery" (1981: 206). At such a moment, whether she is addressing a lover or God does not make much difference for Emma since both are only a means to travel into the world of dreams and exalted emotions. Again reality is pushed into the background and the world of imagination gets the upper hand.

Both Emma and Jim, then, wish to forget the outer world of reality and are ready to use any opportunities of escapism that will enable them to do so. For example, the narrator of *Madame Bovary* describes how Emma is once possessed by a sudden desire to go to church: "It was almost without knowing what she was doing that she set out towards the church, ready to enter into any act of devotion provided that her feelings might be wholly absorbed, and the outer world forgotten" (1981: 104). In *Lord Jim*, on the other hand, Jim avoids the outer world of reality and takes refuge in Patusan, a remote district "'three hundred miles beyond the end of telegraph cables and mail-boat lines'" where "'the haggard utilitarian lies of our civilization wither and die, to be replaced by pure exercises of imagination'" (1989: 251). This is where Jim goes following an unfulfilling career as a water-clerk after the *Patna* incident. In describing Patusan, Marlow is careful to draw a sharp line between

this place and the outer world. He comments on how he felt, leaving Patusan:

> But next morning, at the first bend of the river shutting off the houses of Patusan, all this [the events I experienced in Patusan] dropped out of my sight bodily, with its colour, its design, and its meaning, like a picture created by fancy on a canvas, upon which, after long contemplation, you turn your back for the last time. ... It remains in the memory motionless, unfaded, with its life arrested in an unchanging light .... I had turned away from the picture and was going back to the world where events move, men change, light flickers, life flows in a clear stream, no matter over mud or over stones (1989: 286).

Patusan, with its people existing "as if under an enchanter's wand" (1989: 287), is where Jim finds satisfaction and fulfillment – at least for a certain period of time. He is happy to live closed off from the world of reality, but just like in Emma's case, intrusions are inevitable. The dream world both characters create for themselves is doomed to be shattered by the harsh and unpleasant reality of the outer world. The result is a highly bitter sense of disappointment and disillusionment for both.

Another self-deception strategy both Emma and Jim employ is to look for the causes of their predicament in forces outside themselves. Emma believes that if fate had been kinder, she would have married a better husband and lived in a more exciting environment: "Surely, all men were not like Charles? He might, that dream-lover, have been handsome, witty, distinguished" (1981: 41). Indeed, Emma's thoughts are full of "might-have-been"s, underlining her dissatisfaction as well as suggesting that she is always waiting for a miracle that will save her from her present situation. Jim's situation is not much different. Following both the minor accident caused by the gale during his training days and the major *Patna* incident later on, he deceives himself by believing that there will be other

opportunities, through which he will be able to prove his bravery, heroism, and devotion to duty. Moreover, while confiding his thoughts and feelings about the *Patna* incident to Marlow, Jim's tendency is often to attribute the cause of his cowardice and inability to act to unknown forces. Jim sincerely believes that "infernal powers" had played a trick on him (1989: 123). As Marlow explains, "'It's extraordinary how he could cast upon you the spirit of his illusion. I listened as if to a tale of black magic at work upon a corpse'" (1989: 123). Similarly, Jim blames the skipper and the engineer for his jump from the *Patna*. His argument is that their calling out to him to jump to the cutter lowered to the sea is what made him act the way he did: "'"Oh yes, I know very well – I jumped. Certainly. I jumped! I told you I jumped; but I tell you they [their calling out to him] were too much for any man. It was their doing as plainly as if they had reached up with a boat-hook and pulled me over. Can't you see it?"'"(1989: 134). As Hervouet argues, Emma and Jim's self-deception sometimes reaches such a degree that for a while they believe they have attained the kind of life they have dreamed of and read about in books (1990: 64-5). "I have a lover – a lover!", Emma cries right after giving herself to Rodolphe: "So, after all, she was to know the happiness of love! of those fevered moments of delight which she had despaired of finding. She stood on the threshold of a magic land where passion, ecstasy, delirium would reign supreme" (1981: 154). Jim similarly comments on Patusan: "'"It's like something you read of in books," he threw in appreciatively'" (1989: 215). At such moments, both Emma and Jim are very happy and excited since, in a way, they have found a proof of the reality of their own imaginings (Hervouet, 1990: 64-5). In neither case, however, is this proof long-lasting enough since reality intrudes: Rodolphe decides to break up with Emma, and Brown comes from the outer world to visit Patusan, spoiling the fairy tale quality of the place.

Underneath all this self-deception is the inability of both characters to attain self-knowledge. Emma continually asks herself where her dissatisfaction and disillusionment come from, but she can never realize that the source of these is "her imagination, which continually impels her to desire things that are beyond things" (Llosa, 1987: 139). Similarly, Marlow remarks on Jim's excuses in relation to his behaviour on the *Patna*, hinting that Jim also suffers from a lack of self-knowledge: "'I didn't know how much of it [his excuses] he [Jim] believed himself. ... I suspect he did not know either; for it is my belief

that no man ever understands quite his own artful dodges to escape from the grim shadow of self-knowledge'" (1989: 102). Self-knowledge, then, is something neither Emma nor Jim can attain till the very end. They are not developing characters: the same fanciful nature characterizes them right from the beginning of the first narrative till the end. Perhaps that is one reason why Marlow thinks Jim "appeared no bigger than a child" as he stood on the shore watching Marlow leave Patusan (1989: 291).

As the above discussion suggests, the way Emma and Jim have been portrayed as protagonists invites the reader to approach them critically. At times this invitation to be critical is also encouraged through various narratorial comments and devices. However, in neither novel do the narrators establish a very clear and consistent distance between themselves and the protagonists they are describing. This inevitably leads to a sense of ambivalence concerning the novels' general approach to the dichotomy between reality and imagination. The rest of this paper will first explore the narrators' critical attitude in both novels. This will be followed by a discussion of how this critical attitude is not consistently sustained throughout, making it difficult to judge where both novels position themselves in relation to the problem of reality versus imagination.[2]

In both novels open narratorial comments serve to create a distance between the narrator and the protagonist. The narrator of *Madame Bovary*, for instance, occasionally makes critical remarks like the following: "Objects she [Emma] valued merely for the profit, as it were, that she could draw from them, and rejected as useless everything that did not at once contribute to the consummation of her heart – for she was by temperament sentimental rather than artistic, and engaged in the pursuit not of landscapes but of emotions" (1981: 34). At another instance, the narrator exposes Emma's misconception about the nature of romantic love: "Love, she believed, should come with the suddenness of thunder and lightning,

[2] *Madame Bovary* and *Lord Jim* have narrators that are mostly quite distinct from each other. The impersonal narrator of *Madame Bovary* can only be compared to the impersonal narrator of *Lord Jim*, who briefly describes the events leading to Jim's jump from the *Patna* and afterwards, and then leaves the task of narration to the highly subjective Marlow. Both narrators share, however, an undecided perspective concerning the highly imaginative nature of the protagonists they are describing.

should burst like a storm upon her life, sweeping her away, scattering her resolutions like leaves before a wind, driving her whole heart to the abyss. She did not know that when the gutters are stopped up, the rain forms in puddles in front of the house" (1981: 94-5). In *Lord Jim*, too, Marlow sometimes comments openly on Jim's character and actions: "'Ah, he was an imaginative beggar.... He had no leisure to regret what he had lost [as a result of the *Patna* incident], he was so wholly and naturally concerned with what he had failed to obtain'" (1989: 104). At another instance, Marlow suggests that Jim "'made so much of the disgrace while it is the guilt alone that matters'" (1989: 173). Marlow also hints at his disapproval of Jim's final act of giving himself up to Doramin and, in a way, breaking his promise to his girlfriend, Jewel, that he will never leave her: "'But we can see him [Jim], an obscure conqueror of fame, tearing himself out of the arms of a jealous love at the sign, at the call of his exalted egoism. He goes away from a living woman to celebrate his pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct'" (1989: 351).

In addition to such open narratorial remarks, more subtle narratorial devices are also used in both novels to undermine the dreams and fancies of both protagonists and to draw attention to how they jar with reality. Perhaps the most well-known scene in *Madame Bovary* to serve this purpose is the one in which Rodolphe declares to Emma that he is in love with her. This Rodolphe does while, in the background, the Counsellor is making a dull, political speech full of clichés during the agricultural fair held in the town. The juxtaposition of these two discourses is an important ironic device on the part of the narrator, suggesting that a "real" declaration of love in the "real" world can never be like those Emma reads about in romantic novels. At another instance, the narrator draws attention to the huge gap between Emma's fanciful perceptions and reality. Below is a quotation from the novel describing the three very happy days Emma spends at Rouen with her second lover, Léon:

> They were three full, exquisite and splendid days, a true honeymoon.
> They stayed at the Hotel de Boulogne, down on the quay. They spent the whole time there, with shutters and doors closed, with flowers scattered on the carpet. Iced drinks were brought up at intervals from the morning onwards.

> When evening came they took a boat with an awning and went out to one of the islands for dinner.
> *It was the hour of day when from every shipyard came the sound of caulking hammers working on the hulls. The smoke of burning pitch drifted up between the trees, and the surface of the river showed patches of oil heaving unevenly in the red light of the setting sun, like floating plates of Florentine bronze.*
> *They went downstream through a medley of moored vessels, whose long slanting cables grazed the top of their little craft* (1981: 247, my emphasis).

There is a sharp contrast in this excerpt between Emma's perception of a romantic boat-trip with her lover and the narrator's ugly realistic description of the river presented in italics. It is, then, possible to argue that the narrator looks realistically at what Emma appears to regard as an "exquisite" and "splendid" boat-trip. He exposes Emma's unreliability by juxtaposing her perceptions with his own objective and realistic viewpoint.

The impersonal narrator of *Lord Jim* also makes use of similar narratorial devices to create a skeptical attitude towards Jim and his dreams. Here is a passage from the novel in which the narrator describes Jim's days on board the training-ship:

> His station was on the fore-top, and often from there he looked down with the contempt of a man destined to shine in the midst of dangers, at the peaceful multitude of roofs cut in two by the brown tide of the stream, *while scattered on the outskirts of the surrounding plain the factory chimneys rose perpendicular against a grimy sky, each slender like a pencil, and belching out smoke like a volcano* (1989: 47, my emphasis).

The similarity of this excerpt to the one from *Madame Bovary* above is quite obvious. The italicized sections ironically set Jim and his adventurous fancies against an ugly realistic background. The unreliability of Jim's perceptions is thus exposed and the huge gap between imagination and reality emphasized.

In both novels the narrators also imply their critical attitude through the way they depict the death of the protagonists. Emma commits suicide by taking poison, in the fashion of the many heroes and heroines of the books she has read. The narrator, however, quickly counters such a romantic element by including a realistic, even naturalistic description of Emma's death: "Very soon she started to vomit blood. Her lips became more and more tightly compressed. Her limbs were rigid; brown patches showed on her body and her pulse thrilled beneath the doctor's fingers like the string of a harp just before it breaks. Then she began to scream, horribly. She cursed the poison, abusing it, imploring it to be quick ..." (1981: 310-11). On the other hand, Marlow's description of Jim's death appears to be a rather dignified one, unlike Emma's: "'They say that the white man [Jim] sent right and left at all those faces [watching him] a proud and unflinching glance. Then with his hand over his lips he fell forward, dead'" (1989: 351). This is, indeed very much reminiscent of how the death of a hero would be depicted in a romantic tale. It should not be forgotten, however, that this depiction belongs to the highly subjective Marlow, who has – by this time – been profoundly affected by Jim's life story.[3] Furthermore, even though Jim's death appears to be a dignified one, there are still elements in it that would be foreign to a heroic tale. Right before Jim goes to his death, he is accused of falsehood by his girlfriend, Jewel, to whom he says that he "should not be worth having" (1989: 348): "'"You are false!" she screamed after Jim. "Forgive me," he cried. "Never! Never!" she called back'" (1989: 349). And neither can 'Tamb' Itam, his faithful servant, forgive him or understand him. He is a "hero" whose action of going to his death can be neither forgiven nor understood by those closest to him – a reality element that would be hard to find in a truly romantic tale.

It should also be noted that neither novel leaves the reader in ignorance as to the events following the deaths of the protagonists. In his study on *Madame Bovary*, Victor Brombert calls this "the victory

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[3] Marlow's ambivalent and changing attitude towards Jim will be explored further below.

of Existence over Tragedy itself." After Emma's death, "life simply continues, mediocre and indifferent" (1966: 52). In *Lord Jim*, the end of the narration is closer to Jim's death, but since the novel does not narrate events in full chronological order and since it consists of an embedded narrative, the reader is made to understand that life goes on after Jim's death as well, which is again a realistic element. At the very end of the novel there is even a short summary of what the characters are doing years after Jim's death: "'He is gone, inscrutable at heart, and the poor girl [Jewel] is leading a sort of soundless, inert life in Stein's house. Stein has aged greatly of late. He feels it himself, and says often that he is "preparing to leave all this; preparing to leave ..." while he waves his hand sadly at his butterflies'" (1989: 352).

The above discussion makes it quite clear that the narrators of *Madame Bovary* and *Lord Jim* attempt to establish a critical distance between themselves and the protagonists they are describing. However, they cannot consistently sustain this throughout, which eventually leads to a sense of uncertainty in the reader. In fact, it is possible to argue that neither novel is willing to give a clear answer to the basic human dilemma of choosing between reality and imagination. In Hervouet's words, both Flaubert and Conrad "strove to preserve the uncertainty necessary to leave open all points of view" (1990: 188). In *Madame Bovary*, for instance, the narrator's critical attitude towards Emma is occasionally weakened through the negative depiction of other characters like Rodolphe, Léon, and Homais. In his study of the ironic devices employed in *Madame Bovary*, Lloyd Bishop explains how the narrator does not always "pass explicit subjective judgment" on these characters, but the way they act or speak inevitably leads to a sense of irony and hence of ridicule (1989: 115-16). Soledad Fox similarly explains how the discrepancy between some of these characters' names and personalities creates a sarcastic effect:

> Emma's first lover Rodolphe has the un-Romantic surname of Boulanger (baker), her second lover, Léon, lacks any lion-like qualities …. The names that the pedantic Homais has given his children, and his reason for choosing

> them … reflect his desire to evoke great figures and illustrious acts. The irony of his bombastic aspirations is only heightened by the fact that his children have already been described as … [“] those little Homais brats, always dirty, badly brought up … [”] (2008: 151).

Such devices place these characters in a ridiculous light and encourage the reader to observe them from a critical distance. The same, however, cannot be said for Emma. Although she also receives serious ridicule and criticism, the reader cannot always maintain a critical distance from her. In Bishop’s words, this is because the author[4] not only suggests “certain good qualities in her, [but also] … partially identifies with her and forces the readers to do the same” (1989: 118). Fox similarly states that *Madame Bovary* creates “an intensely personal experience for the reader” (2008: 138). Such qualities of the novel serve to strengthen the sense of ambivalence, creating “a pattern of ebb-and-flow between the opposing forces of real and ideal” (2008: 135). There is even an instance in the novel where the narrator seems to look more favorably at the quality of being a little too imaginative. Describing Léon’s struggle with himself to concentrate more on reality, he remarks:

> He gave up playing the flute because it stimulated his imagination to indulge in sentimental reveries – for every middle class young man thinks, some time or other, in the heat of adolescence, if only for a day, if only for a minute, that he is cut out for the role of lover or of hero. The most squalid little philanderer has, at moments, dreamed of dusty princesses, and every lawyer carries within him the broken remnants of a poet (1981: 282-83).

[4] In the context of this discussion the author can be equated with the impersonal narrator of *Madame Bovary*.

It would not be wrong to argue that these words of the narrator are quite representative of Flaubert's own ideas. Describing Flaubert's life, Soledad Fox explains that "Flaubert was a renegade Romantic by the time he wrote *Madame Bovary* – he had enjoyed being swept away by Romantic attitudes but had since realized that, as a novelist, he was better off trying to keep his feet on the ground" (2008: 128). This biographical detail makes the novel's ambivalent attitude towards its protagonist even more meaningful. Flaubert himself had conflicting ideas about choosing between reality and imagination. It is, therefore, quite understandable that he could never distance himself completely from his protagonist. As Bishop states, Flaubert even went so far as to identify himself "with the victim of his cruel irony," saying, in a statement later on: "'Bovary, *c'est moi*'" (1989: 121). In *Madame Bovary*, then, Flaubert leaves this basic human dilemma unresolved, feeling, as it were, "hatred of realism and disillusionment with romanticism" (Heath, 1992: 31).

With regard to this theme, *Lord Jim* also poses questions and problems rather than giving definite answers. Although Marlow is sometimes very critical of Jim, his attitude is mostly a two-edged one: "as a man able to recall the ardours and illusions of his own youth, he is sympathetic; as an experienced master-mariner he remains skeptical" (Berthoud, 1989: 80). This ambivalent attitude can be observed through all of Marlow's narration, but as the novel proceeds and Marlow delves deeper into Jim's story, the clear distance he has established at the beginning begins to dissolve. He begins to show more sympathy for Jim and even comes to the point of identifying with him. As Davies rightly states, "Marlow insists on his affiliation with Jim even though his conduct on the *Patna* has been scandalous and dishonorable" (2005: 232). It is as though Marlow has "unfinished business with romantic dreams" (Price, 1986: 181), and this makes it impossible for him to distance himself from Jim completely. Bernard Paris's analysis of Marlow's character also corroborates this:

> [Marlow] ... is thrilled by heroic tales and the romantic's 'gift of finding a special meaning in everything that happens to him' (ch.32). He glories in Stein's destiny, which is rich 'in all the exalted elements of romance' (ch.20). It

> is he who celebrates the pepper traders, who glorifies the romantic quest for Truth, who views Jim and Jewel as knight and maiden (2005: 126).

Marlow, then, shares with Jim a sincere interest in and sympathy for the romantic imagination. In the course of the novel, this sympathy is sometimes so strong that he has difficulty defending the realistic as opposed to the romantic. There is even a moment where he criticizes his listeners for their lack of imagination – a moment reminiscent of the narrator's criticism of the harshly realistic characters in *Madame Bovary*:

> 'I affirm he [Jim] had achieved greatness; but the thing would be dwarfed in the telling, or rather in the hearing. Frankly, it is not my words that I mistrust, but your minds. I could be eloquent were I not afraid you fellows had starved your imaginations to feed your bodies. I don't mean to be offensive; it is respectable to have no illusions – and safe – and profitable – and dull' (1989: 209).

In *Lord Jim*, perhaps the person who comments most profoundly on the issue of reality versus imagination is Stein, Marlow's wealthy merchant friend, through whom Jim obtains the opportunity to settle in Patusan. Just like Marlow, Stein's attitude is again highly ambivalent. After listening to Marlow's account of Jim, Stein remarks: "''He [Jim] is romantic – romantic ... And that is very bad – very bad .... Very good, too''" (1989: 202). During his conversation with Marlow, Stein philosophically remarks that man always wants to be something other than himself, "''and every time he shuts his eyes he sees himself as a very fine fellow – so fine as he can never be .... In a dream''" (1989: 199). Problems emerge, however, because man cannot always keep his eyes shut. At times he has to open his eyes and face reality, and this brings about "the heart pain – the world pain" (1989: 200). Stein makes use of the metaphor of a man falling into the sea as he explains his own opinion on how to cope with this basic human problem:

> '"Yes! Very funny this terrible thing is. A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavour to do, he drowns. ... The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up"' (1989: 200).

This argument of Stein's is again rather ambiguous because it can be interpreted in two contradictory ways. In their editorial notes to the novel, Watts and Hampson describe the "two main, contrasting meanings" of Stein's speech:

> (i) 'It's both comical and tragic. Every man who is born into the dream which we call real life is like a man who falls into the sea. If he conceives exalted aspirations and tries to escape from mundane reality, he is like an inexperienced swimmer who, panicking, tries to climb up into the air and consequently drowns. The experienced swimmer, on the other hand, survives by co-operating with the sea: he treads water and lets it sustain him. Similarly, the practical man survives by adapting to reality and co-operating with it.'
> ...
> (ii) 'It's both comical and tragic. Every man who is born enters the realm of ambitions and ideals as inevitably as someone falling into the sea. If he tries to evade those dreams, he perishes. He must come to terms with them, work with them, and thus survive' (1989: 360).

It is very interesting that Stein, the wise philosopher figure, who could, like Marlow, be regarded as representative of Conrad himself, should make a remark allowing for two rather contradictory interpretations: on the one hand, man should not escape from mundane reality, but on the other, he should not escape from his dreams and aspirations. To Martin Price, it is exactly this ambivalence and "the generosity with which each alternative is imagined" that makes *Lord Jim* "Conrad's greatest work" (1986: 195).

Like Flaubert, then, Conrad also leaves the dilemma of choosing between reality and imagination unresolved. Although both novels are seriously critical of their romantic protagonists, they evoke a strong sense of sympathy for them at the same time. Such ambivalence may not be so surprising after all, considering the fact that neither novel can be comfortably classified as belonging to a certain tradition. *Madame Bovary* is often regarded as representative of the transition from Romanticism to Realism, and as a turn-of-the-century novel, *Lord Jim* is similarly placed at the threshold between Realism and Modernism. Representing transition rather than categorization, it is only normal that both novels should foreground undecidedness rather than certainty. As for the dilemma that remains unresolved, both novels may be regarded as suggestive of a reconciliation between reality and imagination – two forces that perhaps deserve an equal say in the construction of a person's character.

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