



The Naturalism of Emile Zola and Gustave Flaubert's Prose Fiction

*AYAO M. NUBUKPO (PhD)

Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora

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Abstract

Gustave Flaubert and Emile Zola belong to two different schools of thought, however some of their works exhibit strong similarities in purpose. In this paper I propose that both writers belong to the literary movement naturalism. A comparative study of Zola's works *Germinal* and "The Experimental Novel" and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* reveals that they are concerned with the description of the ugly side of society. In terms of their preoccupation with the concepts of verisimilitude and determinism, which are two pillars of the ideology of naturalism, these works display striking similarities.

Keywords: Naturalism; Realism; Determinism; Verisimilitude; Émile Zola; Gustave Flaubert; Madame Bovary; *Germinal*.

Introduction

Naturalism can be said to be a kind of purifying movement with regard to realism which developed in the first half of the nineteenth century. Most of the so-called realist novels were in fact a mixture of realism and frequently Romanticism. Even Charles Dickens who was known for his documentary realism, often indulged in portraying the truth through non-realist, 'Romantic' or symbolic ways of presentation. The naturalistic writers, thus intended to be more conservative in their approach. It mattered for them to be as objective as possible in their depiction of reality. It should be observed however that naturalism was not limited to the nineteenth century, especially when the documentary novels of Arnold Bennett (1867-1931) are to be considered (see Dennis Walter, *The Realist Novel*)^[18]

It is assumed throughout the present investigation that naturalistic writers, in addition to focusing on the repulsive aspects of society, held dear the concepts of determinism and verisimilitude which the present work sets out to research more thoroughly. The work is divided into two major parts: "Verisimilitude and Naturalism" and "Determinism and Naturalism". I draw heavily on Emile Zola's *Germinal* and "The Experimental Novel" and Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Zola (1840-1906) is considered as "the father of the French school of Naturalism" (Shaw, *The Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*) while naturalistic writers held Flaubert (1821-1880) as their spiritual father. The two writers at first appear to have very little in common. Flaubert strongly believed that literature should pursue the exclusive goal of creating beauty and Zola drawing on Claude Bernard's experimental method, insisted that literature should lean towards the scientific. It is probably in order to dissipate this ideological dichotomy that Flaubert publicly decried the naturalistic literary trend. "Il déclara au grand scandale de Zola, qu'il regrettait son oeuvre et qu'il rêvait d'un coup de bourse, qui lui eut permis de retirer tous les exemplaires de *Madame Bovary* en vente et de les brûler [Bedier, Hazard, Martino, (ed) *Littérature Française, Tome Second 1948-49* 349]^[2] (He declared, to the great disgust of Zola, that he regretted his work, and that he dreamt of making so much money on the stock that he could withdraw all copies of *Madame Bovary* on sale and burn them). This novel was considered a literary bible by naturalistic writers. All in all, the present work suggests that despite their apparent differences, Zola's *Germinal* and "The Experimental Novel" and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* bear striking similarities.

Verisimilitude and Naturalism

According to *The Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, verisimilitude means likelihood, probability, the appearance or semblance of truth. A work, in which actions and characters seem to readers, to be "acceptable" and "to make sense" as an adequate representation of reality, is said to possess verisimilitude (Shaw, *The Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*)^[15]. According to this definition, verisimilitude refers to the portrayal of life-likeness in literature. That is, characterization, plot and other elements should be akin to real life, which of course, does not mean reality. That

everything ought to be imagined is a view shared by Zola and Flaubert (in his modern novels), at least as far as writing is concerned. Zola believed that ultimately literature should acquire the status of science as had been the case with medical science. In “The Experimental Novel”, he dwells on his theory of what literature should be: an experimental method which, like Claude Bernard’s, ought to be an objective account of an observation of man in nature, a subject of experimentation. In order to fully grasp Zola’s ideas here, however, we first need to be familiar with the experimental method.

Claude Bernard (1813-1878) was a French physiologist. He believed that truth lies in nature, and that a careful observation of nature would reveal the laws governing all the phenomena of life. Thus, his experimental method, that would help mankind get to the truth, consisted of three steps. The first was careful observation of nature, the second was to make hypotheses based on the observations, and the third was the phase of experimentation to confirm (in the case of the discovery of a scientific truth) or to refute the hypothesis.

Zola wanted his contemporaries to follow in Bernard’s steps. They were to observe nature (especially human behavior and passion), then they were to make hypotheses (sticking strictly to the results of their observations). He believed a day would come when science discovered a method of investigating human passions. These hypotheses would then be confirmed, and literature would become a science. The following quote from Zola is illuminating:

L’observateur constate purement et simplement les phénomènes qu’il a sous les yeux...Il doit être le photographe des phénomènes; son observation doit représenter exactement la nature...Il écoute la nature, et il écrit sous sa dictée. Mais une fois le fait constaté et le phénomène bien observé, l’idée arrive, le raisonnement intervient, l’expérimentateur apparaît pour interpréter le phénomène (“Le Roman Expérimental”, 6) ^[20]

[The observer sets down purely and simply the phenomena he has before his eyes... He ought to be the photographer of phenomena; his observation ought to represent nature exactly...He listens to nature and writes at her dictation. But once the fact is set down and the phenomenon is carefully observed, ideas come into play, reasoning intervenes, and the experimenter appears in order to interpret the phenomenon (“The Experimental Novel”165).] ^[21]

Another characteristic feature of works by Zola and other naturalistic writers is their fondness for horrible happenings in society. This is what Roger Sherman Loomis seems to have meant when he wrote:

When Zola issued his well-known pronouncement that Naturalistic art was Nature seen through a temperament, he stressed the word “Nature”. Nature and Nature only must be the subject of art: to face Nature frankly and openly, to present her dullness and stupidities and shames with scrupulous impartiality must be the aim of the artist (“A Defense of Naturalism” 535) ^[14].

Zola’s interest in the morally questionable aspect of nature is not simple fantasy. He entertained the hope that once literature became a science (that is when the laws of natural phenomena became known) the social environment could be easily influenced. In other words, Zola and his followers were not so preoccupied by their naturalistic aesthetics that they were unmindful of the social problems of their time. In fact, nascent industrialization, and the new capitalist society it was creating, would become a source of problems hitherto unknown in Europe. The following excerpt from Zola’s novel, *Germinal*, well corroborates this point.

Des berlines hors d’usage traînaient, d’anciens bois a moitié pouris entassaient des meules; tandis qu’une végétation drue reconquerrait ce coin de terre, s’étalait en herbe épaisse, jaillissaient en jeunes arbres déjà forts. Aussi chaque fille s’y trouvait-elle chez elle, il y avait des trous perdus pour toutes, les gallants les culbutaient sur les poutres, derrière les bois, dans les berlines. On se logeait quand même, coudes à coudes, sans s’occuper des voisins. Et il semblait que ce fût autour de la machine éteinte, près ces puits las de dégorger de la houille, une revanche de la création, le libre amour, qui sous le coup de fouet de l’instinct, plantait des enfants dans les ventres de ces filles à peine femmes (121) ^[19].

(Out of order wagons were lying about the place, old half rotten woods turned into stack, while a thick bush was reconquering that corner of the world, the vegetation was spreading in thick grass and was shooting out in young trees already strong. Thus, each girl could feel at ease there as if in her own room, there were lost holes for each one of them, their lovers could fuck them on the beams, behind the woods, in the wagons. They lived there anyhow, shoulder to shoulder, without worrying about their neighbors. And it seemed as if there was, around that dead engine, close to the pit, tired from pouring out coal, a revenge of creation, the free love making, which, under the drive of instinct, planted children in the wombs of those girls, hardly women).

Few readers would remain untouched after reading this. The writer proves more cynical; he seems to have no compassion for the horrible lives of the people he describes. Besides, the choice of the setting was a matter to be discussed in a lowered voice under normal circumstances. A spectacle of many people engaged in love making in an open space and

without feeling any shame shows the degree of dehumanization the workers have endured. They were turned into animals. The setting is the place where workers used to meet their deaths in the unsafe environment of the coal mine. Consider the example of old Bonnemort who deemed himself a fortunate worker because he had escaped death many times. When it could no longer bury miners, the site was turned into a place where young teenagers were impregnated. That is probably why Zola used the phrase “une revanche de la création” (a revenge of creation).

Such a landscape is ideal for naturalistic writers. In fact, the writer was not cynical, rather, his representation of nature needed to be as objective as possible. Flaubert, who claimed not to be a naturalistic writer, developed the same interest for the faithful depiction of nature: those aspects of nature which no one wanted to acknowledge, or hear about because to do so, aroused feelings of guilt, repulsion, and indignation. Rachael Stanley in her article “The Scientist on Safari: J.G. Ballard and the naturalist gaze” contends that the model of the naturalist novel would look more like Ballard’s vision of the nineteenth century novel which David Baguley described as having plots that are:

Invariably dysphoric, deriving its action, in many cases, from the trivia of the popular press relating a crime, a scandal, an adulterous affair, a fraud, but manifesting itself as the reversal of parody of a ‘romanesque’ or heroic action, subjecting man - or, more frequently woman, - to some ironic or degrading fate, displaying the emptiness of human existence, disclosing the veiled depravity of bourgeois life (166)^[1]

As if to corroborate this point, Flaubert himself in one of his letters to his friend, Louise Colet, asserted the following:

Tu n’as point, je le crois l’idée du genre de ce bouquin. Autant je suis débraillé dans mes autres livres, autant dans celui-ci je tâche d’être boutonné et de suivre une ligne droite géométrique. Nul lyrisme, pas de réflexions, personnalité de l’auteur absente. Ce sera triste à lire ; il y aura des choses atroces de misère et de fétidité (Lettre No 402 à Louise Colet, Croisset, nuit de samedi à dimanche 1er février 1852) ^[10].

I think you can have no idea of the kind of book I am writing. In my other books I was slovenly; in this I am trying to be impeccable and to follow a geometrically straight line. No lyricism, no comments, the author’s personality absent. It will make dreary reading; it will contain atrocious things of misery and sordidness (“On Realism”90-91) ^[7].

It is obvious for more than one reason that Flaubert, in this letter to his friend, was referring to the writing of his novel *Madame Bovary*. First, he was not known for objective reflections of nature in his writings, and he generally did not write about matters that were morally questionable. *Madame Bovary* happens to be the first of his modern novels where the author was concerned with Realism. Another factor is Flaubert’s claims of “dreary reading” and “atrocious things of misery and sordidness”. In the novel *Madame Bovary* Emma, the title character, more than once let herself be persuaded to commit adultery. The plot seems to present these sequences of adultery as understandable. Though she was not in love with her bridegroom, she felt that she should not let the golden opportunity to get married pass. She would force herself to love her husband afterwards. However, she never managed to bring herself to love him. Hence, she became an easy prey to smart characters who exploited her sexually. Small wonder then, that, the writer was prosecuted for “atteinte à la morale publique” when the novel was first published in 1857. Predictably, he was acquitted because he did not make up the whole story. The novel is but the objective account of what the author had witnessed. In a comment which discusses Flaubert’s high concern for fidelity to nature, we can read the following:

Le souci de la réalité est constant, il n’y a guère de passage où un lecteur même prévenu, puisse signaler un délit d’exagération. Aussi bien Flaubert a-t-il toujours retracé dans ces romans modernes des aventures réelles. *Madame Bovary*, notamment, reproduite dans presque toutes ses péripéties un authentique fait divers ; on a reconstitué l’état civil des deux femmes de Charles Bovary et rappelé les aventures d’une autre femme, qui enrichirent cette destinée ; on a nommé le clerc de notaire qui donna le modèle de Léon...la soif de documentation a été, très vite, chez lui, une sorte de besoin physique [Joseph Bedier, Paul Hazard, and Pierre Martino (ed), 1948-49 347] ^[2].

(The concern with reality is constant. There was hardly a passage where even a reader who was looking for it could find an instance of the offence of exaggeration. That is why Flaubert has always portrayed factual adventures. *Madame Bovary*, notably, depicts in all its episodes authentic incidents. The civil status of Charles Bovary’s two wives has been reconstituted and the adventures of another woman who enriches that destiny have been shown; the public notary’s clerk who gave the model of Leon has been identified...the thirst for documentation became, very quickly, with him, a kind of physical need).

As if to echo the above quotation, two critics, Edmond Duranty and Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, in their discussion of *Madame Bovary*, noted:

The author of *Madame Bovary*, has then lived in the province, in the country, in the small town and in the little city; he has not passed through on a spring day like La Bruyere’s traveler, who from a hilltop, sketches his dream like a painting on the slope of the hill; he has really lived there. Now what did he see there? Meanness, misery, pretentiousness,

stupidity, routine, monotony, and boredom, and he will tell us so. This landscape, which is true, so frank, and breathes the lively genius of the place will serve him only as a setting for beings who are vulgar, banal, stupidly ambitious, completely ignorant, or semi-literate, and who are lovers without delicacy ("Two Views of *Madame Bovary*" 100) ^[6].

A typical example of a "lover without delicacy" is the character of Rodolphe in *Madame Bovary*. He was only interested in taking advantage of his lovers (married women in general). He would pretend he loved them, when he really just wanted to have sex with them and let them go when he was tired of them. He did not care how they would feel about the ending of the relationship, let alone what would happen to them afterwards. Emma, for instance, could not, before this point, be called an unfaithful wife, even though she did not love her husband. She was seduced and brought to adultery by Rodolphe. When this latter was pressed by Emma to elope to a place where they would be free to love each other without restraint, he responded by simply putting an end to their relationship. The following excerpt from the novel reminds us of the circumstances in which Rodolphe wrote the letter that would abruptly end Emma's bright future. Rodolphe's sarcasm and total absence of concern for Emma are highlighted.

En effet ces femmes accourant à la fois dans sa pensée, s'y gênaient les unes les autres et s'y rapetissaient, comme sous un même niveau d'amour qui les égalisait. Prenant donc à poignée les lettres confondues, il s'amusa pendant quelques minutes à les faire tomber en cascades, de sa main droite -dans sa main gauche. Enfin, ennuyé, assoupi, Rodolphe alla reporter la boîte dans l'armoire en se disant: Quel tas de blagues!" Ce qui résumait son opinion ; car les plaisirs, comme des écoliers dans la cour d'un collège avaient tellement piétiné sur son coeur que rien de vert n'y poussait, et ce qui passait par là, plus étourdi que les enfants, n'y laissait pas même comme eux, son nom, gravé sur la muraille...Il relut sa lettre.Elle lui parut bonne.

-Pauvre petite femme ! pensa-t-il avec attendrissement. Elle va me croire plus insensible qu'un roc; il eût fallu quelques larmes là-dessus ; mais moi je ne peux pas pleurer ; ce n'est pas ma faute. Alors, s'étant versé de l'eau dans un verre, Rodolphe y trempa son doigt et il laissa tomber de haut une grosse goutte, qui fit une tache pâle sur l'encre : puis, cherchant à cacheter la lettre, le cachet Amor nel cor se rencontra.

-Cela ne va guère à la circonstance...Ah

bah ! n'importe !

Après quoi il fuma trois pipes et s'alla coucher (*Madame Bovary* 285-88) ^[9].

[In fact, these women, rushing at once into his thoughts, cramped each other and shrank, as reduced to a uniform level of love that equalized them all. So, taking handfuls of the mixed-up letters, he amused himself for some moments with letting them fall in cascades from his right into his left hand. At last, bored and weary, Rodolphe took back the box to the cupboard, saying to himself "What a lot of rubbish!" Which summed up his opinion; for pleasures, like the schoolboys in a school courtyard, had so trampled upon his heart that no green thing grew there, and that which passed through it, more heedless than children, did not even, like them, leave a name carved upon the wall...He re-read his letter. He considered it very good. "Poor little woman" he thought with emotion. "She'll think me harder than a rock. There ought to have been some tears on this; but I can't cry; it isn't my fault". Then, having emptied some water into a glass, Rodolphe dipped his finger into it. And let a big drop fall on the paper. It made a pale stain on the ink. Then, looking for a seal, he came upon the one" Amor nelcor". That does not at all fit with the circumstances. "Pshaw! Never mind!" After which he smoked three pipes and went to bed (155-57)] ^[8].

So far, this paper has shown that there is a strong similarity between Zola's and Flaubert's novels in terms of their concern for realistic portrayal and for their privileging of modes of living that were morally questionable. The next section will discuss the second major idea embedded in naturalism: the concept of determinism.

Determinism and Naturalism

According to *The Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* by Harry Shaw, determinism is:

The philosophical doctrine that all facts and events are determined by outside causes, that results and effects are controlled by natural laws. Determinists believe that human choices and decisions are regulated by external sources and that man's will is free and therefore able to function only in the sense that it is uncompelled. Determinism is related to naturalism in that both theories embrace the idea that what a person thinks, does, and says are directed by heredity and environment over which he has little or no control (78) ^[15].

As if to lend credence to this definition, Zola himself in "The Experimental Novel" asserted that:

Ainsi, dans notre roman expérimental, nous pourrions très bien risquer des hypothèses sur les questions d'hérédité et sur l'influence des milieux, après avoir respecté tout ce que la science sait aujourd'hui sur la matière. Nous préparons les voies, nous fournirons des faits d'observation, des documents humains qui pourront devenir très utiles (51)^[20].

[Thus, in our experimental novel we may very well risk hypotheses on questions of heredity and influence of environment, after having shown respect for what science today knows of these subjects. We shall prepare the way, we shall furnish data from observation, from human documents, which will become very useful (195)].

Zola, faithful to his words, relies mainly on observation to formulate his “laws” on heredity and the issue of environmental influence over which man can do very little. If it is assumed that naturalistic writers portray reality, then Zola is right. Indeed, almost all his characters, which for the most part live in dire poverty, could do nothing about their sad fate generation after generation. The following passage from Zola’s *Germinal* is a good illustration of this point.

Ah ! Bien sûr, ce n’était pas d’hier que lui et les siens taping à la veine! La famille travaillait pour la Compagnie des mines de Montsou, depuis la création; et cela datait de loin, il y avait déjà cent six ans. Son aïeul Guillaume Maheu, un gamin de quinze ans alors, avait trouvé le charbon gras à Réquillart, la première fosse de la Compagnie, une vieille fosse aujourd’hui abandonnée, là-bas, près de la sucrerie Fauvelle. Tout le pays le savait, à preuve que la veine découverte s’appelait la veine Guillaume, du prénom de son grand-père. Il ne l’avait pas connu, un gros à ce qu’on racontait, très fort, mort de vieillesse à soixante ans. Puis, son père, Nicolas Maheu dit le Rouge, âgé de quarante ans à peine, était resté dans le Voreux, que l’on fonçait en ce temps-là: un éboulement, un aplatissement complet, le sang bu et les os avalés par les roches. Deux de ses oncles et ses trois frères plus tard, y avaient aussi laissé leur peau. Lui Vincent Maheu, qui en était sorti à peu près entier, les jambes mal d’aplomb seulement, passait pour un malin. Quoi faire, d’ailleurs? Il fallait travailler. On faisait ça de père en fils, comme on aurait fait autre chose. Son fils Toussaint Maheu, y crevait maintenant, et ses petits fils, et tout son monde, qui logeait en face dans le coron. Cent six ans d’abattage, les mioches après les vieux, pour le même patron: hein? Beaucoup de bourgeois n’auraient pas su dire si bien leur histoire (14) ^[19].

(Ah! Of course, he and his family had been mining for a long time! The family had been working for the Montsou Mining Company since its creation; and that was a long time ago, already one hundred and six years. His grandfather Guillaume Maheu, then a boy of fifteen, had discovered the rich coal seam at Réquillart, the first coal mine, today abandoned, over there, near the Fauvelle sugar processing factory. The whole area knew it, and as evidence of this the coal was discovered by Guillaume, after his grandfather. He had never known him, according to what people said he was a fat man, very strong, and died of old age when he was sixty. Then his father Nicolas Maheu, nicknamed the Red, died at barely forty years old in the Voreux mine that they were then digging: a fall, a complete collapse, the rocks drank his blood and swallowed his bones. Later, two of his uncles and his three brothers also died there. He, himself, Vincent Maheu who escaped a similar fate almost intact, with only a limp, was said to be a smart fellow. What to do then? There was no choice but to work. It was passed on from father to son, just like any other trade. His son Toussaint Maheu was presently dying there little by little, as well as his grand-children, and all his neighbors, who lived opposite in the mining village. One hundred and six years of coal mining, sons after their fathers for the same company. Indeed! Few bourgeois would be able to recount their story so well) ^[18].

Thus, the Maheu family could not escape their destitute condition because they were more preoccupied with their daily survival than with thoughts or means of investing in the future of any of their children. In fact, Zola’s theories with regard to heredity and environmental influence found their full justification here. The Maheu family cannot escape their vicious circle of poverty from generation to generation. At this point it might be useful to ask the same question as Zola : “En littérature où jusqu’ici l’observation paraît avoir été seule employée, l’expérience est-elle possible ? (5) ^[20] [Is experimentation possible in literature, where heretofore observation alone seems to have been used?” (164)] ^[21]. Zola again provides a good answer few pages later:

Eh bien! En revenant au roman, nous voyons également que le romancier est fait d’un observateur et d’un expérimentateur. L’observateur chez lui donne les faits tels qu’il les a observés, pose le point de départ, établit le terrain solide sur lequel vont marcher les personnages et se développer les phénomènes. Puis l’expérimentateur paraît et institue l’expérience, je veux dire faire mouvoir les personnages dans une histoire particulière, pour y montrer que la succession des faits y sera telle que l’exige le déterminisme des phénomènes mis à l’étude. C’est presque toujours ici une expérience “pour voir” comme l’appelle Claude Bernard (“Le Roman Experimental” 7-8) ^[20].

Now, coming back to the novel, we can see equally that the novelist is both observer and experimenter. The observer presents data as he has observed them, determines the point of departure, establishes the solid ground on which his characters will stand, and his phenomena will take place. Then the experimenter appears and institutes the experiment, that is, sets the characters of a particular story in motion, in order to show that the series of events therein will be those demanded by the determinism of the phenomena under study. It is almost always an experiment “in order to see”, as Claude Bernard puts it (“The Experimental Novel”166) ^[21].

Flaubert by contrast, is strongly opposed to the idea that science should be associated with literature: “L’identification de la littérature, qui est le principal article du crédo naturaliste, lui parut une absurdité, précisément une de celles qu’il poursuivait dans *Bouvard et Petuchet* (Bedier, Hazard, and Martino, 1948-49 347) ^[2]. (The identification of literature with science, which is the principal component of the naturalistic creed, for him is an absurdity, precisely one of those he pursued in *Bouvard et Petuchet*. In fact, Flaubert always decried ideologies that were later evidenced in his works and *Madame Bovary* proved to be no exception. The novel shows “les scènes qui montrent l’homme livré à ses instincts d’animal” (Bedier, Hazard, and Martino ^[2]. (scenes that exhibit man totally abandoned to his animal instinct).

In the same way as the Maheu family cannot escape the mine due to social conditions, so the title character Emma Bovary in *Madame Bovary* cannot escape adultery. The critic Emily T. Troscianko’s opinion that Emma was subject to cognitive dissonance can explain Emma’s inability to resist falling in love with other men while she is still married to Charles. A person that experiences cognitive dissonance goes through an internal contradiction. In other words, there is a contradiction between what that person is doing and what the person believes to be the right thing; contradiction between what the person is and what that person ought to be. It was recorded in *Madame Bovary* that Emma felt “un malaise insaisissable” a few times after she was married to Charles. This is the evidence that something was wrong with her (Troscianko 2012, Chapanis and Chapanis 1964 and Chen and Risen 2010). Troscianko further opined with insight that:

As part of the attempt to reduce dissonance, Emma makes a single decision (to marry Charles) which results in the disappointment of her dreams of wealth, sophistication, grand passion and all the other ideals, she has gleaned from literature. This is a form of hedonistic dissonance (dissonance created by actions that result in negative consequences for oneself) which reduces all subsequent decisions (to blame Charles for everything, to have affairs, to spend more money than she and Charles have on clothes and furnishings, to kill herself) to vain attempts to negate or vindicate that initial decision (“The Cognitive Realism of Memory in *Flaubert’s Madame Bovary*” 778) ^[17].

Emma wrongly thought she was in love when she married Charles. She realized this only after she was married. She could not experience the bliss that usually characterizes an ideal union. Her opinion was that matters of love would come later, and that with the habit of living together she might start loving him one day. The novel reads:

Cependant, d’après des théories qu’elle croyait bonnes, elle voulut se donner de l’amour. Au clair de lune, dans le jardin, elle récitait tout ce qu’elle savait par cœur des rimes passionnées et lui chantait en soupirant des adagios mélancoliques ; mais elle se trouvait ensuite aussi calme qu’auparavant, et Charles n’en paraissait ni plus amoureux ni plus remué (63) ^[9].

[And yet, in accord with theories she believed right, she wanted to make herself in love with him. By moonlight in the garden, she recited all the passionate rhymes she knew by heart, and sighing, sang to him many melancholy adagios; but she found herself as calm after this as before, and Charles seemed no more amorous and no more moved (31)] ^[9].

Though she could not bring herself to love her husband, she couldn’t help falling in love with other men. She knew very well that she should not be involved in love affairs with other men, because she was convinced that committing adultery was morally wrong. This mindset helped her resist her feelings when she fell in love the first time, with the Viscount. This was easier for her since she knew she would not have a chance to meet him again, after the party. She would not enjoy the same fate when she fell in love with Rodolphe who proved to be a very cunning character. At first, she tried to resist him, but things happened to her as if her whole being wanted to fully belong to Rodolphe.

Mais s’apercevant dans la glace, elle s’étonna de son visage. Jamais elle n’avait eu les yeux si grands, si noirs, ni d’une telle profondeur. Quelque chose de subtil épanou sur sa personne la transfigurait.

Elle se répétait: J’ai un amant! un amant! se délectant à cette idée comme à celle d’une autre puberté qui lui serait survenue. Elle allait donc posséder enfin ces joies de l’amour, cette fièvre du bonheur dont elle avait désespéré. Elle entra dans quelque chose de merveilleux où tout serait passion, extase, délire; une immensité bleuâtre l’entourait, les sommets du sentiment étincellaient sous sa pensée, et l’existence ordinaire n’apparaissait qu’au loin, tout en bas, dans l’ombre, entre les intervalles de ces hauteurs.

Alors elle se rappela les héroïnes des livres qu’elle avait lus, et la légion lyrique de ces femmes adultères se mit à chanter dans sa mémoire avec des voix de soeurs qui la charmaient. Elle devenait elle-même comme une partie véritable de ces imaginations et réalisait la longue rêverie de sa jeunesse, en se considérant dans ce type d’amoureuse, qu’elle avait tant envié (228-29) ^[9].

[But when she saw herself in the glass she wondered at her face. Never had her eyes been so large, so black, of so profound a depth. Something subtle about her being transfigured her. She repeated “I have a lover! A lover!” delighting at the idea as if a second puberty had come to her. So, at last she was to know those joys of love, that fever of happiness of which she had despaired! She was entering upon marvels where all would be passion,

ecstasy, delirium. An azure infinity encompassed her, the height of sentiment sparkled under her thoughts, and ordinary existence appeared only far off, down below in the shade, through the inter-spaces of those heights.

Then she recalled the heroines of the books that she had read, and the lyric legion of these adulterous women began to sing in her memory with the voices of sisters that charmed her. She became herself, as it were, an actual part of these imaginings, and realized the love-dream of her youth as she saw herself in this type of amorous woman whom she had so envied (125)^[8].

It is appropriate to underscore here that there has been a certain development in the character of Emma. She now makes the moral decision to cheat on her husband. This change took place as a result of Rodolphe's expertise. He knew how to seduce women. Let us compare Emma's sentiments just above with how she felt earlier in the novel, when she was involved with the young immature boy whom Leon used to be when he was a clerk:

Elle le trouvait charmant ; elle ne pouvait s'en détacher ; elle se rappela ses autres attitudes en d'autres jours, des phrases qu'il avait dites, le son de sa voix, toute sa personne ; et elle répétait, en avançant ses lèvres comme pour un baiser :

Oui, charmant ! charmant!...N'aime-t-il pas ? Se demanda-t-elle. Qui donc?Mais c'est moi ! Toutes les preuves à la fois s'en étalèrent, son coeur bondit. La flamme de la cheminée faisait trembler au plafond une clarté joyeuse ; elle se tourna sur le dos en s'étirant les bras.

Alors commença l'éternel lamentation : Oh ! si le ciel l'avait voulu ! pourquoi n'est-ce pas ? Qui empêchait donc? (145-46)^[9].

[She thought him charming; she could not tear herself away from him; she recalled his other attitudes on other days, the words he had spoken, the sound of his voice, his whole person, and she repeated, pouting out her lips as if for a kiss:

"Yes, charming! Charming! Is he not in love? She asked herself, "but with whom? With me!"

All the evidence arose before her at once; her heart leapt. The flame of the fire threw a joyous light upon the ceiling; she turned on her back, stretching out her arms. Then began the eternal lamentation: "Oh if heaven had but willed it! And why not? And what prevented it?" (78)]^[8].

Drawing on this excerpt the reader understands that though Emma was strongly attracted to Leon, circumstances prevented her from making the move to betray her husband and become Leon's mistress. However, few times later in the novel, after Leon has turned into a daring young man, she shows herself all willingness to be unfaithful to her husband. Such a development in her personality at such a time is surprising. Indeed, after her long, painful grief and the ensuing serious illness that her disappointment with Rodolphe had caused her, Emma might not be expected to start a new extra-marital love relationship again. But could she really help it?

Conclusion

The present argument aims at pointing out some principles of Naturalism that are common to Flaubert's modern novels (especially *Madame Bovary*) and Zola's works. These similarities should not be considered as solid ground to conclude that Flaubert and Zola are from the same school of thought. Such a conclusion would be highly questionable. In fact, of the two, only Zola has a naturalistic way of looking at the world. He was very much attached to the idea of turning literature into a branch of science like it had been the case with medicine. That is why in his writings he adopts the language of science, which does not leave room for superfluous matters like aesthetic considerations. Flaubert, by contrast, is fond of creating beauty in a work of art. The following quote is illuminated:

There are three main doctrines enunciated by Flaubert: First, the subject is not important; in his words "Yvette donc vaut Constantinople" (Yvette thus is the same as Constantinople). Second, the author must withdraw from his work, maintaining rigid objectivity and impassivity. Third, literature does not preach but shows. There is a fourth doctrine, that of making a beautiful work out of nothing, or as nearly nothing as possible, which is certainly not a realistic idea and has indeed led writers in a counter-direction ("On Realism" 89-90)^[7].

How can a writer combine "objectivity" and "impassivity" with aesthetic concern? This is part of the controversies Flaubert was fond of creating concerning his professed way of writing. He publicly opposed naturalism, but his novel, *Madame Bovary*, features some of the fundamental principles of naturalism. Besides, the French writer, Guy de Maupassant, who is considered Flaubert's intellectual heir and who was trained by Flaubert, became a naturalistic writer. Michael Fried, in the course of an interview about Flaubert's writings declared the following:

...j'ai lu *Madame Bovary*, j'ai été frappé par une espèce de contradiction...J'ai reconnu une espèce de décalage entre le projet de Flaubert, souvent déclaré, de chasser les assonances, d'atteindre une prose parfaite, une espèce de poésie de prose tout à fait nouvelle, etc, et la persistance à travers le livre, surtout dans certains paragraphes,

d'une densité extraordinaire d'allitérations, d'assonances, de consonances –une densité presque matérielle - (Fried and Neefs 2014).

(I read *Madame Bovary*, I was struck by a kind of contradiction...I acknowledged a kind of contradiction between Flaubert's project, often stated, to search for assonances, to attain a type of prose poetry that was really new, etc, and the persistence all through the book, mostly in some paragraphs, of an extraordinary density of alliterations, assonances, consonances – an almost material density).

Indeed, a closer analysis of Flaubert's motives in rejecting a naturalistic ideology, whose aim was to make literature a branch of science, appears well grounded. In fact, it is not at all evident that what comes from the subjective domain (the act of writing), and human feelings or passions can be subject to scientific investigation. With the benefit of our standpoint in time, the fact that literature has still not become a branch of science can be considered the best evidence that Zola was incorrect.

NOTES

I have used English translations where available. Where I provide both the French and the English, the translations are my own.

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