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Gender and Social Mobility: A Literary Portrait of Nineteenth-Century France

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A Literary Portrait of
Nineteenth-Century France

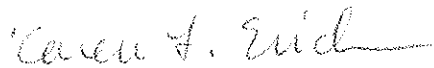
A THESIS
The Honors Program
College of Saint Benedict

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Distinction of
"All College Honors"
and the Degree Bachelor of Arts
In the Department of Modern and Classical Languages

by
Christine A. Jahnke
March 18, 1993

Gender and Social Mobility:
A Literary Portrait of Nineteenth-Century France

Approved by:



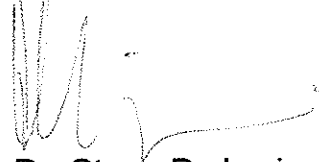
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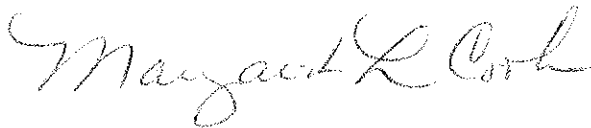
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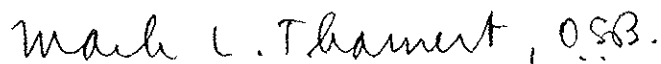
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Class division, injustice, poverty, and conflict scarred the society of nineteenth-century France as it searched for political, social, and economical stability. The hierarchical structure of this society, which determined an individual's success and value on the basis of wealth and social position, contributed to these problems. Under its influence, people were not only confined by the limitations of their particular class, but they were also put in competition with others during their personal struggles for self-actualization. To complicate matters, this society was not only hierarchical but also patriarchal. Women and men, therefore, did not face the same societal conflicts because the first could not participate in hierarchical mobility apart from the second. During this period, a man's options for attaining the wealth and position of society's definition of success included education, apprenticeship, career, the church, and the military. A woman, though, had only two options: inheritance or marriage. The central difference is that a man could experience social mobility on his own. He could move from one class to another on the basis of his own efforts and his own successes and failures. A woman, on the other hand, could only move from class to class by attaching herself to the wealth and position of a man. In most cases this meant that she was born into her father's class, and later she could marry into her husband's

class. Even the few options that were available to her for independent sustenance (school teacher, seamstress, domestic servant or governess) belonged to one class (the lower class) and did not give her the option of gaining success through the class hierarchy. What resulted, then, was that a woman's struggle with her society was an attempt at reaching outward for freedom, even if this meant descending the social hierarchy, whereas a man's struggle consisted of climbing upwards in search of power.

This power was held, for the most part, by the elite class of the social hierarchy. Naturally, then, this was the circle to which most people aspired, and much of the literature of this time period uses these aspirations as its subject. Roger Price explains the reason for this upper-class control in his book A Social History of Nineteenth-Century France:

Power in society is possessed by particular groups by virtue of their control of material resources and the dominant influence this gives them over other social groups. This is exercised not only, or even primarily, through economic relationships but by means of the use of authority on a much broader front through a variety of forms of influence, by means of cultural hegemony and political control. (95)

With the ability to exert all of these forms of influence (economic, social, and political) the notables, who made up this elite class, retained their status. Despite the French Revolution, much of the land stayed in possession of the wealthy, and with investment in this most valuable resource, social position was guaranteed (Price 99). The wealth that resulted from the possession of land allowed for heavy consumption of material goods as elites tried to distinguish themselves as a group through a common lifestyle. This class was cohesive, and its members adopted common manners, attitudes, and

behaviors (Price 94).

Not quite so cohesive, yet still trying to conform to the appearances of the upper class, was the bourgeois society. A diverse group "characterized above all by ownership of property, and by a range of professional activities" (Price 124), this class included landowners, government officials, practitioners of the liberal professions, factory owners, shopkeepers, and other managerial-type professions. Those within this class worked very hard to maintain their social position. Priding themselves on ability and thrift, they avoided waste and tried to keep wealth within the family. They felt the need to distance themselves socially from the working class, so members of the bourgeoisie were involved in an ongoing attempt to keep up with the appearances of the rich. Although they did not have as much economic power or social status as the elite, their daily contact with a broader public gave them considerable influence (Price 141). Often closed-minded and self-centered, those of the middle class were at odds with those less fortunate than themselves. Confusing the causes with the symptoms of poverty, they "blamed misery on drunkenness rather than on low wages and exploitation" (Price 141). In positions of power, they often created tension for their subordinates by insisting on their own interests. For example, landlords who overcrowded their quarters had little sympathy for tenants who could not pay rent. Likewise, while employers wanted to increase productivity, workers suffered from unjust conditions and long hours (Price 142).

Despite this ill-treatment, though, the lower class was not involved in protest as often as it would seem: "For most people, and for most of the time, wisdom involved accommodation rather than conflict" (Price 228). The poor did not see any other options for themselves, and those of the working class feared the possibility of losing

their employment. These attitudes, coupled with the fact that the lower class, too, strived for order and security, left the injustices of the upper and middle classes unchecked. Yet sometimes the misery was more than people could stand and disorder broke out. Especially for peasants, the conflicts were a result of overpopulation in the countryside or unaffordable food prices. Making up three quarters of the population in mid-nineteenth-century France, these peasants depended on the land and its harvest for sustenance (Price 143). Industrialization forced peasants to respond to many changes of which communication was the most significant. Reducing their isolation, improvements in communication consequently increased both competition with and dependence on towns. Because of the lower agriculture prices that resulted from urban competition, migration among peasants was stimulated. On the positive side, this alleviated the misery of rural overpopulation, but on the negative side, it broke down the traditional social structures of the group which gave them a sense of community and rural independence (Price 143-196).

In spite of radical social and industrial change in the nineteenth century, French society was still one of strict class divisions. Examples of "rags to riches" stories, in real life, were few. Even when upward mobility was achieved, it usually involved a "step-by-step process . . . spread over generations and subject to numerous reversals" (Price 109). Mobility, therefore, was rarely the experience of one individual. Instead, it involved families working to secure their present social positions and then gradually working towards a better status so that maybe their grandchildren could reap the rewards. Inheritance played a big role in people's opportunities for advancement: when it is considered that, over the century, three percent of those who died left

seventy percent of the inherited wealth, it is easy to see the inequality of the class structure and the disadvantage of those outside of the elite (Price 97). Besides familial wealth, individual determinants of social mobility included "ability, hard work, thrift and enterprise" (Price 137). Social determinants included education, migration, and current economic opportunities. Education was limited to those who could afford it, but migration gave rural citizens the opportunity to move to an urban area and set up industry that linked them with their region. For example, those from Bourgogne became wine merchants in Paris (Price 137-138). So while social mobility was limited for all, there were possibilities for some men who could be supported by family money, an education, or new industrial opportunities. Improving one's position was a constant thought among people, yet the challenge of retaining one's present position and keeping up with the pressures of that group were often as much as most people could handle.

Members of both sexes experienced this struggle for position, but for women, these experiences were different than they were for men. Several factors increase the complexity of this issue, for marital status, class, and place of residence (rural versus urban communities) all play a part in defining women's roles. For the most part, though, upper-class women were sheltered by men and expected to content themselves with "womanly" activities such as playing piano, embroidering, or writing letters (Price 105). They were occasionally granted a mediocre education in private boarding schools where the primary focus was marriage and managing a household (Moses 32-33). The biggest problem between the genders in the bourgeois society of the nineteenth century stemmed from the separate spheres that each inhabited. Men were drawn away from the home by the demands of their professions, and they

socialized in cabarets and other public circles which excluded women. In the upper and middle classes, women were generally responsible for managing the home. They spent the money their husbands made, and their creativity and talents were expressed through furnishing and caring for the home. Aside from that, child bearing and volunteering with the church took up the rest of their time and energies.

To modern observers, this division of roles seems stifling to the female in that she was not allowed to stray from her imposed post of domestic leader. And, to some extent, this argument was made by women seeking change in the nineteenth century. Yet as Jane Rendall points out, it was not so much the confined role of wife and mother that oppressed women in this patriarchal society as it was the dependent and servile persona they were expected to assume. She explains,

Domesticity could both limit and broaden horizons. Feminists of the early nineteenth century attacked the sacrifice of self-hood which was required; they identified the legal and economic framework of marriage as deeply oppressive remnants of a past feudal world. Yet on the whole they did not attack the view that women's maternal responsibilities, where they existed, should be primary.

(190)

Women were not necessarily *stifled* in the home; in fact, often times their work was done in community with other women. The problem with their positions was the lack of rights that women suffered in marriage, their economic dependency on husbands, and the expectations of women as "passive, innocent, sexually inactive, and malleable" (Mendus and Rendall 8-9). All of these deprivations contributed to the "sacrifice of self-hood" that was not only unfair but counter to upward mobility. Since upward mobility demanded, as previously stated, "ability, hard work, thrift and enterprise," and

women were expected to turn these all inward towards the family, they obviously could not progress through the social hierarchy. The only method available for changing their positions was to try to break outward towards autonomy.

Upper-class and bourgeois women were not the only ones expected to make this sacrifice of self-hood, for working-class women also were circumscribed within their positions. The working woman was forced into the sphere of the working man, but because of discrimination or lack of training, she was restricted to lower-status occupations such as domestic servant or seamstress (Moses 26). In the "male" jobs she was allowed to do, her wage was often only half of what her male counterparts would receive. Finding "cheap labor" in women, manufacturers tended to hire them in place of men, creating tension between the genders. As a result of unequal treatment in the work place, many women were forced into prostitution as the only means by which they could sustain themselves. And since men were not legally responsible for their illegitimate offspring, many women were left to support themselves and their children in a system that victimized them through capitalism and sexism (Moses 31). This too prohibited women from participating in hierarchical mobility because they did not have the same opportunities as men, and they were exploited in what jobs they did receive.

Much of the literature of nineteenth-century France treats these struggles of gender and class by creating characters whose lives are directly affected by them. Four particular novels will serve as examples of how the literature of this time period exposes the distinct struggles of men and women in a society structured by class. In Les Misérables, Victor Hugo writes of characters who each embody the experiences of an entire social type. Fantine, for example, suffers from her role as a poverty-

stricken woman who must bear the injustices of her patriarchal and hierarchical society. La Ville Noire, by George Sand, offers model characters in Tonine and Sept-Épées. The first vows to maintain her independence from men; the second is drawn into the glammers of a higher class, but both, in the end, discover a need for one another and contentment with their initial rank. Typical of upper class expectations and the limited opportunities for women, Mathilde, in Stendhal's Le Rouge et le Noir, was born into her father's money and is expected to remain in the aristocratic group through marriage. The same is true for Madame de Rênal who is confined to a stiff and proper position as mayor's wife by the expectations of her bourgeois status. Julien, however, exercises a wide variety of options as he continually strives towards a position of power over those who are above him in rank. Finally, Flaubert's Madame Bovary portrays the characteristics of bourgeois society through the career-oriented Charles Bovary and Monsieur Homais. These men concentrate on their own professional gains while Emma Bovary is left in a desperate attempt to identify her true self amidst the conflict between societal expectations and her own passions.

The nineteenth century, in France, experienced two major literary movements which dealt with the social tensions that abounded—romanticism and realism. In general, romanticism is thought to have been dominant between 1820 and 1850; realism, during the second half of the century. But these dates are by no means rigid, for the two movements often blend during the middle of the century. Each has its own distinct characteristics, yet writers of the period did not always stick to prescribed rules; consequently, examples of each style can often be found in a single author or work. The romantic period dramatized reality and was marked by "la liberté dans l'art."

This literary movement was a reaction against principles of classical writing like "order, restraint, reason and tradition" (Dolbow 274). It focused on the individual and his or her senses and emotions: "Love, hate, hope, despair, and sadness are confessed and scrutinized again and again in an attempt to define oneself and one's place in society" (Dolbow 274). These emotions played a major role in defining the characters of romanticism, and for this reason it is said that "l'idéalisme romantique déformait parfois la vérité pour des raisons esthétiques ou sentimentales" (Lagarde et Michard 11). An example of this can be found in the way some romantic writers portray the process of social mobility. Often this process is exaggerated and leads a character or characters to an idealized or utopian resolution. Offering a more hopeful social outlook than many realist writers, romantics generally do not give a historically accurate account of social mobility but one that, nevertheless, can offer insights into real life struggles of the individual.

The realist movement that followed romanticism tried to give a more truthful picture of society and its conflicts. Social mobility was seen as the struggle that it actually was, and characters did not always find a perfect solution at the end of their efforts. Characterized by "la sincérité dans l'art," realism gave an "objective, straightforward depiction of the world as it is" (Dolbow 264). It introduced new characters who, before this time, had not received much literary attention: the small investor, the failed artist, and the worker are examples of the true-to-life people portrayed by the realists. With these characters, writers copied in detail their speech, habits, and environments—all to establish an element of truth in their work (Dolbow 265). "Every fact, every detail of background, must be recorded without softening, exaggeration, incidental description, or concern for style" (The Concise Oxford Dictionary of French Literature 516). As a

result, realism exposed society for what it really was--both good and bad. It did not allow art to shape society but rather presented society in the form of art.

The four novels introduced above, Les Misérables, La Ville Noire, Le Rouge et le Noir, and Madame Bovary, all provide examples of the different degrees to which romanticism and realism each portray the social scene of nineteenth-century France. Victor Hugo, one of the most celebrated romantic writers of French history, provides a panoramic view of French society in Les Misérables. By following the development of the character of Jean Valjean from convict to saint, the reader is exposed to an exaggerated process of social mobility but also to many realistic facets of nineteenth-century French society. After nineteen years in prison for stealing a loaf of bread, Jean Valjean is released to wander the countryside in search of food and shelter. With the generosity shown to him by a bishop, Valjean vows to reform his ways. He goes to the suburbs of Paris and opens a factory under a false name. There he encounters Fantine, a penniless young woman who has been abandoned by her lover. Because of her struggles, she was forced to give up her child (Cosette) to the care of the cruel Thénardiens and resort to prostitution in order to earn a living. Before Fantine dies, Valjean promises to raise Cosette and provide for her. As he does this, Valjean is constantly trying to evade Inspector Javert who is still determined to keep him behind bars. Once Cosette is older, she falls in love with a young man (Marius) involved in the revolutionary protest of 1832, and Valjean becomes jealous of the new target of his "daughter's" attention. During a night of fighting, Marius is wounded, and it is Valjean who rescues him. Cosette and Marius are married and gradually see less and less of Valjean. Once the truth is revealed about Valjean's past, the young couple visit him at his death bed and all are reconciled. Satisfied with

himself and the love he found in Cosette, Valjean can die peacefully.

An example of what Alexander Welsh calls "historical realism" (151), Hugo's novel is full of scenes which paint the social portrait of nineteenth-century Paris and its suburbs. Class division and the suffering of the poor which results from it are explicitly detailed, and poverty is described as characters roam the streets. The plight of children is particularly exposed as we see them abandoned, penniless, and so abundant that they live in groups and become a typical sight in the suburbs of Paris:

Quiconque a erré . . . dans ces solitudes contiguës à nos faubourgs qu'on pourrait nommer les limbes de Paris, y a entrevu çà et là, à l'endroit le plus abandonné, . . . des enfants, groupés tumultueusement, livides, boueux, poudreux, dépenaillés, hérissés, qui jouent à la pigoche couronnés de bleuets.

Ce sont tous les petits échappés des familles pauvres. (I: 691)

Scenes such as this one are contrasted with the luxuries of the bourgeois class. For example, Monsieur Gillenormand (Marius' grandfather) is described as having an elaborate house with every material comfort he could ask for. Hugo criticizes this class of comfort-seekers whom he blames for the stagnation of society. In an interruption of the plot, the author describes, "Le bourgeois, c'est l'homme qui a maintenant le temps de s'asseoir. Une chaise n'est pas une caste. Mais, pour vouloir s'asseoir trop tôt, on peut arrêter la marche même du genre humain. Cela a été souvent la faute de la bourgeoisie" (II: 12).

Not only do the members of this higher class enjoy luxuries at the expense of the lower class, but they refuse to acknowledge the misery and injustice that surround their world. Valjean and Cosette witness an unusual passing of prison carriages in which the prisoners aboard are described as filthy, somber, and near death. They are

chained together and dressed in scant and tattered rags. Guards beat them as the carriages move, and hard, black bread appears to be their only sustenance. Their suffering and dehumanization is blatant, but the situation becomes even more appalling when the reason for their unusual route is learned: "C'était la Chêne en effet qui . . . prenait la route du Mans pour éviter Fontainebleau où était alors le roi. Ce détour faisait durer l'épouvantable voyage trois ou quatre jours de plus; mais pour épargner à la personne royale la vue d'un supplice, on peut bien le prolonger (II: 110)." The miserable condition of French society is obvious when its ruler blinds himself to the reality of the suffering of his people.

Along with describing these scenes of social misery, Hugo exposes the reality of nineteenth-century Parisien society through his characters. Most of the main characters represent much more than a single individual's life: they each represent an entire facet of society. For this reason, it is easy to look only at the dramatization of the characters and their experiences and, therefore, deny the credibility of the novel. Yet if the reader looks at these individual characters as a representation of a larger aspect of nineteenth-century French society, their dramatization becomes more justified. Though the experiences and situations of the characters are unlikely to be historically accurate in regards to one individual, they do describe occurrences that were common to groups of people like these characters. As a means of drawing out several different aspects of his society without complicating the plot, Hugo creates characters that embody the traits and experiences of an entire group.

Fantine, with her compounded sufferings, offers an example of the trying experiences of *all* women in her time; Thénardier, in pursuit only of personal gain, reflects the standard of French society that strives for wealth and status; and Jean

Valjean, with his example of a moral conversion versus a social conversion, projects a suggestion for the reform of a suffering community. Each of these characters struggles with mobility, both individually and in their symbolic representations of a group.

Cosette is the only principle character who does not embody the characteristics of a social type or struggle with her own mobility. Instead, her character functions as the representation of the outcome of other people's actions and experiences. Cosette does not really do anything in the novel but only has things done to her. This way, the reader not only understands how the situations of each social type affect the people who participate but also how they affect those in society who are dependent on these participants.

As proof of the few opportunities available to women in this society, Fantine's character is plagued with one misery on top of another. Life with her lover is comfortable and pleasant until he leaves her—without the connection to a man Fantine has no way of upholding her lifestyle. Discovering she is pregnant adds insult to injury. The injustices between the sexes are manifested through the fact that Fantine struggles, and ultimately dies, trying to provide for herself and her child; yet her lover has no responsibilities and can continue to live only for himself. He does not have to bear the social disapproval that forces Fantine to leave the job that provided her with a small but precious income. Prostitution is her only hope for salvation, and this degradation of the human body and spirit unjustly enslaves the women who must resort to it:

Que-ce que c'est que cette histoire de Fantine?

C'est la société achetant une esclave.

A qui? A la misère.

A la faim, au froid, à l'isolement, à l'abandon, au dénuement. Marché douloureux. Une âme pour un morceau de pain. . . . La misère offre, la société accepte.

. . . On dit que l'esclavage a disparu de la civilisation européenne. C'est une erreur. Il existe toujours, mais il ne pèse plus que sur la femme, et il s'appelle prostitution. (I: 232)

Fantine's sufferings project the wide range of difficulties that a woman faced in nineteenth-century France. Apart from the protection of men, she was isolated from society, forced to struggle for existence, and often times robbed of her dignity and reputation. Her plight, in its extreme, separates her from a direct role in motherhood, as is seen when Fantine must leave Cosette with the Thénardiens. Yet her "sacrifice of self-hood" (required of mothers and wives bound to their roles) at this point is at its peak.

While her mother has been taken away from her, Cosette's first father figure does nothing to alleviate the child's misery. Preoccupied with his own gain, Thénardier is unable to provide for those who depend on him, and Hugo uses his character to show the typical mindframe of the time period. In a society of strict class division, men constantly aspired towards wealth and personal gain—Thénardier is the ultimate example of such a man. Characterized by "a morality of gratification, exchange, and revenge" (Grossman 473), this man's attempt at social mobility leads him only to crime and further degradation. Using any means possible to acquire money, the innkeeper lies, steals, and destroys. Ironically, though, Thénardier's social position becomes progressively worse. Examining the goals of social mobility in the entire society, the results are similar to Thénardier's. Through the example of his character, Hugo

suggests that an entire community of status-seekers can result only in the breakdown and immorality of society. Like Thénardier, it becomes easy for men to resort to destructive means for gaining wealth when wealth is society's only value or measure of success. Kathryn Grossman writes, "That Thénardier's egocentricity masks a basic ignorance is a theme that runs throughout Les Misérables" (473). Still, this ignorance masked by egocentricity can be applied further to the entire society of the novel and to Hugo's own society. His criticism of Thénardier is a criticism against nineteenth-century society for its blindness to the destructive aims of hierarchical mobility. The goal of this type of mobility, for both Thénardier in the novel and for men of this time period, is a goal of power over others. Hugo suggests that, consumed by this selfish goal, most men in French society are ignorant to the fact that upward mobility does not have a definite ending point, therefore, the goal of power over others is continually suspended.

A suggestion for the reform of such a power-orientated society is presented in the character of Jean Valjean. "His sense of the brotherhood of man, by way of contrast with Thénardier's treacherous fellowship of thieves, views all men as ends in themselves, to be treated with equal compassion" (Grossman 476). Through the example of Valjean, Hugo calls society to a moral conversion rather than a social one. While the latter can lead only to division, injustice, self-centeredness, and isolation, the former unites society in a common goal of equality. Valjean's social mobility in the novel is unrealistic in that it does not conform to what was actually possible for men to achieve in this time period. An ex-convict, he moves to a suburb of Paris, starts a factory that rebuilds the town's economy, is elected mayor, and earns enough money to give Cosette a comfortable life from then on. Yet his moral "mobility" is a

suggestion for French society to find the generosity and compassion that exist in others and work towards furthering them. What results is the prosperity and happiness that Valjean enjoys through this type of conversion. As Cosette's father, he is able to provide and care for her the way in which children deserve. But even though he has the means to live as a bourgeois, Valjean insists on keeping his ties to the lower class. He lives conservatively (though he lavishes his wealth on Cosette), dresses as a working man, and spends time and money helping the poor. Ironically, Inspector Javert, the symbol of ultimate authority, also wants to tie Valjean to his previous miserable position. By refusing to give up the search for his ex-convict and admit that Valjean deserves to live a better life, Javert (as societal authority) tries to uphold the existing class divisions. Valjean's motives, however, for remaining connected to the lower classes is to establish a sense of unity and enforce the concept that all people are members of the same society and should not be distinguished by class or wealth or status.

La Ville Noire is another romantic novel that depicts the class struggle of the time period, but this one also takes a more in-depth look at gender differences within this struggle. Set in a town of factory workers, this novel describes the relationship between a young woman insistent on independence and a young man in pursuit of a bourgeois lifestyle. The potential love and marriage between Tonine and Sept-Épées is blocked by their different goals. Tonine strives to provide for herself and improve the situation of the working class whereas Sept-Épées aspires to the bourgeois society and wants to leave "la ville noire" for a better lifestyle. Since Sept-Épées is thinking only of himself and his personal desires, Tonine cannot agree to marry him though she loves him very much. He leaves the town in search of his dreams and, while away,

realizes that a higher social position is not as easy to attain as he expected. Lonely for Tonine, he decides that a bourgeois status is not worth the loss of love and companionship and returns home. While he was away, Tonine inherited money from a wealthy brother-in-law and uses it to improve the conditions of the factory workers. When Sept-Épées returns, Tonine consents to marrying him because he has proven that, for him, love comes before ambition. She has established her independence, and Sept-Épées has come to respect that as well.

Each of these two main characters struggles towards a goal consistent with the needs of his or her gender. Sept-Épées, for example, is driven by his ambition and aspires to hold a more powerful role in society than that of a factory laborer. Defending this ambition, Sept-Épées asserts the frustrations of his stagnant working-class position and the intellectual power of the bourgeois: "La tâche de l'atelier est abrutissante, et, dans le commerce, il y a un mouvement d'idées, des émotions, des intérêts variés, des calculs, enfin une certaine passion qui développe la vie dans une sphère moins étroite" (46). As a young male in a hierarchical society, social standards have convinced Sept-Épées that higher class standing is equivalent to a better life. When he tries to explain this seemingly logical connection to Tonine, he is blinded by the fact that for her, as a woman, the equation is not true. Absorbed in his own goals, Sept-Épées cannot understand why Tonine does not share his dream of upward mobility.

Sharing this dream is impossible for Tonine because it would mean giving up her freedom. Sept-Épées is asking her to conform to the middle-class woman's role of a dependent wife who is not in control of her own well-being but relies on a husband to both provide for her and shape her identity. After witnessing what happened to her

sister as a result of being dependent on a man, Tonine will not put herself in that vulnerable position: "Ne possédant rien que ma jeunesse et ma santé, je n'ai besoin de personne pour me gagner mon pain" (111). Here the independent woman asserts her determination to take care of herself in order that men do not abuse their power by controlling her. Tonine also understands the mentality behind each class and knows that Sept-Épées, as a bourgeois, would soon tire of her loyalty to the working class:

C'est très difficile à un bourgeois de se contenter toujours d'une fille d'ouvrier. Nous sommes trop simples, nous ne savons pas causer ni porter le chapeau. Les dames nous trouvent gauches et se moquent de nous. Moi aussi je suis fière, c'est mon défaut; je veux épouser mon pareil, et jamais un compagnon qui pense à la ville haute ne sera mon mari. (41)

This statement reveals the core of Tonine's character. She is aware of her place in the working class and knows that she cannot take on the role of someone she is not. As a woman, her greatest success must take the form of an outward mobility.

Tonine's drive for outward mobility, and Sept-Épée's drive for upward mobility create a conflict that forces them to push aside their true feelings for one another as they try to fulfill their separate needs. Gender differences present each character with specific options for going about the process of mobility. Sept-Épées assumes that his best option is to leave "la ville noire". This bold action is a sign of complete rejection of his ties to the working class. One motivation behind this step is that, disconnected, Sept-Épées is free and independent enough to partake in any opportunity that might come along. Leaving in search of such opportunities, he is implying that "la ville noire" is devoid of any possibility for success or happiness and that only through his own initiative will he be able to achieve social status. The reality

of nineteenth-century mobility is exposed when Sept-Epées does not quickly achieve his aspired status but, instead, wanders aimlessly, doing what he can along the way.

In the female sphere, Tonine is not as free to leave and abandon her roots; rather, her only options for upward mobility are marriage and inheritance. Knowing that upward mobility cannot satisfy her need for autonomy, Tonine rejects the possibility of marriage twice in order to pursue her own independence. In the patriarchal society of the nineteenth century, women were conditioned to think that through marriage they could develop their purpose in life and a sense of self-actualization. Yet Tonine does not accept this philosophy and is determined to establish an identity before marriage. She refuses to marry Sept-Epées because he is too preoccupied with gaining status, yet she also refuses a more stable prospect—the bourgeois doctor Monsieur Anthime—because she does not love him. The only reason for her to marry this doctor would be to secure herself with a providing husband—something that goes against Tonine's self-sustaining character. Remaining true to her needs, then, marriage is no longer an option. Inheritance, though, does not require her to give up any part of herself, so once Tonine is presented with her brother-in-law's wealth, she has all the tools necessary for upward mobility. "Ability, hard work, thrift, and enterprise" are already a part of Tonine's nature, and now wealth completes the requirements. Tonine, though, does not use this money (or her inherent traits) to advance herself in the class hierarchy. She chooses, rather, to remain within her class and assert her own position by improving conditions for the working people.

Once they have chosen their separate paths, Sept-Epées and Tonine each go about achieving mobility as it is defined by their gender. The former soon discovers that upward mobility is not as easy or as rewarding as he anticipated, for his journey

away from "la ville noire" exposes the negative aspects of upward mobility. The first of these aspects is that climbing the social hierarchy is a difficult and trying process—basically impossible for one man to do on his own. Sept-Épées realizes that "en espérant doubler le capital en peu d'années, [il] avait compté sur ces miracles que l'orgueil caresse, mais qui ne se réalisent presque jamais par des moyens scrupuleux et prudents" (185). He also discovers that the desire for power and position is an entrapping cycle that, once started, is impossible to break. He analyzes, "Et quand je quitterais tout à fait mon pays pour m'établir dans ceux où l'on travaille mieux, n'y serai-je pas toujours poursuivi par l'idée de faire encore mieux, sans pouvoir la satisfaire" (188)? Finally, Sept-Épées acknowledges that upward mobility forces him to leave behind people and places that are dear to him. Unable to break away from "la ville noire" mentally, he admits to himself that "l'amour et l'amitié" (194) hold more value than isolated social status.

While Sept-Épées is going through his personal struggle away from home, Tonine is going through her own struggle back in "la ville noire". She has established her independence and self-sufficiency, but Tonine must also show what she will do with this freedom. By taking on the role of the kind and caring samaritan, she creates an identity for herself. This identity appears to be in line with the portrait that history provides of nineteenth-century women. The primary characteristics of these women is "sacrifice of self-hood," and so it is with Tonine to some extent. Like other women of this time period, Tonine's energy is spent in service to other people, yet the difference is that it is her choice—not an expected condition based on a certain role (that of wife or mother, for example). Tonine is not in any position that would require her to reach out to others. As a working-class woman, she would be justified in taking care of

herself. Even the money she earns from the inheritance could be used for her own benefit. Yet her struggle for mobility is a struggle for autonomy, and the freedom she has created for herself from this struggle allows her to choose servitude. Different from typical nineteenth-century women, Tonine exerts her service *outward* for the benefit of the community rather than *inward* for the benefit of the family. This way, she is allowed to have a direct influence on society instead of an indirect one. If she were to marry Sept-Épées and desert her calling in exchange for the supposed luxuries of the bourgeois life, her entire purpose would be smothered behind a facade of properness. By remaining in her position, Tonine is free to use her talents as she wishes and is not dependent on a man for her successes and failures.

The outcome of the two characters' efforts is a reversal of typical nineteenth century status positions in regards to gender—Tonine is the one who is financially independent whereas Sept-Épées does not advance beyond his original place. Sept-Épées, in returning home, accepts his role as a working-class laborer and must also accept Tonine's new role as a middle-class boss. By the rules of upward mobility, Tonine has the power position of a bourgeois. Yet she does not accept this position by adopting an appropriate lifestyle because her goal was to establish a position of independence irrespective of social class. Wealth and status cannot satisfy her (or any other woman's) needs for autonomy. Remaining in the working class, then, her success comes from an outward mobility which has given her an economic and psychological freedom. Sand has created in Tonine a character who is as socially mobile as a woman can become within the realistic restrictions of her gender.

Tonine and Sept-Épées succeed not necessarily in their original plans but in their pursuit for happiness and self-actualization. This is possible because both are willing

to balance their needs for independence and dependence, power and powerlessness, freedom and servitude. They each realize, at some point, that the aims of the upper classes are deceptive—they seem appealing and satisfying from the outside but, in reality, are self-centered and unfulfilling. Leaving out the important aspects of love and friendship, they can never be worth the struggle to attain. Instead of searching elsewhere for a better life, Tonine and Sept-Epées come to agree that "la solution pour l'ouvrier n'est pas de quitter la Ville Noire pour les agréments de la Ville Haute, mais de la transformer par le travail, l'amour, et l'instruction" (Max 88). The characters set about accomplishing this task—Tonine has already made improvements by the time Sept-Epées returns, and by simply coming back, Sept-Epées acknowledges the value of the working class and its potential to yield happiness and personal satisfaction. La Ville Noire is resolved in a utopian manner typical of the romantic movement, yet it is realistic in that the characters remain ultimately within the boundaries of their gender and, to some extent, their class.

Again presenting the trials of the lower class to establish a place for themselves, Stendhal's novel Le Rouge et le Noir is another work that blends different qualities of romanticism and realism. Stendhal is typically considered a romantic writer, and his exaggerated depiction of social mobility supports this classification. However, Le Rouge et le Noir has come to be subtitled "Chronique du XIXème siècle," and its exposure of the harsh restrictions of class structure make present several elements of realism. The reader witnesses Julien Sorel's struggle to climb the social ladder, and the consequences this brings to his life. As the son of a peasant, Julien is sent away from his home to be a tutor and caretaker to the children of a bourgeois family in the town of Verrières. He falls in love with their mother, Madame de Rênal, and the two

have a secret affair. Before a scandal breaks out, Julien leaves and enters the seminary where he spends time plotting his way to the top of the social hierarchy. He is later given a job as secretary to an aristocrat in Paris (Monsieur de la Mole) and ends up falling in love with his daughter Mathilde. The two are married against the wishes of her family, but eventually Monsieur de la Mole recognizes Julien as his son-in-law and gives him both money and a title. A letter from Madame de Rênal describing her and Julien's past affair, along with how Julien had seduced and left her, brought an end to Monsieur de la Mole's support. In a fit of rage, Julien returns to Verrières and attempts to kill Madame de Rênal. He is put in prison and condemned to death. During the time before his trial, Julien reflects on his life and the injustices of society. He realizes that his true love is for Madame de Rênal and, therefore, neglects Mathilde and her sorrow. At his trial, Julien speaks out against the hardships of the peasants and is ultimately put to death.

Though surrounded by many people through the course of his experiences, Julien is involved in a very private struggle of social mobility. He creates his own conflict of society versus self and chooses to alienate himself emotionally from everyone around him. He sees social interaction as a struggle between the rich and the poor, and for the poor this struggle is an issue of pride and control. With the need to establish power over those in the middle or upper classes, Julien becomes a pawn to societal expectations. Believing that power is key to social worth Julien judges his success according to the hierarchical standards of society. He aims for control and complies with the pattern of men seeking upward mobility within their society. Yet Julien's project of mobility is not only to gain status for himself, it is also to convince others of his worth. "There can be no doubt . . . of his lust for power, but the reason, legitimate

enough, is to satisfy his pride, to assure himself that he is not the inferior being society has classed him as, to avenge himself on that society in a variety of ways . . ."

(Charvet 211). Early on in his social climb Julien reflects,

Si je veux être estimé et d'eux et de moi-même, il faut leur montrer que c'est ma pauvreté qui est en commerce avec leur richesse, mais que mon coeur est à mille lieues de leur insolence, et placé dans une sphere trop haute pour être atteint par leurs petites marques de dédain ou de faveur. (95)

His position is clear—he sees himself as an outsider who needs to prove that his capabilities are better than the arrogance of those who are socially ranked above him.

To do this Julien goes to battle. War imagery floods the novel and is seen in every relationship that Julien encounters. He is insistent on proving his power over Monsieur de Rênal and thinks of their mind games as a Napoleonic war: "Oui, j'ai gagné une bataille, se dit-il, mais il faut en profiter, il faut écraser l'orgueil de ce fier gentilhomme pendant qu'il est en retraite. C'est là Napoléon tout pur" (92). This strategic plotting, again, reveals how Julien has set himself up against the rest of society. Even in love, he refuses to let down his guard for fear of losing control of his emotions over a woman. Both of his affairs, then, are treated with the same attack strategy that governs all of Julien's decisions. His hesitation towards Madame de Rênal stems from the fact that "elle a été élevée dans le camp ennemi" (117). With Mathilde, too, Julien considers only his own victory. He believes, "Si elle voit combien je l'adore, je la perds" (425). Fearing that Mathilde will not reciprocate his love, Julien spends a considerable amount of time trying to decide if it is worth it for him to attempt a relationship with the upper class woman. He does not want to be mocked by her aristocratic brother and friends if she should shun him. Still, the thought of his victory

over these men of more prestige feeds Julien's determination, even more than his feelings for Mathilde. Everyone is his "ennemi," and establishing power over them is his goal. Driven by passion, he aspires towards personal gain.

Before Julien can compete with his upper class adversaries, he must leave his own peasant position. As a male, Julien can venture away from his home by himself. With no need for protection or guidance, he is free both to choose where it is he will be most likely to achieve his goals and to place himself there by using his own skills and achievements. Julien realizes this, as Stendhal describes: "Le jeune paysan ne voyait rien entre lui et les actions les plus héroïques, que le manque d'occasion," and it gives him a sense of pride and self-confidence (98). Independent and arrogant, Julien sets the pace for all of his transitions the first time he leaves home. He breaks all ties with his home community and convinces himself that he has no need for former connections. Like Sept-Epées of *La Ville Noire*, Julien concludes that no opportunities will come to him if he remains in his class, so he journeys off to find a place with higher status. Also like Sept-Epées, he thinks that abandoning his relationships with the lower class will be an easy thing to do. Unlike Sept-Epées, though, Julien refuses to acknowledge the fact that he cannot completely break away from his roots and his dependency on others. As Christopher Robinson observes about Julien, "Decisive steps are always taken for him by someone else." For example, his father negotiates his first job, Chélan gets him into the seminary, and Pirard arranges his position as secretary to Monsieur de la Mole (Robinson 37). Yet Julien only sees his own upward movement, not the support of those below him who helped get him there.

As a means of aiding his struggle to advance in society, Julien seduces women in order to establish a sense of power over both them and the men in their lives. Julien

terms his affairs with women "son devoir." For even though the two women he becomes involved with (Madame de Rênal and Mathilde) are above him in class, Julien rationalizes that it is *they* who need liberation. His seduction, therefore, is described as a heroic deed which benefits the women involved more than it does himself. Supporting this claim is the fact that the women become more attached to Julien than he is to them. Julien leaves Madame de Rênal to move on with his life, and though he thinks of her from time to time, he does not have nearly the dependency that she has on their relationship. Her affair with Julien consumes her being and is credited for every bad and good experience that happens in her life. When her son is sick, she believes it is a punishment for her affair: "Dieu me punit . . . je vivais sans remords! . . . je dois être punie . . ." (134). Julien, on the other hand, continues his push up the social ladder and can live for his new experiences instead of dwelling on the past. Mathilde also is seen as having been rescued by Julien from the influence of her father and aristocratic expectations. Once their relationship is established, Mathilde gives up everything for Julien and stands by him, longing for his love, until his death. Julien, though, feels no remorse in dismissing his wife and unborn child from his priorities when his life is coming to an end and he is reflecting on its purpose.

Mathilde, like Tonine in La Ville Noire, wants to break out of the role prescribed to her by society and gain a freedom for herself. Although the two women come from opposite ends of the social hierarchy, they both find little use for the wealth and status of the upper class. Rather, these two women need autonomy to be satisfied with themselves. Born into the aristocracy, Mathilde has had every luxury handed to her, yet she looks with disgust towards the future because there is nothing that she can

accomplish on her own:

Elle voyait l'avenir non pas avec terreur, c'eût été un sentiment vif, mais avec un dégoût bien rare à son âge. Que pouvait-elle désirer? La fortune, la haute naissance, l'esprit, la beauté à ce qu'on disait, et à ce qu'elle croyait tout avait été accumulé sur elle par les mains du hasard. (317)

In order to prove her independence, Mathilde falls in love with Julien. Of course, her family will be shocked and upset—she welcomes this because it gives her a chance to prove her assertiveness. She wants nothing to do with the prescribed characteristics of her class; instead, she wants to live by her own passions and her own decisions. If she were to marry the man her parents have picked, she would be trapped in the same role of every other aristocratic wife. Mathilde reflects on this type of marriage: "J'aurais une nouvelle édition du bonheur de mes cousines, que je méprise si complètement. Je sais d'avance tout ce que me dirait le pauvre marquis, tout ce que j'aurais à lui répondre. Qu'est-ce qu'un amour qui fait bâiller?" (318). It is obvious that Mathilde is dissatisfied with the stale rewards of the class hierarchy and that, as a woman, she strives for the freedom to be herself rather than what society expects of her.

Working towards this outward mobility, Mathilde is willing to give up her position, and even descend the social order, for the opportunity to express herself in a relationship with Julien. Yet Julien also succeeds in his upward mobility because Monsieur de la Mole, once he realizes he has no power over the situation, raises his son-in-law up to a level worthy enough for his daughter. Unfortunately, this mobility is easily dismantled because it was not created on solid ground, rather, by means of deception and using others. Julien spends the entire novel creating his own positions

of power, yet a short letter written by Madame de Rênal describing the means by which Julien arrived at his position is all it takes to strip him of the wealth and standing that he had built up. This blow to his mobility places Julien back in the same position as he started—a desolate peasant who stands before a higher class to be judged and looked down upon with disgust. It is only then that Julien realizes the destructiveness of pride, ambition, arrogance, and lust for power. Consumed by this search for power, Julien failed to establish other elements (trust, honesty, fidelity, and dependency) in his relationships that could have helped secure the social ladder that he was determined to climb or that might have offered him a happiness other than power. As Eugene Schulkind writes, ". . . realizing that he has been deceived by appearances, he at last can say that 'l'ambition était morte'" (87). Knowing that he has lost the battle with the social elite, Julien speaks out against the injustices of the poor in a way that gives him back some of the dignity he had lost in his pursuit of power:

" . . . je vois des hommes qui, sans s'arrêter à ce que ma jeunesse peut mériter de pitié, voudront punir en moi et décourager à jamais cette classe de jeunes gens qui, nés dans une classe inférieure et en quelque sorte opprimés par la pauvreté, ont le bonheur de se procurer une bonne éducation, et l'audace de se mêler à ce que l'orgueil des gens riches appelle la société.

Voilà mon crime, . . . , et il sera puni avec d'autant plus de sévérité que, dans le fait, je ne suis point jugé par mes pairs. Je ne vois point sur les bancs des jurés quelque paysan enrichi, mais uniquement des bourgeois indignés" (476)

Exposing the oppression of the poor by the arrogance of the rich, Julien's speech is an example of the harsh reality of class structure that the realist movement conveys in

literature.

Madame Bovary, by Gustave Flaubert, also uses the methods of realism to criticize the bourgeois and upper class society. The class struggle depicted in Stendhal's Le Rouge et le Noir, provides a useful comparison of gender differences with the situation of Emma Bovary. Tracing a country woman's attempt to escape from a boring, stagnant bourgeois life, the novel makes a harsh criticism of middle-class society. It begins with the marriage of Charles Bovary, a passive and unemotional doctor, to Emma, a farmer's daughter who was educated in a convent and sees marriage as a means of fulfilling the romantic dreams she read about in books. Marriage, for Emma, turns out to be far less exciting than she had imagined. With Charles absorbed in his work, Emma turns to materialism and romantic affairs to alleviate her boredom and satisfy her thirst for passion. As the mother of one daughter, Emma wants nothing to do with her role as caretaker and wife. The men she becomes involved with either disappoint her or do not satisfy her, and all the while she scoffs at her husband's simplicity. By running up a huge debt through the purchase of unnecessary material items, Emma tries to find comfort in spending money. When this debt becomes overwhelming and no longer manageable for Emma, she chooses to commit suicide rather than admit her faults to Charles.

In spite of the similarities between Julien Sorel and Emma Bovary in their ambition and drive for social status, gender presents a barrier to Emma. Emma Bovary is not nearly as self-sustaining as Julien is. As a woman, it is impossible for her to leave her original class on her own, so an independent journey, such as those of Julien and Sept-Epées, is out of the question. Marriage, then, rescues her from the dull life of a farm girl and allows her to enter the over-glamorized life of a bourgeois woman.

Emma makes this transition not through any talent or success of her own, but only on the tails of her husband's medical career and social standing is she allowed to experience a higher lifestyle. Unfortunately, this lifestyle proves to be no more stimulating than the first. Emma finds herself dependent on a man and forced into a predetermined societal role. There is no way for Emma to create a social position of her own making. She is dependent on her husband economically and rebels against this by squandering his money without his knowledge.

At first, Emma believes that the same rewards of upward mobility (wealth and social position) can satisfy her desires. Attending a ball put on by the Marquis, Emma revels in the luxury of an aristocratic lifestyle. She walks in and "se sentit . . . envelopée par un air chaud, mélange du parfum, des fleurs et du beau linge, du fumet des viandes et de l'odeur des truffes" (108). The elegance of her surroundings fills Emma with contentment, and even after the night is over, she longs to remain in the dream-like world that she briefly experienced:

Elle faisait des efforts pour se tenir éveillée, afin de prolonger l'illusion de cette vie luxueuse Elle regarda les fenêtres du château, longuement

Elle aurait voulu savoir leurs existences [ceux qu'elle avait remarqués la vieille], y pénétrer, s'y confondre. (114)

Yet what Emma does not comprehend is that as a woman, she cannot participate in the class struggle of men; consequently, the luxuries that may result from this struggle cannot fulfill her need for passion. Emma fights a different battle—she seeks an outward mobility that will allow her to be free from societal roles and expectations, to explore her own potential and to discover her intellectual and emotional capabilities. Emma searches for an understanding of life that is beyond the comprehension of the

bourgeois society in which she lives.

As a wife and mother, Emma is forced into roles that do not stimulate her inner passion. Confining her to a domestic position, these roles offer nothing by way of the higher emotional and sensual fulfillment she sought from marriage. Neglecting this role is the only way Emma can reject it. She does this several times throughout the novel as evidence of her boredom and dissatisfaction with the typical duties of a bourgeois housewife. While Emma's defiance of these duties is a significant action for a woman of her position, what may be even more interesting is the fact that, occasionally, she resumes her role as a "good" wife and mother. This usually happens when Emma is feeling guilty about her own struggle for freedom. For example, when she first realizes that she is falling in love with Léon, ". . . ses discours, ses manières, tout changea. On la vit prendre à coeur son ménage, retourner à l'église régulièrement et tenir sa servante avec plus de sévérité" (171). Emma, on the outside, is trying to act out the role that is expected of her while on the inside, she is struggling with her own desires. This suggests the powerful psychological influence that society has over women—even someone as self-absorbed as Emma feels the pull back towards her duties as a homemaker when her own desires and emotions begin to surface. She is tied down to these roles no matter how hard she tries to free herself.

Hoping that they will prove more fulfilling than her present situation, Emma looks to relationships with other men for an escape from her prescribed role. Yet again she is clinging to men in order to advance her own potential, and so long as this dependence is her only outlet for happiness, she cannot be free. Emma realizes the disadvantage women suffer in pursuing their own ambitions and reflects on this before the birth of her child:

Un homme, au moins, est libre; il peut parcourir les passions et les pays, traverser les obstacles, mordre aux bonheurs les plus lointains. Mais une femme est empêchée continuellement. Inerte et flexible à la fois, elle a contre elle les molleses de la chair avec les dépendences de la loi. Sa volonté, comme le voile de son chapeau retenu par un cordon, palpite à tous les vents, il y a toujours quelque désir qui entraîne, quelque convenance qui retient. (153)

Emma understands that, for a woman, the only possibility society gives for self-actualization depends on finding a man who can foster the goals and dreams she has created herself. This is why Emma experiences such bliss in her relationship with Rodolphe--she believes that she has found the "perfect" man who can become an outlet to all of her romantic fantasies. Unfortunately, Rodolphe is not sincere and only plays off of Emma's dreams for his own benefit.

Like Julien, Emma is alienated by her desire for mobility. But while Julien sets himself up in battle against the rest of society, Emma is alone in her struggle because the bourgeois society is too shallow to comprehend her needs. Boring and passive, her husband is blind to her restlessness and her search for a more passionate life. Léon and Rodolphe, as her lovers, are just as self-absorbed as she is and, therefore, cannot effectively support her endeavors towards emotional bliss. The first is too easily dominated to rescue Emma from a stagnant life, and the second does not have the commitment needed to make Emma's dreams a reality. Even the local priest—who because of his profession should be able to offer some support—does not connect with Emma or provide her with any understanding. When she is struggling with her growing attraction for Léon, she goes to him for comfort but receives only an unsympathetic response:

—Comment vous portez-vous? ajouta-t-il [le prêtre]

—Mal, répondit Emma; je souffre.

—Eh bien! moi aussi, reprit l'écclésiastique. Ces premières chaleurs, n'est-ce pas, vous amollissent étonnamment? Efin, que voulez-vous! nous sommes nés pour souffrir Mais M. Bovary, qu'est-ce qu'il en pense? . . . il ne vous ordonne pas quelque chose? (177)

Completely out of touch with Emma's needs, the priest cannot even listen to her struggles much less discuss them with her. His advice of going home and drinking a cup of tea puts a final emphasis on Emma's alienation. Her sporadic attempts to bond with her society all fail, and since no understanding or shared vision is found within any of her relationships or even in her connection to spiritual support, Emma realizes her hopeless position as an outcast of society.

This position as an outcast links her with the blind beggar whose ugly appearance disgusts her. Emma does not want to look at him because she does not want to face the bond that she shares with the lower class. In her most desperate moment, she throws him her last five francs. Now this man who is poor, crippled, and outcast has more than Emma does—her sunken position is evident. A woman caught between two classes, she lives in the bourgeois society and acts out the role of this position by indulging in material and sensual pleasures, yet her inner search for more out of life is the same as those of the lower class who have nothing but their goals and dreams to build on. The blind beggar is an outcast because of his position; therefore, no one listens to him or values his presence. Emma faces the same alienation because no one around her understands her unhappiness and boredom.

In an attempt to find someone who can sympathize with her need for passion,

Emma resorts to a form of prostitution and fits the description of the dependent woman who clings to her lovers. Her prostitution is portrayed as the exact opposite of Julien's. This woman seeks a relationship with someone who can fulfill her desire for passion. The result is that she moves from one man to another in an attempt to satisfy this need. While Julien *advanced* his position through relationships with women, Emma only sinks lower in the eyes of society. Seen as a desperate struggle to free herself from the limited vision of her middle-class society, Emma's affairs degrade her to the lower-class position of prostitute. Like Fantine in Les Misérables, it is misery and desperation that lead her to this situation. Though she does not compromise herself for money, she compromises herself for personal satisfaction that does not involve genuine commitment or mutual respect. As consistent with the gender roles in Le Rouge et le Noir, Emma is the one who is dependent on the relationships while the men involved do not place any importance on Emma's needs. Rodolphe abandons his lover when he realizes how seriously she takes their situation. This action devastates Emma to the point of making her physically ill. Dependent on men for her happiness, Emma's prostitution is viewed as pathetic.

Pathetic actually describes Emma's entire social struggle. She is consumed by her efforts, and like Julien, she will only act independently. Her search for freedom, therefore, leads to deceit and overwhelming consequences. The indulgences in which she engages give her an independence from the expectations that her marriage places on her. An enormous debt is her looming reminder of the price she must pay (both literally and symbolically) for her struggle to find freedom. With no way of gaining financial independence, Emma is forced back into the confinement of needing to depend on her husband. The very thought of admitting to Charles her struggle and the

deceit that resulted from it goes against every effort Emma has made to improve her situation. What is worse is that she knows Charles will forgive her and dismiss as unimportant all that she has worked towards:

Alors ce serait un grand sanglot, puis il pleurerait abondamment, et enfin, la surprise passée, il pardonnerait.

– Oui, murmurait-elle en grinçant des dents, il me pardonnera, lui qui n'aurait pas assez d'un million à m'offrir pour que je l'excuse de m'avoir connue . . .

Jamais! Jamais!

Cette idée de la supériorité de Bovary sur elle l'exaspérait. (379)

Wanting to amend her debts on her own, Emma would rather die than give up her freedom by asking Charles' help and admitting his superiority.

Flaubert's social criticism of the bourgeois class as a whole is implied in his criticism of Emma. With the limitations of her gender, "her very ordinary intellect made her suppose that being like a man and having male prerogatives would be enough to provide her with fulfillment" (Newton 14). Emma, consequently, tries to enter the class hierarchy that is reserved for males, and her failure confirms that "the male prerogative of consuming and controlling might be more exciting, but it is no more liberating from social expectations" (Newton 14). When the beggar reappears as Emma lies on her death bed, his song not only criticizes her quest for the romantic ideal but also the bourgeois society's quest for individual status and wealth:

Souvent la chaleur d'un beau jour

Fait rêver filette à l'amour. . . .

Pour amasser diligemment

Les épis que la faux moissonne,

Ma Nanette va s'inclinant
 Vers le sillon qui nous les donne. . . .
 Il souffla bien fort ce jour-là,
 Et le jupon court s'envola! (401)

The "false harvest" here refers to society's imposed idea of success, "false" because it is impossible to completely attain and often leads people to a more sunken position. Emma has spent her life trying to reap this false harvest of romantic idealization. As the realistic forces that work against the romantic ideal and the bourgeois notion of success, the wind that blows "bien fort" exposes Emma and the rest of her society as people preoccupied with their own desires.

The novels Les Misérables, La Ville Noire, Le Rouge et le Noir, and Madame Bovary all present the difficulties of class struggle and social mobility in nineteenth-century France. Through the experiences of several characters, the reader is exposed to portraits of the different class systems, each somewhat molded by literary conventions yet, nevertheless, grounded in the social observations of the period. The working class, as seen in Les Misérables and La Ville Noire, must choose whether to pursue the goals of the upper classes or work towards improving their own community. Julien's battle for social status underlines how psychologically destructive the class hierarchy can be to those who feel pressure to "prove" themselves according to social standards. Finally, Emma's self-absorption reveals the potential for isolation that the bourgeois society yields. In this class, "there is no community among . . . men and women . . . because the only constant in the bourgeois society is the individual in competition with other individuals" (Newton 15). Emma and Julien are perfect examples of this failure of community since they are consumed by a goal that

emotionally alienates them from others. On the other hand, Tonine and Jean Valjean, whose efforts at self-improvement are actually beneficial to the entire community, offer alternative goals of mobility that do not comply with the social norm.

As seen in these comparisons between Julien and Emma, and Jean Valjean and Tonine, some similarities existed between male and female characters in their methods of social mobility, yet the actual process of social mobility separated the genders. In the nineteenth century, men were the only ones able to participate independently in mobility through the class hierarchy. Since society graded success by status and wealth, they entered into a struggle for power over one another. The destructiveness of this upward mobility is seen through the characters of Julien and Thénardier—both cause suffering for themselves and others as a result of their selfish goals. Sept-Épées begins his ambitions in this hierarchy but is fortunate enough to discover its consuming power and is able to transform his idea of success. Women, in these novels, were left to an *outward* mobility since their only options for *upward* mobility (marriage or inheritance) depended on men. Their goal was a sense of freedom and self-actualization that could not be found through their socially assigned roles. Fantine never breaks from the expectations that society places upon her and is destroyed because of it. Emma never understands that the goals of upward mobility cannot fulfill her need, as a woman, for a greater passion in life. Tonine, though, is an example of a woman who does not allow the social pressures of a woman's "duty" to interfere with her search for independence.

Although the plots and characters of these four novels remain fictional, and to some extent dramatized, they all offer insight into the social structure of France in the nineteenth century. Stendhal wrote, "Un roman est un miroir qui se promène sur une

grande route," implying that literature captures the scenes of life as they happen (Le Rouge et le Noir 361). Yet, in response, Harry Levin suggests that "Literature, instead of reflecting life, we might better say refracts it. Part of our task, in any given case is to determine the angle of refraction" (20). The talent of literary authors is their ability to angle our view of the world in such a way that we can see it from a new perspective. Held within these twists or "refractions" is literature's power to teach, to warn, or to inspire. Often times, it is difficult for us to understand the elements of a situation as they appear to our own eyes, but once this same situation is put before us in the form of art, new connections may start to appear. With literary art, we are allowed to look through the eyes of characters who, though fictitious, must hold enough truth to convince a reader that their presence is meaningful.

To some, the purpose of literature is simply that of artwork conveying beauty for the pleasure and entertainment of its reader. And while the artistic qualities of writing cannot be denied, great literature holds something more. It is not beautiful, in Madame Bovary, to watch the downfall of a woman because her dreams are out of place with her time. It is not pleasurable, in Le Rouge et le Noir, to witness a young man's self-absorbency and selfish battle to reach goals forced upon him by society. It is not entertaining, in Les Misérables, to observe the many instances of struggle, suffering, and injustice that are depicted. Yet these works are considered masterpieces—and rightfully so. They provide more than just "a good story," they provide insight—insight into the attitudes and prejudices of a society and insight into the thoughts and feelings of individual characters who make up this society. Even a novel such as La Ville Noire, which could justifiably be labeled a "happily-ever-after" love story, is useful for its portrait of the working class and the conflicting priorities of men and women.

The insight that novels such as these offer is a different perspective on the same situations presented in history books. Of great writers Levin states, "Preserving for us the quintessence of history, they present facts as feelings. Instead of the taxes and treaties, they record the values and textures of a period, the dates that frame individual lives, the events that touch immediate sensibilities" (27). Literature, then, is one more means by which we can learn about the social history of a time. Through the experiences of each character, these four novels give a more personal portrait of nineteenth-century French society than the broad commentary of historians. By mixing personal attitudes towards the social system with a keen observation of human struggle and resolution, the writers expose a society in which gender conflicts and power struggles result in tension and injustice.

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