

Research Article

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Bovarism's Neurotic Reflections Across Cultures: A Comparative Literary Case Study in Light of Karen Horney's Neurosis Theory

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Abstract: This study applies Karen Horney's theory of neurosis as a heuristic framework for analyzing bovarist characters in the literature, offering a comparative literary analysis that integrates psychoanalytic theory with cross-cultural textual examination. By exploring the characters of Emma Bovary in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Ayşen in Refik Halit Karay's *Bugünün Saraylısı*, the article illustrates how Horney's conceptualization of neurosis – specifically, the formation of an idealized self-image, the neurotic need for affection, ambition, and the ultimate descent into hopelessness – can be operationalized to understand the psychological underpinnings of bovarist figures. By situating the neurotic processes of Emma and Ayşen within Horney's framework, the analysis demonstrates how their psychological conflicts, rooted in early childhood experiences and exacerbated by socio-cultural factors, manifest in self-alienation, external validation-seeking, and ultimately, existential despair. Through a close reading of textual evidence and theoretical integration, the study argues that bovarism exemplifies a literary articulation of neurosis, revealing the intricate relationship between psychological distress and narrative construction. The findings suggest that this interdisciplinary approach can serve as a model for future literary analyses, offering a nuanced perspective on the intersection of psychoanalytic theory and literary studies across different cultural and historical contexts.

Keywords: comparative literary analysis, neurosis theory, Karen Horney, bovarism, Madame Bovary, Bugünün Saraylısı

1 Introduction

The novel *Madame Bovary*, written in 1857 by the French author Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880), is regarded as one of the masterpieces of the realist movement and provoked considerable controversy upon its publication. This work paved the way for a concept that would later be incorporated into many pieces of world literature: bovarism. The term was first coined by J. Barbey d'Aureville in 1865, and represents a disorder associated with the life and personality of Emma Bovary, the novel's main protagonist (Oğuz, 1998). The French philosopher and essayist de Gaultier (1921) expands this concept beyond the traits of a single individual, presenting it instead as an inherent, characteristic of human nature. In de Gaultier's view, human beings must confront two forms of reality: the present – typically defined by pain and suffering – and the future, which promises goodness and happiness (Oğuz, 2009). This present reality is filled with conflicts and difficulties that must be endured, despite their incompatibility with one's desires. Such impositions may prompt individuals to deny their existing reality, reinterpret it in alternative ways, and pursue utopian aspirations. While this state naturally exists in human life, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* depicts it in a pathological form through the

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character of Emma Bovary. Building on these observations, de Gaultier (1921) defines bovarism as the faculty granted to man to conceive himself as other than he is, insofar as he is incapable of actualizing this different conception that he forms of himself (p. 217). As the gap between one's lived reality and imagined ideals widens, the intensity of bovarism also increases. Despite possessing a distinct personality, the "bovarist" individual envisions themselves as a different character and endeavors to transform into this persona. Yet, as de Gaultier (1921) points out, although the individual may believe otherwise, this transformation is never fully realized, and their self-conceit inhibits them from acknowledging this shortcoming to themselves.

The dynamics broadly outlined about bovarism align with the neurosis theory proposed by German psychoanalyst Karen Horney. The neurotic process that Horney (1950) describes as a "comprehensive neurotic solution" (p. 22) – wherein individuals construct an idealized self-image to resolve internal conflicts, strive to realize this ideal, and, in the pursuit of this goal, become estranged from their real selves – provides a crucial lens for understanding the bovarist individual. Building upon this foundation, this study aims to illustrate how Horney's model of neurosis can deepen our understanding of such bovarist phenomena through a comparative literary study. Focusing on the French realist tradition epitomized by Flaubert's *Emma Bovary* and juxtaposing it with a notable work of Turkish literature – Refik Halit Karay's *Bugünün Saraylısı* [The Aristocrat of Today] – the study explores the cross-cultural reflections of a similarly driven protagonist who, like Emma, strives to embody an elevated self-ideal. By situating both novels within Horney's theoretical framework, study proposes that the characters' escalating conflicts, desires, and eventual downfalls can be read as manifestations of a neurotic process. After outlining the historical emergence of bovarist characters in Turkish literature and summarizing Karay's novel by drawing attention to the protagonist's bovarist personality, the discussion moves to define neurosis in detail and demonstrate why each bovarist inclination aligns with a neurotic pattern. The article then examines the concrete experiences of these characters – how neurotic personalities of Emma and Aysen are formed because of motherlessness, how it influences their need for affection and ambition, and how these pressures propel them toward despair and ultimate ruin.

2 Emergence of Bovary-like Characters in Turkish Literature and Refik Halit Karay's *Bugünün Saraylısı*

The first appearance of Bovary-like characters in Turkish literature can be traced to the Tanzimat period (1860–1896), a crucial era in the modernization of the Ottoman Empire that marked the introduction of Western literary traditions into Turkish literature. This period emphasized themes of individual and societal reform, giving rise to characters who grappled with tensions between personal aspirations and societal expectations. During this time, Turkish authors began to create characters who mirrored the internal conflicts of Emma Bovary, reflecting the tension between imagination and reality. Ahmet Mithat, a pioneering novelist of the period, exemplified this trend. In his 1879 novel *Yeryüzünde Bir Melek* and subsequent works such as *Karnaval* (1881), *Vâh* (1883), and *Taaffüf* (1895), Ahmet Mithat crafted female characters who resisted societal and moral norms (Korkmaz, 2011). These characters' struggles between personal desires and societal expectations resonate with Emma Bovary's pursuit of freedom and fulfillment. Through these narratives, Ahmet Mithat adapted the Western tradition of the psychological novel to the Turkish context, creating characters whose tragic outcomes underscored the universal consequences of the tension between fantasy and reality (Korkmaz, 2011).

The Servet-i Fünûn period (1896–1901), which unfolded under the oppressive rule of Abdulhamid II, was characterized by a literary focus on individual issues rather than broader social concerns. Known for its emphasis on aestheticism and deep psychological exploration, this period marked a significant evolution in Turkish literature. Writers of this era, influenced by French literary movements such as realism and naturalism, delved into the complexities of individual psychology and social dissonance. Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil and Mehmet Rauf, prominent authors of this period, created characters caught between fantasy and reality, further advancing the representation of bovarist traits. Halid Ziya's *Aşk-ı Memnu* (1899) presents Bihter –

one of the most iconic bovarist figures in Turkish literature. Bihter, much like Emma Bovary, views marriage as a gateway to the happiness she yearns for, only to find herself ensnared in a web of dissatisfaction and disillusionment (Tarım, 2000). Her illicit relationship with Behlül represents a rebellion against societal norms, paralleling Emma's own defiance. Similarly, Mehmet Rauf's *Eylül* (1900) features Suad, another character who exhibits bovarist tendencies. Suad's escapism and dissatisfaction with her monotonous married life mirror Emma Bovary's struggles, culminating in a tragic resolution that reinforces the destructive potential of unfulfilled desires (Tarım, 2000). These works demonstrate how Turkish authors of the Servet-i Fünûn period adopted and localized the psychological and thematic complexities of bovarism.

The Republican era (1923 to the present) represents a transformative phase in Turkish literature, reflecting the profound sociopolitical and cultural changes following the establishment of the Turkish Republic. Literature from this period often grappled with themes of identity, modernization, and individual versus societal conflict. In this context, the exploration of bovarist characters continued, offering nuanced reflections on the evolving struggles of individuals. Peyami Safa's *Bir Tereddüdün Romanı* (1933) introduces Vildan, a character who immerses herself in a fantastical world shaped by the novels and plays she reads. Her identification with Erzilya, the protagonist of Luigi Pirandello's *Vestire gli ignudi* blurs the lines between imagination and reality, embodying the quintessential traits of a bovarist persona (Gürbilek, 2007). Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu's *Ankara* (1934) presents Selma, a protagonist whose dissatisfaction with life in Ankara and pursuit of unattainable ideals epitomize the inner conflict central to bovarism (Çelik, 2013). Selma's struggles with the disparity between her expectations and reality highlight the psychological depth Turkish authors brought to their exploration of bovarist themes during this period. The rise of the Memleket Edebiyatı [Country Literature] movement in the Republican era marked a shift toward works that critically examined Anatolian life and culture. Refik Halit Karay's *Bugünün Saraylısı* stands as a pivotal contribution to the depiction of bovarism in Turkish literature, offering a nuanced critique of class, modernization, and shifting social dynamics in this era. Karay (1908–1965), a prolific writer whose works spanned various genres, utilized his acute observational skills and realist approach to capture the socio-cultural transformations of his time. Initially affiliated with the Fecr-i Ati movement, Karay's literary career flourished under the National Literature movement, where he explored themes of identity, modernization, and cultural conflict (Ekiz, 1999).

Initially serialized in *Hürriyet* newspaper under the title *Olduğu Gibi* [As It Is], *Bugünün Saraylısı* was published as a book in 1964 (Antakyalı, 2020). The novel chronicles the journey of Ayşen, a young woman from Düzcce (a modest town in Turkey), as she navigates Istanbul's high society. Structured into four chapters, the narrative explores Ayşen's transformation and the societal implications of her ambitions. The first chapter, "Düzce'den Gelen Kız" [The Girl from Düzcce], introduces Ayşen as she arrives in Istanbul to live with Ata's family, who are her distant relatives.¹ Set against the backdrop of World War II, the economically strained household initially resents her presence. However, Ayşen's father's financial support and the material gifts she brings gradually win them over, improving their living conditions and elevating Ayşen's status within the family. In the second chapter, "Pavyona Giden Kız" [The Girl Who Goes to the Nightclub], Ayşen becomes enthralled by the allure of Istanbul's elite circles. Her beauty, elegance, and newfound financial independence grant her access to luxurious venues and gatherings. Under Ata's guardianship, she fully immerses herself in this glamorous lifestyle, captivating influential suitors with her charm and sophistication. The third chapter, "Modern Hayat Saraylısı" [The Aristocrat of Modern Life], delves into Ayşen's continued ascent within Istanbul's social elite. Her strategic flirtations and manipulative relationships culminate in her marriage to a wealthy Egyptian Pasha named Ruveyha. Relocating to Egypt, Ayşen seemingly achieves the life of wealth and luxury she has always desired. The final chapter, "Beklenen Kadın" [The Awaited Woman], reveals the emotional toll of Ayşen's choices. While Ata and Rüştü, one of her admirers, long for her return, Ayşen's letters to Rüştü express a longing to reconnect with her past life. However, it is eventually disclosed that these letters were written under the influence of drugs, and her husband had arranged for her rehabilitation abroad. The

¹ In fact, Ayşen is the child of Ata's cousin. However, due to the closeness between them, Ayşen frequently addresses Ata as "uncle" throughout the novel. It is deemed appropriate to clarify this situation here in order to prevent possible confusion later by the readers.

novel concludes tragically with Ata's despairing death, symbolizing the irreparable consequences of unfulfilled desires and societal aspirations.

Through Ayşen's story, Karay critiques the superficial adoption of Western lifestyles and individuals' pursuit of unattainable ideals. Ayşen's bovarist personality – her tendency to construct an idealized version of herself driven by insatiable desires for wealth, luxury, and admiration – reflects the psychological dissonance between her aspirations and the reality she inhabits, a hallmark of bovarism. As a reflection of shifting social dynamics in the Republican era, *Bugünün Saraylısı* offers a compelling commentary on class, modernization, and identity in Turkish literature. Karay's ability to intertwine personal ambition with broader societal critiques solidifies the novel's place in the exploration of bovarist themes.

3 Neurosis and the Neurotic Process

The term “neurosis” is defined in psychoanalytic literature as a state of mental distress that is associated with internal conflicts and unconscious fantasies. The concept of neurosis was first introduced in the eighteenth century by W. Cullen. It describes a state in which a person does not entirely reject reality but experiences a weakened perception of it (Antakyalı, 2016). Unlike psychosis, in neurosis, the individual does not break their connection with reality; reality is not denied, but certain aspects of it are unconsciously avoided.

In the seminal work of Freud (1917/1966), the origin of neurosis is attributed to the existence of internal conflicts between the ego and the id. The id makes demands on the ego that are characterized by a strong impulsivity, yet the ego is able to suppress these demands under the influence of the superego and the constraints of reality. The repressed impulses subsequently manifest themselves as symptoms, thereby giving rise to the neurotic state. Freud (1917/1966) traces the origin of neurosis back to repressed sexual urges in childhood and posits that psychoneurotic symptoms are the product of these conflicts. The repression of an individual's sexual desires and their confinement within the unconscious play a significant role in the mechanism of neurosis. The repressed impulses attempt to surface through symptoms, the meaning of which is often unknown to the patient (Antakyalı, 2016).

In turn, Horney posits that neurosis cannot be solely attributed to biological factors and that cultural and social influences should also be considered. Horney (1994) challenges Freud's biology-oriented theory of neurosis by highlighting the influence of cultural conditions on the concept of normality. In her view, the specific context of the culture, in which an individual lives, has a significant influence on the development of neurosis. Therefore, a combination of psychological and sociological approaches is necessary for a comprehensive understanding of neurosis. Horney (1994) puts forth the argument that the fundamental aspect of neurosis is the presence of “basic anxiety” and the defensive mechanisms that are developed in response to this anxiety. The individual engaged in the neurotic process is alienated from their true self and expends the majority of their energy on the pursuit of ultimate self-perfection through the implementation of a rigorous system of internal directives (Horney, 1950). This is because, “nothing short of godlike perfection can fulfill his idealized image of himself and satisfy his pride in the exalted attributes which (so he feels) he has, could have, or should have” (Horney, 1950, pp. 9–10).

Neurotic individuals lack the opportunity to develop real self-confidence starting from childhood, mostly due to negative environmental factors. But they have an irresistible need for self-confidence or something that can replace it as a substitute. They do not feel emotionally or spiritually empty, debilitated or deprived of life, but they perceive themselves as less valuable and their lives as inadequate in comparison to others. Indeed, if these people possessed a sense of belonging, feeling inferior to others simply would not be such a powerful emotion that would leave them desperate. The individual who becomes isolated in society for these reasons, as Horney puts it, “can only develop an urgent need to *lift himself above others*” (1950, p. 19). More fundamental than this phenomenon is the initiation of a process of alienation from the self. In this process, the development of one's true self is impeded, and individuals are compelled to develop strategic and artificial methods of coping with others. This results in the suppression of genuine feelings, desires, and thoughts. As the need for security becomes paramount, the innermost feelings and thoughts become less significant, even silenced and

obscured. In other words, the primary concern is the preservation of safety rather than the expression of one's feelings. Consequently, emotions and desires cease to be the primary determinants of behavior: "he is no longer, so to speak, the driver, but is driven" (Horney, 1950, p. 19). Furthermore, the inner fragmentation creates a general state of vulnerability and enhances alienation by introducing an element of confusion. The individual is no longer able to recognize their own position or identity. The alienated person requires a refuge and clings to this refuge, which provides strength amidst the weakness of their own nature.

In the absence of a positive change in one's inner state that would enable one to abandon the aforementioned needs, it would appear that the only means by which all of these needs can be satisfied simultaneously is through the use of one's imagination. This imaginative process gradually becomes active in the unconscious and "creates in his mind an idealized image of himself" (Horney, 1950, p. 20). Throughout this process, the individual ascribes unlimited abilities and sublime qualities to themselves. They become a hero, a genius, an ultimate lover, a saint, a deity. This subsequently provides the individual with a much-needed sense of self-importance and superiority over others. Primarily, individuals idealize their own particular "solution" to their underlying inner conflict. This solution may manifest as a shift in values and beliefs, whereby previously negative traits are reframed as positive. For instance, obedience may be reframed as goodness, love as sainthood, aggression as strength, leadership, and heroism. Similarly, aloofness may be reframed as wisdom, self-sufficiency, and independence. In other words, the idealized image becomes an idealized self. This self is now perceived as more real than the actual self. This is not because the idealized image is more appealing, but because it simultaneously satisfies all the vital needs of the individual. Consequently, the neurotic initiates the transformation of the ideal self into the real self, which can be seen as a transfer of the ideal into the individual's life.

Revisiting bovarism through the framework of the neurosis theory introduced above makes it clear that individuals who become entrapped by their fantasies and irrational beliefs – thereby distancing themselves from their authentic identities – can be classified as neurotic according to Horney's model. As previously discussed, bovarism is characterized by a persistent tendency to envision oneself as fundamentally different from one's actual lived experience. This proclivity often leads to internal conflict when the idealized self-image cannot be reconciled with the individual's circumstances. In line with Horney's perspective, this conflict arises from a fundamental anxiety that drives the pursuit of an idealized self to mitigate perceived deficiencies. As de Gaultier (1921) observes, this imaginative process ultimately distorts not only the individual's self-perception but also their interpretation of external realities. While the ability to distort reality may offer temporary solace, it fails to alter objective conditions, resulting in disappointment and alienation. This ongoing oscillation between aspiration and limitation underscores the inherent paradox of bovarism: the more an individual strives toward an unattainable ideal, the more profound their sense of alienation becomes. de Gaultier (1921) suggests that the bovarist individual not only deceives themselves about their true identity but also distorts their perception of the world in an attempt to validate this self-conception. However, because external reality remains resistant to such distortions, the inevitable confrontation with its unyielding nature leads to frustration and self-doubt. Rather than providing a stable refuge, the imagined self becomes a source of constant tension, as it can never fully materialize. This dissonance aligns with Horney's assertion that neurotic individuals, driven by an insatiable need for validation, ultimately become estranged from their genuine desires, emotions, and sense of agency.

Consequently, Horney's conceptualization of neurosis – with its emphasis on alienation from the true self and the construction of an idealized self – offers a compelling framework for analyzing bovarism. Bovarism thus emerges as a quintessential example of the "comprehensive neurotic solution," illustrating how an individual's longing for perfection and transformation can lead to intensified alienation from the real self. The subsequent sections will examine how these tendencies manifest specifically in the lives of bovarist characters Emma Bovary and Aysen, demonstrating how Horney's model of neurosis converges across diverse cultural contexts.

4 Projections of Neurosis in Bovarist Lives

Emma, the protagonist of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, is the daughter of Monsieur Roault, a prosperous farmer. She was orphaned at an early age. Her father enrolled her in a convent for the purpose of

providing her with a suitable religious education, which had a significant impact on her emotional development. The romantic novels that were secretly brought to the convent by a woman who had been sent there to do laundry began to shape her fantasy world:

Emma, at fifteen years of age, soiled her hands with books. She would have liked to live in some old manor house, like those long-waisted chatelaines who, in the shade of pointed arches, spent their days leaning on the stone balcony, chin in hand, watching a cavalier with white plume galloping on his black horse from the distant fields. (Flaubert, 1919, p. 36)

This initiatory phase subsequently diverts her attention from the spiritual teachings she had initially embraced: “Finally she wearied of it, but would not confess it; she continued from habit, and at last was surprised to feel herself soothed, and with no more sadness at heart than wrinkles on her brow” (Flaubert, 1919, p. 38).

On the other hand, the protagonist of *Bugünün Saraylısı*, Ayşen, spent her childhood in Düzce, lost her mother at a young age, and is a 19-year-old girl of considerable beauty. Due to her father’s plans to leave Düzce and travel to distant places for business, she is sent to Istanbul to live with Ata and his family. Upon her arrival in Istanbul, she cannot hide her shyness and excitement. During their first meeting, when Ata asks for her name, Ayşen replies:

‘It used to be Ayşe. Ayşe, but.’ ... ‘My mother used to call me Ayşen; now in Düzce they always call me Ayşen. That’s how it’s written in the civil registry. My stepmother, also, always used to call me Ayşen.’ ‘Then you are officially Ayşen. Welcome, my dear Ayşen! What is that? Are you crying?’ (Karay, 2009, pp. 20–21)

In addition to her initial embarrassment at their first encounter at the train station, she responds readily to Ata’s inquiry about her impression of the city’s landscape. She displays a demeanor as though she has previously traversed the Bosphorus on a ferry numerous times. Furthermore, she informs her uncle that she is not unfamiliar with this scenery, having observed it in numerous films: “Isn’t it beautiful? Do you like it? He asked. The girl replied: we had already been seeing these places in the movies” (Karay, 2009, p. 23).

4.1 Neurosis as the Consequence of Motherlessness

The loss of their mothers during childhood deprived both Emma and Ayşen of essential emotional support and role models, leaving them without the nurturing conditions necessary for healthy psychological development. According to Horney (1950), a child’s intrinsic potential for self-realization can flourish only within an environment of warmth, security, and genuine encouragement. In the absence of such conditions, the development of the child’s “real self” is obstructed, leading to a profound sense of insecurity, or what Horney (1950) terms “basic anxiety” (p. 18). This anxiety arises when the child, isolated and unprotected, perceives the world as a potentially hostile place. Motherlessness not only deprived Emma and Ayşen of the guidance and affection needed to foster a sense of inner security but also inhibited their ability to establish a sense of belonging to an emotional “we.” This lack of belonging fostered profound feelings of isolation and apprehension, compelling both characters to adopt unconscious coping strategies to mitigate their anxieties. Emma’s and Ayşen’s subsequent struggles to reconcile their idealized fantasies with reality reflect the rigidity and extremity of these neurotic responses, as their basic anxiety fueled a lifelong pursuit of unattainable ideals to alleviate their inner conflicts. While their childhoods are not fully detailed in novels, the shared absence of a mother likely deprived them of the essential relational dynamics that might have enabled them to engage with others from a place of spontaneity and authenticity, leaving them instead caught in a cycle of self-alienation and dissatisfaction.

Their capacity for imagination, which enables them to satisfy the needs brought about by their desire for superiority and alienation from themselves in the neurotic processes initiated by their motherlessness, is shaped by the novels read by Emma and the films watched by Ayşen. They endeavor to adapt the books and films, which constitute their idealized images within the context of their fantasies, to their lives. In other words, they seek to actualize their idealized images. The initial manifestations of this adaptation process can be observed in both novels, wherein two bovarist women engage in the design of their new residences. This is not a conventional layout for a woman’s new living space following marriage or a relocation to a new city.

In the initial stages of her marriage, Emma contemplates the alterations she plans to implement in her residence. Her husband, Charles, is also gratified by this arrangement: "She took the shades off the candlesticks, had new wallpaper put up, the staircase repainted [...]" (Flaubert, 1919, p. 31). These changes are not within the realm of possibility for other women in the town, as Emma is under the influence of the romantic books she reads while undertaking these alterations. During this period of transformation, Emma finds her husband's excessive admiration for her insufferable rather than agreeable. Ayşen is initially received with a degree of caution due to her status as a young and attractive visitor in the new residence. Subsequently, she is accepted by all. Ayşen reorganizes the house in accordance with the style depicted in the films she watches: "The dining table had taken on a look similar to those in restaurants. The oilcloth had been removed, a tablecloth had been placed, and matching napkins were arranged on it" (Karay, 2009, p. 36).

The alteration in the environment of Emma and Ayşen is illustrative of Horney's (1994) theoretical perspective, which posits that individuals with neurotic personalities are inclined to modify their surroundings in pursuit of a sense of security. Horney (1994) emphasizes that individuals with neurotic tendencies seek to exert control over their external environment in order to soothe their inner insecurities and anxieties. This tendency is manifested in an attachment to material elements and external changes, which are pursued with the aim of achieving a sense of security and belonging. In this context, the changes that Emma and Ayşen make to their homes are not merely aesthetic preferences; they also indicate an attempt to fill an inner void and to seek security. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that while Ayşen is drawn into and aspires to the Istanbul life depicted in films, Emma, in the other novel, never actually resides in Paris. Despite all the physical changes that they have made and will make, the idealized life of the two women in their dreams never becomes a reality.

The transformation in the family's lives, set in motion by Yaşar Efendi sending money to Ata on behalf of Ayşen, is of course not confined merely to material possessions. One day, Ayşen accompanies Ata's daughter to the beach. In this instance, she is observed swimming in a bikini. This represents a significant departure from the norms of her upbringing in the countryside. Thanks to the influential figures she encounters here, she is invited to a well-known casino. This beach marks a pivotal moment in Ayşen's social life, as the subsequent invitation she receives will reveal the life she has long dreamed of. Meanwhile, her father purchases an apartment in Beyoğlu (a wealthy district in Istanbul), further enhancing her standard of living.

The invitation that she receives subsequent to her visit to the beach is the first of numerous invitations that Ayşen will attend in the future. Nevertheless, the primary significance of this invitation is that Ayşen comes to feel a sense of belonging in this sophisticated milieu shaped by influential individuals, where everyone behaves as though they were in a film:

We're going to the nightclub that night! If it happens to snow, it'll be even more delightful. Snow would look so beautiful on my new fur coat! When I take it off, it'll fall to the floor, just like in Vivien Leigh's latest movie. I learned the proper way to elegantly take off a fur coat from that film. Shall I show you, uncle? I'll go and put it on; watch the pose I'll strike as I walk through the door, and see how I lift the fur from my shoulders and toss it onto the couch! (Karay, 2009, p. 87)

Ayşen perceives the environment of her dreams in concrete terms and experiences profound admiration. Such places are precisely what she deserves. Emma attends such an event at the invitation of her husband. It is, in fact, a ball. The entire setting is imbued with a sense of glamour, and the individuals present display a refined elegance and politeness. Even the smallest details align with the standards depicted in the literary works she has perused. Despite her status as the wife of a doctor, Emma does not wish to dance with her husband at the ball. She is, after all, worthy of such an environment, just like Ayşen:

The atmosphere of the ballroom was heavy ... the memory of the Bertaux farm came back to her. She saw the farm again, the muddy pond, her father in a blouse under the apple trees, and she saw herself again as formerly, skimming with her finger the cream off the milk pans in the dairy. But in the refulgence of the present hour her past life, so distinct until then, faded away completely, and she almost doubted having lived it. She was there; beyond the ball was only shadow overspreading all the rest. (Flaubert, 1919, pp. 49–50)

Both characters have gained access to these exclusive communities not through their own efforts but because of the men in their lives. Ayşen is in these environments because her father provides financial support, while

Emma is there because her husband is a doctor. Ayşen, who is invited to the event, and Emma, who attends the ball, both behave as if they are always in those environments. However, while Emma is merely aware of this wealthy setting, Ayşen has lived in it.

4.2 Neurotic Need for Affection

Horney's conceptualization of the neurotic need for affection offers a powerful framework for understanding the emotional lives of Emma Bovary and Düzceli Ayşen. This need, deeply rooted in anxiety, drives individuals to seek affection not as an expression of genuine love but as a means of reassurance. Both Emma and Ayşen exemplify this phenomenon, as their romantic entanglements and personal ambitions reflect a fundamental misunderstanding of love. Their interactions with others often serve as a mechanism to alleviate their inner conflicts rather than a manifestation of authentic affection.

Emma Bovary's relationships are marked by a desperate quest for affection driven by her neurotic need for reassurance. As Horney (1994) states, such individuals often misconstrue their feelings of gratitude, hope, or relief as love, resulting in a "subjective conviction of attachment" (p. 110) that conceals their deeper anxieties. For Emma, this dynamic is vividly illustrated in her interactions with Léon and Rodolphe. Her emotional entanglement with Léon, marked by idealization and sensual attraction, lacks the mutual commitment and sacrifice that define genuine love. Her hesitation to fully pursue the relationship stems not from loyalty to her husband but from a fear of societal condemnation, which would threaten her precarious sense of superiority:

Humdrum domestic mediocrity drove her to lewd fancies, marriage tenderness to adulterous desires. ... She was seized with the temptation to flee somewhere with Leon to try a new life; but at once a vague chasm full of darkness opened within her soul. (Flaubert, 1919, pp. 107–108)

Emma's relationship with Rodolphe further reveals the neurotic underpinnings of her need for affection. Initially seduced by Rodolphe's flattery and attention, Emma idealizes him, convincing herself that he embodies the romance and excitement missing from her life:

She recalled the heroines in books she had read, and the lyric region of these adulterous women began to sing in her memory with the voice of sisters that charmed her. She became herself, as it were, an actual part of these imaginings, and realized the love-dream of her youth as she saw herself in this type of amorous women whom she had so envied. (Flaubert, 1919, pp. 163–164)

However, after both reach a certain level of sexual satisfaction, her dependence on Rodolphe soon evolves into resentment:

She did not know whether she regretted having yielded to him, or whether she did not wish, on the contrary, to enjoy him the more. The humiliation of feeling herself weak was turning to rancour, tempered by their voluptuous pleasures. It was not affection; it was like a continual seduction. He subjugated her; she almost feared him. (Flaubert, 1919, pp. 172–173)

Horney (1994) explains this phenomenon, noting that in which "one person becomes dependent on the other there is invariably a great deal of resentment. The dependent person resents being enslaved; [she] resents having to comply, but continues to do so out of fear of losing the other" (p. 121). Emma's inability to recognize her own anxiety as the source of her subjugation leads her to blame Rodolphe, further alienating her from genuine emotional intimacy. Emma's neurotic need for affection also manifests in her compliance and self-sacrifice within her relationships. As Horney (1994) observes, "the complying attitude can go so far that the neurotic will extinguish not only aggressive impulses but all tendencies toward self-assertion" (p. 120). This pattern is evident in Emma's willingness to overlook Rodolphe's indifference and deceit, as she clings to the illusion of love despite mounting evidence of his apathy. Her eventual realization of Rodolphe's disinterest plunges her into despair, illustrating the fragility of affection based on neurotic dependency.

While Emma's neurotic need for affection is characterized by compliance and dependency, Ayşen's relationships reveal a contrasting dynamic rooted in her quest for control and prestige. Horney (1994) explains that neurotic individuals seeking power and admiration often use affection as a means of fortifying their self-image, rather than as an expression of genuine emotional connection: "The neurotic that falls in this group develops a stringent need to impress others, to be admired and respected. [She] will have fantasies of impressing others with beauty or intelligence or with some outstanding achievement" (p. 171). Ayşen's conversation with Ata upon returning from the nightclub reflects this aspect of her personality. Ayşen's drowsy demeanor suddenly transforms into a cheerful expression, catching Ata's attention. Upon his inquiry, Ayşen explains that she adopted this attitude deliberately.

First of all, it supposedly suited her; apparently a tired, sleepy look in the late hours of the night becomes every beautiful woman. Moreover, she did not want to appear to those around her like the other girls and women who filled the nightclub—those who were pleased to give free rein to themselves, to leap around restlessly, and to seem like bar performers turning nightlife into their occupation. In Istanbul, young women diminish themselves in the eyes of men by indulging in pleasure and luxury like this, believing that looking somewhat flighty appeals to them. They cannot find the right balance, revealing everything they have and leaving no hidden side to spark curiosity. Ayşen, however, was going to create an entirely different type of young woman. (Karay, 2009, p. 108)

These moments highlight Ayşen's aspirations to craft an image of sophistication and her determination to embody the ideals she perceives as socially admirable. Furthermore, her interactions with her suitors – Rüştü, Faruk Senai, and Mister Thomas – further demonstrate her desire to maintain an aura of unattainability and superiority, as she derives satisfaction from encouraging their interest while ultimately shattering their hopes, thereby reinforcing her reliance on admiration as a key component of her self-worth.

Horney (1994) also notes that neurotic individuals often experience a paradoxical reaction to affection, simultaneously desiring and rejecting it. This dynamic is evident in Ayşen's relationship with Ata, the one man she genuinely admires. Despite her feelings for Ata, Ayşen's fear of vulnerability and loss of control prevents her from openly expressing her affection:

-Yes, uncle... I thought about it all night; one doesn't marry for money; to get married, one needs love; I will only marry the man I love.

-Is there someone like that?

-My aunt is coming! I'll tell you about it later when we're alone. I don't want anyone to hear. My dearest uncle! (Karay, 2009, p. 131)

Horney (1994) explains, "The attraction which a neurotic woman feels for a man may suddenly turn into contempt if he falls in love with her" (p. 169). In accordance with this statement, after learning that Ata harbored romantic feelings for her, Ayşen quickly distances herself and chose to marry Ruveyha Pasha, a wealthy and influential man. This decision reflects her prioritization of material wealth and social status over emotional connection. By leaving Ata behind and aligning herself with Ruveyha, Ayşen reveals both the superficiality of her relationships and the depth of her neurotic need for validation.

Both Emma and Ayşen's romantic experiences are deeply influenced by anxiety, which Horney (1994) identifies as a central factor in neurotic behavior. Anxiety drives Emma to idealize her lovers and cling to them as sources of reassurance, while it compels Ayşen to seek control and admiration as a means of fortifying her self-image. As Horney (1994) explains, anxiety can distort an individual's understanding of love, causing them to confuse feelings such as dependency, admiration, or gratitude with genuine affection. This distortion is evident in Emma's intense attachment to Rodolphe and Ayşen's manipulation of her suitors, as both women seek to alleviate their inner turmoil through external validation. Horney (1994) further notes that the neurotic need for affection often results in fleeting and unreliable emotional connections, as the individual's dependency on others for reassurance prevents the development of stable and authentic relationships. This is exemplified by Emma's serial infidelities and Ayşen's calculated interactions with her suitors, both of which reveal their inability to sustain meaningful emotional bonds. The transient nature of these connections underscores the futility of seeking reassurance through affection, as the underlying anxiety remains unresolved.

The lives of Emma Bovary and Düzceli Ayşen vividly illustrate the dynamics of the neurotic need for affection as outlined by Horney. Emma's dependency and compliance contrast sharply with Ayşen's quest for

control and prestige, yet both women share a common struggle to reconcile their inner anxieties with their external relationships. Their inability to distinguish between genuine love and the illusion of affection rooted in neurotic needs highlights the psychological tensions that define their experiences. As Horney (1994) concludes:

The difference between love and the neurotic need for affection lies in the fact that in love, the feeling of affection is primary, whereas in the case of the neurotic, the primary feeling is the need for reassurance, and the illusion of loving is only secondary. (p. 109)

4.3 Neurotic Ambition and Need for Superiority

The concept of neurotic ambition as described by Horney refers to a situation in which individuals are driven by desires that are either unlimited or unattainable. However, these desires often result in feelings of deep dissatisfaction and inner conflict. Horney (1994) posits that neurotic individuals seek excessive success, perfection, or superiority as a means of filling the inner emptiness they experience. Such individuals are prone to making comparisons with others and may attempt to compensate for their own perceived deficiencies by attaining external achievements. However, their drive for ambition is typically employed as a means of alleviating internal conflicts rather than as a means of achieving a healthy goal (Horney, 1950).

Such manifestations of neurotic ambition are exemplified in the characters of Ayşen and Emma, each of whom demonstrates how the drive for superiority and external validation, rooted in unresolved inner conflicts, shapes their actions. Ayşen's desire to bring the groom-to-be, whom she believes to hold her in contempt, to her doorstep with her family is an evident manifestation of the neurotic ambition: "Let his father, who despises my father, come and beg me. Let his mother beat a path to my door, then maybe I will think about it!" (Karay, 2009, p. 142). Ayşen's behavior in this instance reflects the neurotic individual's need to be superior to others, extending beyond a desire for revenge. Ayşen is attempting to elevate her own self-worth by minimizing the groom-to-be and his family. Similarly, Emma's neurotic ambition, rooted in her idealization of herself as a woman destined for a grand and romantic existence, is evident in her tendency to compare herself with other women and in her lamentations over the perceived injustice of God:

Would this misery last forever? Would she never issue from it? Yet she was as good as all the women who were living happily. She had seen duchesses at Vaubyessard with clumsier waists and commoner ways, and she execrated the injustice of God. She leaned her head against the walls to weep; she envied lives of excitement, longed for masked balls, for violent pleasures, with all the wildness of which she knew nothing, but which these must surely yield. (Flaubert, 1919, pp. 63–64)

This neurotic ambition manifests in the two characters in ways that lead them to disparate outcomes over the course of the novel. While Ayşen has succeeded in making herself an unattainable woman in the eyes of society, particularly in the eyes of men, Emma has become a woman accessible to many men within a narrow social circle.

Neurotic ambition often leads to an absence of introspective self-criticism, which is one of the most striking traits of bovarist characters. This psychological construct, as articulated by Horney (2001), manifests itself in a pattern of behavior and attitudes that deflect responsibility away from the individual and toward external circumstances or other people. For characters like Emma Bovary and Ayşen, this deflection is not simply a means of avoiding blame; it is deeply embedded in their sense of self. According to Horney (2001), the neurotic's idealized image leaves no room for the possibility of error or fault. As she explains,

[The neurotic] really could stand up only for [her] idealized image. This, however, does not permit the possibility of being wrong. Hence, if [her] decision or action leads to trouble, [she] must falsify matters and ascribe the adverse consequences to someone else. (Horney, 2001, pp. 172–173)

This mechanism is vividly portrayed in Emma's narrative. She offers words of encouragement for her husband to undertake a difficult surgical procedure, thinking that her own dignity will also be elevated. However, when it becomes apparent that failure is unavoidable, she does not hesitate to belittle him:

And it was for him, for this creature, for this man, who understood nothing, who felt nothing! For he sat there, quiet, not even suspecting that the ridicule of his name would henceforth sully hers as well as his. She had made efforts to love him, and she had repented with tears for having yielded to another! (Flaubert, 1919, p. 188)

Similarly, Ayşen's neurotic ambition and idealized self-image prevent her from seeing her own flaws. After Ayşen falls out with Rüştü, with whom she got on well at the ball, Ata asks her about the radical change in her relationship with Rüştü. Ayşen's answer illustrates this phenomenon:

Ata asked Ayşen:

-You and Rüştü were getting along quite well. Have you made up?

-Yes. He behaved very politely, so I forgave him.

-But you were the one at fault; he was the one who forgave you.

The girl repeated,

-I forgave him. ... (Karay, 2009, p. 189)

4.4 Concept of Hopelessness and Consequences of Interest-Oriented Choices

In order to attain the lifestyle they aspire to, the two protagonists enter into marriage without any emotional foundation. Emma leaves her father's company by marrying a respected doctor of the time, while Ayşen is willing to change her country by marrying a man who is both respected and wealthy. The women's acquiescence is not to the men they take into their lives, but to the lives they dream of obtaining as soon as possible. Nevertheless, these marriages devoid of emotional intimacy result in profound unhappiness for both women. Indeed, the concern of being perceived as having made a "perfect marriage" is a phenomenon that has been observed in diverse geographical contexts, manifesting in a strikingly similar manner. It is important to note that, despite the high levels of unhappiness experienced by both women, Emma's tendency to seek physical and emotional connections with other men after her marriage is not evident in Ayşen's behavior. Whereas Flaubert imbues his protagonist with an intense sense of lust, Karay confines Ayşen solely to a state of being overwhelmed by luxury.

Horney's concept of hopelessness offers a crucial lens for understanding the personal destruction of Emma Bovary and Ayşen. Drawing upon Søren Kierkegaard's assertion in *The Sickness unto Death* that "all despair is fundamentally a despair of being ourselves" (Horney, 2001, p. 183), Horney expands on the idea by illustrating how unresolved inner conflicts culminate in a state of hopelessness. For neurotic individuals, this despair often emerges from the inability to reconcile their idealized self-image with the constraints of reality, leading to a mounting sense of failure, alienation, and ultimately hopelessness. In both Emma's and Ayşen's cases, their pursuit of interest-oriented choices – be it romantic, material, or social – reveals the intensifying neurotic struggles that Horney described.

Horney's exploration of hopelessness begins with the recognition that individuals often feel trapped in conflicts, as if caught "like a bird in a net, with no apparent possibility of ever extricating oneself" (Horney, 2001, p. 183). This sense of entrapment is evident in Emma's pursuit of emotional and sexual fulfillment, which she mistakes for freedom. Emma marries Charles Bovary, aspiring to escape her mundane existence and achieve the idealized romance she has read about in novels:

Before marriage she thought herself in love; but the happiness that should have followed this love not having come, she thought she must have been mistaken. And Emma tried to find out exactly what one meant in life by the words felicity, passion, rapture, that had seemed to her so beautiful in books. (Flaubert, 1919, pp. 33–34)

When her marriage fails to deliver the passion and excitement she craves, she turns to extramarital affairs with the Viscount, Léon, and Rodolphe. Through these relationships, Emma seeks validation of her self-worth and an escape from her disillusionment. Yet, as Horney (2001) notes, repeated failures in love, "marriages, friendships, which are shipwrecked one after another" (p. 184) only deepen a person's sense of hopelessness.

Emma's increasing debts and societal disrepute exacerbate her existential despair, culminating in her tragic decision to take her own life:

Now her situation, like an abyss, opened before her. She was panting as if her heart would burst. Then in an ecstasy of heroism, which made her almost joyous, she ran down the hill, crossed the cow-plank, the foot. ... [She] seized the blue jar, tore out the cork, plunged in her hand, and withdrew it full of a white powder, which she began to eat. (Flaubert, 1919, pp. 328, 330)

Similarly, Ayşen's marriage to Ruveyha Pasha represents her attempt to secure material and social freedom, paralleling Emma's pursuit of romantic fulfillment. Ayşen, too, enters marriage as a means to an end rather than as a union founded on emotional intimacy:

Ayşen hadn't hidden her plan even from the very beginning; she had already said that she would choose the richest among the suitors who came her way, the one who could provide her with the most luxurious life. From time to time, she felt inklings of love and desired to love someone and belong to the one she loved, but this other feeling overpowered it. (Karay, 2009, p. 228)

However, Ayşen's newfound affluence and social status fail to satisfy her deeper existential needs. Horney (2001) posits that the pursuit of an idealized image, such as Ayşen's conception of herself as a successful and admired socialite, often becomes a "factually hopeless enterprise" (p. 184). For Ayşen, the waning attention from her social circle and the realization that luxury cannot compensate for her inner emptiness propel her into a state of disillusionment. Her remorse is evident in a letter she sent from Egypt: "I've grown completely weary and disgusted with the high-society life I once enjoyed so much, thinking I'd never tire of it. I want to run away from it altogether, but I can't" (Karay, 2009, p. 285). This disconnection from her true self manifests as an existential crisis, driving her to morphine addiction as a means of escaping her anxiety and despair.

Both Emma and Ayşen demonstrate Horney's assertion that neurotic individuals repeatedly pursue futile solutions to their inner conflicts, further alienating themselves from their authentic selves. Emma's obsession with romantic and sexual gratification mirrors Ayşen's fixation on material and social status, both of which are symptomatic of their inability to confront their true desires and limitations. As Horney (2001) explains, realizing that "[one] is far from being the uniquely perfect person [one] sees in [their] imagination" (p. 184) often leads to "profound self-contempt" (p. 184) and an intensification of hopelessness. This realization is pivotal in both characters' narratives, as it marks the point where their illusions unravel, and their existential anxiety comes to the forefront. Emma's final act of desperation – her suicide – epitomizes Horney's (2001) description of hopelessness as "the deeper source from which the depressions emanate" (p. 188). Her inability to reconcile her desires with reality leaves her feeling trapped in a life devoid of meaning. Ayşen, while not resorting to suicide, similarly succumbs to her despair through her morphine addiction, which signifies her resignation to a life bereft of authentic fulfillment. For both women, their interest-oriented choices, while initially promising freedom, ultimately reveal the futility of external pursuits in resolving inner conflicts.

5 Conclusion

This article set out to explore how Karen Horney's theory of neurosis can offer a nuanced understanding of "bovarist" characters by examining Gustave Flaubert's *Emma Bovary* (from *Madame Bovary*) and Refik Halit Karay's *Ayşen* (from *Bugünün Saraylısı*) in a comparative literary context. By situating both novels within Horney's theoretical framework, the study has illustrated how the neurotic personalities of these characters emerge, develop, and culminate in outcomes that reinforce the destructive potential of striving for unattainable ideals. The article has assessed how core Horneyan concepts – basic anxiety, the neurotic need for affection, neurotic ambition and superiority, and eventual hopelessness – map onto Emma's and Ayşen's personal trajectories, thereby revealing the cross-cultural significance of such neuroses in literary depictions of bovarist figures.

The analysis began by situating bovarism as a literary and psychological concept, linking it to Horney's notions of basic anxiety and the idealized self-image. Both Emma and Ayşen were shown to embody the neurotic estrangement from the real self, a condition shaped by motherlessness and the subsequent absence of

emotional security during their formative years. This lack of nurturing, a cornerstone in Horney's theory, set the stage for their lifelong struggles with alienation from self, and dependency on external validation. The study demonstrated how these factors contributed to their neurotic tendencies, including their idealized self-perceptions and their attempts to realize unattainable fantasies.

Emma and Aysen's neurotic personalities are reflected in their reliance on imagination as a coping mechanism to bridge the gap between reality and their idealized selves. Emma's attachment to romantic literature and Aysen's fascination with films provided them with frameworks to construct idealized worlds. These fictional templates, however, served only to exacerbate their dissatisfaction, as their attempts to impose these fantasies onto reality failed to yield the security or fulfillment they sought. This study detailed how both characters modified their physical and social environments, such as Emma's redecorating of her home and Aysen's efforts to adopt an elite lifestyle, in attempts to assert control and align their realities with their idealized images. These actions, analyzed through Horney's theory, revealed a deep-seated need to mitigate inner insecurity and a longing for a sense of belonging.

In the exploration of the neurotic need for affection, this study found that Emma and Aysen's relationships were characterized by dependency, manipulation, and a fundamental misunderstanding of love. Emma's interactions with her lovers, Léon and Rodolphe, reflected her desperate need for reassurance and validation. Horney's observation that neurotic individuals often mistake dependency or gratitude for genuine love was evident in Emma's inability to recognize the superficiality of these relationships. Similarly, Aysen's calculated interactions with suitors revealed her reliance on admiration as a substitute for authentic emotional connection. The contrasting expressions of their neurotic need for affection underscored their shared struggle with self-worth and their inability to form meaningful, stable bonds.

The study also examined the role of neurotic ambition and the quest for superiority in shaping the characters' behaviors. Both Emma and Aysen demonstrated how excessive ambition, fueled by self-alienation and dissatisfaction, drove them to pursue unattainable ideals. Emma's yearning for a grand, romantic existence and Aysen's determination to command admiration in high society were shown to be rooted in a need to compensate for perceived deficiencies. Their ambition, however, was ultimately self-defeating, leading to deeper dissatisfaction and alienation. Horney's insight into the absence of self-criticism among neurotic individuals was illustrated in their unwillingness to acknowledge personal faults, further reinforcing their patterns of externalizing blame and perpetuating their inner conflicts.

Finally, the study addressed the concept of hopelessness, a pivotal outcome of their neurotic processes. Both Emma and Aysen's lives culminated in states of despair as their pursuit of idealized selves clashed irreconcilably with reality. Emma's tragic suicide and Aysen's morphine addiction symbolized the destructive consequences of unresolved internal conflicts. Horney's assertion that neurotic individuals repeatedly pursue futile solutions to their problems was exemplified in the characters' reliance on external validation, material success, and romantic idealization, all of which failed to resolve their inner turmoil.

Ultimately, the integration of Horney's theory has provided a robust framework for understanding the psychological complexities of bovarist figures in the literature. By demonstrating how neurotic processes manifest across distinct cultural and historical contexts, the study has revealed the relevance of such dynamics in human behavior and literary depictions. Future research could extend this comparative approach to include other literary traditions, thereby enriching our understanding of how neurosis, as theorized by Horney, resonates across cultures and eras. Moreover, exploring how societal structures and cultural norms influence the development of neurotic traits in literary characters could offer further insights into the intersection of psychology, sociology, and literature.

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