



## Madame Bovary

*Gustave Flaubert , Malcolm Bowie (Introduction) , Margaret Mauldon (Translator) , Mark Overstall (Contributor)*

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) ➔

## Madame Bovary

*Gustave Flaubert , Malcolm Bowie (Introduction) , Margaret Mauldon (Translator) , Mark Overstall (Contributor)*

**Madame Bovary** Gustave Flaubert , Malcolm Bowie (Introduction) , Margaret Mauldon (Translator) , Mark Overstall (Contributor)

Madame Bovary is the debut novel of French writer Gustave Flaubert, published in 1856. The character lives beyond her means in order to escape the banalities and emptiness of provincial life.

When the novel was first serialized in La Revue de Paris between 1 October 1856 and 15 December 1856, public prosecutors attacked the novel for obscenity. The resulting trial in January 1857 made the story notorious. After Flaubert's acquittal on 7 February 1857, Madame Bovary became a bestseller in April 1857 when it was published in two volumes. A seminal work of literary realism, the novel is now considered Flaubert's masterpiece, and one of the most influential literary works in history.

### Madame Bovary Details

Date : Published 2004 by Oxford University Press (first published 1856)

ISBN : 9780192840394

Author : Gustave Flaubert , Malcolm Bowie (Introduction) , Margaret Mauldon (Translator) , Mark Overstall (Contributor)

Format : Paperback 329 pages

Genre : Classics, Fiction, Cultural, France, Literature

 [Download Madame Bovary ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Madame Bovary ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online Madame Bovary Gustave Flaubert , Malcolm Bowie (Introduction) , Margaret Mauldon (Translator) , Mark Overstall (Contributor)**

---

## From Reader Review Madame Bovary for online ebook

### Kelly says

Oh, Emma. Emma, Emma, Emma. Darling, why must you make it so easy ? No, dear, (for once) I don't mean for the men. I mean for everyone else in the world who goes into this book just *looking* for an excuse to make fun of you. I would say that most people don't know that much about France, but they do know a few things: that they like their baguettes, their socialism, Sartre, dirrrty dirrrty sexy lurrve and they despise this thing called the *bourgeoisie*. This book doesn't really do a thing to disprove any of this (though I can't say baguettes had a prominent place in the plot), and I expect that it had a great deal to do with starting the last two stereotypes. Emma, my dear, *Desperate Housewives* isn't your fault, but you can see why some people might blame you, don't you? Your constant, throbbing whining about how your (plentiful) food isn't served on crystal platters, how your dresses (of which you have more than a typical country doctor's wife) aren't made of yards of spider-spun silk, and most of all how your husband dresses wrong, talks wrong, thinks wrong, WEARS THE WRONG HAT (!), and is so offensively *happy* with you that he enjoys coming straight home to tell you about his day and relax in front of his fireplace every night instead of going out drinking- well, there's a saying about the smallest violin, isn't there?

It makes it easy for people to plausibly dismiss this story with things like this:

(If it makes you feel better, dear, you are hardly the only one.. Your other compatriots in 19th century repressed female misery receive similar treatment:  
)

It is easy to despise you, Emma. You and your seemingly shallow priorities, the unthinking selfish harm you did to your husband AND your baby girl, the endless excuses you had for your, frankly, off the charts stupid behavior, the fact that you didn't even *try* and communicate how unhappy you were to the guy who loved you who might've done something about it (since all the evidence shows that he is willing to COMPLETELY CHANGE HIS LIFE whenever you ask him to) and, finally (what can seem to be) the incredibly coward move you made in finding a way to not face the consequences your childish sense of the world couldn't believe would eventually come up. What goes around comes around ,as the wise chanteur sayeth. (Perhaps the alternate cover above should substitute 'Justin Timberlake' for Sassy Gay Friend.)

That's pretty much how I felt about you for about 150 pages after you made your entrance, Emma. While you started your endlessly copied, endlessly bastardized fall from Angel in the Home Grace, and while you tried to make a saint out of yourself for not having sex with a young clerk who couldn't have supported you anyway. You were simply the grandmother of *Lady Chatterley*, an extended protest letter to a dead king I couldn't care less about.

But in the end, you won, Emma. I couldn't escape you. Seriously, y'all, this book would not leave my head alone, for days, and I thought... many different and contradictory things about it. In the end, though, I kept coming back to one thought: the most terrifying thing I can think of is getting caught in Emma Bovary's eyes. Did everyone read that profile about Dan Savage this weekend about infidelity and marriage? I did. Emma is the literary incarnation of Savage's argument. Her eyes are on the cover of this book, and the more I looked at them, the more disturbed I got. Those eyes are the reason that marriage is so frightening, why 'commitment issues' exist. This is a novel about how reality can look just the same to you from one day to the next, but to your partner, it can have turned into a hell or a heaven, even if it is the same Tuesday routine as the last one. Emma's gaze, how each time she fixes her eyes on some scheme of happiness and how those eyes transform everything they see. She shows how unstable marriage is, how thin the foundations are-

resting on nothing but the words- "I love you." Words that just need one more word to dissolve the entire thing. That's it, you guys. One word and someone's will to speak it is all that stands between a solid marriage and one that is over- no matter how much paperwork you sign, how many kids you have, houses you fill with furniture. You never *really* know what the person across from you is thinking. How do you really know what motivates someone? Are they with you because they have made a resolution to be? Are they there with you because the stars shine in your eyes? Are they perfect to you because they are about to leave? Marriage, for better or worse, no matter what people say, adds so many complications. It is the commitment that people twist and bend over and around in so many different contortions to try to make it work- because it is a marriage, because it means something. How difficult is it to trust that people are simply what they say they are? Charles is simple and straightforward and rather sweet- and Emma hates him for it. She smiles and smiles and smiles... and then cheats on him, bankrupts him, tries to prostitute herself and kills herself rather than spend another day with him.

This is the most anxiety inducing book I have ever read about marriage. It's the 19th century where you have to make a vow for life that you can't get out of, not really, in order to test the idea that you might want to be with someone. If you're wrong, that's it. You've failed. It's all-or-nothing. Emma is the incarnation of the expectations of the institution at the time- all-or-nothing. Madame Bovary is destroyed because she tries to put her all into Charles, then Rodolphe and then Leon, and none of them can withstand it. Each of them are good for different things, and only for a little while, and she can't accept it. That is not the ideal. She won't accept less than the ideal. You guys, she's nothing more than exactly what she is told is available to her- granted, she's after the best of what she's told is available: the ideal. But why do we hold that against her? As long as we live in a society where we're told to strive after the ideal, to never give up, you will have people who destroy themselves and everyone around them to get it. Savage's discussion of what the "ideal" means in real life is enlightening and pertinent here, I think. He talks about how you have to be willing to change a lot and make a huge effort to keep the deal of monogamy alive. Of course everyone has their limits, and in many marriages, the trade offs of one person's limits for the others (I won't do this, and you won't do that- I won't do that, but I will do this) end up making the deal of monogamy work. But you have to be honest about it, you have to be able to say things that you've never said out loud before. You have to admit that you won't be happy unless you live a life where you have crystal knickknacks on your fireplace, and you get off from pies being thrown in your face. But it's not that easy- Emma was on her deathbed, writhing in agony from *eating* arsenic, and she still couldn't tell Charles what she wanted from him.

I can't blame Emma, ultimately. It actually made me think, of all things, a bit about *Planet of Slums*. That book talks about the millions of people who have been born outside the system, in illegal settlements to parents who are illegal themselves, and who are not, in fact, ignored by the system. They *never get into the system in the first place*- a system that is not built to cope with the mind-blowing poverty that arises from its excrement. The system can't acknowledge it and justify itself. At the risk of sounding like I think relatively-well-off white lady problems bear any resemblance to the horror of someone living on the outskirts of Kinshasa in a lean-to, Emma is just trying to get in to a society that can't acknowledge her and go on. She's trying with all her might to buy into the fairy tales she's been told (just like the revived, and growing belief in magic in some slums), and does whatever she has to do to get her hands on it, even if only for a little while. She saw that fairy tales are real (or so she thinks) at that ball that one time- she SAW it, mommy- and can't handle the fact that they exist on this earth and she can't be a part of it. And in case anyone finds her head-in-the-sand refusal to face the world overly childish or impossible to relate to: The endless line of irresponsible credit she takes out from the scam artist down the street in order to feed her fantasies about the way she believes her life should look has obvious immediate relevance to America in the pre-2008 financial crisis era. In some ways, the existential crisis Flaubert is trying to outline here: between a solidly practical, profit-and-advancement outlook on life and a sensibility that at least tries to aspire to something higher, even if it is unaffordable or impossible, is the distilled essence of the push and pull of American partisan politics. Monsieur Homais would have done very well on Wall Street. Emma can be read as being more American than French, really.

Emma is a true believer. She doesn't just want attention from men, or shiny things. I didn't really believe that until the part where she tries to renounce the whole world for fervent religious devotion. Failing making it into her fairy tale, she wants to escape where she is- to somewhere else, anywhere else. By the end, I felt like I was suffocating right along with her. Virginia Woolf said that the "*present participle is the devil*". Emma adds the present place, the present time, the present person you are with. She really is willing to try anything to escape. On her deathbed, as she pleaded to die, my heart was racing along with hers and the whole finale read like a blockbuster last action scene with explosives and severed limbs flying. I didn't enjoy the journey I had with her, but I had made it and lived in tiny spaces with her, spaces that got ever smaller as the book wound down. Every chapter there was less and less light until she was curled up in a ball in solitary confinement with no hope of escape. In the Count of Monte Cristo, we root for the hero to get thrown over the side of a cliff in a body bag because it is his only hope of escape. How could we do less for poor Emma? She deserves her chance to make it to the place she always hoped for- even if priests and businessmen argue whether she got there over her corpse. If she can't be buried in 'blessed' ground, well, at that point the priest's God is just another man telling her she has to stay in the woods with the witch and her oven rather than try to find the path home, like she was always taught to do.

Flaubert handles his prose deftly, precisely, and with a deceptively commonplace hand. He doesn't try for smart metaphors and delicate similes, but rather has characters say what they mean in an effectively believable way that makes Emma a character who can impact the lives of real women. Parts of this novel are spine-tinglingly sordid, others wrench out your gut, most of it can be drearily, boringly, mind-numbingly quotidian, and every so often, a gem shines through that makes you turn around and look at someone you had thought you were done being interested in. In other words, it's like last Wednesday. And the Tuesday before that. And today. And probably next Monday. The morning when you woke up vowing that today it was all going to be different, that afternoon when you just wanted to die, the evening when you forgot it all making dinner and laughing about that thing you saw on the internet.

Flaubert can't get it all, or say it all right, but he knows that. In fact, he's willing to tell his readers that. But he does it in such a way that you just want to punch him in the face like you do that size 0 model who complains that she's too fat:

*"Whereas the truth is that fullness of soul can sometimes overflow in utter vapidness of language, for none of us can ever express the exact measure of his needs or his thoughts or his sorrows; and human speech is like a cracked kettle on which we tap crude rhythms for bears to dance to, while we long to make music that will melt the stars."*

Aw, come on, Gustave. Why do you want to make those of us with irrevocably not-size-0 rears, who can't get from Q to R, cry? Yet, even your complaining makes me want to hug you.

I guess what I am saying is why are you so awesome, Monsieur Flaubert?

---

## **Fionnuala says**

There's something about Flaubert's writing that makes me want to comment on his books as I'm reading them. I had that experience with *Bouvard et Pécuchet* last year and I had it again while reading this book, so I jotted down my thoughts as I read.

### **Part I jottings**

When you're reading such a famous story as this one, the ending of which everyone knows already, you read it differently. You dawdle along, indulging yourself with odd details. And so, in these early pages, I'm admiring how Flaubert describes the part of France in which he has chosen to set his story: Haute-

Normandie, his home territory. It's clear that he loves the countryside around Rouen very much. I'm also enjoying the fact that there's more than one Madame Bovary in the story. Mme Bovary 'mère' is a formidable lady who ushers in Madame Bovary 'belle-fille', formidable in her own way if not exactly 'belle'. But Mme Bovary the second, in spite of faithfully taking the medicine prescribed by her doctor husband Charles, dies conveniently, allowing Madame Bovary the third, the very incarnation of 'belle', to be ushered in, bringing bag-loads of tension in her train. If she was a match, she'd ignite all by herself.

Now that he's set up his story, and described its landscape, I feel that Flaubert is really testing his writerly capacities. He's challenging himself to inhabit Madame Bovary the third's fiery spirit. He's good at this. He's so good at it that I wonder how he can keep it up. I'm noticing too how often he describes the view from her window as she stares longingly at the broader world beyond the walls of her narrow life. That reminds me of something, though I'm not sure what..

And I have to smile at his foresight when he makes Emma Bovary wish that the name Bovary will become famous, that it will be displayed all over bookshops and repeated in the newspapers.

But as the quiet pages turn, I find myself longing for a change for Emma and for me as a reader. Her world is too limited. What about the reader's needs, dear M Flaubert? Spare a thought for us.

Emma is invited to a ball in the neighboring château and I think, yes, Flaubert is going to change the pace here, and he does. The comical descriptions of dinner at the chateau remind me of the humorous juxtapositions that occurred on every other page of Bouvard Et Pecuchet, and I can't help wishing this book could be more like that one. But unfortunately, the château episode is soon over and it hasn't delivered much in terms of change for Emma - or for the reader.

## Thoughts on Part II

This section starts off with a little more promise. Emma and Charles are moving to Yonville, a little town in a valley by a meandering river. Flaubert describes the road leading to the town as bordered by young aspens, *une chaussée plantée de jeunes trembles*.

The French word for aspen, 'tremble', immediately reminds me of Tennyson's lines from The Lady of Shalott:

*Willows whiten, aspens quiver, little breezes dusk and shiver,  
thro' the wave that runs forever by the island in the river, flowing down to Camelot.  
Four gray walls and four gray towers, overlook a space of flowers,  
and the silent isle imbowers, the Lady of Shalott.*

I remember the descriptions of Emma looking at the world through her window, and I think, Yes! Up to this point, Emma has been exactly like the enchanted Lady of Shalott, looking out at the world as if from a mirror, cut off from real life.

Perhaps from her window in Yonville, she will see Sir Lancelot riding by...

The town provides some interest for the reader in any case. We are introduced to a colorful set of inhabitants. There's Mme Lefrançois, who runs the local hostelry; there's her club-footed man-of-all-work, Hippolyte; her regular customers: a querulous tax collector called M. Binet and a young lawyer's clerk called M. Leon Dupuis. Then there's a slimy haberdasher called M. Lheureux; the Rouen-Yonville stage-coach driver Hivert; a sanctimonious clergyman called M. Bournisien and a free-thinking but rather pedantic pharmacist called Homais.

An immediate battle of words between the clergyman and the pharmacist livens up the story nicely. I welcome these new characters, no matter how sanctimonious or pedantic. And Homais reminds me quite a bit of Bouvard and Pécuchet, though admittedly Homais seems actually to know what he's talking about unlike that comic duo.

But while introducing several interesting and comic characters, Flaubert is simultaneously playing with our expectations. He tells us there was little to see in Yonville - the single street, the length of a rifle's range, stopped short at the corner of the road. If you turned right at the end, you arrived at the cemetery. The mention of a street the length of a gun's range, and which comes to an abrupt end, combined with the mention of a cemetery, doesn't augur well at all.

But perhaps I'm wrong to focus on premonitions. On her first morning in her new home in Yonville, Emma looks out the window and sees the lawyer's clerk, Leon, go by. Is he Sir Lancelot? In any case, within the space of a few pages, he seems to have cheered Emma up considerably. I'm cheered up too because I'm really enjoying the contrast between the super scientific conversations which Homais engages in with everyone, and the super romantic conversation that Emma and Leon have at every opportunity.

But Flaubert is still offering us hints about the future: Homais praises Emma's new house and mentions particularly the advantage of having a side door in an alleyway that allows people to enter and leave without being seen.

The pages go by without much happening, and the side door remains unused. Oh, wait, something is happening. A bunch of characters are going on a day trip! How exciting!

But it's only to visit a linen factory.

In Part II, the character list may have expanded but life in ~~Yonville~~ Yawnville hasn't really become more interesting.

Emma is increasingly bored and exasperated by her gentle husband Charles and by her narrow life in the town. I'm feeling the same with regard to Flaubert. I absolutely can't find fault with the writing but the story is becoming just as much a torment for me to read as it is for Emma to live through.

But a passage beginning, 'Un soir...' , and which mentions spring and buds, etc, brings hope - for the reader, at least.

Alas, the passage ends with the church bells tolling in peaceful lamentation. Poor Emma. Poor me.

And poor Leon has become so bored with Yawnville that he can't stand it any longer. He leaves without having once made use of that tempting side entrance.

What has Emma to look forward to now?

Oh right, an Agricultural Show...

But in the meantime, Emma has realised that Leon might have been her best chance at love and she missed it. Really, it goes from bad to worse. I'm certain Flaubert was chuckling to himself as he wrote!

But perhaps shedding a little tear too. His ability to perfectly phrase his character's thoughts excuses him a lot:

*C'était cette rêverie que l'on a sur ce qui ne reviendra plus, la lassitude qui vous prend après chaque fait accompli, cette douleur enfin que vous apportent l'interruption de tout mouvement accoutumé, la cessation brusque d'une vibration prolongée.*

Emma has bought herself a prie-dieu, a gothic kneeler. I can't believe Flaubert wrote that with a straight face.

Oh! It's market day in Yawnville. Perhaps something will happen today...

Why yes! From her window Emma spies a fine Sir Lancelot in yellow gloves. Or is it Mr Bingley? A single man with twenty thousand a year renting a house in the area, he must surely be in want of a....

Ah! His name is not Bingley but Boulanger, Rodolphe Boulanger. He sounds as romantic as a red-nosed baker. But still, he's arrived just in time to escort Emma to the Agricultural Show! Who'd have thought the Agricultural Show could turn into a romantic venue!

And side by side with the romance, Flaubert offers us a comic interlude between Mme Lefrançois and Homais, who according to Flaubert, has expressions to suit every circumstance, even unfortunate ones. *Quelle épouvantable catastrophe ! s'écria l'apothicaire, qui avait toujours des expressions congruentes à toutes les circonstances imaginables.* Yes, I was right. This IS a comic novel!

And now it's Emma who's described as having a red nose! Is Flaubert mocking his main character? Yes, he seems to be mocking everyone in the course of this Agricultural Show episode, juxtaposing contrasting scenes to great comic effect. While the local Deputy engages his large audience at a slow pace on the subject of cereal production, Rodolphe engages his tiny audience at a fast pace on the subject of serial seduction. The deputy is planning a venture involving manufacturing linen, Rodolphe is planning a venture involving bed linen!

The comic strand has the upper hand in this section, and it may well be descending into complete farce because Homais is proposing a radical new medical procedure to cure Hippolyte's club foot. Is Flaubert trying to turn Homais, the supreme unbeliever, into a Messiah who will make the lame walk and the blind see? In the predictably disappointing aftermath of the miracle procedure, Flaubert gives us some great dialogues between the priest and the pharmacist. These are definitely my favourite parts.

Meantime, Emma dialogues with her conscience on the subject of her affair with Rodolphe. Yes, you've guessed right, the side door on the alley has been finally put to some use.

But Rodolphe doesn't measure up to Emma's expectations, and his letter of adieu arrives by the unfaithful side-door. While I'm reading Rodolphe's letter, I'm distracted by the mention of a 'mancenillier' tree so I pause to look it up. It's a poison tree, a tree of death. Flaubert is amusing himself again. And even as Emma enters crisis mode, Flaubert makes Homais create a comic diversion. And then he gives Charles serious money troubles just to bring us back into serious mode again.

In the next section, Flaubert coolly announces that Emma wants to become a saint! *Elle voulut devenir une sainte.* Am I the only one who notices this constant lurching between the serious and the farcical?

Ok, she's now safely through the 'saint' crisis and Charles is going to take her to see 'Lucia de Lamermoor' at the Rouen opera house. This should be a serious episode but it's introduced by another farcical debate between the pharmacist and the priest. The two are stock comic characters. But romance prevails in spite of the comedy; Emma, like Lucia in the garden scene, meets her old love Leon at the opera.

This more mature Leon turns out to be as calculating in his modest way as Rodolphe was, and he manages to get Charles to agree to Emma staying on an extra day in Rouen by herself. So the pair rendezvous at the cathedral which gives Flaubert an opportunity to indulge in flamboyant parallels between Emma's situation and the edifice itself. The cathedral is described as a gigantic boudoir, the vaulted ceiling extending its ribs like arms to receive Emma's confession of love for Leon, the stained glass illumining her face, the smoke from the incense burners creating an angelic halo, etc, etc.

Someone convince me that Flaubert wasn't laughing when he wrote this. And there's a ridiculous person hanging around who insists on giving the pair a guided tour, especially of the Chapel of the Virgin under which is buried a Louis the Something, seigneur of something else, etc, etc, who died on the 23rd of July, a Sunday...

The reference to the 'Sunday' is one detail too much for Leon. He flees the cathedral's suffocating arms dragging Emma behind him, and grabs a cab. Not just any cab of course. It has to be a cab that has blinds that can be pulled down completely. Flaubert sends the cabby and his two passengers on a crazy journey around and around the city so that people in the streets see the cab go by again and again and are amazed at the apparitions and reappearitions of a shuttered vehicle in broad daylight. Phantasmagoric!

When Emma gets back to Yawnville after the cab 'ride' there's bad news. But Flaubert can't just give us a simple delivery of bad news. No, the scene has to open with Homais castigating his apprentice for daring to unlock his medicine cabinet - where he has a bottle of arsenic locked away. Homais is so carried away that he expostulates in Latin and would have expostulated in Chinese or 'groenlandais' if he knew such languages! In the middle of all this expostulating, he conveys the bad news to Emma: Charles' father has died.

The story moves on through many more chapters as Emma and Leon find possibilities for more rendezvous, sometimes described in ridiculous terms, sometimes in sublime ones: for Leon, Emma is the heroine of every novel and drama. She is the unnamed She of every love poem. But above all, she's an angel! This is heady stuff!

Emma's stolen idylls cost money so she borrows and borrows on the strength of Charles' inheritance. Each time the story strikes such a serious note, Homais is called in to do another comic turn. The man who used to spout Latin at every opportunity suddenly starts peppering his conversation with slang terms to great effect: *nous ferons sauter ensemble les monacos. L'apothicaire, autrefois, se fût bien gardé d'une telle expression ; mais il donnait maintenant dans un genre folâtre et parisien qu'il trouvait du meilleur goût ; et, comme madame Bovary, sa voisine, il interrogeait le clerc curieusement sur les mœurs de la capitale, même il parlait argot afin d'éblouir les bourgeois, disant turne, bazar, chicard, chicandard, Breda-street, et Je me la casse, pour : Je m'en vais.*

Then for ten pages or so, there's no comic contrast. Flaubert is serious at last. Leon is gone - or as Homais might say, he's vamoosed. Emma is left with nothing but debts and broken dreams - described in the most beautiful language needless to say.

Just when I'd given up on any more comic turns, Homais comes to my rescue to advise against eating wheat and dairy products! There's nothing new in the world surely.

And even when things worsen, he still manages to make me laugh. He declares that in cases of poisoning, the most important thing is to carry out a test. Follow the scientific method. Everything will be fine if you follow the scientific method and carry out tests.

At the very worst moment after the famous doctors have arrived and given up on curing the poison victim, Homais feels obliged to entertain them at his house, sending out for pigeons and lamb chops, the best cream and eggs, and warning his wife to take out the wineglasses with the stems. He even dares to offer the famous doctor his own diagnosis, not omitting to mention that he can't imagine where the victim could have come upon the arsenic.

And while the entire town, me included, are waiting for news of the victim, Flaubert allows Homais to continue his farce. He can't finish dinner with the famous doctor without a coffee from a very scientific-sounding machine, using coffee he has of course torrifed and pulverised himself, and when he offers the famous doctor sugar for his coffee, he uses the scientific name: *Saccharum, docteur?*

Soon Homais is back in the sickroom, using all his science to protect the dying woman from the priest's superstitions. But he doesn't succeed: Emma is encouraged to bestow on a crucifix the most loving kiss she's ever bestowed on a man's body. It's a wonder Flaubert didn't name her Marie Madeleine!

And Flaubert isn't done with us yet. Homais and the priest sit by the deathbed arguing about religion until they both fall asleep, when they are shown to be indistinguishable from one another: two fat men nodding in their chairs, their chins resting on their chests. When they wake up, their differences re-emerge: one sprinkles the room with holy water, the other with chlorine and the story ends on that note.

I really believe 'Madame Bovary' is a comedy. But Homais would no doubt prove me wrong. Using suitably scientific methods, he would prove that the majority of readers consider it a tragedy. So be it.

---

### **DeLaina says**

This is one of the books that has had a profound effect on my life. The moral? Be happy with what you have and where you are!!! Mme. Bovary fritters away her entire life with thoughts of, "If only X would happen, THEN I could be truly happy" and yet she never is. She gets everything she thinks she wants only to find out she's still not content.

I read this while I was engaged and at the time, thought, "Well, I'll be happier when I'm married, but once I am, then life will be fabulous". After a few years I found myself playing the same role as Mme. Bovary: "Once I can get pregnant and have kids, then I'll be happy"; "Once I'm not pregnant and sick anymore, THEN I can be happy"; "Once we get out of this apartment and into our house, then I will surely be happy"; "Once the baby starts sleeping through the night, I can definitely be happy"; "Once the baby is out of diapers...etc. etc. ad nauseum...literally!

I want to be content with my circumstances, whatever they may be, and Mme. Bovary is a reminder of what happens to those who are unable to find contentment in the journey, and are continually seeking yet another unsatisfying destination.

---

### **Kat Kennedy says**

Henry James once said, "Madame Bovary has a perfection that not only stamps it, but that makes it stand almost alone; it holds itself with such a supreme unapproachable assurance as both excites and defies judgment."

That's right. Defies judgment.

*I don't know... he looks kind of judgy to me...*

Unfortunately, I had to read a translation as my French is nowhere near good enough to read the original. Though I am assured that the prose in the original French are amazing and inspiring.

I can certainly appreciate the characterization and story-telling ability but I personally struggled with the story as I reconciled what Flaubert seemed to be saying about society, women, women who had affairs, men and romance.

Now, I would like to take a moment to quote Manny's Review, since he is the one who convinced me to read this book in the first place.

"Flaubert makes no obvious attempt to judge Emma..."

No, Flaubert doesn't break up his beautiful prose at any point with, "So whilst that is a very nice tree, I would like to intrude and mention that Emma is, like, a total ho! So, now back to the tree..."

I feel he doesn't do this because that would be superfluous. In fact, it seems to me that he doesn't stop judging through this entire book.

[image error]

*The judgement is like looking at vacation photos of a ninja family. You can't see it but you know it's there.*

Why else would Flaubert so meticulously describe and relish in Emma's fall from grace? Every little detail is mentioned with the same eagerness as a kid dobbing in their little brother. He puts together a file of evidence for her complicity, a smoking gun as you'd say, and leaves it up to us to point the finger.

- She immediately decides after her wedding night that she doesn't love Charles.
- She then sets about creating her own misery by obsessing and romanticizing this unhappiness until it consumes her.
- She goes from a productive and proficient housewife to a morose, unrelenting mess.
- She quickly begins despising Charles and blaming him for everything while he dotes on her and grows increasingly content.
- Her home quickly falls into a state of shabbiness.
- Her daughter goes neglected.
- Her first romance uses her unforgivably but is eventually driven away by her incessant neediness and demands.
- Her second romance, whilst more earnest in his affections, is also driven away by her incessant neediness, deteriorating mental health and demands.
- She drives her husband into bankruptcy.
- Commits suicide to escape it all.
- Her husband falls into despair, neglects their child and quickly dies.
- The child ends up working in a cotton factory.

What would a child do working in a cotton factory, you ask?

Oh, just a little mill-scavenging. Their job was to crawl under the huge, spinning **WHEELS OF DEATH** to pick up the spare bits of cotton. They were not allowed to sit, rest, or take a break while the mill ran - which was always except for Sunday when they cleaned the huge, spinning **WHEELS OF DEATH** that caused these children to live in a constant state of grief and terror

Well, doesn't that just cheer you up!

The entire story arc and every unnecessary tidbit condemns Emma like one more nail in the coffin. Society is condemned, men are condemned, romantic idealism is condemned. Really, this novel thinks everyone is to blame. What is this novel's answer to it? It seems to be saying, "Well, that silly woman had so much and she threw it all away and look at her now, kids. She's dead! And poor, which is really much worse."

The novel seems to step back and tsk at Emma, saying that she had so much. A safe and comfortable home, a good husband who doted on her and she just couldn't be happy with that.

Then it looks at society and says, "Well, you created this and now you've helped destroy her too, you assholes!"

It shakes its head at Charles and says, "You weren't strong enough to keep her in line and then you pined over this worthless woman to the ruinment of your only child."

But I wonder what this book would have been if Emma hadn't been a victim to everyone and every circumstance except for Charles. I wonder what this book would have been like if it displayed a far more

realistic approach to a woman having an affair and her reasons. Because, let's face it, this book's depiction of a woman and why she has extra-marital relations is very obtuse. Emma's life and situation is hardly the common for women who seek more out of life. This book makes her quest for more seem silly, unnecessary and ungrateful.

Most of all, I wonder what this novel would have been like if it had dealt with Emma as a real character. One who didn't need to be mostly insane to justify having an affair. One who wasn't both stupid and entitled and didn't lose all her money through a lack of self-control and ability to take five seconds to do the math. One who was capable of growing and learning from life.

Unfortunately all that is lost. Even in the end, Emma learnt nothing. All sound and fury. Signifying nothing.

Much like this novel.

My final criticism about this book...

This was a book about people gettin' it on...

AND THERE WAS NO SEX!

[image error]

*Curse you, Flaubert! Curse you!*

---

## **Perry says**

### **Splendid Sensations of Prose in Lydia Davis' Translation of *Madame Bovary***

Most realize that the novel's basic substance or theme: an adulteress *supreme* and her poor cuckold hubby. Madame Bovary dreams of literary, romantic adventures with young studs and is one of the most self-centered persons in the Western canon. Yet, it could be that some who haven't read it have no idea of the "ending" ending (which I won't give away here).

This is a masterful novel, and maybe one reason it's so affecting is because most of us know that we could have taken a bite of the luscious apple, that if we had made that one wrong turn in life and given in to sensual desire (however fleeting), we too would have carried ourselves and our loved ones hurtling down a road that leads always to tragedy for *someone* in our life.

If you haven't read this, I recommend this translation, in which Lydia Davis' prose is sublime, e.g.:

Love, she believed, had to come, suddenly, with a great clap of thunder and a lightning flash, a tempest from heaven that falls upon your life, like a devastation, scatters your ideals like leaves and hurls your very soul into the abyss. Little did she know that up on the roof of the house, the rain will form a pool if the gutters are blocked, and there she would have stayed feeling safe inside, until one day she suddenly discovered the crack right down the wall.

The novel was ground-breaking in several ways, not the least of which is the well and range of human emotions that ebb and flow through the reader while marveling at Flaubert's astounding attention to detail. Clunky translations of this novel in the past took away from the experience of the sadness, anger, disgust,

contempt and pity that this translation so aesthetically accentuates.

I highly recommend this translation if you haven't read this.

---

### **Michael Finocchiaro says**

My 3rd reading of this masterpiece written with irony and finesse. The eternal story of Emma Bovary and her broken dreams is heartbreaking every time.

The narration is actually quite modern in that the perspective changes quite often from a mysterious first person in the beginning (a schoolmate of Charles Bovary?) to the interior monologues of Charles, Emma, Léon, and Rodolphe. The descriptions of the various locations in the book are always surprising with tiny references to the principle characters. It may surprise you to know that this book, which is essentially a tragedy, also is full of humor and sarcasm. For example, when Léon and Emma have a rendez-vous in the Cathedral of Rouen, the Swiss guard who tries to give them a tour of the church while Léon is freaking out and wants to get out of there while Emma pretends to be interested because she is not quite sold on the seduction is pure genius. In a similar, if more romantic vein, the whispered conversation of Rodolphe and Emma in the lodge as the vice-Prefect gives the world's most boring speech (his boss couldn't be bothered to come) was extraordinary. Every word in Flaubert is measured and perfectly weighted to each situation, the original French is absolutely splendid - whether he is describing the pretentious conversation of M. Homais or the various season and their impact on the moods of the characters and tone of the novel. The only criticism that I can bring is that the denouement is a bit long - that being said, there is another fantastic ironic payoff in the last sentence.

This book from 1856 is of course a product of the Romantic period in culture but it surpasses most of its contemporaries by its precise psychology - both of men and women, its irony, its subtle criticism of the "petit bourgeois" and French society, and the meticulous observation of detail. Even 161 years later, it remains a monument of literature and a summit of free expression (Flaubert was pursued in court and beat the censors.)

---

### **Martine says**

Like every European teenager who takes French at secondary school, I was supposed to read *Madame Bovary* when I was seventeen or so. I chose not to, and boy, am I glad I did. I couldn't possibly have done justice to the richness of Flaubert's writing as a seventeen-year-old. Moreover, I probably would have hated the characters so much that I never would have given the book another chance. Which would have been a shame, as it's really quite deserving of the tremendous reputation it has.

*Madame Bovary* is the story of Emma Rouault, a mid-nineteenth-century peasant woman who has read too many sentimental novels for her own good. When the hopeless romantic marries Charles Bovary, a country doctor, she thinks she is going to lead a life full of passion and grandeur, but instead she gets stuck in a provincial town where nothing ever happens. Hell-bent on some escapism and yearning for someone who understands her romantic needs, Emma embarks on two adulterous affairs, plunges herself into debt and ends up very badly indeed, leaving behind a husband who might not have been the dashing hero of her dreams but who most certainly did care about her.

*Madame Bovary* is most famous for its portrayal of an unfulfilled woman, and indeed it's Emma's ennui and

desperate need for romance that the reader will remember. They are described so convincingly that it's hard to believe the author was a man rather than a woman. However, *Madame Bovary* isn't all about one woman going through life dreaming and breaking down every time reality catches up with her. Like other great classics of realism, it's about society – about the social mores and conditions which instil certain kinds of behaviour in people and then punish them for it. Flaubert's depiction of Emma's provincial village (a haven of all that is base and mediocre) is painstakingly detailed and realistic. It's a wonderfully vivid and well-observed account of life in mid-nineteenth-century rural France, where people go about doing their jobs, conducting illicit affairs, gossiping behind each other's backs, ruining each other financially and generally leading lives which are far from exalted. Flaubert's portrayal of his characters is unabashedly vicious and misanthropic, but such is the quality of his writing that you forgive him for taking such a dim view of humanity. There are descriptions in the book (the seduction at the market, the club-foot operation, the endlessly prolonged death from arsenic poisoning) which rank among the best things nineteenth-century realism has to offer – gloriously life-like scenes which make you feel as if you're right there in the thick of things, watching things happen in front of your horrified eyes. And if the whole thing has a tragic and deterministic slant to it, well, so be it. That's realism for you. At least Flaubert has the decency to grant his heroine a few sighs of rapture before her inexorable demise. For it may be a realist novel, but it has some genuinely romantic moments of passion and drama (cab ride through Rouen, anyone?), and is all the better for it.

Ultimately, how you respond to *Madame Bovary* depends on your own susceptibility to romantic notions. If, like Emma Bovary, you're prone to dreams of passion, beauty and perfection, and yearn to feel and experience rather than being stuck in a dreary life in a village where nothing ever happens, chances are you'll be able to relate to Emma and thus see the genius of Flaubert's depiction of her. If, on the other hand, you think that such romantic escapism is a lot of sentimental, self-indulgent claptrap (which it is – that's the tragedy of it!), you probably won't be able to relate to Emma at all, and therefore won't much appreciate her as a tragic heroine. As for myself, I'm definitely in the former camp. If I'd been Emma, I probably would have walked into the same traps that she does. I would have fallen in love with the one neighbour who seems to understand my need for intensity, I would have gone through the same mad cycle of repentance, dissatisfaction and making the same mistakes again, and I probably would have spent a bit too much money in my quest for soul-affirming experiences, as well. My ruin wouldn't have been as complete as Emma's, but it would have been fed by the same dreams and desires. Oh, yes. So don't let anyone tell you Madame Bovary is an old-fashioned creature whose dilemmas are no longer relevant to modern readers. There are plenty of people in modern society who are as much in love with romance itself as she is, and not just women, either. And as for discontent, how many people today aren't dissatisfied with their lives because they don't match the glamorous/exciting lives they see on TV? And how many people today don't rack up huge debts because the magazines they read have led them to believe that they're entitled to more than is within their means? Replace 'sentimental novels' by 'TV', 'movies' and 'magazines', and all of a sudden Emma's cravings won't seem so outdated any more. Quite the contrary; they're as timeless and universal as they ever were. That's the hallmark of a classic – it speaks to us from across a century and a half and shows us ourselves. We may not much like the picture of ourselves, but it's pretty powerful all the same.

I'd give the book four and a half stars if I could, but alas. In the absence of half stars, four stars will have to do, with the assurance that it's well worth another half.

---

## Nayra.Hassan says

???? ???? ..? ???? ????? ???? ??? ?? ??????.. ????? ?????? ??????? ?????? ????? "???? " ???????  
???????



???? ???? ????????: ??? ???? ???? ? ???? ???? ...????? ???? ? ?  
?????????? ..? ?????? ???? ???? ???? ????.....????? ???? ? ? ???? ????  
??????..? ? ???? ???? ???? ???? ?

?? ???? ? ? ? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ? ????..? ? ? ?  
???? ???? ? ? ???? ..? ???? ? ? ???? ? ? ? ? ?

---

**Agir(???) says**

????? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ????  
????? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ????  
? ? ? ? ? : ????  
? ?

:? ? ? ? ? ? ? ?

?  
?  
? ?

????? ?

????? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ????  
? ?

????? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ????  
????? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ?

????? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ????  
????? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ?

????? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ????  
????? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ?  
?????

????? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ????  
? ?

????? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ????  
...???

????? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ????  
? ?

????? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ????  
????? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ?

(view spoiler)

## **Lisa says**

Since I read Quicksand by Nella Larsen this week, Emma Bovary started haunting my mind yet again!

We are old friends, Emma and I.

I spent hours and hours over a dictionary at age seventeen in high school, trying to read about her agonies in original French, with only the Isabelle Huppert film as a guidance. In fact, I actually think I owe it to Emma Bovary that I finally made it over the threshold to understand written French. That ultimately led me to university studies in French literature, and a lifelong love for French writers. In a way, I could argue that Emma introduced me to Diderot and Voltaire, I guess.

But she did so much more for me, as well.

She awakened in me a sense that the world holds different options for women and men, and that women's dreams are dangerous, detrimental and slightly sentimental and ridiculous. She made me socially, politically angry for the first time.

I know there are thousands of erudite studies showing all the weaknesses of Emma Bovary, but from the start, I could not - would not - see her that way. I was with her when she danced in the ballroom, and I wished the party would never end. I hated the conventional goodness of Charles, and understood Emma's frustration with him better than his frustration with her. After all, she had ideas, dreams, longings, and he had: routine, reputation and boredom.

I rejoiced that she dared to do what men have always, always allowed themselves to do: enjoy a sexual life of her own choice. She knew she would pay a much higher price than any man ever would for that freedom. I loved the fact that she embraced life in its passion and pain, and I suffered through the horrifying pages of her brutal final agony with the feeling that I would not have wanted her to say no to one single piece of experience in exchange for a better end - living according to her husband's standards would have been death over and over, without end.

I am fully aware that this is not a moral reading or interpretation of the novel, and I don't encourage or follow her choices in real life, but I loved Emma Bovary's daring rebellion without limits when I was young, and it has never actually changed. Whenever I remember my encounter with Emma, the first thought invariably is: "Go girl! Do what you want!"

To close the circle: reading Larsen's Quicksand made me think of Emma because the character Helga Crane, not fully belonging anywhere, and drifting from one place to the next, never really lives her dreams fully. She always pulls out, runs away, hides from too strong emotions, and in the end, she resigns herself to rural life with a preacher she hates, and multiple pregnancies to bind her to the hopeless boredom and tedium.

Reading about Helga, I found myself thinking again with fondness of Madame Bovary: "Go girl! Do what you want!"

---

## **Petra X says**





Ψυχρ?,οργισμ?νη,κυκλοθυμικ? και ανισ?ρροπη.

Ελπ?ζει και εκστασι?ζεται πριν το γ?μο της. Απογοητε?εται και αλλ?ζει ερωτικ?ς αγκαλι?ς μετ?. Ο ερχομ?ς του παιδιο? της δεν καταφ?ρνει να την ανταμε?ψει με το μεγαλε?ο της μητρ?τητας.

Η αγ?πη του ?πιου,αγαθο? και ταπεινο? συζ?γου της ε?ναι μ?λλον πατρικ? για εκε?νη.  
Μ?σα της παλε?ει η θρησκευτικ? ψευτοηθικ? της εποχ?ς και η ματα?ωση των προσδοκι?ν της.  
Πολ? γρ?γορα νικο?ν οι προσδοκ?ες και παραδ?νεται σε ερωτικο?ς πειρασμο?ς.

Αφετ?ρου,η ?δια αυτ? πλοκ? μας φ?ρνει δ?πλα και πολ? κοντ? σε ?να δυστυχισμ?νο πλ?σμα που αξ?ζει τη συμπ?νοια μας.

Η ?μμα ε?ναι μια εν?λικη που στερε?ται σχεδ?ν τα π?ντα απο παιδ?. Μεγαλ?νει και ζει ταπειν? κοντ? στον πατ?ρα της ?χοντας περ?σει πολλ? χρ?νια εσ?κλειστη σε μοναστ?ρι. Η θρησκευτικ? αγωγ? της στ?ρησης δεν ταιρι?ζει στην ψυχ? της.

Δεν π?ρε αγ?πη ποτ?. Δεν αγαπ?θηκε βαθι? και ανιδιοτελ?ς απο κ?ποιον,επομ?νως ε?ναι αν?κανη να αγαπ?σει. Η συναισθηματικ? της νοημοσ?νη αρχ?ζει και τελει?νει σε ?ναν κ?σμο προβολ?ς,εξιδαν?κευσης και ατομικ?ν απολα?σεων.

Ζ?ντας απομονωμ?νη σε ?ναν στεν?μυαλα ανδρικ? κ?σμο συμβιβ?ζεται αρχικ? και παντρε?εται για να αποδρ?σει και να αγαπηθε?.

Απογοητε?εται απο τη ν?α κατ?σταση και αρχ?ζουν οι τ?σεις φυγ?ς.

Θλ?βεται ?ντονα,αντιδρ?,επαναστατε?,πιστε?ει πως αξ?ζει μια ασυμβ?βαστη και πολυτελ? ζω?.

Αρχ?ζει να μ?χεται για ικανοπο?ηση παντ?ς ε?δους και ανεξαρτησ?α.

Ε?ναι τρυφερ? και γενναι?δωρη με τους εραστ?ς της επειδ? παλε?ει να αγαπηθε?,για να αισθανθε? ασφ?λεια καταντ?ει εμμονικ?,?ρρωστη,κουραστικ?.

Πν?γεται,ρισκ?ρει,βασαν?ζεται,προδ?δεται και καταρρ?ει.

Ε?ναι αφελ?ς και ευ?λωτη. Θεωρε? το κ?ρος και την υψηλ? κοινων?α λ?τρωση. Διαψε?δεται.

Ενδ?δει με περισσ? ανωριμ?τητα σε πειρασμο?ς για να οδηγηθε? στην ευτυχ?α.

Η αποτυχ?α της ε?ναι μεγαλει?δης και επισ?ρει αισθ?ματα ο?κτου και οργ?ς.

Καταστρ?φει τη ζω? της και την οικογ?νεια της.

«GUSTAVE FLAUBERT» : «Η Μαντ?μ Μποβαρ? ε?μαι εγ?»...

Χυδα?α μαντ?μ Μποβαρ? ? ?μμα σε αν?νη αναζ?τηση αγ?πης;

Καλ? αν?γνωση!

Πολλο?ς ασπασμο?ς!!

---

**Ahmad Sharabiani says**





her heart.

And I remembered Jane Austen, who opened the door for woman to search for happiness in their marriage. Why did women marry in those times? Women married only to increase their social standing or for money, but with Austen they start to have a chance at happiness. Flaubert does something similar with Madame Bovary, I believe. He accuses the status quo, the position of women, in a circumvented way, by showing us Emma's deep unhappiness and how her actions condemned her and society. Poor Emma. I pitied her for each time she fixed her gaze on some scheme of happiness and how her eyes led her astray.

Then the lusts of the flesh, the longing for money, and the melancholy of passion all blended themselves into one suffering, and instead of turning her thoughts from it, she clung to it the more, urging herself to pain, and seeking everywhere occasion for it. She was irritated by an ill-served dish or by a half-open door; bewailed the velvets she had not, the happiness she had missed, her too exalted dreams, her narrow home.

The only pastime she could enjoy without guilt was reading. From that she built fantasies, it is true. But did she not have the right at least of her own fantasies? It seems not, as we overhear Charles and her mother in law talking:

"Do you know what your wife wants?" replied Madame Bovary senior. "She wants to be forced to occupy herself with some manual work. If she were obliged, like so many others, to earn a living, she wouldn't have these vapours, that come to her from a lot of ideas she stuffs into her head, and from idleness in which she lives."

"Yet she is always busy," said Charles.

"Ah! always busy at what? Reading novels, bad books, works against religion, and in which they mock at priests in speeches taken from Voltaire. But all that leads you far astray, my poor child. Anyone who has no religion always ends up turning badly."

So it was decided to stop Emma reading novels.

As if she had the choice of earning a living, being a female. What hypocrisy! The only choice they see to avoid her *turning badly* is to forbid her reading her novels. One of the few pleasures she was allowed.

In a time that judged everyone by their wealth; that breathed a suffocating morality deceptively reinforced mainly by women themselves, society would be horrified by women's pursuit of anything more than their obligations. On top of all that isn't it understandable that Emma would pray for a son when she got pregnant?

She hoped for a son; he would be strong and dark; she would call him George; and this idea of having a male child was like an expected revenge for all her impotence in the past. A man, at least, is free; he may travel over passions and over countries, overcome obstacles, taste of the most far-away pleasures. But a woman is always hampered.

She was so right, men at least were much more free than women. I not only comprehend her reasons, but commiserate with her. So, why look at a baby girl she knew had been born with the wrong gender! It all went against her most heartfelt dreams. Emma might have towards the end had a touch of evil brought by desperation. But who wouldn't?

### *Ambushes and pitfalls...*

Oh, she tried to renounce all her dreams through moments of fervent religious devotion. *At mass on Sundays, when she looked up, she saw the gentle face of the Virgin amid the blue smoke of the rising incense. Then she was moved...* Intrigue, however, had already tempted her and kept coming her way. Why would she be invited and attend a ball in a house so out of her reality? Was it not a trap? After that, you could not help yourself but wish you had access to that fairy like life. What an ambush, when she was attempting to behave:

Her journey to Vaubyessard had made a hole in her life, like one of those great crevices that a storm will sometimes make in one night in mountains. Still she was resigned. She devoutly put away her beautiful dress, down to the satin shoes whose soles were yellowed with the slippery wax of the dancing floor. Her heart was like these. In its friction against wealth something had come over it that could not be effaced.

Such a fortuitous event served only to stress the undesirability of her life.

After the ennui of this disappointment her heart once more remained empty, and then the same series of days recommenced. So now they would thus follow one another, always the same, immovable, and bringing nothing. Other lives, however flat, had at least the chance of some event. One adventure sometimes brought with it infinite consequences and the scene changed. But nothing happened to her; God had willed it so! The future was a dark corridor, with its door at the end shut fast.

Another bait would present herself in the person of Monsieur Lheureux. He began cajoling Emma quite innocently for the first time when offering her to buy some scarves, *'I wanted to tell you, he went on good-naturedly, 'that it isn't the money I should trouble about. Why, I could give you some, if need be.'* Thus, another temptation felt into her lap like a dream come through. The endless line of irresponsible credit was not more than an option offered her that she could not have imagine existed if were not for this trickster.

Later we witness how she tries to reform, to be more tolerant and wishing to endure her life as it was, taking responsibility for her daughter and taking interest in the housework. Just then up comes Monsieur Rodolphe Boulanger, who after first meeting Madame Bovary *'[s]he is very pretty', he said to himself, 'she is very pretty, this doctor's wife.'* And he goes on, *'I think he is very stupid. She is tired of him, no doubt. She is gaping after love like a carp after water on a kitchen-table. Yes, but how to get rid of her afterwards?'* He decides so easily to seduce her. Oh, yes, she went along with it and of her free will. But it was too much temptation, for someone so thirsty. I imagined that if it was not Rodolphe it would be another. And later on came Leon.

After the affair with Rodolphe begins, Emma marvels at how much she had lacked living before:

"I have a lover! a lover!" delighting at the idea as if a second puberty had come to her. So at last she was to know those joys of love, that fever of happiness of which she had despaired! She was entering upon marvels where all would be passion, ecstasy, delirium. An azure infinity encompassed her, the heights of sentiment sparkled under her thought, and ordinary existence appeared only afar off, down below in the shade, through the interspaces of these heights.

Thus, Flaubert puts all these temptations in her way. It is as if Emma when walking down a meadow starts to stumble on beautiful, ripe apples that lie on the ground and cannot resist but pick some and take a few bites. Could she have resisted them all?

### ***But could Emma have escape her destiny?***

Could she have simply accepted life as it was offered to her?, with all its constraints and no reward... I believe all that she lived was utterly inevitable. Could she have run away from her own behavior and avoided her ultimate destiny? Emma was on the same boat as Oedipus found himself in. I felt after reading Oedipus Rex that there was not really anything that Oedipus could have done to get himself out of his destiny. Could Emma have done it differently? It seemed to me that the more Oedipus attempted to get out of it, the deeper he was immersed in its inevitability. It is simply that there was no way for him to avoid doing it all and facing his fate. Was Emma's destiny any less inevitable? I do not believe so. There was no chorus to declare that to us, but Flaubert himself serves the role, even if it is not so explicit and you have to read between the lines:

It seemed to her that the ground of the oscillating square went up the walls and that the floor dipped on end like a tossing boat. She was right at the edge, almost hanging, surrounded by vast space. The blue of the heavens suffused her, the air was whirling in her hollow head; she had but to yield, to let herself be taken; and the humming of the lathe never ceased, like an angry voice calling her.

### ***And so it all ends...***

But as in the beginning in the end, you beguiled me Emma. I was with you from the start and you could not escape me even in death. Seriously, I tell all your critics, your tragic story would not leave me alone. It still doesn't. You had no choice like Oedipus could not escape killing his father or marrying his mother. So, why people do not stop condemning you when they pity him?

You were clever and wanted to exercise your intellect. Imagine the frustration of nothing to do? Perhaps your mother in law was right, you were fated to end badly. What a tragedy of never finding someone that could begin to understand you. Flaubert with his impressive prose evokes her thoughts and feelings throughout the novel, and I had no choice but be enticed by his heroine.

...it seemed to her that Providence pursued her implacably, ...she had never felt so much esteem for herself nor so much contempt for others... She would have liked to strike all men, to spit in their faces, to crush them, and she walked rapidly straight on, pale, quivering, maddened, searching the empty horizon with tear-dimmed eyes, and as it were rejoicing in the hate that was choking her.

Finally, I think I was able to grasp the reasons that make Madame Bovary a classic, a modern tragedy where a soul is doomed because she appreciates and battles against all that comes her way. Despite her limitations in life and as a product of her time, Emma has an unbridled passion and ends pursuing her fantasies. That ends condemning her. Nevertheless, Emma Bovary is brave in her irresponsible choices because it brings her closer to the happiness she wants, even if doing so she is able to attain only a glimpse of her dreams. Even if for that she had to die. And she died so that other women could strive for a more compassionate fate.

---

## **Orsodimondo says**

### **C'EST MOI**

## **Meravigliosa come sempre, semplicemente perfetta, Isabelle Huppert nell'adattamento del 1991 firmato da Claude Chabrol.**

Letto un paio di volte e sempre amato. Uno dei massimi capolavori della letteratura, secondo me. Flaubert è uno dei sommi: me lo immagino di notte, solo nella sua casa di Rouen, che sono ovviamente stato a visitare, al lume di candela, che 'recita' le parole scritte, ancora e ancora, urlandole, cancellando, limando, riscrivendo, fino a trovare la formula giusta, quella perfetta. Le mot juste. Perché, lui è con la perfezione che si misurava. E alla perfezione si è avvicinato, e, secondo me, la perfezione ha raggiunto.

*Realistico, il romanzo certamente lo è: non contiene nulla che non sia esistito nella vita reale (e facilissimo da riscontrare attraverso sopralluoghi e testimonianze); e anche se sbuffa ogni tanto "nulla in questa storia è tratto dalla vita, è totalmente inventata", non c'è dubbio che questo autore ha seguito con scrupolo il precetto dello 'scrivere solo di ciò che si conosce'.*

*Però dopo aver scritto la scena di seduzione nel bosco, nella Corrispondenza si trova: Che delizia scrivere! Non essere più se stessi, ma spaziare per l'universo che si descrive! Oggi, per esempio, mi sentivo uomo e donna, amante e amata, cavalcavo per una foresta in un pomeriggio d'autunno sotto le foglie gialle, e io ero i cavalli, le foglie, il vento, le parole dette da lui e da lei, e il sole scarlatto sopra le loro palpebre semichiuso, gonfie per la passione....*

Alberto Arbasino: Certi romanzi, pp 131-132

---

## **Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says**

Oy, the tedium, the drudgery of trying to read this book! I tried to get into this story. Really, I did. It's a classic, right? And everyone else likes it. I kept making myself continue, hoping I could get into the story and figure out what's supposed to be so good about it.

I won't waste any more of my precious reading time on this. It's about a self-absorbed young wife who longs for anyone else's life except her own. When she's in the city, she dreams of the farm. When she's in the country, she dreams of the city. When she's at a social gathering she imagines that everyone else's life is so much more exciting than her own. Blah, blah, blah.

Too many wordy descriptions of what people were wearing, what the buildings looked like, etc. If you're going to take a long time to tell a story, it had better be a good story. This one is NOT!

---

## **Shannon says**

Why are all the "great classics" lead by famed female heroines all too often about personal freedom thru means of sexual compromise leading to abject misery and ultimate demise? I realize it's an accurate depiction of culture and times, however why are Bovary and Moll Flanders the memorable matriarchs of classic literature? See my commentary on the Awakening for similar frustrations. Why aren't there more works about strong women making a difference in their own lives if not those of their families and

communities? Why aren't we having young women read a work or 2 portraying a strong female who doesn't end up having an affair, committing suicide, or otherwise screwing up her own life and the lives of others as she sinks to the bottom where she inevitably belonged? Where are the strong, sentient heroines who might make feminists look slightly intelligent and/or inspirational?

---

## Garima says

*Her too-lofty dreams, her too-narrow house.*

We meet and greet different sorts of people; we greet and read different sorts of books. Last year, I had the pleasure of meeting Ms. Jane Eyre. With her modest dreams and dignified living, it was easy to accept and love her. She was far from perfect but there was hardly a thing I would have changed about her. A fictional character of literature exemplifying the virtuous side of real life but she was not alone. There were some other characters surrounding Jane who certainly struck a chord with me but the music thus created was not a soothing melody. The arrogant ways of Reed cousins and the vindictive streak in Bertha Mason's love symbolized an unpleasant world which held within it afflictive but relevant stories. In one such story this year, I met Emma.

*But shouldn't a man know everything, excel at a host of different activities, initiate you into the intensities of passion, the refinements of life, all its mysteries? Yet this man taught her nothing, knew nothing, wished for nothing. He thought she was happy; and she resented him for that settled calm, that ponderous serenity, that very happiness which she herself brought him.*

The Bored and Beautiful, Madame Bovary. We all probably know her. That naive little girl who doesn't appreciate the toy in her hands because another child owns an artificial but glittering tiara. That reckless young woman who jots down a list of inordinate whims which could culminate into a glorious Happily Ever After when time comes. That unfortunate mature lady who finally realizes the vacuity of her air castles when it's too late. Emma while single had imagination and anticipation; Ms. Bovary while married had perversity and passion. It was difficult to love and accept her but that's precisely what I did- with a little help from Flaubert's terrific writing and a little help from the world around me.

Love and its vicious pleasures don't spare anyone. Those pleasures when turned inside out, sometimes take the shape of eternal sufferings too. The difference possibly lies in the vacuum created out of being in love and the idea of being in love. Both can be fatal but I would like to believe that the latter is something that is bound to make a person delusional about oneself and everyone around. Emma tried to form a derisory bridge from her idea too, in a hope to reach an unknown destination she usually read in her books but eventually she suffered too.

*Where could she have learned this depravity, so deep and so dissembled that it was almost incorporeal?*

Why, from this society only. A society which thrives upon displaying its pretentious happiness and insists on concealing the perpetual sadness. A society which constantly invents ways of piling up the debt upon another person while wearing the sham of welfare. A society where another Madame Bovary, Emma's mother-in-law, silently accepts her fateful marriage. Amidst all these lies, it's no wonder that Emma learned something which was not worth learning at all. Flaubert, through his omniscient narration hasn't passed any judgment or jumped to futile conclusions here. He has simply stated how people conduct their lives when materialism comes to the forefront of one's mind. Love goes to hell in such cases.

*She was the beloved of every novel, the heroine of every drama, the vague she of every volume of poetry.*

Ah! The irony.

---