



Madame Bovary

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Emma Rouault, a farmer's daughter, perceives herself as a romantic, a sensitive soul surrounded by clods and dolts. Addicted to wild fantasies nourished by popular literature and art, she longs for a grand passion that will somehow liberate her from her stultifying provincial existence. In time her reveries appear to affect her health, causing Charles Bovary to move his medical practice from the village of Tostes to the somewhat larger town of Yonville.

It is in Yonville that Emma, now a mother, will indulge her inclination towards a grand passion. From a chaste friendship with the mild-mannered law clerk Leon, in whom she perceives a kindred romantic spirit, Emma plunges headlong into a tawdry affair with the ruthless playboy Rodolphe, only to instigate a truly physical affair with Leon after Rodolphe has deserted her. By that time, her fantasies have led her into extravagance and crippling debt, leaving her open to blackmail on the part of her principal creditor. Charles Bovary, oblivious as usual, is caught totally unprepared by Emma's impulsive, yet slow and painful suicide.

In addition to the psychological portrait of Emma Bovary, the book is notable for its supporting characters, frequent memorable scenes depicting rural French society, and, above all, for Flaubert's painstaking attention to language, pattern, and coloration in forging his much-admired prose style.

Bibliography:

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Emma Bovary*. New York: Chelsea House, 1994. Includes excerpts from reviews and articles (some contemporaneous with the novel), as well as ten essays that analyze the heroine in light of twentieth century and feminist perspectives and understanding. Extensive bibliography.

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Gustave Flaubert's "Madame Bovary."* New York: Chelsea House, 1988. An excellent and balanced collection of some of the best and most provocative essays published in the last third of the twentieth century. Topics range from thematic to linguistic and from deconstructionist to psychoanalytical.

Fairlie, Alison. *Flaubert: "Madame Bovary."* London: Arnold, 1962. A well-written, sensitive, and insightful interpretation that provides a thorough examination of the themes, characters, narrative structure, style, and importance of the masterpiece.

Gans, Eric. *"Madame Bovary": The End of Romance*. Boston: Twayne, 1989. A brief but very good introduction that covers the work's essential points, influence, and critical reception. Also places it in its historical and sociological context.

Giraud, Raymond, ed. *Flaubert: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964. Includes essays dealing with Flaubert's literary theories and his other works. Also reprints several stimulating pieces on the novel (two not translated elsewhere) that include a perceptive reading by the poet Charles Baudelaire and thoughtful character analyses by Martin Turnell and Jean Rousset.

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