

# The mirroring of the blind beggar to madame bovary

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The blind beggar is used in *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert to reflect the character Madame Bovary. As the plot and characters develop, the beggar is interspersed into the novel at significant moments to emphasize the meaning and emotions of that particular scene, essentially as an objective correlative. Because of Emma Bovary's immense amount of emotions, Flaubert uses the beggar to better express all of the emotions that she is feeling to the readers. The beggar is also used to have the readers experience the same general uneasiness that Emma is feeling, by stimulating the same emotions in the reader.

Emma Bovary experiences constantly changing emotions throughout the entire novel but the underlying characteristic that doesn't change about her is her inability to be content. This ultimately will end up ruining her life. She spends so much of her time desperately reaching for that which she can not have that she forgets to take the time to enjoy what she does have. Every time she reaches for something that should be unattainable to her, the blind beggar is there to express the uneasiness Emma is feeling. Such an example of this is on page 263; " Sometimes he would suddenly appear behind Emma, bare-headed. She would draw back with a cry" In this scene, Emma is in the Hironnelle on her way back from one of her many trips to see Léon. Her mind is only focused on the thought of her beloved Léon and she cries out " sweet words and kisses that were lost in the wind" (pg, 262). However, upon seeing the beggar she is yanked back unwillingly to reality. She becomes filled with anxiety because she is no longer in her bubble, far above sin and poverty. The significance of stating that the beggar is " bare-headed" is used to further shatter Emma's illusions of living the upper class lifestyle

that she fools herself into thinking she has. The phrase “bareheaded” was also used at the beginning when Emma is looking out the window which served as a symbol that separates the upper class from the lower class. “And the bailiff’s clerk, bareheaded and holding a sheet of paper in his hand would often stop to listen as he walked past the house in his cloth shoes” (pg 40). Those who had wealth could afford a hat, and those who couldn’t were “bareheaded”. Emma can’t even escape the reality of poverty in her own home.

The beggar also physically represents Emma. While the beggar is grotesque on the outside, Emma is grotesque on the inside. As unfortunate as his life is, the beggar still sings happy songs and “whenever he spoke to anyone he would throw back his head and laugh idiotically.” (page 262). Emma was “so beautiful” (pg 22) and not only in Charles’ eyes for she caught the attention of several other men. However, on the inside, she was grotesque. She was unable to ever be grateful with what she had and so she selfishly took what she could not have. She put her emotions before everyone else’s. Even when her husband, Charles, found out his father had died she made little to no effort to pretend like she was downhearted. All she could think about was how pathetic Charles looked when he cried. “He seemed to her contemptible, weak and insignificant, a poor man in every sense of the word. How could she get rid of him?” (pg 247). He was nothing like her lovely, wealthy Léon. She spent the rest of the evening trying to block out external sensations that would distract her from her memories of the time she spent alone with Léon. This included blocking out Charles when he needed her the

most. The disgust Emma feels with her own life, she refracts onto the beggar. "...like a starving dog. Emma, overcome with disgust, tossed him a five franc coin over her shoulder. It was her entire fortune. Throwing it away like that seemed to her a noble gesture." (page 296).

Both Emma and the blind beggar are doing what they feel is needed to survive. The beggar acts like a dog to show his appreciation to the pharmacist who pretends he can help cure him of his blindness. Emma acts like a dog in the sense that she uses the tricks that she learned from her romance novels to lure people into being under the influence of her charm. In this sense, they are both reverting back to a primal state. The beggar is similar to a tame dog, doing tricks to try to earn money. Emma is similar to a wild dog, moved by her animalistic impulses to just take what she wants with little to no regard for the people she is taking from. This being said, Emma Bovary is still aware of the few tricks she needs to get ahead in life. For the most part though, she refuses to be domesticated. There is also symbolism in the fact that she won't even look at the beggar when she tosses him the coin. She merely tosses it over her shoulder, believing that she is so far above him. She is attempting to stay in the illusion that she is of the upper class, and therefore better in every sense of the word than the beggar. However, in reality, she is merely middle class and in morals, the blind beggar comes out ahead. In a sense, Emma is just as blind as the beggar because she thinks she knows what she wants but on the contrary, she is incredibly indecisive. "How could she have misjudged him so seriously once again, she who was so intelligent?" (page 180). She is referring to Charles in

this scene and this is one of the rare cases in which Emma attempts to take the blame for a decision she made. She only does this because of her constant regret of marrying Charles and her inability to make any real attempts to remedy her situation besides adultery, which even still did not satisfy her or fix anything.

The beggar appears in almost every scene that Emma is stressed. He is there when she is in her frantic search for money, on her trips to see Léon, and even when she is dying. As she lays there on her deathbed, she hears him singing for one last time “ and she began to laugh, a horrible, frenzied desperate laugh, imagining that she could see the wretched beggar’s hideous features looming in the shadows of eternity like the face of terror itself”(pg 321). Emma too has gone mad in the fear of death and just like the blind beggar would “ laugh idiotically” (pag 262) Emma is laughing. She is in some way realizing that the horrible beggar is a reflection of all the mistakes she made in her life and that will haunt her for eternity. Flaubert described the beggar on page 295; “ in general he seemed almost idiotic”. Emma was able to present herself much better in life. However, in death she was just as idiotic and mad as the beggar. This irony that Flaubert uses is to show that Emma’s life only catches up to her when she is about to die, thus her true side is revealed. “ And in his eyes she saw a love such as she had never seen before”(pg 312). Emma is finally realizing just how much Charles loves her and that she really could have learned to have been content all along. Emma’s life continues to be revealed even after death, which is when

Charles discovers all her affairs. “ She was corrupting him from beyond the grave” (pg 338) but despite this, Charles still deeply loves her.

Not long after Emma’s death, Homais “ finally managed to have the beggar locked up... his enemy was sentenced to spend the rest of his life in an asylum” (pg 339). In the end, both characters, who thrived only off of the attention of others, are destined to spend an eternity alone, Emma in death, and the beggar in an asylum. They mirrored each other for their entire lives and even after one of their lives ended, they still continued to reflect each other.