

# A woman as a resource: emma's marital status



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Published in 1856, the novel *Madame Bovary* is one of the first to explore the issue of women's disempowerment in a pointedly modern fashion. As a woman, the protagonist Emma experiences a number of obstacles that prevent her from reaching what she desires the most. Emma is viewed as a valuable asset, rather than as an individual; her prestige depends on her husband's social status, which makes her a mere "attachment" to another person. Thus, Emma doesn't possess the power she needs to reach her ambitions and learns that men cannot help her in obtaining what she wishes, too.

In the novel, Emma stands not as an independent person, but as a valuable commodity to be traded. After realizing Charles's intentions towards his daughter, old Rouault considers not Emma's feelings, but possible personal financial gain from a potential marriage, "When, therefore, he perceived that Charles's cheeks grew red if near his daughter, which meant that he would propose for her one of these days, he chewed the cud of the matter beforehand. He certainly thought him a little meager, and not quite the son-in-law he would have liked, but he was said to be well brought-up, economical, very learned, and no doubt would not make too many difficulties about the dowry". Emma is no more than a precious asset her father uses to better his financial situation, "Now, as old Rouault would soon be forced to sell twenty-two acres of "his property," as he owed a good deal to the mason, to the harness-maker, and as the shaft of the cider-press wanted renewing, "If he asks for her," he said to himself, "I'll give her to him". Therefore, this novel explores the idea of a woman, being treated as a profitable commodity, rather than as a person.

After marriage, Emma's social status becomes higher due to esteemed position her husband takes. This signifies Charles's superiority over his wife. During wedding, old Rouault condemns one of the traditional wedding games that, on his opinion, don't suit his future son-in-law status, "...a fishmonger, one of their cousins (who had even brought a pair of soles for his wedding present), began to squirt water from his mouth through the keyhole, when old Rouault came up just in time to stop him, and explain to him that the distinguished position of his son-in-law would not allow of such liberties." At the same time, Emma's desire to get married at midnight under the torch light is ignored, " Emma would, on the contrary, have preferred to have a midnight wedding with torches, but old Rouault could not understand such an idea". From the start of the couple's relationships, Charles is viewed as the leader of the household. Emma, on the other side, serves as an " attachment" to her husband, whose wishes are not quite as important.

Emma's submissive position motivates her to use the men as an indirect tool of achieving her goals. This method limits Emma's power and brings her only disappointment. At first, Leon meets Emma's romantic ideals. The two become close and Emma seems to have found the sophistication and refined taste in art she always searched for in her lover. As the time goes by, Emma notices Leon's weak character and limited intelligence, " She accused Leon of her baffled hopes, as if he had betrayed her; and she even longed for some catastrophe that would bring about their separation, since she had not the courage to make up her mind to it herself". Once again, at the minute of need, when Emma urges Leon to provide her with financial help, he makes up excuses to avoid doing so, " Go, try, try! I will love you so!" He went out,

and came back at the end of an hour, saying, with solemn face—" I have been to three people with no success". Charles's passivity prevents Emma from entering higher social circles and having elegant life she desires; she falls in love and seeks fulfillment of her wishes in Rodolphe, who loses interest in an " insane" lover and leaves her, " She sighed. " We would go and live elsewhere—somewhere!" " You are really mad!" he said laughing. " How could that be possible?" This way, as a woman, Emma doesn't have a power she needs to achieve her goals and fails to receive whatever she wants from the men around her.

In a progressive feminist novel *Madame Bovary*, Gustave Flaubert depicts the struggles of a representative woman who is viewed as a financial resource, rather than an individual. Emma is defined by her husband's social status, rather her personal achievements; she becomes disillusioned and bitter by her husband's and lovers' failures to fulfill her ambitions.