

Class conflict in the house of the spirits and madame bovary



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German philosopher Friedrich Engels once said “ All history has been a history of class struggles between dominated classes at various stages of social development”. In all societies, each social class has unique characteristics and distinctions, especially in lifestyles and privileges within their respective cultures; however, when differences between social classes become too great, problems begin to arise. Despite the different settings of Allende’s *The House of the Spirits* and Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, the distinctions between social classes in each novel produce the same problematic results for the characters; the problematic results demonstrate the negative effect of vast distinctions between social classes. Allende depicts the differences between the social classes in *The House of the Spirits* well through the interaction between the people of Tres Marías. Tres Marías contains two major social classes: the landowning class and the peasant class. The landowning class consists of the Trueba family, for Esteban Trueba is the patron of the hacienda, while the peasant class consists of the hacienda’s workers, including the García family. Allende presents the two classes as foils of each other. While Allende portrays the wealth of the landowning class through their fancy clothing, she depicts the peasant class as poor through their filthy rags. Relationship-wise, the landowning class has complete control over the peasant class; the Truebas have control over the happenings in the hacienda and the people who work there. While the peasants toil over the land, all of the rewards go towards the Truebas. The distinctions between the two social classes make them too different to live in harmony, causing major problems for the characters. Because of his title as the patron of Tres Marías, Esteban Trueba finds himself superior to the peasants and expects the rest of his family to feel the same. However, the

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other family members' involvement with the lower social class causes tensions within the family. To get around her father's prohibition, Blanca hides her relationship with Pedro Tercero. " Without anyone telling them, they realized that they could not act so freely in front of others... they began to hide when they wanted to play. They stopped walking hand in hand within sight of the adults, and they ignored each other so as not to attract attention" (Allende 147). Once Esteban Trueba discovers Blanca's secret, he becomes furious with her. Blanca's brothers Jaime and Nicolas also have interactions with the peasant class. Both feel sympathetic and charitable towards the workers of Tres Marias and other people less fortunate. Their involvement with the peasants causes tension between them and their father because Esteban Trueba does not want them to ruin the family reputation by becoming involved with people below them. Because of the great differences between the two classes, jealousy arises. Esteban García provides a perfect example; Esteban García envies the Truebas' luxurious life and believes that if Esteban Trueba realizes and accepts that the Trueba blood flows through his veins as well, he too can live that life. However, Esteban Trueba fails to acknowledge Esteban García as his illegitimate grandson, which results in a growing hatred within Esteban García. This hatred fuels Esteban García's desire for revenge. In Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, differences between social classes also cause problems for the characters. As a member of the bourgeoisie, protagonist Emma Bovary finds herself bored with the lifestyle of her social class and desires the elegant life of the aristocrats. Emma uses her affairs with Rodolphe and the new, cosmopolitan Leon in order to feel like she belongs in higher society. As the story continues, her desire for acceptance by the aristocrats becomes out of

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control and her endeavors fail to meet her expectations. Ironically, as Emma tries to force her way into a higher class, she ends up falling down a class. “The men whispered in one corner, probably discussing the expenses. There were a clerk, two medical students, and a shop assistant. What company for her! As for the women, Emma quickly realized from their voices that almost all of them were from the dregs of society. Then she grew frightened, pushed back her chair, and lowered her eyes” (Flaubert 273). Flaubert uses irony to show how Emma realizes that she has failed to live the social lifestyle she originally envisions. The difference and the isolation of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy cause Emma to concoct ideal visions of the lives of the aristocrats, which does not reflect reality. This results in Emma trying to realize her ideal expectations of the upper class, which eventually leads to her death. The House of the Spirits and Madame Bovary incorporate the dangers of the vast differences in social class in similar ways. For example, both authors have social class bring about tragedies in their novels’ plots. In The House of the Spirits, Esteban García personifies the struggle involving social class. As a child, Esteban García aspires to become a recognized part of the Trueba family and the landowning class. However, his illegitimate grandfather fails to acknowledge him as part of the family, spurring hate within Esteban García which intensifies as he becomes older. This hate fuels his desire for revenge on the Trueba family, which he releases upon Alba Trueba, who he keeps as a personal prisoner. In Madame Bovary, Emma’s desire to change social classes brings about her ultimate downfall. Desiring to enhance her social class, she buys extravagant gifts for her lovers. Her expenses, however, bring her deeper into debt. Under desperate measures to get herself out of debt, she takes her own life. Also, both Esteban García

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and Emma Bovary, the characters involved with the social class-caused tragedies, aspire to rise in social classes; in the end Esteban García succeeds while Emma does not. Allende and Flaubert use different distinctions between their cultures' social classes in order to create the conflict in their respective novels. In *The House of the Spirits*, Allende describes the peasant class as less classy than the landowning class. In fact, Allende describes them in a negative way. " They were a sorry lot. He saw various women of indecipherable age, their skin dry and cracked, some apparently pregnant, all of them barefoot and dressed in faded rags" (49). The landowning class, the Trueba family, owns a large estate, has a lot of power over the other class, and benefits from the peasants' work. In *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert uses the protagonist's influence on the reader to characterize the two classes. Emma finds her bourgeoisie life boring and mediocre. The reader perceives the aristocratic class as superior because Emma believes so. Also, the two novels have different settings. Allende's novel takes place in a Latin American country whereas Flaubert's novel takes place in France. The novels, which have similar conflicts that revolve around distinctions between social classes, occur in different settings, but still produce the same, tragic result. This proves that issues caused by the differences in social classes can happen in any culture. In their respective novels, Allende and Flaubert demonstrate that the differences between social classes can have negative impacts on the lives of the characters. The great differences cause Emma Bovary and Esteban García to strive to become part of the better class. As a result of their efforts, they cause tragedies within their respective novels' plots. The novels teach its readers that the increase in differences between social classes can have dire results. They also encourage the readers keep <https://assignbuster.com/class-conflict-in-the-house-of-the-spirits-and-madame-bovary/>

these results in mind while they look at our own culture in order to make sure that differences in social classes do not have the same or similar negative impacts.