

# Symbolism in "madame bovary" by gustave flaubert essay sample

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



In the novel *Madame Bovary*, Gustave Flaubert displays through the use of symbolism the moral corruption that eventually consumes Emma's being. Flaubert uses a combination of characters and objects to illustrate her impending downfall. At a young age, she harbors idealistic romantic illusions, longs for sophistication, sensuality, and passion, and descends into fits of extreme boredom and depression when her life fails to match the romantic novels she treasures.

Emma's bourgeois aspirations set her up to later be disappointed by Charles' unpolished boorish behavior. " But it was above all meal-times that were unbearable for her, in this small room on the ground-floor, with its smoking stove, its creaking door, the walls that sweated, the damp flags; all the bitterness in life seemed served up on platter, and with the smoke of the boiled beef there rose from her secret soul whiffs of sickliness. Charles was a slow eater...". The quote employs description to express the distain Emma feels toward the Bovary home.

" She now let everything in her household take care of itself... she who was formally so careful, so dainty, now passed whole days without dressing, wore grey cotton stockings, and burnt tallow candles. She kept saying they must be economical since they were not rich..." At this point in the novel Emma appears to be fed up with her life. She is pretending to be happy but her actions around the house proves different. She used to tidy up and take pride in her personal up keep. Emma's health is failing her but only because it is self inflicted. She is causing herself to be miserable. As a result Charles makes the decision to move to Yonville in hopes of improving Emma's

health. As she prepares to move she stumbles across her wedding bouquet which she burns as a gesture of defiance against her unhappy marriage. The dried bouquet stands for disappointed hopes, and for the new promise of a wedding day turned sour and old. In another sense, Emma's burning of her bouquet foreshadows the way her desires will consume her youth and, eventually, her life.

A image of physical decay, the blind beggar who follows the carriage in which Emma rides to meet Leon symbolizes Emma's moral corruption. He sings songs about " birds and sunshine and green leaves" in a voice " like an inarticulate lament of some vague despair." This coupling of innocence with disease relates to the combination of beauty and corruption that Emma herself has become. While her words, appearance, and fantasies are those of an innocent and beautiful wife, her spirit becomes foul and corrupt as she indulges herself in adulterous temptations and the deceptions necessary to maintain her illicit affairs. Later, when Emma dies, the blind man gets to the end of his song about a young girl dreaming. We then discover that what we thought was a song about an innocent woman is actually a vulgar, sexual song. This progression from innocence to sexual degradation mirrors the path of Emma's life.