

The tragedy of madame bovary assignment

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The Tragedy of Madame Bovary Madame Bovary is both a product of and a commentary on life in 19th century France. Gustav Flaubert's wrote the novel in a realistic style, which was then the major movement in art and literature. This technique, which allowed him to honestly portray the nature of provincial life, was the perfect medium to showcase his opinion of the bourgeoisie and their preoccupations. He used mostly his main character, Emma Bovary, to show that the corrupt values of the middle class could only lead to tragedy and ruin.

At the beginning of the story, Emma is a young, educated country girl with an idealistic heart and a passion for reading. She is a romantic soul, and assumes the world will live up to the heights she has witnessed in her novels. Emma believes that great happiness is the normal state of most people and throughout the novel cannot reconcile her own life with her expectation. After her marriage to Charles, she slowly becomes more and more dissatisfied with her situation. " Before she had married she though she was in love. But the happiness that should have resulted from this love had not come; she must have deceived herself, she thought. (Flaubert 33) Emma repeatedly feels stifled by the predictability of her life. Initially she blames her discontent on living in Tostes, and convinces Charles to sell his house and move their family to Yonville. She insists, even though the move causes a setback in Charles' career, who laments that he would leave Tostes just " when he was beginning to take root. " (Flauber 64). When this change ultimately also disappoints Emma, as her life doesn't change in any meaningful way, she chases excitement in her two love affairs and through her materialistic purchases.

Emma fails to realize that the romantic ideals she has read about are unattainable, or at least unsustainable, in the real world. She craves the fantasy, the perfect happy ending, and loses herself in vague daydreams and wishes. She spends her energy seeking extremes in emotion. When Emma finds no clear way to contentment and happiness, she flees her boredom by basking in her exaggerated misery. “ And then the fleshy appetites, desire for money, and the melancholy grip of passion combined into one agony. Instead of turning her thoughts from it, she dwelled on it more and more, wallowing in the pain and reaching out for it at all times. (Flaubert 102)

Emma feels entitled to much more than her station in life, and mediocre husband, is able to provide. Yet she makes no concrete efforts to foster social connections or earn any additional income for her family, unlike the pleasant, thrifty, and enterprising Mrs. Homais, who is in many ways Emma’s foil. Emma gives weight only to superficial impressions, is mostly contemptuous of the other women of Yonville, and even brings herself to reject the small pleasures in life precisely because they are only small pleasures. Throughout the story Emma is mostly a liability to the people that care about her.

She concerns herself with Charles only because he reflects on her reputation, and feels no guilt over betraying him through her affairs or her secret spending. She fires her first housekeeper in a fit of temper, without troubling herself over the poor woman’s prospects. Even her own daughter, Berthe, is neglected and ignored. Unless Emma happens to indulge a short lived whim to play out a maternal fantasy, her daughter is relegated to the care of the maid. Emma’s false values become disruptive to her life. Her romantic

outlook causes her to look for happiness in the beauty of physical possessions and melodramatic emotions.

She focuses only on her feelings of boredom and ennui, which allow her to justify her indulgences, which don't come cheap. In her two affairs, Emma falls in love with the ecstasy of passion, and has no care for her own reputation or her family's circumstances. She is reckless in escaping to meet her lovers and showers them with luxurious gifts that she cannot truly afford. Her extravagance even dwarfs that of her wealthy lover, Rodolphe, who never comes close to reciprocating her generosity. In the end, it is Emma's heedless and repeated burrowing of funds that brings her house of cards crashing down around her.

When the moneylender swoops in for the kill, and his hefty profit, she is taken by surprise. When no help can be found from either of her former lovers, Emma doesn't choose the honorable route. Instead of confessing and reconciling with her husband, she seeks the desperate escape of the tragic heroine, and poison's herself with arsenic. Her demise starts the chain of events that also lead Charles into death and condemns their daughter to make a living in a cotton mill. Emma's reverence and insatiable lust for excitement and luxury ultimately leads her into an excruciating suicide and her family into ruin.

This unhappy conclusion is the end and the moral of the tale we know as Madame Bovary. Flaubert almost starts his story where the traditional tale leaves off, when the heroine is married and lives happily ever after. Of course, this is far from what happens to poor Emma. Instead, she and her

neighbors become a commentary of the life and shortcomings of the 19th century bourgeoisie. Madame Bovary reflects the Realist movement in French art and literature at the time. It was in some ways a backlash to the romantic and idealistic views that predated it.

In realism, the author or artist tried to portray life, particularly peasant life, as it really was. This included painting the gritty, dirty, and uncomfortable aspects of everyday existence on canvas, and representing fictional life with as much detail and honesty as possible. This style is evident throughout the book. Realist writing seeks to portray reality without stylizing, romanticizing, or idealizing it. Flaubert goes to great lengths to accomplish this. He often describes even trivial aspects of Emma's surroundings, though this also helps to illustrate her preoccupation with the physical reality and constraints of her life.

This level of detail allows the reader to get a clear sense of the setting, in its imperfect splendor. The conversations in the novel are often everyday exchanges, with the character's feelings and perceptions not shared in a meaningful way. Even Emma's affairs are portrayed in a straightforward manner, without condemning her outright for immoral behavior. Flaubert tries to show the full experience of his characters' lives, from their fleeting happiness to the more banal routines. It is this realistic style that gives us a glimpse of what middle class life meant in 19th century France.

The novel shows that the professional class at this time was starting to be able to afford some luxuries, such as buying books and magazines, attending the opera, and pursuing leisure. Mr. Homais, and his opinion on the clergy,

give some impression of the contemporary opinion of the church and religion. Also, at the pinnacle of Emma's social experience, when she is able to attend the ball at Vaubyessard, we see that some successful individuals could be invited to aristocratic events, though they were clearly still outsiders. The fact that the bourgeoisie was gaining power at this time did not sit well with everyone, however.

In *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert doesn't fail to illustrate his contempt of the bourgeoisie and their culture. He shows Emma running from one romantic delusion to another, committing adultery without thought and squandering away the family's money on extravagant trivialities. Charles, the stories main good guy, is an idiot; and does not even notice the slightest thing about his wife's escapades until the irrefutable proof is in his hands. The pharmacist, Homais, is a two-faced liar; he befriends Charles only to sabotage him, and the merchant, Lheureux, is a scruple less moneylender who takes full advantage of both Emma and Charles.

All the major players in this story are deeply flawed to showcase the deplorability of their society. The novel thus succeeds in what its author intended. Through its realistic style and somewhat archetypal story, the novel illuminates the banality and selfishness found in middle class society of his time. Flaubert proves to the reader that nothing good can come from chasing in the wrong values. Works Cited Byatt, AS. "Scenes of a Provincial Life."?? The Guardian. Guardian News and Media Limited, 2002. Web. 23 Nov. 2011. . Cummings, Michael J. "Madame Bovary."?? Cummings Study Guides. Michael J. Cummings, 2004. Web. 23 Nov. 2011. Fajardo-Acosta, Dr. Fidel. "Madame Bovary."?? Fajardo-Acosta. com. Fidel Fajardo-Acosta, <https://assignbuster.com/the-tragedy-of-madame-bovary-assignment/>

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