

Madame bovary by gustave flaubert

Literature



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Madame Bovary Gustave Flaubert Interpret how Flaubert describes the plight of women during that time through the words and actions of Emma Bovary. Madame Bovary written in 1857 and is considered to be one of the most famous works by Gustave Flaubert. It reflects esthetic principles of the author marked by deep socio-philosophical meaning. The dramatic node of the novel is the conflict of a dream with reality in the life of the main hero Emma Bovary. Being a realist and naturalist, Flaubert described the situation in his contemporary society in general referring to the heroes of the novel and realistically described the position of women in French society of the nineteenth century.

Emma was a daughter of a farmer and was raised in the cloister. This type of education which assumed that she spent most of the time in her own imaginary world had made a great impact on her future destiny. Being raised on the romantic novels and idealist views she appeared unable to perceive reality adequately. She was a nice young lady, loved and admired by her dad, but inside of her soul she felt personal solitude. Emma married Charles Bovary, a country physician who cured her Dad after an accident. Her decision was motivated more by the desire to leave father's dirty farm than by love to Charles. But she doesn't find satisfaction in family life as well, as Charles is a usual country physician, probably with no future. He is a common man, he loves Emma, but nevertheless Emma doesn't find anything romantic, original and personal in him. He was a good husband, but a dull and predictable person.

Poverty, none-acceptance by higher society and philistinism of surrounding oppressed Emma and in a while turned into depression:

" But it was above all at mealtimes that she could bear it no longer, in that

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little room on the ground floor, with the smoking stove, the creaking door, the oozing walls, the damp floor-tiles; all the bitterness of life seemed to be served to her on her plate, and, with the steam from the boiled beef, there rose from the depths of her soul other exhalations as it were of disgust.

Charles was a slow eater; she would nibble a few hazel-nuts, or else, leaning on her elbow, would amuse herself making marks on the oilcloth with the point of her table-knife"(from Madame Bovary in Norton Anthology)

Broken and confused, Emma betrays her husband, developing a relationship with the young assistant of the lawyer Leon Dupuis. Leon impressed Emma by his originality and non-ordinary way of thinking and appearance. In general, simply because he was different from the rest of society in provincial small town.

Leon left the town but nevertheless Emma didn't return to her husband as she met a wealthy landowner Rodolphe Boulanger, local Don Juan who charmed Emma by his ability to please and interest young women. Emma fell in love with Rodolphe, but for him she was not more than a simple affair and he didn't want her to destroy her family as he even didn't love her. In pursuit of personal happiness, Emma betrayed her family duties, ruining her family, her husband's prosperity and leaving her baby daughter Bertha.

But as a result she was left by both of her lovers Rodolphe and Leon, as she discovered their real nature and their character. In many ways they were similar to the rest of philistine, mean and selfish society, but they just could hide their real face when they had a need in that. Being depressed, humiliated Emma decides to commit suicide and poisons herself.

On the example of the personal tragedy of Madame Bovary Flaubert showed the position and destiny of the majority of French women in the nineteenth

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century. The main reason of the personal tragedy and social conflict was inability and absence of desire in society to understand and accept an individual as he is. Philistinism, hypocrisy of narrow-minded surrounding is opposed by rich inner world of the main heroine, who was raised on romantic novels. Michael Dirda in article Madame Bovary for Washington Post writes: " Describing the houses in Yonville, we learn that " here and there the plastered walls, crossed diagonally by black beams, support a straggly pear tree, and at the doors of the houses are miniature swinging gates, to keep out the baby chicks that cluster round the step to peck at crumbs of brown bread soaked in cider"

In many aspects it's a conflict of a woman who has her natural right to be happy, to love and to be beloved and society which doesn't accept these principles and lives in a traditional way seeing woman as a house-wife who must sacrifice herself to family.

Flaubert had showed the personal difficulties of a very complex personality, with high spiritual and social demands in the society which was isolated and had no sense in its routine life. The main pathos of the novel is the fall of romantic hero, who as a result had changed his romantic dream to pseudo-romantic one which in reality turns to be mean and cruel. Flaubert delivers the personal crisis of Emma and the same time describes immorality of her vicious behavior, which appeared to be simply physical desires and selfishness.

Emma's solitude and Emma's destiny was typical for provincial French and in general any European woman of the nineteenth century. As it was the century of changing life standards, changing stereotypes and ideologies it is no wonder that naive provincial lady raised in the manner of romanticism was

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not ready for harsh realities of mercantile world, where material goods had much higher value than spiritual values and happiness. It was a common practice to submit to the demands of society, dedicate the rest of the life to husband and children leaving no time for personal needs. Flaubert brilliantly describes the essence of French family morals and view in the following passage, when Emma thought that she would have a son, not a daughter: " She hoped for a son; he would be strong and dark; she would call him George; and this idea of having a male child was like an expected revenge for all her impotence in the past. A man, at least, is free; he can explore all passions and all countries, overcome obstacles, taste of the most distant pleasures. But a woman is always hampered. Being inert as well as pliable, she has against her the weakness of the flesh and the inequity of the law. Like the veil held to her hat by a ribbon, her will flutters in every breeze; she is always drawn by some desire, restrained by some rule of conduct." "(from Madame Bovary in Norton Anthology)

Emma is different from those who decided to submit, but her protest and her revolt fails as she sees no support in the face of her lovers, who do not want to lose their social status and respect because of personal issues: " Emma nonetheless tries, and tries hard, to live her dreams and in this sense is hardly different from, say, Fitzgerald's Gatsby. Or any of the rest of us. Don't we all ache with unabashed hopes, unassuaged desires For Emma, the ball at La Vaubyessard shines as a golden interlude in her drab life, a glimpse of paradise. Nonetheless, " little by little, in her memory, the faces all blurred together; she forgot the tunes of the quadrilles; no longer could she so clearly picture the liveries and the rooms; some details disappeared, but the yearning remained."(from Dirda, Michael Madame Bovary)

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Nevertheless feeling sympathy to Emma at the beginning of the story we definitely judge her at the end. She has a right to be happy, but no one gave her the right to violate the laws of family life: she is not only unfaithful and simply a bad wife, but a bad mother. She doesn't care about her child and is devoted only to her physical desires and to her illusion, which she invented only to escape from reality. In fact she appears to be lying and silly woman who is far away from her romantic ideal. "Madame Bovary" impresses by realism and naturalism of the events described and by the social direction of the plot. It's often compared to Leo Tolstoy's novel Anna Karenina as both novels touch nearly the same themes and authors stand nearly on the same positions in the questions about society, morality and family issues.

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