

MADAME BOVARY

by Gustave Flaubert



THE AUTHOR

Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) was born in Rouen, France, the son of a wealthy doctor. His first novel, *Madame Bovary* (1857), was by far his most successful. It allowed him to rise to the heights of the Paris intelligentsia and enjoy both wealth (though he squandered most of it) and popular acclaim. Despite these successes, however, Flaubert's life was not a happy one. In his teens he became infatuated with a married woman ten years older than himself, and the disillusionment that resulted from the failed love affair affected the rest of his life. In 1846 he took a mistress, poet Louise Colet, though he rarely saw her and carried on the affair largely through correspondence. After the affair ended in 1855, he contented himself with frequenting prostitutes. Critics and the public were shocked by the open portrayal of adultery in his first novel, and the scandal in the closely-censored artistic environment of Napoleon III led to Flaubert and his publisher being put on trial for an attack against public morals. Though he was acquitted, he never got over his bitterness toward the middle-class morality of the bourgeois leaders of France. Flaubert was reclusive and obsessive in his approach to his craft - *Madame Bovary*, for example, required five years of uninterrupted labor to complete. A later novel, *The Temptation of Saint Antony* (1874), was thought to have influenced Freud. Throughout his life he struggled with pessimism, depression, and what may have been epilepsy. He died of a cerebral hemorrhage at the age of fifty-eight.

Madame Bovary was based on an actual incident in which a doctor's wife engaged in several affairs, ruined the family's finances, then committed suicide. It was a new kind of novel in its day, dealing with matters of everyday life in the French middle class. The social criticism and ironic tone of the book became models for many of the writers who followed. The character of Emma itself became a prototype of the dissatisfied woman who is imprisoned by society's standards and seeks fulfillment through love affairs, most notably in American writer Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, published about forty years later. Though Flaubert considered himself to be a romantic at heart, he disliked romanticism in literature, as may be seen in the extent to which romance novels play a role in destroying Emma Bovary's character and ruining her life. He also served as one of the earlier exemplars of the realistic school of novelists.

PLOT SUMMARY

The story begins with the arrival of Charles Bovary, age fifteen, at a boarding school in Rouen. He is the offspring of a lazy father who alternately ignores him and tries to toughen him up and a doting mother who spoils him. After a period of being mocked by the other students, he settles into a routine of mediocrity. After completing tenth grade his mother sends him off to medical school, where he at first works hard but understands nothing. He then begins to enjoy the pleasures of freedom, spending his time playing dominoes and ignoring his studies. He fails the examination, but his mother brings him home and reassures him that his failure was because of the unfairness of the examiners. He crams and memorizes and passes the exam on his second try. His mother then arranges for him to set up a medical practice in the town of Tostes, where the only doctor is elderly and on the verge of death or retirement. There Charles takes a wife, a forty-five-year-old widow named Heloise Dubuc, who brings some money to the marriage but makes Charles miserable by dominating him completely. Less than a year later Charles is called in the middle of the night to treat a wealthy farmer who has broken his leg. This farmer, Monsieur Rouault, has a lovely young daughter named Emma who keeps house for him. Attracted to Emma, Charles makes frequent visits to check on her father's condition. Heloise becomes suspicious and forbids him to visit the farm again. Shortly thereafter, the custodian of Heloise's money runs off with it and Charles discovers she has little more than her debts left to her. His parents visit and initiate a major row. This is too much for Heloise to handle, and she collapses and dies days later.

Charles misses his wife but enjoys his freedom more. One day Monsieur Rouault comes to pay his bill, commiserates with Charles, and invites him to visit as often as he likes. Charles takes advantage of the opportunity and in the process comes to know Emma much better. The old farmer, seeing what is going on, is prepared when Charles asks for his daughter's hand in marriage and readily agrees, as does Emma. They spend the remainder of his mourning period planning the wedding. The wedding goes well despite rowdiness among some of the guests, and Charles then takes his new bride home to Tostes. Before long the disparity between the two becomes evident. Charles loves his young wife to distraction, but she does not love him, and spends her time thinking of ways to make improvements in the house and grounds. In her early years she had become enamored of the romances of literature and the sights, sounds and smells of the environment of the convent where she was educated. All of these gave her an unrealistic view of life and love and made her disillusionment with Charles and his boring existence almost inevitable. As she becomes increasingly disenchanted with her marriage, she begins to think of how things might have been - they might have taken a honeymoon to some romantic spot; she might have married someone clever and sophisticated (surely all her schoolmates must have done so!); perhaps she should not have married at all. Even the gift of a young greyhound does not soothe her spirit or assuage her discontent.

Then one day she and Charles receive an invitation to dine at the home of the Marquis d'Andervilliers, a former cabinet minister with growing political ambitions whose abscess had been healed by Charles' ministrations. Emma marvels at all she sees and loves the dinner, the ball that follows, and the entire atmosphere, while Charles is bored to death. The experience not only increases her longing for a life different from her own, but also brings her into contact with a young viscount with whom she dances at the ball, and who leaves his cigar case in their carriage. When she gets home she is in a foul mood, picks a fight with her maid Nastasie, and fires the girl

on the spot. In the days that follow she increasingly occupies herself with daydreaming about the ideal life of her imagination. She spends hours fantasizing about the viscount's cigar case and the man himself, reading popular magazines about Paris and its fashions, and wishing she were there rather than in her little provincial town. She hires a new maid, Felicite, a fourteen-year-old orphan, whom she tries to make into a sophisticated lady's maid. She spends more and more money for luxuries and tries to add touches of elegance to her home, but becomes increasingly frustrated at Charles' bourgeois ways and lack of ambition. The utter boredom of her life becomes stifling. She begins to neglect her household and her appearance, which shocks her mother-in-law. When her father comes to visit for a few days, she can hardly tolerate his talk of crops, livestock, and poultry and is relieved when he finally leaves. She gets to the point where she doesn't care what anyone thinks of her; she expresses radical and immoral opinions in public conversation and openly despises all around her. She also neglects her health, which gets worse and worse. Charles, concerned for his wife, finally decides that a change of scenery is needed. He reluctantly leaves his well-established practice in Tostes and moves to Yonville-l'Abbaye. By the time of the move, Emma is expecting a child.

Yonville turns out to be another boring small town much like Tostes. On the way to her new home, Emma's dog runs away. When they arrive in Yonville, they eat dinner at the only inn in town, where Monsieur Homais, the local pharmacist, dominates the conversation with Charles, telling him all about his scientific expertise and the ignorance of the local people, while Leon Dupuis and Emma talk all about Paris, which neither has ever seen, and the boring nature of small-town life. Charles and Emma then go to their new house. In their new home, money becomes a problem; Charles had depleted the dowry he received over the first two years of the marriage by buying Emma all the little luxuries she wanted, and in Yonville he has few patients as yet. Homais treats Charles and Emma kindly, hoping to curry their favor and gain their support should the government ever decide to prosecute him for practicing medicine without a license. Charles spends much of his time hanging around the house, but is delighted with the idea of becoming a father. Emma, however, sees the child as simply something else to tie her down, and secretly hopes for a boy because at least a boy will grow up to be his own person, while a girl would have no such hope. Of course, she has a little girl. After much debate on the subject, she decides to name the child Berthe. Charles and Emma throw a party, but much of it is occupied with drinking and arguing. Emma sends the baby off to a local peasant to nurse as soon as possible, visiting her only occasionally; when she does visit, the wet nurse tries to wheedle more money out of her, but Emma seems to be little concerned at the squalor in which her daughter is being raised. One day when she goes to visit the child she invites Leon to accompany her. They speak of their common interests, and by the end of the day Leon is beginning to turn his thoughts toward the pretty young newcomer, despite the fact that he considers her unattainable. Before the sun sets, the town gossips have spread the word that Madame Bovary is "compromising herself" by walking out alone with Leon.

As life settles into a routine, Charles and Emma spend a great deal of time with Homais and Leon. The former eats with them every evening, while the latter sees them on Sunday afternoons at the home of the pharmacist. Soon Leon and Emma are spending time in private conversation every Sunday and being exchanging small gifts and favors. The town gossips conclude that she must have become his mistress, but he lacks the courage to express his affection to her, while she doesn't even think about her feelings for him, since she believes that love must come upon one suddenly, like a thunderstorm. Charles, meanwhile, sees no harm in their

relationship. One day while visiting a spinning mill Emma again spends a lot of time with Leon, and upon returning home suddenly realizes that he is in love with her and she with him. She is ashamed of her illicit love and tries to do everything she can to be the perfect wife and mother. She becomes attentive to Charles, brings Berthe home from the wet nurse, and is even pleasant to the neighbors. In her conversations with Leon she remains aloof and spends much of her time praising her husband. Inside, though, her love is growing stronger, as is her hatred for Charles, whom she irrationally blames for all her unhappiness and dissatisfaction. Leon, meanwhile, becomes convinced that his love for Emma is a hopeless endeavor.

Emma's feelings weigh on her increasingly until one day she on a whim decides to cross the street to the church to seek spiritual help from the priest. He, however, is so busy herding a group of boys together for catechism class that he pays no attention to her and never gives her a chance to tell him what her problem is. She then goes home and harshly pushes Berthe away from her every time she tries to get near her; the third time the child falls and is injured, though not seriously. Leon, meanwhile, tries to express his malaise to Homais, but gets no sympathy from him. Finally he decides that the only thing to do is seek a change of scenery - he determines to move to Paris to complete his studies in the law. All his friends encourage him in the move, and his parting with Emma is one in which neither comes close to revealing the feelings that they hide inside. After Leon leaves for Paris, Charles and Homais discuss the dangers and pleasures of the big city while Emma sits silently and suffers at every word they speak. In the days that follow, everything Emma sees reminds her of Leon and she begins to idealize her memory of him while falling deeper into despair. She refuses all medical treatment from Charles, and he ignores his mother's advice that she needs some work to do instead of sitting around all day reading novels that fill her head with radical and irreligious ideas. She spends long hours looking out her window watching the foolish peasants, but one day a new person walks past - a young aristocrat newly arrived in the neighborhood named Rodolphe Boulanger. Boulanger brings his servant to Charles to be bled; in the process both the peasant and Justin, the apothecary's assistant, faint, and Emma is called upon to assist the proceeding. As he returns home, Boulanger muses about Emma's beauty and considers how he might add her to his long list of sexual conquests. He decides that the coming agricultural fair should provide the ideal opportunity.

The day of the fair arrives and Rodolphe escorts Emma to the celebration. They walk around and watch the livestock being judged, then go up to the second floor of the town hall to have a better vantage point to hear the speech of the prefect's councilor. While he drones on with his boring political dissertation, Rodolphe speaks to Emma of his wasted life, his broad experiences, and the lack of satisfaction they have given him, and suggests that each person, some day, will find that soul-mate to whom he can truly reveal his heart. As the speeches drone on and the awards are handed out, he continues to seduce Emma with his words and they tenderly hold hands. He then takes her home, and after the community dinner and a miserable fireworks display (the rockets had been stored in the basement and had gotten damp), the crowd disperses. Rodolphe considers his day to have been a very successful one indeed, and walks home thinking of the many nights of lovemaking that lie ahead of him. He stays away for six weeks, but this is a strategic move on his part to increase her love for him. One day he comes to her house, tells her openly of his love, and suggests she give him a tour of the place. At that point, however, Charles enters, spoiling his plan, and Rodolphe recovers quickly, expressing concern about Emma's health - a concern that Charles shares. Rodolphe proposes horseback riding as a good antidote; Charles enthusiastically concurs, but Emma refuses. Later, Charles talks Emma into

accepting Rodolphe's offer and she finally gives in. The next day they go riding together. Rodolphe tries to seduce her, and after several halting attempts to resist his advances, she succumbs. When she returns home Emma is thrilled - she now has a lover and all of her dreams will come true. In the days that follow, they often ride together with the same result; then she begins to slip out and go to Rodolphe's chateau early in the morning after Charles leaves for his rounds.

This goes on for a while, but then Rodolphe suggests that she not come quite so often because she is compromising herself. Clearly, he is tiring of his conquest while Emma is taking the relationship increasingly seriously. They begin to meet in the garden behind Emma's house after Charles has gone to sleep at night, with Emma becoming increasingly attentive and Rodolphe increasingly careless. Gradually Emma examines her own feelings and realizes that, while she loves their lovemaking, she is afraid of Rodolphe himself, and she wonders whether she should regret ever having succumbed to his seduction or whether she should redouble her efforts to love him. One day a letter from her father arrives with the annual gift of a turkey, and Emma begins to think of the days of her childhood; for the first time in many years, she looks back at them with joy. When she sees Berthe playing with the maid, she lavishes kisses on her, much to the maid's surprise, and the next time she sees Rodolphe, she is cold and distant. He warns her that she cannot turn back now, but she determines to repent of her affair and even try to love Charles again, though she doubts that such a thing is possible.

Homais then reads an article about a possible surgical cure for club foot and proposes to Charles that he try it; the two fantasize about Yonville becoming the surgical center of France for such operations and both becoming rich and famous. For Emma, this is a hope to which she can cling - her husband is finally going to make something of himself! Half the town convinces the stableboy, who has a club foot, to submit to the operation. He reluctantly agrees, and Charles severs the Achilles tendon and straightens the foot, then encases it in a heavy box to allow it to heal in the right position. Within days, Hippolyte is in agony as the foot swells inside the box; in a few days more it turns gangrenous. Finally Homais summons a doctor from Neufchatel, who takes one look at the leg and prescribes amputation. As the boy's screams reverberate around the village, any love that remains in Emma for her husband withers and dies; he has failed once again. She repents of her repentance, screams at Charles, refuses to let him touch her, and that night resumes her affair with Rodolphe. As the days pass Emma becomes increasingly reckless, and few in the town are now unaware of what is going on - except Charles, of course. The two meet at her house in the middle of the day, walk out in public, she buys him expensive presents, and in the process runs up a large debt, which she pays by using funds from her husband's medical practice. Gradually, this begins to affect people around her - her maid is constantly kept busy cleaning her clothing (Justin cleans her shoes, though Felicite is becoming increasingly impatient with his attentions), the shopkeeper seeks to use his knowledge of what is going on to his own advantage (though Emma foils his attempts by paying what she owes him), and Emma has a huge fight with her mother-in-law. She had been begging Rodolphe for a long time to take her away from all this, and after the fight with Charles's mother, her tears bring him to the point where he finally agrees to run away with her to Italy. They begin to make plans - she secretly purchases a cloak and a trunk while he arranges for passports and a coach. She has told him that she intends to take Berthe with her, but she gives little thought to her child. Rodolphe, meanwhile, can't imagine why any mistress would take such a small matter as a love affair so seriously and has no intention of actually going through with it; two nights before the planned departure they discuss

its details, but after leaving her he intends never to see her again. Charles, meanwhile, is blissfully ignorant, thinking to himself how lucky he is to have such a beautiful wife and daughter and thinking of the joys that await them in future years.

Rodolphe goes home and cynically writes a letter ending the relationship and sends it to Emma in the bottom of a basket of apricots. When she receives the fruit she senses that something is wrong, tears open the letter and runs screaming from the room. She pushes her way past Charles and goes to the attic, where she reads the entire letter and contemplates throwing herself out the window. Charles then calls her for dinner, but she is unable to eat anything. When she catches a glimpse of Rodolphe going down the street in his carriage she faints. After Homais brings vinegar to revive her, she is put to bed and faints again. For the next forty-three days she is comatose with brain fever; Charles cares for her personally and totally ignores his patients. After regaining consciousness and becoming strong enough to walk in the garden on Charles's arm, she sees the site of her rendezvous with Rodolphe and passes out again, this time with alarming symptoms that make Charles believe she has cancer. Meanwhile, he has not been treating patients and has no income. The shopkeeper takes advantage of Charles's desperate situation, sending to the house everything Emma had secretly ordered and refusing to take any of it back, then lending Charles a thousand francs (with interest, of course), hoping to make a financial killing. Emma's condition slowly improves and she seeks solace in religion. The priest visits her daily, she asks to receive Holy Communion, during which she sees a vision of God in heaven, and she begins caring for the poor and engaging in charities of various sorts. The priest tries to encourage her progress by obtaining books for her, but these only disillusion her and drive her away from the religion she had been seeking.

One day after Homais has a debate with the priest in which he champions skepticism, he suggests to Charles that what Emma needs is a trip to the opera. The priest objects, but Charles is determined to do this for his wife. They make preparations and travel to Rouen. Emma breathes in the atmosphere of the theater and becomes absorbed in the romance of the music. At one point she even fantasizes about what her life would be like if she were married to the leading tenor, in reality a notorious philanderer. Charles, meanwhile, is having trouble following the story and keeps distracting her with questions. During intermission Charles goes to get Emma a drink and runs into Leon Dupuis, who is now studying law in Rouen. Leon comes back to the box and Emma immediately decides she is bored with the opera and wants to go out for something to eat. Leon joins them while Charles talks about his disappointment at missing the end of the opera, which he had been beginning to enjoy. Leon praises the ending and Charles decides that, even though he must get back to Yonville to tend to his practice, Emma should stay another day and see the opera again with Leon. Both Emma and Leon think this is a wonderful idea.

When Leon and Emma meet the next day, both begin by talking about how boring and meaningless their lives are. They then tell each other lies about a persistent affection for one another; Emma says nothing about her affair with Rodolphe and Leon says nothing about his habit of frequenting the company of loose women. As their desire for one another grows, Emma pushes him away and tells him to meet her in the local cathedral later in the day. After a terribly boring tour of the facility, Leon finally loses patience, pulls Emma outside, and calls a cab. He then has the cab drive around aimlessly for hours, during which time they begin their affair in the back seat. When Emma arrives home she is told to go to the pharmacy. There she finds Homais in high dudgeon because, when they needed a pan for making jam, he had gone into the laboratory and taken one used for drug preparation - one that had been placed right next to the arsenic on the

shelf. Once he calms down Homais tells Emma that her father-in-law has died. She goes home and tries to commiserate with Charles, but can work up no sympathy for him. Soon Lheureux, the shopkeeper, arrives to try to sell Emma cloth for a mourning dress. He pulls her aside and tries to convince her to gain her husband's power of attorney so she can conduct his financial affairs. She finally agrees and easily convinces Charles to consent. She then proposes that they seek some legal path to escape their financial woes, and recommends that Leon be consulted for that purpose. She then generously consents to take the tip to Rouen to see him and stays for three days. Emma and Leon have a delightful three days; the only negative moment comes when a boatman with whom they are riding mentions a ladies' man he had carried the day before whom Emma immediately recognizes as Rodolphe. She then goes home, and Leon still has no idea why she should want a power of attorney for her husband.

For a while Emma and Leon are unable to see one another, and finally Leon becomes frustrated and goes to Yonville to visit her. Charles, of course, suspects nothing. When they can capture a few stolen moments together, Emma promises to find some way for the two of them to be alone once a week. She then begins dropping hints about how much her musical skills have deteriorated. Charles finally agrees that she should have lessons, for which she goes to Rouen weekly. Though she really spends the time with Leon, her piano skills show marked improvement. Every Thursday they spend the day in a hotel room, but soon problems begin to arise. Charles runs into the woman from whom she is supposed to be taking lessons, and the woman does not recognize her name. Emma lies and Charles believes her, but she becomes increasingly wrapped up in a fabric of lies. She is also running the family deeper and deeper in debt. Lheureux obligingly writes out larger and larger notes, hoping to make a fortune from Emma's extravagance; at one point he even convinces her to sell some property that Charles had inherited without his knowledge. Charles's mother criticizes Emma's spendthrift ways and demands that Charles rescind the power of attorney, but Charles gallantly defends his wife without knowing the true extent of her expenditures. Meanwhile, Emma sneaks off to Rouen more and more often and Leon's employer begins to complain about his frequent absences and neglect of his duties.

One day Homais decides to take a break from the apothecary shop and visit Leon in Rouen. He chooses a Thursday, and in the process occupies Leon's time for the entire day so he cannot spend it with Emma. She is furious, and from then on their love grows colder and more remote. Leon's friends urge him to break off the relationship, and he is on the verge of doing so. At this point Emma is drawn by little more than sex, and begins fantasizing about the perfect man who must be out there in the world *somewhere*. Meanwhile, her debts continue to mount. One day she returns to find that Lheureux has called in her debts and that the authorities are demanding payment of eight thousand francs within twenty-four hours in order to avoid official legal consequences. Emma has nothing more to sell and no way of obtaining the money. She begs Lheureux to be patient, but he shrugs her off and says the time has come for him to reap his profits. The next day the bailiff comes to assess the value of everything in the house. She continues to hide the truth from Charles, but is desperate to find a source of money. She goes to Rouen, tries to borrow money from bankers there and is laughed out of their houses of business, then tries to get Leon to obtain money for her somehow. He promises to try, but leaves and never returns. Back home she tries to get help from Guillaumin the notary, Leon's former employer. He acts sympathetic but tries to get her to agree to sex in exchange for his help. She rejects him and goes hopelessly to the home of Berthe's wet nurse, dreading the inevitable moment when

Charles finds out the truth - that she has ruined them financially. Then she has one final desperate thought - Rodolphe is rich! Perhaps he will help her! She is therefore prepared to prostitute herself in order to get the money she needs.

Rodolphe receives her kindly and they begin to speak of their love, but when she asks him for money and lies about the reasons it is needed, he suddenly grows cold and refuses her. She leaves with her last hope dashed and stumbles homeward toward the apothecary shop. She convinces Justin to let her into the laboratory and promptly finds the arsenic and scoops several handfuls into her mouth. When she arrives home Charles is frantic, both because of her unexplained absence and because he has found out about the impending sale of all their property. She tells him to ask her no questions and goes to bed. The symptoms of arsenic poisoning soon overtake her - the unquenchable thirst, the tremors, the vomiting. Homais does what he can, doctors from Rouen are quickly summoned but can do nothing, and finally the priest arrives to administer the last rites. Filled with agony, Emma hears a blind beggar in the street singing a song about girls who are seduced by love, sits up and screams at the blind man's words, and then dies.

Charles is overwhelmed by grief and at first refuses to consider funeral arrangements. He finally agrees to do so, then insists on expensive trappings, including a triple casket, that he can no longer afford. Homais, meanwhile, spreads the story that Emma had mistaken the arsenic for sugar while she had been baking. At the wake the priest and Homais argue theology while Charles is inconsolable. When Emma, in her wedding dress, is placed in the coffin and taken downstairs for the mourners to pay their last respects, her father arrives and immediately faints. Homais had written to him in such gentle and vague terms that he hadn't realized that his daughter was actually dead. The funeral goes on interminably, but Emma is finally taken to the cemetery and buried. Most people return to their normal routines. Charles's mother comes to live with him, secretly overjoyed that she has him back, while Rodolphe and Leon feel nothing at all and Justin secretly mourns at Emma's grave in the dark of night. In the days that follow Charles discovers letters revealing Emma's infidelities; he then all but abandons his practice, wallowing in his grief, and one day dies as he sits in his garden. All he owns is sold to pay his debts, leaving only enough money to take Berthe to her grandmother's house. Charles's mother soon dies, however, and Berthe is put to work in a cotton mill. Leon marries a young woman in Rouen, while Homais continues to prosper, takes all of Charles's former patients, drives out any doctors who would dare to compete with him, promotes himself tirelessly to government officials, and finally receives the cross of the Legion of Honor that he had long coveted.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Charles Bovary - A mediocre man who becomes a country physician. He adores Emma and is blind to her faults, and dies of grief when he discovers her infidelities.
- Madame Bovary (the elder) - Charles's mother, she spoiled him as a child and tries to dominate him as an adult. She disapproved of his marriage to Emma, but her efforts to control her son fail.
- Heloise (Dubuc) Bovary - A forty-five-year-old widow who becomes his wife, turns out to be a shrew, and dies fourteen months later.

- Theodore Rouault - A wealthy farmer who summons Charles to treat his broken leg; while he is there Charles meets the farmer's daughter, the lovely Emma.
- Emma (Rouault) Bovary - A beautiful farmer's daughter who becomes Charles's second wife. She longs to get away from the farm and enjoy the life of the city, but soon becomes bored with her marriage. After failed affairs with Rodolphe Boulanger and Leon Dupuis and after compiling huge debts in her desire for luxury, she commits suicide by swallowing arsenic. Her desire for a new life drives the plot of the novel.
- Berthe - Charles and Emma's daughter, she receives no attention or affection from her mother and eventually is forced to work in a cotton mill after her mother squanders all their money and both her parents die.
- Marquis d'Andervilliers - An ambitious politician who invites Charles and Emma to a ball at his home, thus increasing her longing for wealth and society and her dissatisfaction with her marriage.
- Monsieur Homais - The apothecary of Yonville, a skeptic who considers himself intellectually superior to all around him, yet who is practicing medicine without a license. His pride and desire for recognition motivate all he does.
- Leon Dupuis - The notary's clerk in Yonville, he is bored with life and longs for travel and excitement. He also soon longs for Emma. She resists him, but later, after the end of her affair with Rodolphe, she submits to his advances. After Emma's death he marries.
- Rodolphe Boulanger - A thirty-four-year-old nobleman who moves into the neighborhood of Yonville; he has had many mistresses in his life and is determined to add Emma to his list of conquests. He succeeds, but drops her when he becomes tired of the game.
- Felicite - Emma's maid, she is being pursued by Justin, the apothecary's apprentice.
- Justin - Apprentice and family servant to Homais, he is in love with Felicite, Emma's maid.
- Hippolyte - A stableboy with a club foot, he submits to an operation by Charles to fix the problem; the surgery fails and the leg has to be amputated.
- Lheureux - The shopkeeper in Yonville who takes advantage of Emma's unquenchable desire for luxury to lead her deeper and deeper into debt until the family is bankrupt.
- Guillaumin - The notary in Yonville, he is Leon's first employer. Later he tries to seduce Emma when she comes to him for financial help.
- Father Bournisien - The priest in Yonville, he tries to bring Emma into the Catholic Church, but accomplishes little more than drawing her to temporary piety during her brief periods of repentance.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“For him the universe did not go beyond the silken confines of her petticoat; and he would reproach himself for not loving her enough, and yearn to be with her again; he would ride back at top speed and run upstairs, his heart pounding.” (Part I, ch.5, p.29)

“Before her marriage she had believed herself to be in love; but since the happiness which should have resulted from this love had not come to her, she felt that she must have been mistaken. And she tried to find out exactly what was meant in life by the words ‘bliss,’ ‘passion’ and ‘rapture,’ which had seemed so beautiful to her in books.” (Part I, ch.5, p.30)

“She had to be able to extract some kind of personal benefit from things, and she rejected as useless anything which did not contribute to the immediate gratification of her heart, for her temperament was more sentimental than artistic and she sought emotion, not landscapes.” (Part I, ch.6, p.31)

“Even in the midst of her raptures she had always maintained a propensity for the concrete; she had loved the church for its flowers, music for the sentimental words of the songs, and literature for its power to stir up the passions. She rebelled against the mysteries of faith and became increasingly irritated by discipline, which was antipathetic to her nature.” (Part I, ch.6, p.34)

“But shouldn’t a man know everything, excel in all sorts of activities, initiate you into the turbulence of passion, the refinements and mysteries of life?” (Emma, Part I, ch.7, p.35)

“The closer things were to her, the farther her mind turned away from them.” (Part I, ch.9, p.51)

“She did not believe that things could be the same in different places; and since her life so far had been bad, the remainder of it would surely be better.” (Part II, ch.2, p.74)

“A man, at least, is free; he can explore the whole range of the passions, go wherever he likes, overcome obstacles, savor the most exotic pleasures. But a woman is constantly thwarted. Inert and pliable, she is restricted by her physical weakness and legal subjection. Her will, like the veil tied to her hat with a cord, quivers with every wind; there is always some desire urging her forward, always some convention holding her back.” (Part II, ch.3, p.76-77)

“She was exasperated by Charles’s apparent unawareness of her ordeal. His conviction that he was making her happy seemed to her an idiotic insult, and his placid confidence about it struck her as ingratitude. For whom was she being virtuous? Was he not the obstacle to any kind of happiness, the cause of all her misery, the sharp-pointed tongue in the buckle of the strap that wound around her, binding her on all sides?” (Part II, ch.5, p.94)

“The drabness of her daily life made her dream of luxury, her husband’s conjugal affection drove her to adulterous desires. She wished he would beat her so that she could feel more justified in hating him and taking vengeance on him.” (Part II, ch.5, p.94)

“Well, here’s what duty really means: our duty is to feel what’s great and cherish what’s beautiful - not to accept the conventions of society and the ignominy it forces on us.” (Rodolphe, Part II, ch.8, p.125)

“At last she was going to possess the joys of love, that fever of happiness she had despaired of ever knowing. She was entering a marvelous realm in which everything would be passion, ecstasy, and rapture.” (Part II, ch.9, p.140)

“She repented of her past virtue as though it had been a crime, and what was still left of it was now collapsing under the furious onslaughts of her pride.” (Part II, ch.11, p.160)

“His amorous pleasures, like children in a schoolyard, had so trampled his heart that nothing green could grow in it.” (Part II, ch.13, p.174)

“She was not happy, and never had been. Why was life so unsatisfying? Why did everything she leaned on instantly crumble into dust?” (Part III, ch.6, p.245)

“She was beginning to find in adultery all the dullness of marriage.” (Part III, ch.6, p.251)

“Yes, he’ll forgive me - but even if he offered me a million francs I wouldn’t forgive *him* just for having met me! Never! Never!” (Emma, Part III, ch.7, p.264)

“Of all the winds that blow on love, none is so chilling and destructive as a request for money.” (Part III, ch.8, p.269)

“Charles had moved away from him and was walking swiftly past the espaliered fruit trees along the wall, grinding his teeth and casting curses up to heaven with his eyes but he was not answered by so much as the stirring of a leaf.” (Part III, ch.9, p.284)

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. Compare and contrast the moral perspectives of Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* and Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*. Do the two authors have the same perspective on the adulterous behavior of their protagonists? Do they approve of the actions of Emma Bovary and Edna Pontellier or do they consider them immoral? How do you know? Use supporting details from the two novels to support your conclusions.
2. Compare and contrast the social criticism found in Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* and Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*. What aspects of society do the two authors despise? Give special consideration to the views of women displayed by the two novelists.

3. Compare and contrast the inner lives of the protagonists of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. What are the attitudes toward life that drive them to adultery? Do the two women have good reason to be dissatisfied with their marriages? Are their expectations about what their lives should look like realistic? Why or why not?
4. Compare and contrast the attitudes of Emma Bovary and Edna Pontellier toward their children in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. How do others suffer for the sins of the protagonists? Do the authors acknowledge this suffering or ignore it? Why do you think so?
5. Compare and contrast the suicides of the protagonists in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. How do the attitudes with which the two women approach death differ? How do these differences illumine the attitudes of the authors toward what the two women have done? Be specific.
6. Compare and contrast Leon Dupuis and Rodolphe Boulanger in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* with Robert Lebrun and Alcee Arobin in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. Do the pairs of lovers with whom the protagonists become involved play the same roles in the two stories? How do their differences help to bring out the themes of the respective novels? Be sure to support your discussion with specifics from the two stories.
7. Consider the treatment of adulterous women found in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, and Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. Which differs most from the others? How would you explain these differences?
8. Both Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* were condemned as immoral books when they were first published. Do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not? Remember that the moral value of a story deals not only with what it depicts, but also with the perspective it takes on those characters and events. Support your conclusion from Scripture as well as from the novels themselves.
9. Discuss the psychological insights found in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Consider especially the causes of Emma's feelings of discontent and the ways she responds to those feelings prior to falling into adultery. In what ways do these insights demonstrate the truth of Jesus' words when He said that "anyone who looks on a woman [man] lustfully has already committed adultery with her [him] in his [her] heart"?
10. In Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, do you think that Emma was actually in love with the men with whom she became infatuated, or was she more in love with an idea, an abstraction, of a life different from her own? Why do you think so? Support your conclusions with details from the novel.

11. In Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, romance novels play a significant role in creating the mindset that ultimately leads Emma Bovary to ruin. Relate this idea of the power of literature to other treatments of the same subject found in books such as Sheridan's *The Rivals* and Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. In addition to the comic tone of the latter two books, how does Flaubert's treatment of this powerful influence differ from that of the other two authors?
12. In Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, why is Emma dissatisfied with her life? Does she have good reason to be discontented? Why or why not? Why is Paul's injunction in Philippians 4:11-13 so important if one is to live a godly life? Support your answer with details from the novel.
13. Discuss the attitude toward religion displayed by the author in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Why does he despise religion so much? Is his criticism justified? Why or why not? Support your conclusions with details from the novel.
14. Discuss the use of irony in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. In what ways does Flaubert advance his critique of the society of his day by describing things in ways that are either contrary to the facts or contrary to his own opinions? How effective do you consider this tactic to be? Use specific examples to support your argument.
15. Discuss the view of love as expressed by the protagonist in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. What are the salient characteristics of love according to Emma Bovary? Is her view of love a realistic one? What are the consequences of her concept of love? Be sure to include a biblical evaluation in your treatment of the subject.
16. In Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, is Emma really capable of loving another human being, or is she totally self-absorbed and in love with "being in love"? Support your conclusions with details from the story.
17. In Part II of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Emma says, "A man, at least, is free; he can explore the whole range of the passions, go wherever he likes, overcome obstacles, savor the most exotic pleasures. But a woman is constantly thwarted. Inert and pliable, she is restricted by her physical weakness and legal subjection. Her will, like the veil tied to her hat with a cord, quivers with every wind; there is always some desire urging her forward, always some convention holding her back." Discuss the view of women presented in the novel. Does Flaubert agree with Emma's sentiments? Why or why not? Evaluate the extent to which Emma Bovary is a mouthpiece for the author in her view of the plight of women.
18. In Part II of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Rodolphe says, "Well, here's what duty really means: our duty is to feel what's great and cherish what's beautiful - not to accept the conventions of society and the ignominy it forces on us." To what extent does the author agree with the words he places in the mouth of the aristocratic cad? Support your conclusion with details from the novel.

19. In Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, to what extent is Homais a mouthpiece for the author and to what extent does he represent everything Flaubert despises? Consider his skepticism, his attitude toward science, and his attitude toward wealth and popularity. Use specific quotations from the novel to support your answer.
20. In speaking of his most famous novel *Madame Bovary*, Gustave Flaubert often said, "I am Madame Bovary." He considered himself an incurable romantic and thought that he had expressed his own longings through this woman who came from his imagination. If that is indeed true, what conclusions should the reader draw about Flaubert's character? Support your discussion with details from the novel.
21. Gustave Flaubert was an early participant in the realistic school of novelists. In his *Madame Bovary*, the narrator presents characters and action dispassionately and without passing judgment while ridiculing the conventions of Romanticism. What aspects of Romanticism does Flaubert criticize in his novel, and how does he accomplish this? Use specific examples from the story to support your arguments.
22. Evaluate the character of Charles Bovary in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. What are his principal strengths and weaknesses? Is Emma right to despise him? Do you consider him an admirable character? In what ways?
23. In Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Emma often rails against the society that she feels has imprisoned her. Are her criticism and frustration justified? In what ways, if any? To what extent are Emma's frustrations with society shared by the author himself? Support your arguments with specifics from the novel.
24. Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* is told from the perspective of a third-person omniscient narrator. How would the book be different had it been told from a first-person perspective such as that of Emma or Charles? Discuss how the narrative perspective contributes to Flaubert's ability to communicate the major themes of the novel.
25. One of the major themes of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* is boredom. Emma is clearly bored with her life, but she is not the only one. What is the primary cause of boredom in the novel? Does it lie more in the characters or in their surroundings? How does boredom affect the behavior of the characters? Are their reactions justified? Be sure to think biblically in your response to this question.
26. Discuss the parallels between the protagonist's moral and financial conditions in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Why does one necessarily impact the other? Which is more fundamental to Emma's life? Why do you think so? Support your conclusion with specifics from the novel.

27. Suppose you were asked to give marriage counseling to Emma and Charles from Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. They have been married for a year and have recently moved to Yonville. How would you advise them? What should they do to repair their marriage? What steps would prevent the downfall narrated in the remainder of the novel from taking place? Be sure to use Scripture in your counsel.
28. In Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, a blind beggar appears periodically and sings of the blindness of love. Discuss the extent to which the main characters in the story are blind. Focus your attention on Emma, Charles, and one other character of your choosing.
29. Discuss the two affairs in which Emma becomes involved in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. At the height of these relationships, do the participants really love one another? Why or why not? To what extent does your answer depend on how one defines love?
30. In Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, does the author really *like* his protagonist? Does he approve of her and feel sorry for the tragedy that her life becomes, or is he critical of the values and actions she represents? Support your conclusion with details from the book.
31. Discuss the importance of setting in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Pay particular attention to the contrast between small towns like Tostes and Yonville and cities like Rouen, where much of the action late in the book takes place, and Paris, the city of Emma's dreams that she never actually gets to see. How does the difference between small town life and city life help to underscore the central themes of the novel?
32. Evaluate the view of human nature found in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Does the author believe people are basically good or basically evil? What evidence would you give to support your conclusion?
33. Gustave Flaubert was the son of a doctor, and his knowledge of medicine is evident in his novel *Madame Bovary*. It appears not only in the descriptions of Charles Bovary's medical endeavors, but also in the words of the pharmacist Homais and, most tellingly, in Emma's death scene. Discuss how the author's medical knowledge contributes to the themes of the novel. Incorporate all three aspects of the story mentioned above in your analysis.
34. Discuss the psychological insights found in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Since much of the book talks about the inner lives of the characters - especially Emma, but others as well - the skill of the author in the realm of psychology is important. Is Flaubert a good psychologist? Do his insights into the working of the human mind ring true? Choose one major character and evaluate the treatment of that character's thought life by the author.
35. Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* is often considered an early example of feminist literature. Do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with specific incidents and quotations from the story.

36. In Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, the author attempted to meld content and style in such a way that the choice of words and rhythm of sentences matched the mental states of the characters and the nature of the action. Because of Flaubert's success in this stylistic endeavor, the novel has become a model for aspiring novelists ever since. Clearly the power of such an approach is somewhat lost in translation, but remains somewhat discernible if the translation is of good quality. Does the translation you read display this stylistic quality of the original? Use specific examples from the text to support your conclusion.