

049109 -0023

Essay WC: 1250

Ref WC: 363

Reflective Statement: Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*

In our interactive oral we discussed the cultural and contextual considerations of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. During our discussion we covered the difficulty and ease of understanding certain aspects of French history and norms, specifically the middle class and women, because the protagonist, Emma, was both. As well as how those aspects can be seen in our society today.

Throughout our conversation we agreed that time specifically played a major role in shaping themes in the text because we so often live in the present, and we are surrounded by what we once were and will be. We agreed on the fact that seasons can be shown to represent changes in mood and tone, equivalently to how we view seasons today: winter being cold and dead, spring being the center for new beginnings, summer being the place for life and prospering, and fall being the transition back to death.

From our discussion we also agreed that when Emma was in an extramarital relationship it was easier to understand, mainly because she was happier. In parallel, when she was without emotional satisfaction, she broke down into a state of turmoil, making it incredibly hard to understand.

By discussing the relations between 19th century France and our current day society, the similarities were made clear. We discussed primarily gender-related issues, including gender stereotypes, career options for women, and promiscuity. We agreed that all these themes are

equally as present in *Madame Bovary* as they are in real life, although maybe not as severe. We also conversed on the topic of the class systems and how difficult it was to change classes then as it is to now, including the fact that solely having money or marrying up a class didn't give you entrance to a higher class.

In my opinion, the most interesting part of the oral was the fact that we all concurred that the despised elements shown in Emma are now occasionally viewed as resilience when shown by women, and that she was not solely a whiny slut, but an assertive female idol.

The Pane of Existence in *Madame Bovary*

Although complexity is strived for, it is not always necessary in literature. There are numerous of examples of marvelous uses of complex forms, allusions, comparisons, etc. in works of writing, and each one has a notable purpose in the piece, but sometimes the simplest of ideas can have the greatest effect on a novel. *Madame Bovary*, by Gustave Flaubert, takes place in 19th century France, and is centered on Charles and Emma Bovary. The novel depicts the collapse of their marriage, due mainly to Emma's extravagant longings for love that could not be met. Flaubert uses some of the most complex writing techniques, while simultaneously using some of the most simple. The appearance of windows throughout the book is quite a natural presence when skimmed over, but when one indulges themselves into the connotations of this

household object, something much greater can be seen. In *Madame Bovary*, Gustave Flaubert uses windows to express Emma's elaborate character development.

Flaubert uses windows to show Emma's first stage of development through her romantic longings. In Charles and Emma's first encounter, Charles travels to fix Monsieur Rouault's leg, and Emma answers the door. As Charles enters the house, the varying tools, instruments, and utensils are described as "mingling with the first rays of the sun coming in through the window" (Flaubert 1:ch. 2). The sun, shown through the window, is an archetypal symbol of happiness. Emma is in the early stages of her life, and has been constantly obsessed with romantic novels. Her happiness for having a man in her life is displayed via the sunlight coming through the window. Shortly following this, Charles asks Monsieur Rouault for Emma's hand in marriage. Rouault replies by stating, "If it is a 'yes'... I'll open wide the outer shutter of the window" (Flaubert 1:ch 3). Then just an hour later "... a noise was heard against the wall; the shutter had been thrown back" (Flaubert 1:ch 3). Monsieur Rouault's use of windows to show Emma's response indirectly shows Emma's longings for a romantic lover, and uses a window to do so. The fact that he signifies her acceptance to marry Charles with an open window conveys that Emma is open to marriage and excited to leave her home. Windows exhibit Emma's primary stage of development, which is her yearning for romantic passion, by presenting her thirst for a man.

Windows are additionally used to show Emma's extramarital relationships, which are her second stage of development. Emma's first affair was with Rudolphe, and began with her seeing him through a window. It was described as a dreary day in Yonville, and Emma was leaning out a window when she caught sight of "a gentleman in a green velvet coat. He had on yellow

gloves, although he wore heavy gaiters; he was coming towards the doctor's house” (Flaubert 2:ch. 7). The dawn of Emma’s first affair is significant because she sees Rudolphe through an open window, giving both Emma, and the reader, an introduction to his availability and high class. Of course, Emma instantly wants to be with him, and obsessed over him in the days to come. Once in a relationship, the two are at the agricultural fair, and Rudolphe proclaims his love to Emma while situated at an open window. He notices that her hands are like “a captive dove that wants to fly away” (Flaubert 2:ch. 8). As one can see from the quote, this is the first point that she is no longer imagining and dreaming her fantasy, but actually living it. Her hand quivering like there is a dove trapped inside shows two things: primarily, that she is deeply in love with Rudolphe, and secondly, that the “dove” is ready to break free and fly out the window to its freedom. Emma represents the dove as she escapes the hands of Charles’ and flies free to Rudolphe.

Her second affair, with Leon, is also riddled with windows. In Rouen, the day after the opera, Emma commits fully to her rendezvous. The two enter a carriage, and in response to the coachman’s question of where they would like to be taken, they tell him to simply go where he likes. After driving around aimlessly for some time, they arrive at a harbor, and the folk that live there are surprised to see “a cab with blinds drawn, and which appeared thus constantly shut more closely than a tomb, and tossing about like a vessel... a bared hand passed beneath the small blinds of yellow canvas , and threw out some scraps of paper that scattered in the wind” (Flaubert 3:ch. 1). The tightly closed windows infer the sexual excitation occurring within, and the movement of the carriage depicts the movement of Emma and Leon making love. Finally, Emma’s sexual climax is implied, along with the end of all her resolutions and devotion to

Charles, when she thrusts out her hand and releases the shredded letter that she had written to Leon, but never given him, explaining why she could not be his mistress. Windows are used during Emma's sexual encounters to display her progression as a character, and that she is now more outgoing and willing to be with men other than her husband.

Windows are used to emphasize Emma's slow demise, which is her third, and final, stage of development. After accumulating enormous debts from Lheureux, Emma goes to see Rudolphe in an attempt to borrow some money. He calmly refuses, and as Emma storms out, the walls are described as trembling, and the ceiling as crushing. She almost falls, but manages to turn around and see the chateau, and all the windows on its facade (Flaubert 3:ch. 8). The way in which she walks, and feels that everything is coming down on her, represents her emotional instability, while her sighting of the windows on the face of the house further her vulnerability by being described as impassive and unwelcoming, like Rudolphe. Later, after poisoning herself, Emma lies in bed with Charles at her side. Charles asks her how she is, and she responds by exclaiming, "It is nothing! Open the window; I am choking" (Flaubert 3:ch. 8). At this point, her life is clearly close to its end, but the window playfully prolongs it. The fact that she asks for it to be opened implies that she believes that it will somehow help her, but it is clear to the reader that it will not, so the only role of the window is to assert Emma's inevitable end. Just moments before her death, Emma hears a noise in the street beneath her window. She sits up to look out, and is surprised to see the blind beggar singing to himself. (Flaubert 3:ch. 8). The window depicts Emma's demise because she looks through it at the beggar, who is far less privileged than she, yet who is clearly enjoying life to its fullest. The contrast is clear as he is happily singing to himself while Emma is on the brink of death. Windows illustrate Emma's downfall,

which is her final stage of development, by constantly being present in times of her hardship and suffering.

In conclusion, Flaubert uses windows as a tool to convey Emma's stages of character development throughout the novel. He does this by interposing them in significant scenes, specifically between her and the various men in her life. While *Madame Bovary* is one of the most complex, analyzed, apotheosized novels of all time, it simultaneously presents to us some of the most simple, direct, and honest lessons there are. Through all the profound analysis, sometimes the most significant ideas are lost. Uniformly, at times the most complex and occult doctrines can be pulled from the exceedingly transparent portions of literature. So I ask, can understanding be achieved by simply lifting your head, glancing out the open window, and leaving the scrutinizing investigation behind?

Works Cited

Flaubert, Gustave. *Madame Bovary*. Trans. Eleanor Marx-Aveling. New York: F. Watts, 1969.

Kindle File.