Madame Bovary

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

Gustave Flaubert was born and raised in Rouen, the son of a wealthy, middle-class surgeon. A neighbor often read *Don Quixote* aloud to Flaubert when he was very young, and he knew Quixote's story by heart. He attended school in Rouen and then law school in Paris, where he made many literary friends. After a few years, Flaubert left law school and moved to Croisset, a small town near Rouen, where he lived for the remainder of his life. In 1846, about the time he left Paris, he began the one important romantic relationship of his life – a literary and epistolary friendship with the poet Louise Colet. Between 1846 and 1850, when he began work on *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert travelled with friends through the Middle East. On that journey, he contracted venereal diseases that weakened him for the rest of his life. He had written two shorter works before *Madame Bovary*, a novella called *November* and a baroque, magical book called *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*; his literary friends advised him to stay away from the supernatural and the lyrical and to shift his focus onto daily life. From then on, he alternated between the two modes. *Madame Bovary*, *Sentimental Education*, the *Three Stories* and the unfinished *Bouvard and Pécuchet* describe the lives of his contemporaries, especially the petit bourgeoisie, but in the historical novel *Salammbô*, published just after Madame Bovary, he returns to the lurid style of his earlier work. Flaubert wrote slowly and painstakingly, and was much less prolific than many of his contemporaries. He devoted himself to the labor of creating a perfect sentence, and the accident of the perfect word (*le mot juste*). He died at home of a cerebral hemorrhage.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Many French novelists and intellectuals have written critiques of bourgeois culture, and Flaubert is often counted among them. He once wrote in a letter to George Sand: "Hatred of the bourgeois is the beginning of virtue." The *bourgeoisie* is a term loosely equivalent to the middle class. The emergence and growing influence of the middle class in 19th century Europe is a key component of any literary exploration of bourgeois culture. The French Revolution at the end of the 18th century marked the transition from feudal society, which consisted mainly of wealthy landowners and the peasants in their employ, to capitalist, industrial society, which fell into the hands of business owners, merchants, bankers, and artisans – a large and variegated group that comprised the bourgeoisie. Flaubert himself was born into a middle-class family. However, the term "bourgeois" is often used to indicate not only social class but also state of mind, a perspective on money, art, and knowledge. When Flaubert made scathing pronouncements about the bourgeoisie, he was mainly referring to the second meaning, a very vague idea indicating, as the quote implies, something like the antithesis of personal virtue. "Bourgeois" may be used to mean stupidity, greed, shallowness, hypocrisy, conservatism, philistinism, and a whole host of other human foibles. *Madame Bovary* does primarily describe middle-class people, but it does not directly attack the middle-class as such: only the failings of individual characters. However, the historical role of the French middle class is certainly a part of the story's carefully rendered landscape.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Many authors and critics have said that modernist literature as we know it would not exist without *Madame Bovary*: its fine psychological detail, the sharpness and beauty of its prose, the subtle harmony of its structure, and the innovation of free indirect discourse – a technique in which the author echoes the character described in style, tone, and pacing. Nabokov once said that without Flaubert there would be no Joyce, no Proust, and no Chekhov. Flaubert himself was interested by the emerging realist style in France, exemplified by the novels of Balzac. He sought to temper romantic ideals and excesses with realism's honesty and clear-sightedness, and he often felt torn between the two impulses himself. Flaubert is said to have influenced the French *nouveau roman*, a mid-twentieth-century literary movement whose practitioners focused on style and fact at the expense of plot, character development, and narrative commentary.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Madame Bovary*
- **When Written:** Croisset, France
- **Where Written:** 1851-1857
- **When Published:** 1857
- **Literary Period:** This novel marks the transition from romanticism to realism.
- **Genre:** Novel
- **Setting:** Tostes, Yonville, and Rouen, France, mid-19th century.
- **Climax:** Emma's death.
- **Antagonist:** Monsieur Lheureux.
- **Point of View:** In the first chapter of the novel, the narrator is a plural first-person "we", which stands for a group of Charles's classmates. Throughout the rest of the novel, the narration is third-person omniscient.

EXTRA CREDIT

Sued. After the publication of Madame Bovary, Flaubert was sued for the book's obscene depictions of extramarital affairs. In expressing his outrage, the prosecutor identified some of the book's key literary innovations, free indirect discourse and narrative ambiguity. The prosecutor stated in court: "Who can condemn this woman in the book? Nobody. Such is the conclusion. There is not in the book a character who can condemn her…. Would you condemn her in the name of the author's conscience? I do not know what the author's conscience thinks."

His character, himself. Flaubert once said that when Emma took arsenic, he had awful stomach pains.

PLOT SUMMARY

The novel begins by introducing us to a teenaged Charles, awkward, mild, dull, and studious. After struggling though primary school and a series of courses in medicine that he finds inscrutable, Charles passes his exams and becomes a doctor. His solicitous mother finds him a wealthy middle-aged wife named Madame Dubuc, and the couple move to a small town called Tostes, where Charles begins to practice medicine.

One night, he receives a call to set a man's broken leg. During his visit, Charles is enchanted by the man's daughter, a beautiful, elegant girl named Emma. Not long after, Charles's wife dies of a nervous ailment, and within a year Charles and Emma are married. Charles adores his new wife, but Emma is soon bored and disappointed. She does not feel anything like the love described in her favorite romance novels, and she blames Charles's bad looks and dull conversation. Though he is kind, loving, and moderately successful in his profession, she feels that he is not an adequate husband, and spends her days dreaming of a better life – an elegant, refined, exciting life. When she and Charles attend a dazzling ball, Emma's longings are sharpened and intensified. She becomes thin and listless, and Charles decides to move them to a new town in hopes of curing Emma's malaise. Around that time, she becomes pregnant and gives birth to girl named Berthe.

Emma and Charles move to Yonville, a little farming town near Rouen. They quickly meet the town's small cast of characters, who bore Emma – all except Léon, a dreamy clerk who shares her interest in sentimental discussions of music and literature. She and Léon fall in love, but Emma holds him at bay. Soon, he moves to Paris to finish his law degree, and she languishes in his absence. One day, though, she meets a wealthy, aristocratic man named Rodolphe – a womanizer who decides to seduce her. They begin a long, passionate affair, which initially brings Emma a great deal of joy and satisfaction. But Rodolphe does not really love Emma, and begins to tire of the charade of love. He breaks up with her in a letter the day that they had planned to run away together, and Emma is miserable and delirious for months. Meanwhile, she is racking up very large debts buying pretty clothes and gifts from the sly Lheureux, the town draper. Meanwhile, she and Homais, the town pharmacist, convince Charles to perform a dubious operation on Hippolyte, the stableman at the inn, and the man ends up losing a leg.

One day Charles and Emma travel to Rouen to attend a play. They run into Léon, who has returned from Paris, and Emma and Léon finally strike up an affair. By pretending to take piano lessons, Emma manages to come to town once a week to see him. As with Rodolphe, the affair is joyful at first but eventually becomes repetitive and boring, and both lovers grow dissatisfied with one another.

Emma's debts grow larger and larger, and one day she receives an official notice stating that she must pay a very large sum of money or forfeit all her possessions. In desperation, Emma tries to get the money from Léon, who is noncommittal; from the town lawyer, who propositions her; and finally from Rodolphe, who refuses her coldly. Emma is wild with confusion and fear. She convinces Justin, the pharmacist's assistant, to lead her into Homais's laboratory, and she eats a fistful of arsenic. She dies horribly later that night.

Charles is miserable with grief, and overwhelmed by Emma's debts. Some time after the funeral he finds Emma's love letters, and dies only a few days later. Berthe goes to live with a poor relative, who sends her to work at a mill.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Emma Bovary – A beautiful, mediocre woman consumed by the desire to live an elegant and passionate life. Emma's placid country childhood sharpens her appetite for passionate feeling and excitement. Her only idea of a life other than her own, a life full of pleasure and joy, comes from romance novels. These novels teach her that excitement, for a woman, is only possible through love, and that love must be carefully cultivated with elegant settings, beautiful clothes, and noble-sounding words. When she realizes that her marriage does not resemble the affairs in her novels, and Charles does not resemble the novels' heroes, she falls into misery and boredom. She becomes fatally obsessed with achieving her only goal – to bring into her own life the joy and passion in books. Her obsession makes her cruelly mistreat her husband and daughter, pursue two unhappy affairs, rack up enormous debt, and finally kill herself by swallowing arsenic.

Charles Bovary – Emma's husband, a kind and peaceful country doctor whose main joys in life are his wife, his daughter, and a hearty meal. After an unhappy marriage to Mamade Dubuc, Charles is overjoyed to be married to the

beautiful Emma, whose every movement, word, and flounce enchants him. Charles is not attractive, charming, or brilliant, though he is for the most part a competent doctor. He has endless patience for his difficult, mean wife, and he is both mother and father to their daughter Berthe. He has a rough, dull exterior, and he is not very good with words, but he is delicate and his selflessness is morally beautiful. He turns a blind eye to Emma's affairs and violent temper throughout the book. When he discovers her trove of love letters after her death, he dies of shock.

Rodolphe Boulanger – A free-spirited, relatively wealthy landowner and womanizer. Emma falls for him because of his stylish green coat and his title, and he desires her because she seems like an easy conquest, and because she is prettier than his present mistress. Rodolphe is a cynical, calculating man who habitually feigns love and sweetness to seduce credulous women. At first Emma is very happy with him, because he faithfully copies the manners of fictional lovers, but gradually he grows tired of the charade and begins to act like himself – like a ruthless, cold, rapacious man. Emma becomes unhappy, but she does not understand why: she is not in the habit of evaluating character. Rodolphe abandons Emma the day they plan to elope together. He is indifferent in the face of her desperation and financial ruin, and he does not mourn her death.

Léon Dupuis – Emma's second lover. When Emma first meets Léon, he is a bored, ambitious clerk who loves to talk vaguely with her about music and literature. He works for the lawyer Guillaumin, and, like Emma, feels stifled by his quiet country life. Emma likes his auburn curls and blue eyes, and they quickly become infatuated with one another. At first nothing happens between them, and Léon moves to Paris to finish his law degree. When he and Emma meet in Rouen four years later, they finally strike up an affair, fueled by many years' longing and regret. But because their only subject of conversation is love and sentimentality, they know almost nothing of one another, and find no basis for real affection. Léon tires of Emma's demands and wants to focus on his career. When Emma dies, Léon does not mourn her.

Monsieur Homais – Yonville's pharmacist, an ambitious, deceitful, sugar-tongued man who befriends the Bovarys when they're new to town. Homais loves talking about rationality and progress, and he loves berating priests and religion. He has a large, prosperous family that meets every standard of propriety. He initially seems merry and well-meaning, though a little pompous, but gradually it becomes evident that his one true passion is self-advancement, and that he feigns most other feelings to win admiration and to further his career. He treats people well when it benefits him, but he does not hesitate to treat people cruelly. He plays a principal part in promotion the operation that cripples Hippolyte, and shows no hint of remorse or pity. The novel ends tragically for most central characters, but Homais is flourishing: he receives the Legion of Honour.

Monsieur Lheureux – Yonville's versatile merchant, who slowly and deliberately drives the Bovarys to financial ruin. Lheureux affects a pleasant air, but he is a ruthless businessman. He makes money by encouraging people like Emma to spend more than they can afford and then lending them money at very steep rates. Homais may be indifferent to other people's suffering, but Lheureux seems to enjoy it. Though he is in large part responsible for Emma's death, he attends her funeral without a trace of guilt.

The elder Madame Bovary – Charles's mother, a nervous, demanding woman exhausted by years of unhappy marriage. She craves Charles's affection, and resents sharing it with his wife. She often quarrels with Emma. Charles wants to please both women, and finds it very difficult to take sides. She abandons Charles after Emma's death, when he is at his most helpless, because of a meaningless fight.

Berthe Bovary – Emma and Charles's daughter, a sweet, affectionate toddler. Emma generally ignores her or treats her cruelly, though the little girl obviously wants her attention very badly. Charles adores her, plays with her, and tries to teach her to read. After her parents die, she ends up living with a poor relation and working in a mill.

Monsieur Rouault – Emma's father, a nice, lonely man. His wife passed away when Emma was a child, and Emma is his one joy and consolation. He lives quite far from Yonville and does not often get to visit, but he sends the Bovarys a turkey every year as a token of his affection. He is devastated by Emma's death.

Hippolyte – The stableman at the Golden Lion, a quiet, hardworking man afflicted with clubfoot. Homais convinces him to undergo an experimental operation, because he thinks the operation would bring prestige to Yonville and to himself. The experimental method is a hoax; Hippolyte develops gangrene, and his leg has to be amputated. Though Homais promised that the operation would be painless and effective, Hippolyte never complains. When he is able to walk with an artificial leg, he resumes work at the inn.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Monsieur Binet – Yonville's tax collector and amateur lathe-spinner. Binet is a quiet, unsociable man who dines regularly at the Golden Lion and spends all his free time happily working at his **lathe**. Emma propositions him for money, but he refuses.

Justin – Homais's teenaged assistant, who falls in love with Emma in the second half of the book. Emma tricks Justin into leading her to the arsenic in Homais's laboratory, and Justin is tormented by guilt when he learns of her death.

The Viscount – A mysterious, elegant man who dances with Emma at the ball. She knows nothing about him, but in her mind

he represents a romantic ideal.

The Beggar – A mentally ill man with infected eyelids, who follows the evening coach begging for money and singing a song about young love.

Abbé Bournisien – Yonville's priest.

Monsieur Guillaumin – Yonville's resident lawyer, Lheureux's sometime accomplice, and Léon's first employer.

Félicité – Emma's young maid, who steals all her clothes after she dies.

Héloïse Dubuc – Charles's first wife.

Catherine Leroux – An old farmer who receives a lifetime achievement award at the agricultural fair.

Monsieur Canivet – A famous doctor who amputates Hippolyte's leg after Charles's botched operation.

Lagardy – A famous singer. Emma and Charles attend his performance in Rouen.

Irma, Napoléon, and Athalie – The Homais children.

Mère Rolet – The wet nurse for Emma's daughter, Berthe.

Madame Lefrançois – The widowed innkeeper in the town of Yonville-l'Abbaye, where the Bovarys live.

Félicité – Emma's maid.

Marquis d'Andervilliers – The nobleman who gives the ball to which Charles and Emma are invited, and which fuels Emma's passion for luxury and romance.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

ABSTRACTION, FANTASY, AND EXPERIENCE

All of us make use of both detail and abstraction in the effort to interpret our experience. We arrange a vast amount of sensory detail into lower-level abstractions, like the concept of a tree, and higher-level abstractions, like the concept of loyalty. We interpret new experience according to previously established abstractions, and we alter our abstractions to fit our experiences. We cycle between experience and abstraction, adjusting the one and the other, in order to maintain a connection between them – the connection that we call knowledge. But the balance between abstraction and experience is different for each person. *Madame Bovary* explores the psychology of a person who always chooses abstraction over experience as a guide to action, and who derives her abstractions not from her own life but from sentimental novels.

Like Don Quixote, Emma abstracts a set of rules from a literary genre and then imposes those rules onto a complicated reality, which exceeds and contradicts those rules at every turn. But unlike Quixote, Emma never learns to adjust her abstractions according to her experiences. She ignores everything that does not fit well with the rules of romance novels, and deems irrelevant anything that falls outside their province. That means she blinds herself to anything not directly related to love, beauty, and sensual luxury, and to any love that doesn't strongly resemble the love in novels. She then finds that almost her entire life is unreal to her: her marriage, her child, her town, all her pursuits. Only her love affairs with Léon and Rodolphe, which are made to resemble the affairs in books, seem to have any value. Léon himself lives in similar world of abstractions, and Rodolphe knows that world well enough to pretend as part of his efforts at seduction. The men's artificiality and insincerity paradoxically allow Emma to experience the affairs as real and true. The affairs dissolve shamefully, life seems to run to nothing, and Emma senses a vague disillusionment: the exhaustion of ideals growing stale. But she holds fast to them, and dies with them.

THE SUBLIME AND THE MUNDANE

Flaubert, who knew *Don Quixote* by heart even before learning to read, shares Cervantes's habit of always putting the beautiful next to the hideous, the lofty next to the petty, and the tragic next to the mundane. Hardly a chapter goes by that does not contain the juxtaposition, but the most pointed examples center on the beggar with the infected eyelids. He is there, leering and suffering, when Emma sits dreaming rosily about her new affair with Léon, and he is there singing about a young girl in love while Emma is dying.

In *Madame Bovary*, the contrast emphasizes the absurdity of any perspective that excludes the extremities of ugliness and suffering. Every gruesome detail seems to punish the reader, the writer, and most of the main characters for their blindness. Such details are a reproach to the vague, soaring mindset of the romantic, a perspective that must ignore so much in order to maintain itself, and which therefore chooses emotional comfort over truth. The denunciation of the romantic is also closely related to issues of abstraction and reality. A person like Emma, who lives by canned abstractions, is basically hypocritical: such a person appropriates beliefs without grounding them in action or experience.

But the novel does not come out squarely on the side of the mundane. It does not amount to unqualified praise of the realist, for Lheureux is basically a realist. The far side of realism is disbelief in *anything* intangible: extreme realism relegates every ideal to foolish fantasy and irrelevance, including the

ideals of beauty, kindness, and love, The best and most difficult life, the book implies, is one that tries to create an implausible harmony between fact and belief, reality and fantasy, the world and the imagination.

LOVE AND DESIRE

Since Emma's romance novels describe appearance rather than experience, love, for Emma, is identical to the appearance of love, to certain expressions of love. Her third-rate novels have no fully developed characters, only cardboard stereotypes, so she comes to understand love not as a feeling of admiration and affection for a distinct person, but as a series of pleasure-giving interactions. Love, for her, *is* desire, sex, and flowery letters: she does not recognize that these are only the surface aspects of an emotion. She mistakes the smoke for the fire. In this sense, she and Rodolphe are alike. Love affairs, for him, amount only to a series of pretty faces and sentimental words, with no distinct people or feelings behind them.

Love understood as pleasure is self-directed and self-contained. It is fundamentally an interaction with oneself, in which another person serves as a prop. A love like Charles's, on the other hand, is directed outward at the beloved, anchored in the other person's qualities, cares, and general well-being. It brings joy, but only incidentally – an unselfish joy in the beloved's existence. Emma and Charles embody two extremes of love, which in life are always mingled.

For Emma and Léon, experiencing the right kind of love is also bound up with self-image. Since love in books dwells only in aristocratic homes, they feel that the right kind of love connects them to the right kind of life, the refined, elevated life they've always dreamed of. Rodolphe's love affairs are also bound up with self-image, because they allow him to feel strong, canny, and superior. Unlike Rodolphe, Emma wants love that is true and everlasting, but a frail foundation of sensual pleasure weakened by the intrusions of reality keeps her affairs disappointing and short.

CAUSES, APPEARANCES, AND BOREDOM

Charles falls in love with Emma, and then shows his love through kindness, care, admiration, and desire. The emotion of love is the cause, and the behaviors of love are the result. But Emma inverts the cause and the result: she simulates the appearances and behaviors of love without the impetus of actual love, and she expects the simulation to bring her happiness – her flawed approximation for the emotion of love. Her true impetus for the behaviors of love is her desire to imitate fictional heroines. But her life can never quite resemble the cartoonish novels, the desire to imitate is frustrated, and she is left mechanically performing actions even after the incentive has disintegrated.

Novels have taught Emma that love leads to permanent happiness. When she discovers that the happiness of love eventually turns to boredom, she becomes cynical: "For now she knew the pettiness of the passions that art exaggerates." But her conclusion is false, for she has gone through the motions of love without experiencing love itself. Or, rather, she has ignored any love she did feel so thoroughly that it naturally wilted out of existence. Her pursuit of love weakens her capacity for actual love, and she experiences the consequent emotional emptiness as a terrible boredom.

Emma is surprised that her mechanical, simulated passions fail to inspire real joy. But to the end of the novel, and in every area of her life, she inverts cause and effect: she substitutes appearance for impetus. Just as she thinks love is sex, she thinks religion is prayer, and she equates motherly love to the activities of motherhood (like washing behind the ears). But praying without the inner impetus for prayer, and washing ears without actual love and care, soon seems nonsensical and exhausting, and profoundly boring. Convention and mimicry can only carry Emma so far, for they provide a very short supply of motivation.

The novels she loves have taught her, paradoxically, both to value intense emotions above all else and to act out the shells of emotions without understanding their origins. She faithfully tries to act out the shells, but the shells soon leave her cold – and being cold is intolerable to her. She is trapped in an ever-cooling cycle.

TRUTH, RHETORIC, AND HYPOCRISY

In several asides, Flaubert insists that human speech does not often convey anything true about the speaker or the subject matter: it either surpasses its subject, or fails to reach it. Language is full of cliché and abstraction, rhetorical tools that allow the speaker to convince the listener of something quite other than the truth, and therefore it is often a conduit for conscious or unconscious hypocrisy: "Language is indeed a machine that continually amplifies the emotions."

Skilled speakers and writers – rhetoricians – easily manipulate language to their own ends. Homais's linguistic facility allows him to disguise or distort the truth: he vastly exaggerates his emotions and achievements, and his article about Charles's irresponsible operation makes Charles seem like a hero. Rodolphe employs the rhetoric of romantic love, which disguises his actual cynicism, in order to manipulate Emma and seduce her. On the other hand, kind but tongue-tied people like Charles and Catherine Leroux often fail to convey the depth and delicacy of their emotions. For them, language does not quite rise up to the truth. People incorrectly assume that their simple, stunted ways of speaking indicate stupidity: "… as

though the soul's abundance does not sometimes spill over in the most decrepit metaphors, since no one can give the exact measure of their needs, their ideas, their afflictions." We are urged to remember that language is an imperfect reflection of the speaker's opinions and emotions.

If an author's goal is manipulation or personal gain, language is a well of fluidity and floweriness one can plumb indefinitely; but if an author is concerned with truth, language is a precision game she is bound to lose. Flaubert lived this belief through his meticulous, searching prose and his disdain of linguistic ornament and cliché.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

"THE BIG BLUE COUNTRY"

When Emma is already growing bored with Léon, she tries to force love by imagining him as a composite of ideal qualities, living in a misty "**blue country**" containing little but the scent of flowers. Earlier, when she dreams of running away with Rodolphe, she imagines their future together as a vague "blue immensity", perfect and empty. That blue nothingness is the world in which Emma always tries to live, a world made out of ideals and abstractions, free from the confounding detail that comprises the actual human world. To Emma, only that exotic place is suitable for love, and the man that dwells there, a ghost or a god, is the "incarnation of love itself." But the novel teaches that love itself is nothing without human beings to give it meaning and contour. A person who is the incarnation of love is merely something becoming nothing.

THE LATHE

Emma wears blue when we first meet her, and in almost every other scene. Her dark hair and eyes have a bluish tint. She herself wants to become pure spirit. It is fitting, then, that the bottle of arsenic that really does change her from something to nothing is a pale, transparent blue.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *Madame Bovary* published in 2002.

Part 1, Chapter 5 Quotes

The universe, for him, did not extend beyond the silken round of her skirts.

Related Characters: The elder Madame Bovary, Charles Bovary

Related Themes:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

The beginning of Charles' marriage to Emma is marked by the former's utter devotion and infatuation. Flaubert details the doctor's every tender feeling towards Emma over the course of the day: in sum, the whole of his attention is directed at Emma, while already she only feels lukewarm towards him.

The gulf between the husband and wife is already evident to the reader; while Charles cannot conceive of a world beyond Emma's "skirts," she does not feel an equivalent love. Emma dreams of ineffable, vague romances — her universe is the stuff of novels—but reality, even a dull one, satisfies the much more practical Charles.

Yet despite Emma's fanciful nature, Flaubert reminds readers that she belongs fully to her material and financial circumstances. Emma worries about her clothing and jewelry throughout the book, and even Charles' love is also, in part, a love for her "silken" clothing, her aesthetic sensibilities and expensive taste.

And Emma sought to find out exactly what was meant in real life by the words *felicity*, *passion*, and *rapture*, which had seemed so fine on the pages of the books.

Related Characters: Emma Bovary

Related Themes:

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of Chapter 5, Flaubert describes Charles' blind affection for Emma and her own more ambivalent feelings. She already understands her mistake: bliss has not immediately followed her marriage because she never truly loved Charles.

Here, readers first encounter Flaubert's worries about language. Emma wants to "find out exactly what is meant in real life by [three] words," to understand how words can describe and capture her lived experience. Readers should, of course, ask themselves this same question as they read Flaubert's text: can an abstract word like "felicity" match so-

called real life? *Madame Bovary* is a book about distortion, the gaps between reality and our transcription of it. Flaubert even ends the chapter with the noun "books," hinting that (mediocre) literature will go on to play an important role in Emma's life. This bittersweet moment already tells us of Emma's permanent dissatisfaction, which goes on to become a self-annihilating lust for physical delights and material goods. Emma is always seeking and never quite finding.

Part 1, Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ Familiar with the tranquil, she inclined, instead, toward the tumultuous. ... From everything she had to extract some personal profit; and she discarded as useless anything that did not lend itself to the heart's immediate satisfaction.

Related Characters: Emma Bovary

Related Themes:

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

Just as Chapter 5 ends with the word "books," Chapter 6 begins with Emma's experience of the sentimental novel "Paul et Virginie." In this section about Emma's upbringing, Flaubert makes it clear that books shape Emma's childhood and adulthood: in Catholic school, she relishes all opportunities to starve and purify herself.

Emma's romantic nature is, in some ways, merely a compulsion to commodify her own life. Familiar with the structures and patterns of love stories, she tailors herself and her experiences to these standards and "discards" all that remains. (The words "profit," "extract," and "discarded" here should remind readers that Emma is still very tethered to the corrupt material world, despite her daydreams of abstractions.) Flaubert comments on this misuse of literature, which, in his estimation, should not serve as an ethical model or example (unless as a deeper mode of thinking, rather than *acting*). Emma is wrong to mimic the behavior she discovers in novels: the starving and praying and moaning. Again and again Emma fails to understand that love itself, particularly the love depicted in popular fiction, cannot be an end or a goal.

❝ Emma was inwardly satisfied to feel she had reached at her first attempt that ideal exquisite pale existence, never attained by vulgar souls.

Related Characters: Emma Bovary

Related Themes:

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

The death of Emma's mother pushes Emma even further, and allows her to engage in even more extreme behavior. She eventually becomes so weak (or "exquisite") that others take notice — and this attention satisfies her.

Flaubert is deft in his juxtapositions: though Emma cries for several days, she feels "inwardly satisfied" and pleased when someone else notices her distress. In other words, her sadness is a sort of performance, an imitation of a human sentiment. Even at a young age, Emma exists at a remove from reality, always observing herself and her life and then molding them into whatever shape she finds most pleasing. Emma treats her life like a possession, like any other frock or necklace that she has bought on credit--or like a work of art, like any of the sentimental novels she so adores.

Readers can also note Flaubert's juxtaposition of Emma's "ideal exquisite pale existence" and the other "vulgar souls." Much of Emma's identify rests on this imagined gulf between herself and other members of the rural middle class; she cannot see her own vulgarity or superficiality, which is as evident to the reader as Monsieur Homais' greed or Rodolphe's dishonesty.

Part 1, Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ To her it seemed that certain places on earth must produce happiness.

Related Characters: Emma Bovary

Related Themes:

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

Emma believes that her unhappiness stems from her environment: she would be perfectly happy as a newlywed if only she lived in a chalet or a villa, not a humdrum country house in Tostes. Of course, when she moves to Yonville in Part 2, she remains as listless and bored as ever.

Again, Emma confuses the trappings of emotion with emotion itself. Happiness, for her, is not an internal state but rather a set of external circumstances (just as love is not a feeling, but a set of gestures). In using the verb "produce" (in

French, "produire"), Flaubert shows readers the extent of her misunderstanding: happiness becomes a part of the material world, the world of popular novels and expensive fashions. In sum, Emma rarely considers her own agency and expects happiness and love to come from without and not from within.

Charles's conversation was as flat as any pavement, everyone's ideas trudging along it in their weekday clothes, rousing no emotion, no laughter, no reverie.

Related Characters: Charles Bovary

Related Themes:

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Flaubert offers us a glimpse of Charles through Emma's eyes. She finds her husband insufferably dull, incapable of witty conversation and uninterested in entertainment.

This is a subtle instance of so-called "free indirect discourse" in the novel: the omniscient narrator temporarily inhabits a character's consciousness, channeling the character's thoughts while never resorting to the first-person point of view. Through repetition and accumulation, the narrator emphasizes "emotion" and "laughter" and "reverie" in this section, the stuff of Emma's fantasies. And the central metaphor, a derogatory allusion to the middle class, typifies Emma's preoccupation with wealth and glamour. She finds "workday clothes" repugnant and her scorn seeps into the narrator's voice: the result is a scathing portrait of Charles and also a mockery of Emma's own elitism and vanity. She fails to understand that witty banter (foreign to Charles but very familiar to Rodolphe, her lover in later chapters) often is merely a cover for selfishness and arrogance.

But this, this life of hers was as cold as an attic that looks north; and boredom, quiet as the spider, was spinning its web in the shadowy places of the heart.

Related Characters: Emma Bovary

Related Themes:

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter 7, Emma finally allows herself to regret her marriage and contemplate other, now seemingly impossible, futures with other men. These other hypothetical lives and hypothetical men all seem preferable to her current situation, her "life … as cold as an attic that looks north."

In this section, as in many others, the division between Emma and the narrator blurs: the latter seems to inhabit her despair, giving up detached scorn for more lyrical and indulgent prose. (Note that the sentence includes two similes, the first involving an attic and the second a spider.) This is the language and diction Emma favors as she contemplates her life with Charles.

Of course, Emma's boredom is indeed powerful, destructive enough to undermine her marriage and her social status. The spider is traditionally a sinister creature and this image foreshadows the novel's subsequent tragic events. Emma's boredom has almost nothing to do with her circumstances, but more to do her fantasies, her conviction that everyone else she admires is living a perfectly beautiful life, full of excitement and happiness.

Part 1, Chapter 8 Quotes

Her heart was just like that: contact with the rich had left it smeared with something that would never fade away.

Related Characters: Emma Bovary

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5254

Explanation and Analysis

Emma has trouble adjusting to her old routine after the ball. She is in a foul temper for a while and, as she is putting away her slippers with reverence, notices that their soles are stained from the ballroom's waxed floors. So too is her heart, she decides, from the night itself.

On the one hand, this is a striking image, rendered even more striking by the grammatical division between the sentence's two halves. Emma makes this dramatic assertion with confidence (though the text remains in the third person) — the stains will "never fade away."

And yet, on the other hand, readers shouldn't hesitate to critique this metaphor and see humor in melodrama. Emma cannot recover from her fleeting glimpse of wealth and, in her fit of despair, compares her heart to a dirty shoe. (The verb "smear" is particularly unglamorous, a far cry from the

ball's elegance and charm.) Flaubert employs such ironic juxtapositions again and again throughout the novel, switching back and forth between sympathy and contempt for Emma.

Part 1, Chapter 9 Quotes

It was Paris, rippling like the ocean, gleaming in Emma's mind under a warm golden haze. The swarming tumultuous life of the place was divided into several parts, classified into distinct tableaux. Emma grasped only two or three of these, and they hid all the rest from her, apparently representing the whole of humanity.

Related Characters: Emma Bovary

Related Themes:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

Emma's new purchase, a map of Paris, allows her to imagine all the diverse, complicated scenes unfolding in the capital. She has never seen the city, yet it captivates her.

However, even as Emma imagines the "swarming, tumultuous" excitement of Paris, she does so in a highly stylized, detached way. She sees "tableaux:" in other words, she sees arrangements of people and things, a simplification and flattening of human experience. ("Tableaux" means "paintings" in French, and readers might consider the role of visual arts in Emma's daydreaming.)

Slipping back into a more objective point of view, Flaubert then acknowledges the glaring flaws in Emma's fantasies, implying that she mistakes "two or three" of the tableaux for "the whole of humanity." She lets pleasing images of ambassadors and duchesses distract her from the poorer and darker parts of Paris. This passage bears a certain resemblance to an earlier one, when local peasants shattered a window during the ball and peered at their fashionable counterparts. Flaubert takes care to emphasize the wealth disparities in nineteenth-century France, as well as showing Emma's indifference to them.

She confused, in her desire, sensual luxury with true joy, elegance of manners with delicacy of sentiment.

Related Characters: Emma Bovary

Related Themes:

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is a simple diagnosis of Emma's problem: she confuses the internal and the external, appearances and feelings. Having read countless novels in which elegant ladies swoon in lush, blooming gardens, she assumes that the dresses and gardens are the cause and beginning of happiness and love.

Emma has similar thoughts in Chapter 7, when she concludes "that certain places on earth must produce happiness." She wants joy and romantic fulfillment, and yet searches for them in all the wrong places, among fashionable, ruthless aristocrats and, later, selfish youths.

The parallel structure in this sentence pits "sensual luxury" and "elegance of manners" against "true joy" and "delicacy of sentiment," implying that Flaubert not only considers the two categories distinct, but almost mutually exclusive. Luxury and elegance do not lead humans towards joy, but rather often lead us astray.

Part 2, Chapter 3 Quotes

She wanted a son; he would be strong and dark, she would call him George; and this idea of having a male child was like an anticipated revenge for the powerlessness of her past. A man, at least, is free; he can explore each passion and every kingdom, conquer obstacles, feast upon the most exotic pleasures. But a woman is continually thwarted.

Related Characters: Emma Bovary

Related Themes:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

Flaubert first introduces Emma's pregnancy a few paragraphs earlier, and the whole matter receives very little narrative attention. Charles is delighted by Emma's pregnancy, and both husband and wife anticipate a son. Of course, Berthe's birth, a few paragraphs later, is then a disappointment for Emma, undermining any healthy relationship between mother and daughter.

Emma's thoughts about her unborn child in this section align with her usual fantasies: she hopes her infant will be like the hero of a novel, someone "strong and dark." Emma is so detached from herself and her environment that she cannot consider her child as a real person, only a two-dimensional character.

Yet Flaubert also comments on gender in this passage, differentiating it from similar earlier moments. In Part 1, Emma does not devote a great deal of thought to the injustices of marriage. She curses her fate, but only later in the text does she perceive Charles' relative freedom and her own wretchedness.The final sentence — "a woman is continually thwarted" — is again somewhere between omniscient narration and internal monologue. And it's bitterly ironic: Emma's own hopes are "thwarted" by Berthe's birth (as Berthe, Emma assumes, is destined to grow up thwarted as well) and the disappearance of the imaginary George.

Part 2, Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ With her black hair, her large eyes, her straight nose, her gliding step, always silent now, did it not seem as if she passed through life almost without touching it, bearing on her brow the pale mark of a sublime destiny? She was so sad and so calm, so gentle and yet so shy, that by her side you felt under the spell of a frosty charm, just as you shiver in church at the scent of flowers mingling with the feel of cold marble. ... But she was filled with lust, with rage, with hatred.

Related Characters: Léon Dupuis, Emma Bovary

Related Themes:

Page Number: 99-100

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Emma realizes that Leon is in love with her — this information delights her, and pushes her to adopt new, wifely mannerisms. Her tenderness only fans the flames of his passion and in this section, the narrator slips into Leon's mind, full of hyperbole and love.

This description — of a "sublime destiny" and "frosty charm" — aligns with Leon's romantic sensibilities, and the reader can infer that the narrator has moved away from more impartial omniscient narration. Leon and Emma share this fragile disposition, an interest in "the scent of flowers mingling with the feel of cold marble." In other words, Leon turns Emma into a caricature of a romantic heroine ("so sad and so calm"), just as she similarly reduces most people to novelistic archetypes.

Dialogue then interrupts Leon's daydreaming and, when the narrator returns, readers encounter a changed Madame Bovary, "filled with lust, with rage, with hatred." Flaubert jolts the reader by juxtaposing these two contradictory descriptions, mocking Leon's naiveté and Emma's deceitful nature. Leon loves a woman who does not exist, an impossible incarnation of beauty itself, a mirage.

Part 2, Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ It was that mingling of the everyday and the exotic, which the vulgar, usually, take for the symptom of an eccentric existence, of unruly feeling, of the tyranny of art, always with a certain scorn for social conventions which they find seductive or exasperating.

Related Characters: Rodolphe Boulanger, Emma Bovary

Related Themes:

Page Number: 128

Explanation and Analysis

At the agriculture show, Rodolphe mocks the provincial people of Yonville, particularly the women with their unfashionable outfits. This mockery appeals to Emma, of course, as it matches her own fascination with wealth, glamour, and romantic pride.

In this section, the narrator steers clear of the characters' minds, remaining aloof, omniscient, and scornful. Both Emma and Rodolphe are mocked: the latter simply combines "the everyday and the exotic" in the hopes that he will seem "eccentric." And Emma, one of "the vulgar," falls for his trickery and believes herself to be superior to the rural society. In this moment, the narrator reduces both characters to their basic flaws. Readers might consider the source of this scathing commentary: is it a response to the couple's mockery of the townspeople? Does Flaubert want us to sympathize with the town's farmers and laborers? And does Rodolphe, a careless philanderer, represent the whole country's upper-class?

Part 2, Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ At last, she was to know the pleasures of love, that fever of happiness which she had despaired of. She was entering something marvellous where everything would be passion, ecstasy, delirium; blue immensity was all about her; the great summits of sentiment glittered in her mind's eye, ordinary experience appeared far below in the distance, in shadow, in the gaps between these peaks.

Related Characters: Emma Bovary

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 150-151

Explanation and Analysis

Emma and Rodolphe consummate their illicit love in the woods; when they return, Emma looks in the mirror, finds herself changed, and begins to daydream.

The fantasy here unfurls in a single long sentence, wrapped around a central metaphor. Love, for Emma, is "blue immensity" — she is at the peak of a mountain, surrounded by nothing but the loveliest blue, far from the petty trivialities of Yonville (or reality itself, essentially). Emma has finally reached her heart's desire: love. And the moment is indeed climactic for that very reason. The protagonist feels the very emotion she has been hounding since adolescence, the passion described in her favorite novels.

And yet Flaubert also reveals it to be pure abstraction, a feeling so detached from material reality that it ceases to have any intelligible meaning. Emma wants a love untethered to any person or place, but Flaubert dismisses this as an impossibility. The ironic accumulation of abstract words — "passion, ecstasy, delirium" — imply skepticism. The spatial distinction between love and "ordinary life," peak and nadir, indicates that Emma's perfect blue love is only a manifestation of her haughty arrogance.

Part 2, Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ Emma was just like any other mistress; and the charm of novelty, falling down slowly like a dress, exposed only the eternal monotony of passion, always the same forms and the same language. He did not distinguish, this man of such great expertise, the differences of sentiment beneath the sameness of their expression.

Related Characters: Rodolphe Boulanger, Emma Bovary

Related Themes:

Page Number: 177

Explanation and Analysis

While Emma and Rodolphe remain passionate, he becomes increasingly annoyed by her melodramatic outbursts and her endless gifts. He lumps her together with the rest of his past mistresses: they all use the same language to describe their love.

In this passage, Flaubert hints at his own complicated relationship with language. On the one hand, he warns against Emma's tendency toward cliché and hyperbole, repeating the adjective "same" (and the noun "sameness") in order to highlight its monotony. On the other hand, Rodolphe is equally culpable, refusing to look for the "differences of sentiment" that differentiate the various mistresses. Flaubert is wary of language, since it can disguise truth and complexity, but he also seems to advocate for charity between interlocutors here. Emma is flawed, but she is fully herself, hardly indistinguishable from other women.

Readers might also note the intriguing simile in this passage, a comparison between novelty and elegant clothing. The relationship duplicates, on a grand scale, each individual encounter, with its progression from flirtatious artifice to a sort of bleak nudity. And yet this nudity is not any more honest than the artifice, since "the same forms and the same language" appear here, too.

❝ ... as though the soul's abundance does not sometimes spill over in the most decrepit metaphors, since no one can give the exact measure of their needs, their ideas, their afflictions, and since human speech is like a cracked cauldron on which we knock out tunes for dancing bears, when we wish to conjure pity from the stars.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 177

Explanation and Analysis

This is one of the novel's essential passages. The narrator breaks away from the plot, fleshing out a digression on language. Again, this is a sort of apology for Emma and all her clichés: according to the narrator, we all have occasion to use "the most decrepit metaphors" in an attempt to describe our interior lives. (Readers should note the first person plural "we" in this section.)

Of course, this raises important questions about Flaubert's project. Does he too use "decrepit metaphors" in the text? And if so, do they undermine his work? In fact, Flaubert places this condemnation of inexact, clichéd language next to a particularly elaborate metaphor: "human speech is like a cracked cauldron..." Here, we find a juxtaposition of the sublime and mundane, the cold, inspiring heavens and ridiculous "dancing bears." Though Flaubert mocks the romantic sensibilities of Emma (and Leon), this passage reveals its own kind of idealization of the human soul, too.

The moment, then, might have an ironic subtext; it might also serve to cut some of the narrator's bitterness, and temper it with earnestness and a kind of sadness.

❝ And yet, in the immensity of this future that she conjured for herself, nothing specific stood out: the days, each one magnificent, were as near alike as waves are.

Related Characters: Rodolphe Boulanger, Emma Bovary

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 182

Explanation and Analysis

Rodolphe and Emma plan to flee with Berthe together; this plan makes Emma quite happy, improving her relations with her mother-in-law. At night, she dreams of her future with Rodolphe, but "nothing specific [stands] out."

Readers might consider how the "waves" here have something in common with the "blue immensity" of Chapter 9. (In both cases the word "immensity" appears, and Emma envisions herself surrounded by an all-encompassing blue substance.) Her heart's desire, pure romantic bliss, lacks some necessary specificity — it's formless and shapeless. Each wave, each day, resembles the next. The words "and yet" point to the need for specificity; love without any particular details is impossible abstraction.

Even with the verb "conjured for herself" (and a more literal translation might be "made appear for herself"), Flaubert indicates that Emma exists less in material reality, and more in a romanticized and novelized world, full of imagined futures and abstract passions.

Part 2, Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ Whenever she went to kneel at her Gothic prie-dieu, she called upon her Lord in the same sweet words she had once murmured to her lover, in the raptures of adultery. It was meant to arouse faith, but no delectation descended from on high.

Related Characters: Emma Bovary

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 199

Explanation and Analysis

As she recovers from her lingering illness, Emma turns back toward religion. Charles offers her many books about theology, most of which confuse and agitate her.

Emma first developed her interest in religion while in Catholic school, where the nuns praised her piety. However, even then, Emma was only confusing the trappings of devotion with devotion itself. She prayed, but only because she had read novels featuring pale, saintly young women. Here, too, her extreme religiosity is a charade, not a consequence of faith but an attempt to "arouse faith" and "delectation." For Emma, God is means rather than end, and she fails to understand that this does not conform to Catholic dogma.

In fact, she conflates godly love and romantic love, hoping both are paths to the "blue immensity" in her imagination. The narrator states this with slight irony, evidenced in the words "sweet" and "raptures."

Part 2, Chapter 15 Quotes

❝ For now she knew the pettiness of the passions that art exaggerates.

Related Characters: Emma Bovary

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 209

Explanation and Analysis

At the theater, Emma shrugs off Charles's questions and devotes all her attention to the play. The heroine's wedding dress pushes Emma to despair as she remembers her own happy wedding day, a time before her boredom and adultery. However, Emma then adjusts her relationship to the play, viewing it with scorn rather than empathy.

This shift towards cynicism, of course, comes from Emma's aborted affair with Rodolphe. Having recovered from the incident, Emma allows herself to feel superior and worldly, no longer susceptible to sentimental works of art. Again, the narrator seems to inhabit Emma's mind, despite the use of the third person: Flaubert's free indirect discourse gives readers an often-cruel insight into his characters. We see that Emma feigns cynicism in order to disguise her infallibly romantic nature. In fact, this moment precedes and foreshadows Emma's second adulterous relationship, in which she again turns her life into a novel.

Readers might also consider how Flaubert depicts art here.

Is this play akin to the "decrepit metaphors" that he describes in Chapter 12? How does Flaubert's realism differentiate his own novel from these other art works?

Part 3, Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ ...for that was how they wanted it to have been, each of them now devising for the other an ideal rearrangement of their past. Language is indeed a machine that continually amplifies the emotions.

Related Characters: Emma Bovary, Léon Dupuis

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 218

Explanation and Analysis

In Part 3, Leon and Emma reunite and discuss their past, their shared love. Both tell each other lies: Emma exaggerates her illness and Leon pretends to have changed his will for her sake. The narrator drifts away from their conversation at the end of the paragraph, moving towards more a more abstract discussion of language.

Again readers encounter Flaubert's skepticism. He does not trust language to truly convey feelings and ideas; instead, he believes that words disguise and modify reality. Leon and Emma share an inclination towards dramatic and sentimental diction and each enables the other, remaking the past into a novel.

In the original French, the narrator compares language to a rolling mill, an obscure machine that flattens and stretches substances. The verb that follows this noun, then, is "*allonger*," meaning to spread or extend. While Flaubert does imply that language "amplifies" emotions, he also believes that it thins and weakens feelings. Readers might also note that the rolling mill is a machine of the industrial revolution: in some ways, *Madame Bovary* is a novel about the slow move away towards modernity and complete industrialization. (Charles and Monsieur Homais, for instance, are eager to test new surgical procedures on the unsuspecting Hippolyte earlier in the book.)

❝ Was she serious in saying such things? Doubtless Emma herself had no real idea, being quite taken up with the charm of the seduction and the necessity of resisting it.

Related Characters: Léon Dupuis, Emma Bovary

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 220

Explanation and Analysis

Emma doesn't immediately yield to Leon's entreaties; instead, she stresses the importance of a platonic relationship. She tells him that other women will love him, but she herself is too old. Yet the narrator, as usual, questions her intentions.

The rhetorical question beginning this quotation distances the readers (and narrator) from the scene itself, placing us at an ironic remove. Emma falls into familiar patterns, using hyperbolic and canned expressions in order to recreate scenes from novels. Despite her delusions of cynicism and worldliness, she remains fascinated by "the charm of seduction and the necessity of resisting it." She still believes she can find love if she learns the gestures of love, the confessions and calculated refusals.

And yet the narrator tells us that Emma "herself [has] no real idea" of her honesty or lack thereof. This slight uncertainty does seem characteristic of an older, wearier Emma. She entertains fewer illusions about the correspondence between language and sentiment.

Part 3, Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ The pharmacist had meditated every phrase, he had smoothed and polished it and made it flow; it was a masterpiece of deliberation and progression, of elegant style and tactfulness; but anger had obliterated rhetoric.

Related Characters: Monsieur Homais

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 233

Explanation and Analysis

Emma returns to Yonville, only to walk in on Monsieur Homais berating Justin. Though Monsieur Homais planned to tell her of her father-in-law's death in a delicate, diplomatic fashion, he is so enraged and distracted that he forgets the speech and can only speak plainly. Emma leaves the shop.

The question of language and artifice becomes essential in this scene. Though the narrator acknowledges (albeit ironically) Homais' rhetorical abilities, he also seems to scorn the artifice involved. (Note the accumulation of vivid, metaphorical verbs: "smoothed and polished and made it

flow.") The sentence itself moves along a similar path, beginning with superfluous and dazzling language and ending with a blunt assertion: "anger had obliterated rhetoric."

The narrator does not tell us of Emma's immediate reaction to the news. Instead, readers learn of Homais' return to calm, his own obliviousness to his hurtful words. Once again language has affected and distorted reality and interpersonal communication.

Part 3, Chapter 5 Quotes

He admired the exaltation of her soul and the lace on her skirts.

Related Characters: Léon Dupuis, Emma Bovary

Related Themes:

Page Number: 247

Explanation and Analysis

Emma and Leon delight in their affair, and their room with its mahogany bed and red curtains. Leon, in particular, is amazed that he's found someone so elegant and refined.

Here, Flaubert uses a clever zeugma (a figure of speech in which a word applies to two other words in different senses)to mock the young man: the verb "admired" governs both "the exaltation of her soul" and "the lace of her skirts." This unites the two grammatical objects, and also lowers "the exaltation of her soul" down to the material world. To Leon, the two, however different, simply prove Emma's social value and worth as a mistress. Both are commodities, just as her own marriage to Charles is a commodity, a fact that makes Emma more desirable to Leon.

Of course, Emma is not guiltless either; she has turned "exaltation" into a game. Leon does not necessarily wrong her by treating her disposition as a material good. Since Emma merely mimics the gestures of love and adoration, any "exaltation" is a performance, disconnected from her internal state.

Part 3, Chapter 6 Quotes

But, if there were somewhere a strong and beautiful creature, a valiant nature full of passion and delicacy ... What an impossibility! Nothing, anyway, was worth that great quest; it was all lies! Every smile concealed the yawn of boredom, every joy a malediction, every satisfaction brought its nausea, and even the most perfect kisses only leave upon the lips a fantastical craving for the supreme pleasure.

Related Characters: Emma Bovary

Related Themes:

Page Number: 264

Explanation and Analysis

As her second adulterous affair falls apart, Emma asks herself why she has never found happiness. She longs for some ideal man, a "strong and beautiful creature," the only one who can draw her out of her despair and boredom.

Here Flaubert's free indirect discourse gives readers an almost claustrophobic understanding of Emma. (The various feverish exclamations lets readers know that the narrator has moved away from the omniscient third person.) At first, Emma gives her imagination free rein, just as she has again and again since adolescence. She pictures some lofty goal, and tells herself that it alone will give her pleasure. However, at this point in the novel, she's a changed woman: she suddenly swings from daydreaming to a profound, violent cynicism. ("It was all lies!") She cannot find a happy medium between sentimental idealism and pure contempt.

In a way, Emma seems to have accepted the essential banality of the world, a place full of yawns and disappointments and broken hearts. However, in her fit of passion, she begins to use more and more dramatic language to describe the ordinary; she complains of "maledictions" and "fantastical cravings." Emma turns the mundane into the villainous, forever trapped in the language of romance novels.

Emma was recovering in adultery the platitudes of marriage.

Related Characters: Emma Bovary

Related Themes:

Page Number: 271

Explanation and Analysis

Emma and Leon lose interest in each other, though Emma continues to give him gifts and write letters. In addition, many of Leon's friends and coworkers warn him against an involved affair with a married woman, and he decides to lead a more respectable life.

Emma resents Leon just as she resents Charles; she pinned her hopes on both men, and both proved themselves lacking. The platitudes of marriage, here, are disappointment and boredom and restlessness. In Emma's "blue immensity," love and happiness are endless passion; when the passion for Leon wanes, she blames him and longs to end their affair.

Of course, the word "platitudes" describes much of Emma's language throughout the novel. She uses stale language to describe her boredom as well as her joy — she has fed on platitudes for years and so can only convey the vaguest of feelings, ones poached from novels and plays. Flaubert warns readers to treat language with caution, even as we delight in his own careful prose.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART 1, CHAPTER 1

The book begins in a French rural classroom. The headmaster has introduced a shy, slightly countrified new student called Charles Bovary, who arouses the other students' contempt with his earnestness, odd manners, and unusual style of dress. The fifteen-year-old Charles is only now entering school for the first time. His father is a disgraced former army soldier, a hedonistic and dramatic man who married Charles' mother for her large dowry. We learn that he ate through his wife's fortune in a few years and then moved with her to the country, where his bad temper and profligate habits left them with little money or pleasure.

In these early descriptions of Charles and his father, the novel introduces two contrasting male archetypes. There is the dull, mild, sweet man, who impresses no one but who performs his duties faithfully, and the dazzling, sociable man who impresses everyone but who, in his selfishness, brings misfortune to those closest to him. So far, we only know the dull, unsociable aspect of Charles. But in the character of his father, charm is clearly divorced from goodness.

As the years pass, Charles' mother (the elder Madame Bovary) grows bitter and angry. After some years, Charles is born. His father tries to raise him in a harsh, manly way, but his mother coddles and loves him, and entertains great hopes for him. Charles is a "naturally peaceful," fun-loving child who spends his days exploring the village. After turning 12, he receives a sleepy, sporadic education from the village curé (a parish priest). A few years later, his mother insists that he be sent away to school in Rouen.

Charles has no capacity for the trappings of manliness, the ostentatious toughness that both made and ruined his father. He is not interested in appearing one way or another: he likes simply being out in the world and seeing what it has to offer. His attention is directed outward, not inward.

Charles is a relatively hard-working, well-behaved, unremarkable school boy. After some years, his parents enroll him in medical school. His classes confuse and exhaust him, but he works hard, "grinding away in perfect ignorance." Little by little, though, he stops going to the mysterious classes and instead spends all his time playing dominoes in dark taverns, a deviation that gives him a thrilling sense of freedom.

Charles has almost no ambition or self-regard, but a relatively strong sense of duty. He is not bothered by the contempt of others, nor by any sense of intellectual inferiority. He obeys his mother's wishes out of kindness and respect. He is not a dullard: he loves freedom and excitement, but he doesn't feel entitled to them.

Charles fails his medical exams, but he studies hard for the next round and manages to pass. His mother, the elder Madame Bovary, sends him off, newly licensed, to a village called Tostes, where he becomes the country doctor. Charles' mother also finds him a wife, a wealthy, unattractive middle-aged woman named Héloïse Dubuc. Charles discovers that he does not enjoy marriage. His wife is demanding, controlling, and needy, and he does not love her.

His mother's disappointment and hurt feelings have more weight, for Charles, than his own pleasure, so he obeys her wishes. Charles does not come to marriage with any expectations or demands. He experiences marriage, and then draws his conclusions: an inductive method that proceeds from detail to abstraction.

PART 1, CHAPTER 2

One night, Charles is called away to set a broken leg in Les Bertaux, a distant village. He sets out a few hours after he receives the message, sleepy, comfortable, and slightly anxious about his task. His patient is an old widower named Monsieur Rouault, who lives on a large farm with his daughter Emma. Charles easily sets the simple fracture, admiring, in the meantime, the daughter's white nails, lovely eyes, and general elegance. She serves him a small meal, and they talk briefly about the difficulties of country life.

Charles is a dutiful doctor, but he is not passionately self-sacrificing. He does what needs to be done without implicating his ego. He enjoys simple pleasures – sleep, food, and beauty. Emma, from the very beginning, is much less easy and natural. Her appearance suggests a sort of nervous, meticulous care. Her self-consciousness and self-regard are visible from the beginning.

Charles returns the very next day to check on Monsieur Rouault's leg, and very frequently thereafter. The man's leg heals quickly and easily, and Charles begins to get a good reputation. Charles intensely enjoys his visits without quite knowing why. Soon his wife discovers that Monsieur Rouault's daughter is pretty and well-educated, and becomes quite jealous. She complains shrilly about Charles' disloyalty and berates the young girl to no end. Charles agrees to stop visiting Les Bertaux, but he thinks about Mademoiselle Rouault all the more.

Charles follows his instincts without trying to analyze them. He knows that he wants to go to Les Bertaux, so he goes. Only at his wife's insistent hinting does he realize that he has feelings for Emma. He lives his life without the need to create an imaginative structure corresponding to it, a fantasy world of ideas, ambitions, and justifications. When he acts, he considers the effect of his actions on others, but not on his self-image.

One day, Héloïse's lawyer runs off with the entire Dubuc fortune, and Charles' wife is left penniless. It also comes to light that she had lied about the value of some of her assets. Charles' parents quarrel with her, and she dies of a seizure a week later. Charles responds with a sort of ambivalent sadness.

Because Charles very nearly lacks an ego, a self-image, he also lacks any sense of his rights or privileges. He observes that his wife makes him unhappy, but he does not feel that he deserves better. He takes her life and her death as they come, without the distortions of ego.

PART 1, CHAPTER 3

Soon after her funeral, Monsieur Rouault visits Charles to pay him for his services and to offer his condolences. He describes the crushing grief he felt after his wife's death, and assures Charles that with time the grief will abate. He invites Charles to come do a little hunting on his farm, and Charles happily accepts. He begins to visit Les Bertaux again, where he is coddled and comforted by all. He feels some sadness at the thought of his wife, but he enjoys his independence.

Charles does not expect anything in particular of marriage, and he imposes no preconceived ideas on widowhood. He perceives his emotions – slight misery, and then slight sadness – and accepts them. He does not ask himself: "what should *I feel?" He is almost a caricature of a realist, a blank slate where experience is written. He is implausibly neutral.*

One day, Charles comes to Les Bertaux when only Emma is at home. He watches her sew gracefully in the afternoon light. She asks him for medical advice and shows him her room, explaining all her most precious possessions and telling him stories about her childhood. He is enchanted by the modulations of her voice. At home, he thinks of Emma longingly all night.

Emma is anything but neutral. She has constructed an elaborate, inflected narrative of her life, made of stories, objects, and refinements of behavior. Because Charles is so profoundly unselfconscious, he cannot suspect Emma of falseness. He encounters her as he would a lovely deer – as though she were born lovely.

Charles resolves to ask for Emma's hand in marriage, but never seems to find the courage. When Charles visits at Michaelmas, he finally tries to speak to Monsieur Rouault. Before he can even get his words out, Monsieur Rouault happily gives his blessing. Rouault goes inside to tell Emma, and gives a sign indicating her consent – an open shutter. They are married the following spring.

Charles loves Emma and wants to be near her, but it is difficult for him to propose to her. He lacks the conviction that he deserves happiness – not because he hates himself, but because he does not love himself. Because he has no coherent self-image, he has nothing to live up to – no ideal driving him on.

PART 1, CHAPTER 4

Emma had wanted to have a small, romantic wedding by candlelight, but her father insists on a traditional wedding feast. Dozens of guests arrive at Les Bertaux, dressed variously according to social station. On the day of the wedding, bride, groom, and guests walk in a colorful procession to the church. After the ceremony, they eat and frolic all day long. Charles' mother feels neglected, Charles' father smokes and drinks all night, and Charles himself has only a so-so time with the rambunctious guests, since he "[has] no talent for the facetious." The morning after the wedding, however, he is all aglow; he dotes on Emma in the most loving possible way, though she herself is somewhat cool and detached. The newlyweds leave for Tostes the next day, leaving Monsieur Rouault to reminisce sadly about his own lost happiness.

In almost every detail of the novel, Flaubert embeds the contrast between Emma and Charles. Emma is preoccupied with the ceremony, the symbol; she had wanted an elegant, aristocratic wedding, not a peasant feast. Yet she seems indifferent about the actual marriage. She does not have a framework f or marriage itself, because love stories tend to drop curtain before married life begins. Charles, on the other hand, does not care very much about the ceremony, and does not perform well at it. But the marriage itself is deeply significant to him.

PART 1, CHAPTER 5

When the newlyweds arrive in Tostes, Emma takes a tour of Charles's house, which (we can infer from the tone of the description) seems to her very dowdy. All she can see is dirt and dishevelment. In her new bedroom, she finds Héloïse's old wedding bouquet, which Charles hurriedly takes to the attic. In the course of the next few days, she redecorates the house as much as she can: she changes the wallpaper and the candle shades, paints the walls, and puts benches in the small garden. To please her, Charles buys her a used carriage.

Here, and throughout the book, Flaubert conveys the preoccupations of the characters by describing only the aspects of their lives that are important, and, therefore, visible to them. As with the ceremony, Emma's primary concern is appearances. She is lucid and opinionated about the color of the walls, but she seems quite vague about the actual life taking place between them.

Charles is infatuated with Emma and feels nothing but perfect bliss. He is in love, he is sexually gratified, and he thinks himself the happiest he has ever been. He loves all her small gestures and delicacies, and he can hardly stand to leave the house. Emma, on the other hand, quickly realizes that since she is not happy, she must not be in love. She has read about the various joys of love in novels, and she is determined to experience them herself.

Charles, on the other hand, is blind to things like wallpaper. He is in love with Emma, and all his attention is on her. Emma does not seem to see Charles. She sees only herself, her joys and disappointments. Love, for her, is not a strong feeling toward another person; it is a self-contained, self-directed happiness or the achievement of an ideal received from books.

PART 1, CHAPTER 6

This chapter tells the story of Emma's upbringing. Even as a young girl, she reads romantic stories like *Paul et Virginie*, which describe idealized tragic love. At thirteen she enters a convent, which she enjoys for its beautiful, unearthly atmosphere. She loves most religious writings because they are full of "romantic melancholia," which she finds emotionally satisfying. The convent's maid brings the girls romantic novels, which give Emma a passionate desire to resemble their heroines in every way: she craves their beautiful clothes and castles, their admirable lovers, and their tragic dispositions. Even in her music lessons, Emma seeks out the satisfactions of emotional turmoil.

Emma's childhood is peaceful and somewhat uneventful, so instead of accumulating the experience available to her, she absorbs the experiences described in fanciful, clichéd novels – experiences that don't really have an equivalent in life. She trains herself to respond most strongly – with the greatest sense of reality – to experiences that are unreal. In craving these experiences, and the abstract, vague identity that goes along with them, she essentially tries to become unreal – a 19th century cartoon character.

When Emma's mother dies, Emma mourns her by crying and making a keepsake from her hair. Emma enjoys exhibiting sorrow, and thinks it flattering. She makes a lifestyle of it. But soon that lifestyle begins to bore her, and she admits to herself that she is no longer sad. The convent, too, begins to bore her, because she feels oppressed by its austere and intellectual aspects. She returns to the farm, which she dislikes even more than the convent. So when Charles comes into her life, she assumes that it is true love coming to save her – that she will finally experience the passion described in books.

Emma has learned the appropriate ways to express grief: she has made the connection from event to expression, but not the connection from event to emotion, or from emotion to expression. She is missing the central step. At first she enjoys the appearance of sorrow, but because it does not have any reason besides itself, it loses meaning, and Emma becomes bored. She goes through the same experience with religious devotion.

PART 1, CHAPTER 7

Emma wonders why her honeymoon period isn't bringing her happiness, and concludes that her home is simply the wrong setting for love. Love, she believes, can only unfold in lavish, romantic settings, in faraway exotic places. Love requires fine foods and beautiful clothes. Charles has no idea of Emma's dissatisfaction, and she begins to resent him. She believes that he is not sufficiently masculine, learned, energetic; he has nothing interesting to say, and no way to excite and entertain her. His main quality, to her, is an annoying contentment.

Emma is interested in the world around her only to the extent that it affects her emotionally, and she is only affected emotionally by a world that resembles that of the silly, bad novels. Since her house doesn't bring her the right kind of joy, she dislikes it; because Charles fails to thrill her, he is nothing to her. She is not interested in who he is, only in what he can do for her: a selfishness that verges on solipsism.

Charles, on his end, is endlessly amazed and awed by all of Emma's small habits and accomplishments. He delights in her amateurish piano-playing and sketching, and takes pride in her elegant housekeeping. Charles' mother, the elder Madame Bovary, sometimes comes to visit, and Charles' love for Emma makes her feel desolate and abandoned. She scolds Emma for being extravagant and wasteful. Charles, who loves both women, cannot bring himself to take a side.

Charles, on the other hand, is not at all interested in what Emma can do for him. He is interested in Emma as a separate, unique being. He does not measure her against any abstract standard – a standard of wifehood, or artistic accomplishment. He perceives her just as she is, as best he can. He is a realist, though also not a strong personality.

Emma tries to rouse herself to passion with poetry and moonlight, but she remains indifferent to Charles. Their lovemaking becomes a boring habit. Emma often goes wandering through fields with her greyhound Djali, thinking vaguely about her life. Finally, her unhappiness crystallizes into a single regret: "Oh, why, dear God, did I marry him?" If she had waited, she thinks, she might have married a handsome nobleman who would have given her an exciting life. She knows that many men have found her attractive. She has one thing to look forward to: a ball at La Vaubyessard, held by the Marquis d'Andervilliers. The Marquis had asked Charles for some cuttings of a cherry tree, noticed his pretty wife, and sent them an invitation.

At first, Emma genuinely wants to love Charles. It does not occur to her that loving Charles would mean… loving Charles – finding aspects of his personality or appearance that she admires, for example, as he does with her. She believes firmly that love is a certain feeling in a certain setting, as described in the books (one might add, here, that if her reading had been broader, her definition would have been broader as well). But when Emma recreates the setting and the behaviors of love, it does not cause her to feel love. She is confusing cause and effect.

PART 1, CHAPTER 8

The Wednesday of the ball, Emma and Charles drive at the magnificent château. Emma is deeply impressed by the spaciousness, the marble, the imposing line of portraits on the walls, the smell of flowers and the sounds of crystal. She observes that some of the women do not put their gloves into the wine glasses, meaning they will not abstain from alcohol. She notices the Marquis's father-in-law, a famous adventurer and former lover of Marie-Antoinette's, who now sits frightening and decrepit.

For the first time in her life, Emma finds herself in a place that does – to an extent – resemble the world of the books. It is a superficial resemblance, because Emma knows nothing of the life that takes place there. But Emma always infers values from appearances; she believes that a beautiful exterior always indicates something *of great value, though she does not quite know what something is.*

Emma dresses beautifully for dinner, crossly warning Charles not to try to dance with her. She comes down to the ballroom and performs a quadrille, a dance that excites her by its graceful exchange of partners. She notices a dispersed group of men that all have a certain something in common: they have the clothes, the complexions, and the "peculiar brutality" of great wealth. She overhears enchanting, mysterious conversations about faraway places and expensive racehorses.

The château's guests further confirm Emma's blurry ideas about the good life. Their lives seem exciting and refined. But, ultimately, Emma is admiring wealth and nothing else: the good looks of wealth, the emotional complacence of wealth, and the pastimes of wealth. She thinks she is observing a refinement of mind and emotion, but it is only refinement of acquisition.

Emma notices peasants at the windows looking in at the brilliant scene, and remembers her own rural childhood at Les Bertaux. Dazzled by the ball's splendor, she hardly feels as though that childhood happened at all: it seems to be fading by the minute. An exquisite dinner is served. At 3 AM, the remaining guests begin to waltz. A mysterious man known as the Viscount invites Emma to dance. He dances beautifully, and soon Emma is exhausted and enraptured. From her seat, he watches him dance with another beautiful woman, more skilled in dancing than Emma. Soon, the guests go to their rooms to sleep.

Because Emma lives through fantasy, not experience, her past life easily falls away from her. She has formed no attachments to it, to its people, places, or values: she has only attached herself to the people and places of her books. The Vaubyessard ball is all she needs to cement her fantasies, to confirm their significance and supreme importance. The vagueness of the experience, its lack of detail or human meaning, is only another way the experience mirrors the novels.

The following afternoon, Emma and Charles set out for home. As Emma sits languishing in their carriage, she thinks she sees the Viscount and another man ride by on horseback. Emma and Charles find a green silk cigar-case, probably belonging to one of the men. When they arrive at Tostes, Emma fires her maid for some perceived rudeness. Charles begins to smoke one of the stranger's cigars, but Emma takes the case away and hides it. She spends her days reminiscing sadly about the ball.

Vagueness appeals to Emma for good reason. It allows her to worship something without really knowing it; knowledge always reveals flaws, ambivalence, complications, and Emma has no stomach for such things. She wants the things she loves to be simple and perfect. Therefore, she prefers the unknown: the Viscount without a name or face, the real life shrouded in mystery.

PART 1, CHAPTER 9

Emma often examines the cigar case, breathes its expensive smell, and imagines that it was given to the Viscount by a beautiful lover. She fantasizes that the Viscount is in Paris, and longs to go there herself. She takes countless sad imaginary journeys along a Paris street map. She reads fashion magazines, society columns, and more romance novels, trying desperately to connect herself to the Viscount and his life. Her reading leads her to imagine Paris in three parts: the political, the aristocratic, and the artistic. Each world seems wonderfully exciting, and the rest of life seems banal and irrelevant.

Emma singles out certain kinds of life experiences, and in valuing them over all others, she effectively erases all others from her imagination. Only that which she values is real to her: everything else ceases to exist. The worlds that she does allow into existence – the exciting, fashionable, wealthy worlds – she knows only through the abstract, detail-poor, hyperbolic writing she consumes. Such writing imparts emotion but not knowledge.

Emma hires a new maid, an obedient young girl named Félicité whom she trains to behave like a lady's maid. Emma buys beautiful negligées and little household refinements to console herself. Charles delights in all these feminine mysteries. His business is prospering, and he is very well-respected. Emma hates his professional complacency and his bad manners, but he always manages to interpret her displeasure as a mark of concern and affection.

Here, Charles is no longer purely an inductive realist. He has observed details, and drawn conclusions, and now he must force the new details to accord with the earlier conclusions. Charles has begun to be deductive. He has had to deal with abstractions, as everyone must, at some point. Pure realism is impossible.

A year passes, and Emma becomes increasingly bored and desperate for some sort of change. She is too depressed to read or play piano, so she spends her days observing small marks of decay in the house and garden, and staring at the monotonous routine outside her window. She looks at the run-down wig shop and watches a street performer play an organ; on top of the organ there are miniature dancers in a tiny salon. She is miserable all day, but she feels worst at mealtimes, when she experiences a particular "rancid staleness." She loses her appetite and stops taking care of the house. When Charles's mother or her father come to visit, she is impatient and rude. Soon she develops a vague nervous ailment, and Charles decides that she needs a change of scenery. When they leave Tostes, she is pregnant.

Emma is bored and depressed because she lacks the impetus for any kind of action. She has only one goal for herself: to live a life that resembles that of the heroines of the novels. The novels define the heroines by their beauty, their possessions, and their love affairs – not by their accomplishments, thoughts, or values. So, even though Emma likes reading, drawing, and playing piano, the activities are meaningless to her because they do not help to create the life she wants. She did not learn to value art or knowledge for the private joy they give – only for their contribution to the appearance of a certain life.

PART 2, CHAPTER 1

Emma and Charles settle in Yonville-l'Abbaye, a small town near Rouen. The town is composed of dying pasture, a reddish river, a church, a large market, Homais' pharmacy, an inn called the Golden Lion, and a cemetery. The cemetery is very large, due to a recent cholera epidemic, and the grave-digger (who is also the sexton and the beadle) uses the extra space to plant potatoes.

In even a short space, Flaubert makes the town seem like a great many things at once: it is charming, stifling, cozy, narrow. Finally, it is a little grotesque, with its cemetery potatoes. The beautiful and the ugly, the idealistic and the cynical must coexist there.

Next, we see the innkeeper – a widow named Madame Lefrançois – busily preparing for the arrival of the Bovarys. Monsieur Homais sits contentedly next to her as she bustles about the kitchen, making dinner for both the newcomers and the regular patrons. One of these is Monsieur Binet, a crotchety, awkward tax collector whose greatest passion is working a **lathe**. He comes to the inn every day at six o'clock.

The idea of regularity is significant in the life of this small town. The inn's patrons eat dinner with the repetitive faithfulness of Binet's lathe. This regularity is all Emma can see. But behind it, in the finer details, lay all sorts of odd deviations and idiosyncrasies that she never notices.

Monsieur Homais chatters to the innkeeper about practical matters and makes a grandiose speech about the hypocrisy and irrationality of organized religion. Just then, the Bovarys arrive in the evening coach, a large yellow carriage called a Hirondelle. The carriage is late, because it stopped to look for Madame Bovary's missing greyhound.

Homais habitually expounds about rationality and progress, the scientific and humanistic ideals of the 19th century. But he uses a borrowed, elevated, self-congratulatory language, and his primary goal seems to be self-aggrandizement and personal success.

PART 2, CHAPTER 2

Homais introduces himself to the newcomers and asks to join them for dinner. A young blond man watches Emma as she warms herself by the fire: it is another one of the inn's regulars, a clerk named Léon Dupuis. Monsieur Homais describes, in a pointedly learned and scientific way, the area's climate and most prevalent diseases, while Léon talks to Emma romantically about the beauties of nature, the pleasures of music, and the wonder of a good book. Whatever subject they touch on, they seem instantly to agree, though they say almost nothing of their actual lives. After dinner, Charles and Emma go to their new home.

Just as Homais is well-versed in the rhetoric of progress, Léon and Emma are well-versed in the rhetoric of sentimental melancholy. Each sort of rhetoric is a string of platitudes, which express nothing about the speaker or about the surrounding world. A language relatively free from cliché might form a link from the person to the world, and from the world to another person; but rhetoric only connects one person's frothy self-image to another's.

PART 2, CHAPTER 3

Léon spends the following day waiting expectantly for dinner. He is thrilled by his conversation with Emma – his first long conversation with a lady. He is well-educated but shy, and he feels that the conversation brought out all his best thoughts and most refined instincts. Homais, on his end, is as helpful and friendly to the Bovarys as he can be. He has gotten in trouble in the past for practicing medicine without a license, and he wants to befriend the new doctor so that he might keep quiet about the pharmacist's infringements, if need be.

Like Emma, Léon experiences the world primarily as a set of vague abstractions. Emma is not Emma, but a "lady"; she is meaningful to him for her abstract contribution to his self-image, not for her particular qualities. Similarly, their conversation is not valuable to him for any insight or pleasure. It is valuable because it fits into the abstract category of a "refined" conversation.

Charles is anxious that he has no patients as yet, and he is worried about the family's growing expenses. Emma's many extravagant purchases, and now this difficult move, have finished off her entire dowry. But he is overjoyed about their unborn child. Emma, on the other hand, cannot quite look forward to the child's birth because she cannot spend as much as she would like on its clothes and bedding. She is hoping for a son, so that he might be strong and free to do anything he likes. He would do all the wonderful things that Emma cannot.

Here, and elsewhere, Emma resembles Charles' father. Emma squanders her dowry on extravagances, just as the elder Monsieur Bovary squandered his wife's dowry. He is adventurous, ill-mannered, selfish, and charming, just as Emma would wish to be, if she were a man. Emma wants a son that might fulfill this dream for her. She is only capable of valuing the child on this very specific condition.

However, Emma gives birth to a girl. After long deliberation she names her Berthe, after some aristocratic young woman at the Vaubyessard ball. After a rowdy christening party, she gives the child to a wet nurse named Mère Rolet.

Since the child is a girl, and the condition cannot be fulfilled, Emma creates another, equally narrow one: the girl must abstractly represent beauty and aristocracy.

Some time after the birth, Emma goes out to the nurse's house to visit the child. She runs into Léon on the street, and he shyly offers his company. The nurse's house is small and rather squalid, and the nurse appears with a very sickly child at her side. Emma picks up Berthe from a cradle on the floor, and just as Léon is admiring her incongruous delicate beauty, the child vomits on the shoulder of her dress. The nurse takes the opportunity to ask Emma for some soap, then some coffee to keep her awake, then some brandy. Emma agrees with some irritation.

Emma seems not to notice the dirt, sickness, and sadness of the nurse's house. She does not care that her child is living in very bad conditions. She is concerned only that she might appear lovely to Léon. Even when she picks up the child, the text implies, subtly, that she does it for his benefit, and, therefore, for the sake of her self-image. She is willfully blind to this uglier part of life, which she has fantasized into nonexistence.

On their way home, Emma notices Léon's fine hair and fingernails, which he cares for very conscientiously – it is "one of the clerk's main occupations." They walk home slowly, admiring the scenery and discussing a dancing-troupe. They are struck by an intense mutual sympathy, very much like love or lust. By evening the entire town has heard of their promenade, and public opinion condemns it as very improper. Léon walks Emma to her door, returns to his office, and thinks despairingly of his deep boredom with country life. He has had no one interesting to talk to – until now.

Léon is similarly obsessed with appearances. She notices his pampered fingernails, just as Charles once noticed hers. Like Emma, Léon strives for some vague, ideal life, but he can only identify it by its external markers. He thinks that clean fingernails are somehow equivalent to something like emotional delicacy; but he can't manage to be interested in the delicacy itself, just as Emma can't manage to be interested in music itself.

PART 2, CHAPTER 4

Emma spends much of her day observing passers-by. With a shadowy feeling, twice a day she watches Léon walk from his office to the inn. Homais joins Emma and Charles for dinner nearly every night, and chatters expertly with Charles about medicine and the news. His assistant, Justin, comes to get him every night at eight. On Sundays, the Bovarys visit the Homais house for a sort of weekly party; the pharmacist is an unpleasant gossip, so few people attend. Léon never misses a Sunday, since it is his one chance to talk to Emma. Together, they look through picture books, read aloud to one another, and talk intimately.

As in Tostes, Emma is oppressed by the ordinariness and the regularity of her life. She understands it only as an abstraction in a bad book: it is a dull, provincial life with hardened patterns and little pleasure. She also understands her conversations with Léon abstractly: she thinks that they are refined and proper, and gesture toward a different sort of life. The aspiration toward a different sort of life is the true and only subject matter of their intimacy.

Léon gives Emma some cactuses, which are fashionable at the moment, and during the evenings they watch each other tending their window-gardens. Emma gives Léon an expensive striped rug, which further throws their friendship into public scrutiny. Léon desperately wants to declare his love, but he can never find the courage. Emma does not wonder whether she loves Léon, because she knows love must be sudden and intense, not soft and gradual.

Emma's abstractions about love befuddle her to such an extent that she fails to notice her actual love. Abstraction predominates over reality, and nearly squashes it. But in this novel, love can survive even in barren conditions, with almost nothing to substantiate it. Love can be resilient, it can be shallow, but above all love is not anything in particular.

PART 2, CHAPTER 5

One winter Sunday, the Bovarys, the Homais family, and the clerk go to visit a half-built flax-mill. Emma takes the opportunity to mentally compare Charles' dull, sluggish appearance to Léon's lovely, refined one. Later that night, she thinks long and hard about the contrast. She can't stop thinking about Léon and his many charms. She becomes fully aware for the first time of his love for her, and the realization fills her with both bliss and bitter regret. She had not attended the Sunday soirée at the Homais house, and she is pleased to learn from Charles that Léon left early.

Everyone sometimes zeroes in the looks of friends or acquaintances. But Emma is not simply suddenly paying attention to Charles's and Léon's looks: for her, their appearances are the sum total of who they are, or at least the largest, most central, and domineeringly symbolic aspect of who they are. For her, the thought "Charles is plain" is identical to the thought "He is nothing, and I do not love him."

The next day, Emma has a visit from Lheureux, the draper (or wholesaler), who offers to bring her any goods she might need. He offers her various pretty things, and explains that she would not have to pay right then. He even offers her a loan. She coldly declines, but he chatters pleasantly about Charles's patients and quietly leaves, promising to return.

Emma has already spent more than she and Charles could afford. Lheureux comes to tempt her with precisely the sorts of thing she cannot resist: objects that she believes make love possible, at an elegantly ambiguous price. Lheureux is offering her the illusion of an aristocratic life for his own personal profit.

Léon visits Emma, but the awkwardness of their situation leaves them with little to say. She is quietly enjoying his admiration, while he wonders whether she is displeased with him. She tells Léon that she no longer has time for music, since she must take care of her husband, child, and home. From that moment on, Emma really does put all her energies into homemaking. She takes Berthe from the wet nurse, and displays the child to all her visitors like a mother in a book. She becomes an attentive and conscientious wife. Her performance makes Léon lose all hope of a romantic relationship with her, but it makes him love her all the more, in a worshipful way. Emma becomes even paler and thinner, like an angel of mercy. Her sad, gentle exterior makes her widely admired in town.

Emma is torn between two desires. She wants to feel strongly and freely, but she also wants to cultivate a particular, elegant, admirable exterior. The books she loves have taught her that true passion is contingent on a certain self-presentation, in a certain setting. Emma has been in the grip of boredom: she can't seem to achieve strong feeling. So, logically, she directs her attention instead to the cultivation of the certain appearance and setting that should (in her mind) cause strong feeling. Her convent upbringing slants her behavior toward the saintly.

Underneath, though, Emma is miserable and angry, and "filled with lust" for Léon. Her pleasure in her purity is tempered by "the cravings of the flesh, the yearning for money, and the melancholia of passion." She becomes irritable with her household and angry with Charles for thinking her happy. She is tired of pretending, and wishes she could elope with the clerk, but the thought fills her with dread.

But it is feeling that creates appearance, not the reverse. Emma feels no motherly or romantic love, and playacting mother and wife does not make her feel anything. She is bored and empty. Her one genuine emotion is her attraction to Léon. Her interior and her exterior have split.

PART 2, CHAPTER 6

One spring evening, Emma sits dreaming about her girlhood days in the convent. She walks to the church and tries to talk to the priest about her troubled state of mind, but the priest, distracted by the children running in the courtyard, does not say anything useful. Emma wants spiritual guidance, but the priest can talk of nothing but food, fire, bloated cows, and other practical matters. Emma gives up and leaves, listening to the priest try vainly to give the children their lessons.

Flaubert seems to mock Homais for his dogmatic hatred of priests, but here he himself takes an accusatory stance. The priest claims to care for the soul, but he can speak of nothing but the body; he seems only to believe in troubles of the body, not of the soul. Such a blindness in a person of his vocation is absurd and hypocritical.

When Emma comes home, Berthe tries to play with her, but Emma pushes her away so meanly that the little girl falls and badly cuts her cheek. When Charles comes home he takes care of her; Emma worries slightly, and then feels pleased at herself for worrying. Berthe lies crying quietly in her cradle, and Emma thinks her very ugly.

This sad scene leaves no room for doubt about Emma's relationship to Berthe: she has no feelings of love, care, or responsibility toward her daughter. Emma is not monstrous – simply inexperienced at doing or feeling anything that does not benefit her directly. Motherly love is learned. It is worth noting that Emma grew up without a mother, as her mother died when she was young.

After dinner, Charles goes to the pharmacist's house to return some bandages. Charles takes Léon aside and asks him to find out about ordering a daguerreotype – he wants to surprise Emma with a little romantic gesture. Léon, meanwhile, is growing weary of unrequited love and of his tedious daily routine, and dreams of going to Paris to finish his law degree. There, he would live like an artist and wear beautiful clothes. He takes his time making preparations, since in his heart he is unwilling to leave Emma behind. Finally he cannot postpone any longer.

Like Emma, Léon is consumed by boredom. His life is uneventful, and for the most part his emotions are idle; he can only feel so much for Emma without receiving anything in return. Léon loves Emma because it adds to the pleasure and excitement of his life, not because, say, her presence in the world seems wonderful to him. When unrequited love stops providing excitement, Léon moves on to other sources.

The day of his departure, he comes to say goodbye to Emma. They stand there, silent and flushed, full of feeling. He admires her one last time and leaves; he thinks he catches her staring at him from behind a curtain. That evening, she is forced to listen to Homais and Charles discussing Léon's future life in Paris. Before he leaves, Homais announces that their town will soon be hosting a large agricultural show.

Léon and Emma's sort-of-love has one interesting quality. When each one considers the love in solitude, it seems to collapse pathetically into pretty features and a shared interest in pink cliché. But when they are together, something slightly more mysterious takes place between them.

PART 2, CHAPTER 7

The next day, Emma feels confused and desolate. Her feeling of loss resembles her longing for Vaubyessard. In absentia, Léon seems ever more beautiful and marvelous, and she deeply regrets letting him go. Her sorrow becomes her sustaining warmth. But with time, the emotion fades, and she is left more unhappy than ever. She begins to buy expensive clothes and trifles to console herself, and tries to read serious books. She is restless and moody, and develops a tendency for fainting fits.

Emma's longing for Léon is like her longing for Vaubyessard because both are emotions directed inward; both objects of longing represent a better, happier life for Emma, the achievement of an abstract ideal. When Léon leaves, he is no longer a possibility of pleasure, and Emma finds herself loving him for his own sake. But she is not used to such a selfless devotion, and redirects her energies into more familiar channels.

One day, when Emma spits blood, Charles writes his mother for advice. The elder Madame Bovary thinks books and idleness are Emma's trouble, and she cancels Emma's library subscription.

This scene is a straightforward reference to the book-burning scene in Don Quixote. *Charles' mother seems ignorant, but she is not wrong.*

One day, Emma notices a man in a green velvet coat walking through the square. She overhears his name – Monsieur Rodolphe Boulanger de la Huchette – and concludes that he is a nobleman. He has come to ask Charles to examine his servant, who has been having pains. At the servant's request, Charles bleeds him. He has asked Justin to hold the bowl, and both young men have some sort of nervous fit. Monsieur Rodolphe watches as Emma gracefully nurses Justin back to consciousness.

Emma and Rodolphe embark on a romance of appearances. Emma likes Rodolphe for his fancy coat and aristocratic name, and Rodolphe likes Emma for good looks and genteel bearing. They form complete opinions of one another based on these impressions, without reference to any of the traits, values, and habits that make us distinct people.

Rodolphe talks to Emma a little bit afterwards. She tells him that she has never had a fainting fit, and he expresses admiration for her strength. After he leaves, he thinks shrewdly about Emma and her life. He guesses that Charles is clumsy, stupid, and unsatisfying, and that the lovely Emma is longing for some excitement. He thinks he could easily seduce her, though he wonders how to "get rid of her afterwards." He thinks that he prefers Emma to his current mistress, who is losing her looks. He decides to pursue her.

Rodolphe's shrewd interpretation of Emma's life is like a very cursory summary of the novel itself. It is not inaccurate, exactly, but it is missing so much – everything that differentiates Emma from a million other pretty, bored wives. Rodolphe deals in abstractions, like Emma; but his abstractions are as cynical as Emma's are sentimental.

PART 2, CHAPTER 8

The day of the agricultural show has arrived, and the town is in a pleasant tumult. Emma is walking arm in arm with Monsieur Rodolphe, who is admiring her inscrutable profile. They walk though a meadow, busy with people, goods, and animals, and Rodolphe flirts with Emma by disparaging other conventional women and by describing his melancholy. His tone is carefully calculated to inspire admiration. He goes on to imply that he is in need of a beloved to whom he could devote all his time and energy. Emma is torn between pleasure and skepticism.

Even though Rodolphe, in his world-weary way, feels that he deciphered Emma the instant he saw her, his attraction is to the inscrutable in her. Love does not sit easily with absolute comprehension. Whatever real love Rodolphe may feel, he suppresses by being distant and calculating. He easily imitates Emma's preferred language of sentimental abstraction in order to feign emotional closeness.

A councillor arrives to say that the county prefect will not be attending the show. Rodolphe takes Emma to the empty town hall, so that they can observe the festivities in private. The councillor makes a fatuous speech about patriotism and national prosperity. Meanwhile, Rodolphe talks to Emma about the turmoil of the soul and implies that happiness can only be found in true love. As the speaker talks of duty, Rodolphe declares that one's only duty is to beauty and happiness. Emma struggles against Rodolphe's words, but the crowd gathered around the councillor is completely mesmerized.

The councillor's words are interwoven with Rodolphe's for sarcastic emphasis: both speeches are empty, frothy rhetoric. Both men are using the power of words not to communicate something they believe to be true, but to manipulate the listener or listeners. Their speeches are rhetoric because they use abstractions to appeal to grand emotions, but without reference to fact, or to the complexity and confusion of actual life.

Rodolphe continues to talk imploringly of love. As Emma looks at him, noting the color of his eyes and the smell of his hair, she remembers the Viscount and the clerk, and feels everything blurring together. Her sensory impressions of Rodolphe "[go] down deep into her past desires." The second speaker exalts labor and agriculture; Rodolphe praises fate for bring them together, and takes Emma's hand. As he talks to her directly of his love, the speaker is announcing prizes for farming, manure, and swine.

This scene juxtaposes the vulgar and the sublime: swine, and love. It's a technique quite directly modeled on Don Quixote, but used to different effect. Cervantes employs this technique to show that the vulgar and the sublime, the low and the high, happily coexist in every part of life. For Cervantes, that coexistence is quite beautiful. Flaubert finds it disgusting and deflating.

An old farmer named Catherine Leroux receives a medal for fifty-four years of labor. She is deeply worn and calloused, with the "wordless placid state of being" of the animals in her care. She is stunned by the crowd, and barely manages to receive her award. Rodolphe takes Emma home, thinking intensely about her beauty and charm. The town celebrates the end of the fair with a messy banquet. The chapter ends by citing Homais's sugary, overblown description of the event, printed in a local newspaper.

Catherine Leroux, who is "wordless," acts as a counterpart to the rhetoricians in this scene: the councillor, Rodolphe, and Homais. She also doesn't possess any physical beauty (which people like Emma use to manipulate others, as a sort visual rhetoric). She is not trying to create any sort of impression, and so seems both transparent and irreducible—she is who she is, for all to see.

PART 2, CHAPTER 9

Rodolphe keeps away from Emma for six weeks, to stoke her interest. Finally he comes to visit, explaining that he loves her too much to see her casually; he tried to stay away to conquer his love, but he can't help but yield, since she is so wonderful. His flattery melts Emma's last defenses. Sensing his success, he tells her that he stood outside her house every night to be near her. He pretends to be in love.

Rodolphe pretends to love Emma, though, in his flimsy way, he really does *love her. He has constructed an abstract, cynical framework, and in that framework love is only lust, women are all the same, and the world is simple and manipulable.*

Charles walks in, and Rodolphe suggests that horseback-riding might improve Emma's health. Charles readily agrees, and Rodolphe offers Emma one of his horses. When Rodolphe leaves, Charles himself convinces a hesitant Emma to accept the man's offer; she is finally compelled by the prospect of a pretty riding outfit.

Clothes play a truly inordinate role in Emma's life. In a way, this riding outfit turns the course of her life, just as Rodolphe's green jacket first sparked her attraction. It's not that Emma is empty or emotionless: rather, she invests her deepest and strongest emotions in surfaces.

Emma and Rodolphe go riding the following day. They ride through the countryside and into the forest, where they dismount, walk into a meadow, and sit down. Rodolphe tells Emma about his love, and nearly attacks her; she repulses him, and he becomes timid again, saying that he thinks her pure and holy. Finally, they sleep together in the grass.

Rodolphe's aggressive behavior directly contradicts both his timid words and his general claims about his romantic and genteel nature. But Emma's books have not taught her to interpret such contradictions, only to trust romantic rhetoric.

They return to town in the evening. Charles compliments Emma's complexion, and tells her he has bought her a horse. When he leaves for work, she sits dreaming, and thinks to herself that she has finally known true passion. She finally sees herself as one of the heroines of her books.

Emma is only capable of understanding her experience through its likeness to her books. She can only experience her life by forcing it to resemble the books. She erases all non-corresponding details.

Emma and Rodolphe begin to see one another on a regular basis, meeting in a hut in the forest. They write each other love letters every day, though Emma feels Rodolphe's are too short. One morning, when Charles is away, she visits Rodolphe unexpectedly at La Huchette. After that, she surprises him any morning Charles is at work. At first he is pleased to see her, fresh from the morning walk, but eventually her ardor begins to tire him. He tells her she is putting her reputation in danger.

Emma shapes their relationship on the model of the books, as dutifully as Charles repeating his mysterious medical lessons. She writes letters, acts impulsive, and focuses on physical love, without wondering what any of it might mean, what the impetus might be. She is reciting her lessons without understanding them.

PART 2, CHAPTER 10

Soon, Emma herself begins to worry about her reputation – not because she cares about the townspeople's opinions, but because she is afraid of forfeiting Rodolphe's love. An accidental morning encounter with Binet nearly exposes her secret. Emma and Rodolphe think of a new strategy for their meetings. Rodolphe comes to the house late at night, Emma waits until Charles falls asleep, and then she and Rodolphe go the arbor or the consulting-room. Rodolphe begins to get tired of Emma's fancies and demands, her sentimental mannerisms. But he still finds her very charming and beautiful, so he puts up with it.

Rodolphe successfully imitated the rhetoric of romantic love at the beginning of the relationship, but he is not as well-versed in it as Emma. Because he does not want or expect to maintain any relationship for too long, he has not bothered to learn the rhetoric of continued romantic love – only the rhetoric of seduction. Therefore, Emma's games and elaborate marks of affection are like a foreign language to him. He doesn't understand their purpose.

Since Emma is already so obviously devoted to him, Rodolphe stops taking care to woo and flatter her, and she begins to fear that he no longer loves her. The months go by, and their love becomes at once hostile and boring.

Eventually he stops complying with this aspect of the game, and, stripped of rhetorical froth, their relationship dwindles to what it's always been – impersonal lust.

One day, Emma receives a sweet and lonely letter from her father, along with his yearly gift – a turkey. She thinks about her carefree childhood, with its "abundance of illusions," of which little remains. She wonders why she is so unhappy. Her house is lovely and comfortable, her child is playing happily. She calls the girl over, kisses her, washes her ears, and talks to her with tearful love – all very unusual for her. She quarrels slightly with Rodolphe, and begins to wish that she loved Charles instead, though there's very little about him she can love.

Emma has placed all her faith in surfaces and appearances: she has animated them with the power of her strongest feelings. Now, the surface of her life corresponds in every important detail to the lives of her heroines, yet it doesn't bear fruit – it doesn't give her joy. When she thinks vaguely about illusions crumbling, she comes close to realizing that her surface-centered abstractions have betrayed her.

PART 2, CHAPTER 11

Soon, Emma has the opportunity to try and change her feelings. Homais wants Yonville to become more modern in its medical practices, and he decides that Charles should implement an experimental new cure for club-foot. Emma and Homais convince Charles to operate on Hippolyte, the club-footed ostler (stableman). Charles sends away for the description of the cure and studies it carefully. Homais convinces Hippolyte to agree to the procedure by assuring him that it will nearly painless, absolutely effective, and free of charge.

Emma decides to love Charles by nudging him in the direction of a condition she considers loveable – a condition of prestige and power. These qualities are contained within her already existing framework of love, which requires a certain kind of man just as it requires a certain kind of setting. She is trying to bend reality to her abstractions, even though the abstractions are bloodless and empty, and Charles is human.

The day of the operation comes. Following the manual's instructions, Charles cuts Hippolyte's Achilles tendon and straps him into a special wooden box. The same day, Homais writes a grandiose article describing the operation's certain success and praising the miracles of science. Emma, that evening, manages to feel some tenderness for her husband, now that he might become rich and famous.

Emma and Homais manipulate Charles into performing a dangerous operation – Emma with the rhetoric of love and mercy, Homais with the rhetoric of science and progress. Both use abstraction to throw a pink veil over vicious self-interest, and they do it so well that they even conceal themselves from themselves.

Five days after the operation, Hippolyte is in great pain. Underneath the wooden machine, his foot is swollen, dark, and gravely infected. Charles and Homais are alarmed by the sight, but all they can think to do is strap him back into the machine. The infection spreads higher and higher, until finally the innkeeper decides to send for Monsieur Canivet, a doctor famous in that region. The doctor is incensed by the stupid and careless operation and amputates Hippolyte's leg the following day. Charles sits at home, ashamed and horrified, and Emma watches him with a mixture of contempt and self-pity.

The foot, hidden away inside the impressive-looking machine, is the awful proof of hypocrisy – the discrepancy between words and action, between real and feigned intent. Emma and Homais did not particularly want to cure Hippolyte – they only wanted to use him as a prop in their self-advancement (by way of Charles). Hippolyte's suffering concerns them both only as a hitch in their plan. Charles alone experiences the suffering as a direct failure.

They listen to Hippolyte's horrible scream, which carries all the way across town. Charles asks Emma for some comfort and affection – a kiss – and she refuses in disgust. That night, she and Rodolphe reunite.

Emma evaluates Charles exclusively by his status, his superficial place in the social world. His good intentions, his sympathy and kindness – these inner qualities are not just unimportant but invisible to her.

PART 2, CHAPTER 12

From then on, Emma and Rodolphe are more closely bound than ever before. One day, she mentions that he might rescue her from her suffering – that they might run away together. The more she loves Rodolphe, the more she hates Charles. She takes endless care with her appearance, "like a courtesan awaiting a prince."

Emma's preoccupation with appearances and her love for abstract ideals are basically at odds with one another – a contradiction that forms the ground for her suffering. Here, she finds a little peace by resting fully on appearances.

Emma spends a lot of money on maintaining her looks, and on the many pairs of boots she ruins running through the mud to La Huchette. She even buys Rodolphe an expensive riding-whip, along with other fine presents. She gets most of these things from Lheureux, who never asks her for money, and never tells her how much anything costs. She also induces Charles to buy two expensive false legs for Hippolyte – a fancy one and an everyday one. When he gets used to wearing a false leg, Hippolyte returns to his old job at the inn.

Emma decides to fix Charles's failure by concealing the evidence of that failure – the missing leg. She is very pleased with herself for this superficial mending. She does not have enough imagination or conscience to realize that she is in large part responsible for Hippolyte's awful suffering and loss. He is a sort of moving cardboard figure to her, so to her the appearance of wellness is not meaningfully distinct from actual wellness.

One day, Lheureux shows up unexpectedly with a large bill that Emma cannot pay. Lheureux gets annoyed and threatens to ask Charles for the riding-whip. In this way, he subtly blackmails Emma and lets her know he has guessed at her affair. In desperation, she pays off Lheureux by taking money behind Charles' back.

Emma would not want to be a dishonest, thieving person. But her preoccupation with appearances allows her to see herself just as others see her. Since her dishonesty is kept secret, she remains pristine in her own eyes, because they look through the eyes of others.

Meanwhile, she becomes ever more dramatic and demanding with Rodolphe. He dislikes her expressions of love, because they seem to him exactly like those of other women. He responds by becoming harsh and domineering, and Emma yields to him with anesthetized, sleepy pleasure.

Emma's words and actions resemble those of other women, so to Rodolphe Emma is indistinguishable from them. Rodolphe does not know that she has a self, anxious and unexpressed, just as Emma does not know Charles's.

One evening, she is especially childish and despairing. She gives Rodolphe a sign to come to the house, and begs him run away with her; somehow, in the charm of the moment, he agrees. Emma becomes more beautiful than ever, blooming "like flowers that have manure, rain, wind, and sun."

Emma is like a flower because she is made of manure and sun, the vulgar and the sublime. She is also like a flower because her solipsism, her total disconnection from others, stops her from truly entering the human world.

Charles dreams often about his daughter's bright future, her school-days, her adolescence, and their happy life together. Emma dreams of her escape into a **vague romantic land** full of pleasure. She asks Lheureux to find her a travelling cloak and several bags.

Charles's dreams are full of warm, precise detail, of life as it really is. Emma's dreams are full of blue emptiness. She tries to imagine a reality made of abstraction, and as a result she imagines a pleasing nothingness.

Rodolphe keeps pushing back their departure date, but several months later it finally arrives. The night before, they meet and agree on a number of final details; Emma is wildly affectionate, and Rodolphe is hollowly obliging. As he watches her leave, he decides finally that the plan is absurd.

Rodolphe initially agrees to run away with Emma because he is distracted by his real affection for her. His emotional life struggles under his cynicism like grass under concrete. Cynicism is stronger.

PART 2, CHAPTER 13

At home, Rodolphe looks for some memento of Emma. He keeps a tin full of old love-letters and miniatures, and as he looks through it all his lovers seem to blur together and finally seem like "a load of nonsense." He writes Emma a false and cloying letter explaining that he must cancel their plans; he loves her too much to let her ruin herself. He adds that he is leaving Yonville the following day. He even adds a fake teardrop.

To Rodolphe, all his old lovers really are an indistinguishable mass of photographs, of empty, interchangeable images. The photos bolster his faith in the nonexistence of actual feeling. This faith makes it easier for him to lie to Emma with an easy conscience: you can't betray something that does not exist.

The next morning, his servant delivers the letter to Emma in a basket of apricots. When she reads the letter, she is angry and delirious, and nearly throws herself out a window. Over dinner, Charles himself mentions Rodolphe's departure, which is all over town. Just then, Emma sees Rodolphe's carriage pass through the square and faints straightaway. She remains feverish and delirious for over a month. Charles tends to her carefully, but any reminder of Rodolphe throws her into near-insanity.

Emma's insanity is a dark, mysterious rupture in her constructed reality. Rodolphe was the right kind of man, and he said the right kinds of words: on the surface level, he was perfect. To comprehend his betrayal, Emma would have to perceive a reality beyond that surface reality. She is not capable of it. Her insanity allows her to erase the past instead of understanding it.

PART 2, CHAPTER 14

Charles is deeply worried about Emma's health, but he is also concerned about money. His housekeeper is stealing from him, and Lheureux is drowning him in real and invented bills. Lheureux loans Charles a great deal of money with very high interest, hoping to get rich off the doctor's misfortune.

Flaubert was intensely misanthropic, often overwhelmed by feelings of hatred and disgust toward people in general. It is telling that almost every person in the world of his novel is, in the final count, heartless and despicable.

Emma gets better very slowly, and after meeting several times with the village priest she takes up her old taste for purity and saintliness. She dreams of an eternal love, a love she can depend on. She is deeply stirred by sentimental religious books full of "the finest Catholic melancholy." She thinks often of Rodolphe, and she prays to God as she once spoke to her lover. She soon realizes that praying does not inspire any real feeling in her; but she romanticizes her quest for faith, and becomes obsessed with performing charitable works.

Emma escapes her insanity, and the quandary that created it, by retreating from the world. Religion fits into her sentimental-novel framework because she interprets it as an eternal love affair. But just as she cannot make herself love Charles by imitating love, she cannot make herself love God by imitating prayer. She knows something is missing from her charade—real feeling and engagement—but it is something in which she does not quite believe or even really comprehend.

The Homais family visits often. Justin falls in love with Emma, little by little, but Emma doesn't notice. One day, Homais suggests to Charles that Emma might benefit from a night at the theatre. Lagardy, a famous singer and philanderer, is performing in Rouen. Charles is convinced, and they travel to Rouen the following day.

Once again, Emma is so obsessed by the idea of love that she does not notice the actual love there in front of her, just as she did not notice her love for Léon. Abstraction obscures both other people and oneself.

PART 2, CHAPTER 15

Emma is enchanted by the bustle of the theater and by its more aristocratic attendees. She enjoys the music and the sentimental story, which is just like the novels she read as a girl. She admires Lagardy, a flashy, handsome "charlatan" and heartbreaker. In his stormy seduction of the heroine, he reminds her of Rodolphe. Charles is bored and confused by the story, and doesn't understand why the man is mistreating the lady.

Flaubert is describing cultural literacy as a tolerance for implausible, highly emotional, and often unkind stories. Emma's tolerance for such stories is very high, and Charles's is very low. The well-being of others is more important to him than emotional excitement, so he can't understand the purpose of sentimental cruelty or what might be described as "romantic excitement."

Charles goes to get Emma some water and runs into Léon, recently returned from Paris. When Emma sees Léon, she is overcome with emotion. The three of them leave at the beginning of the third act, since Emma is eager to speak to Léon in a more intimate setting. Léon mentions that Lagardy is performing again in the next few days, and Charles encourages Emma to stay in Rouen and see the performance through to the end.

Charles has a basic faith in other people's honesty and good intentions – a faith borne of his own unfailing honesty and good intentions. That means he is easily manipulated, and easily taken advantage of. Like Rodolphe, Léon makes Charles help arrange his wife's seduction.

PART 3, CHAPTER 1

The third part begins with an overview of Léon's time in Paris. He was somewhat popular with women, but he didn't really get caught up in the hedonism of the city. He thought of Emma often, in the three years that passed, but the memory of her slowly faded. Now, though, all his feelings have returned in full. He regrets having once missed his chance. Now, full of a new confidence, he is determined to have her.

Léon's determination to seduce Emma resembles Rodolphe's, a few chapters earlier. It's a determination that has little to do with Emma herself; it is driven not by love but by self-image. Léon wants to sleep with Emma because it would make him feel like a man, a protagonist—it would confirm that he has grown beyond what he was when he couldn't have her.

The day after the performance, he visits Emma at her hotel. They talk about their boredom and misery, but they don't tell each other anything in particular. They both conceal their romantic histories, and Léon pretends that he's pined for Emma all this time. They reminisce about their earlier friendship, and Emma feels "astonished at being so old." Léon's memories fill out her idea of her own past, so that it seems more complete and more appealing.

Emma and Léon pick up where they left off – in the pretend world of romantic melancholy. They still know nothing of one another's actual lives, habits, or tendencies. Their relationship is built entirely on reinforcing one another's fantasies of literary heroism. They treat one another like characters from books.

The room turns dark, and Léon implores her to start their love anew. She resists, because it is proper, but she is really filled with longing for him. She finds him very beautiful. She agrees to meet him the following morning at a nearby cathedral. After he leaves, Emma writes him a very long letter cancelling their meeting, but since she does not know his address, she decides to give it to him tomorrow.

Like Rodolphe, Léon is feigning a feeling he actually experiences. He does feel some sort of love for Emma – but it is not quite the right kind of love, not quite typical or coherent. So he overwrites his fragile, indeterminate feeling with a literary charade.

The next morning, Léon comes to the cathedral early. He is full of joy, but the attendant is meddlesome and irritating, and Emma is late. When she finally comes in, she ignores Léon and begins to pray, which annoys him. The attendant insists on giving them a tour of the cathedral, but Léon drags Emma out by the hand; to her lingering doubts, her answers: "It's what people do in Paris!" and pulls her into a cab. He shuts the blinds, and the cab circles town all day, until the horses are nearly dead of exhaustion. Emma raises the blinds just once, to throw away the torn pieces of her letter. In the evening, the cab drops her off at an inn.

The previous day, Emma and Léon's actions were both modeled on romantic novels. But now they are acting within different frameworks. Emma is trying to follow the framework of virtuous resistance, the prudish prelude to adultery, as described in the novels. Léon is trying to follow a "Parisian" hedonistic framework, more openly skeptical of conservative morality. Neither framework is directly related to their actual feelings and desires.

PART 3, CHAPTER 2

Later that evening, Emma returns to Yonville. the driver of the coach tells her to go to the pharmacist's at once. She walks in on a fight between Homais and Justin, who had made the mistake of taking a jam-jar from Homais' private laboratory, the Capharnaum. The empty jar had stood next to a container of arsenic, and Homais shouts that Justin could have killed them all. When Emma finally gets his attention, Homais tells her quite bluntly that her father-in-law has died. Charles had asked him to tell her in a delicate way, to prevent a nervous attack, but the pharmacist was too distracted to carry out his task properly.

In this scene, rhetoric – the "delicate way" – is an empty, deceptive embellishment. It is not a more precise or more truthful phrasing, just one that obscures the truth or softens its impact. Like belligerent speechmaking, this sort of rhetoric is a means of controlling the listener's reaction, but a "delicate," surreptitious way that conceals itself – that de-emphasizes its difference from simple fact.

Charles is waiting for her at home, and she feels a bit guilty when he kisses her hello. Over dinner, Emma thinks mainly of her own boredom. Hippolyte brings in her luggage, tapping painfully with his wooden leg, and she thinks that he is perfectly fine, after all, though he is proof of Charles's stupidity.

Emma's self-absorption is remarkable in this scene. She only cares about other people's suffering when it directly affects her self-image – as when Berthe's fall made her feel like a bad mother.

The elder Madame Bovary arrives the next day, and they plan the funeral. Emma is annoyed by this distraction – she wants only to think of her new affair. Lheureux comes to speak to her about her debts, and to tempt her to buy more pretty things. He convinces Emma to take power of attorney over Charles's debt. Emma presents Charles with the document, adding that she thinks the writing somewhat dubious. Charles suggests that she go to Rouen and consult with Léon, and she leaves the following morning.

Emma is selfish because she only understands love as personal happiness. The counterpart to Emma's selfish love is Charles's selfless love: a more or less unconditional joy in someone's existence. The selfish sort of love seeks happiness, but is always thrown back on its own dwindling devices. The selfless kind of love finds happiness as if by accident – by anchoring itself in something external.

PART 3, CHAPTER 3

Emma and Léon spend three days together in a hotel, only leaving the room in the evenings to get dinner on a romantic island. They are completely blissful, and everything they see looks new to them. On their way home from the island, the boatman mentions that he recently took out a big party led by a womanizer with a name he cannot remember – but it is something like Rodolphe. Before Emma goes home, she and Léon agree that they will write each other through Mère Rolet, the wet nurse.

Emma is in the happiest stage of her affair with Léon, at the moment that most fully confirms her vision of life and validates her pursuit of joy. But even here, there is a pinprick of doubt, a little bit of rot. The boatman's story makes Emma realize, however faintly, that Rodolphe lied to her in his letter and probably many other times. There is a flaw in her vision.

PART 3, CHAPTER 4

The affair gives Léon a feeling of intense, persistent arrogance; he can hardly pay attention to anything else. One day, he is overcome with longing and comes to Yonville to visit Emma. Charles happily receives him, but the couple don't get any time alone. Emma is miserable to see him go, and promises to find a way to arrange a weekly meeting.

The affair makes Léon feel arrogant because it is ultimately a closed circuit between himself and his self-image. When that circuit fails, and he deflates, the love will disappear. Love founded on self-love is necessarily fragile.

Emma continues to buy all sorts of clothes and furnishings from Lheureux. She also suddenly takes up the piano. One evening she practices in front of Charles, but she makes many mistakes and complains about her "rusty fingers." She mentions that she'd like to hire a teacher – if only it weren't so expensive. Finally, Charles agrees that she should go to Rouen once a week for piano lessons.

Emma manipulates Charles into suggesting a pretext for her affair. She clearly takes pleasure in her deception, and considers herself the winner of the situation. Yet it is Charles who is the happier. He is married to a woman he loves, who has a delightful passion for music. Charles has all the joy and serenity in the world.

PART 3, CHAPTER 5

Every Thursday morning, Emma takes the coach to Rouen to see Léon at a hotel. Léon is awed by Emma's charm and refinement, and proud to be the lover of a real lady: "he admired the exaltation of her soul and the lace on her skirts." She reminds him of every beautiful woman described in books. He feels that his soul is captured in her beauty. When they are together, they disguise their sexual longings with "displays of wonder."

Flaubert is master of the sarcastic zeugma, a sentence structure that attaches two incongruous nouns (soul, skirts) to a single verb. In this case, the zeugma serves to show that exaltation of the soul can be as superficial and as easily acquired as a skirt. Léon does not admire anything like Emma's actual soul – only a soul she affects.

Emma takes the coach back Thursday night. On the way back to Yonville, the coach often passes a deranged beggar with horribly infected eyelids, who sings a pretty song about a young girl in love in springtime. Sometimes he pushes his upturned hat through the window, and the driver chases him away with a whip. Emma feels moved and disturbed by his odd singing.

Flaubert sets Emma's moony daydreaming in scathing contest to the man's appalling suffering, just a foot away. Through this juxtaposition, he is asking a question that will become especially urgent in the 20th century: can it be right to live lyrically in a world full of terror and suffering?

One day, Charles tells Emma that he ran into her piano teacher, who told him that she has no student named Emma Bovary. He suggests that perhaps there is another piano teacher who has the same name. The next day, he finds a forged receipt for the piano lessons in his boots. From then on, Emma finds a new pleasure in lying.

Emma has struggled between Christian / middle class morality, which she received through her family and her religious education, and the free-thinking, sensual mores of her romance novels. She has exhausted herself trying to live by the former without internal impetus, and she feels relief in finally abandoning it.

One day, Lheureux sees Emma and Léon coming out of a hotel. Three days later, Lheureux comes to subtly blackmail her for the money she owes. She is broke, so he suggests that she sell an old cottage that once belonged to Charles' father. She agrees, and he immediately finds her a buyer, though it is implied that the sum offered is significantly below the actual value of the property. Emma is delighted to have any money at all. She decides to pay off her debt to Lheureux, but he convinces her to keep her money and simply take out some more loans.

Flaubert often exposes Emma's cruelty, emptiness, and selfishness. Again and again, he shows her inflicting pain. She is so indifferent to other people that she hardly registers their suffering, let alone her part in it. But this indifference, which makes her what we might call sociopathic, is also the foundation of her unhappiness. In this scene and throughout, she is both villain and victim.

Emma uses most of the money to pay off three earlier bills, but one final bill comes to their house. Lheureux convinces Charles to sign two other bills for it, with steep interest. Charles asks his mother for some money, so the elder Madame Bovary inquires into Emma's expenses, and is horrified by the indulgence and waste. Charles agrees to let his mother burn Emma's power of attorney, but Emma convinces Charles to sign another.

Here, Charles and Emma are both Lheureux's victims. In Flaubert's cynical view, people with any kind of sentimental framework – even one as poisonous as Emma's – generally fall victim to totally amoral, unimaginative, shrewd people like Lheureux. In this view of life as battle, love and fantasy are just vulnerabilities.

Emma becomes extravagant in her efforts to dramatize her love with Léon, to draw as much pleasure from it as possible. One Thursday, she does not return to Yonville. Charles is desperate with worry, and after a sleepless night he comes to Rouen to look for her. After looking for her in every reasonable place she could be, he runs into her on the street. She tells him coldly that she spent the night at her piano teacher's, and complains that his anxiety is stifling. From then on, she comes to see Léon at every whim. She even surprises him at his office, to his boss's annoyance. She begins to criticize his appearance and his house and demands love poems. He is in thrall to her, and yields to all her requests.

With Léon, Emma has travelled through all the stages of her affair with Rodolphe: bliss, rapaciousness, and finally vague dissatisfaction. The beginning of dissatisfaction coincides with a certain kind of artificial intensity – a means of postponing and masking impending boredom. Emma is not happy anymore, and she believes that her love affair is supposed to make her happy, so logically she explains her unhappiness as a defect of the affair. And since she knows she herself has not changed, the defect must be Léon's.


PART 3, CHAPTER 6

One Thursday, Homais decides to visit Léon in Rouen. He is determined to have a wild time, and insists on drinking with Léon in a café. As a result, Léon is hours late for his weekly meeting with Emma. When Léon finally gets away from Homais and comes to the hotel, Emma is furious. He begs her forgiveness, but then a servant calls him downstairs: it is Homais again. Léon swears that he needs to work, but somehow allows Homais to drag him to another café.

Léon is growing tired of Emma's extravagances and complaints, as Rodolphe grew tired of them. They are the sharp points of a formless unhappiness. But Léon is as stupefied by Emma sexually as she was by Rodolphe, and he can't find the will to reject her. The presence of Homais offers Léon with an opportunity to laze into a kind of passive resistance to Emma.

By then, Emma has left. She walks through the streets, angrily thinking of her lover's defects. The affair has become somewhat disappointing, despite Emma's increasingly fervent and ornamental love letters. Léon is repulsed and a little frightened by her desperation, and stifled by her controlling temperament, but he can't let her go. Emma becomes unhappy and dissatisfied, and wishes for a lover wonderful enough to make her happy forever.

Emma is disenchanted because her love for Léon is founded only in her happiness. But she may also be disenchanted because she is beginning to know Léon as a person, not just as an idealized lover. She is finding out his flaws, small and large. She is angry at him for becoming real. Her books have taught her that real people are unfit for love.



One day, Emma receives a legal notice requiring that she pay a debt to Monsieur Vinçart, to whom the draper sold her debt. Emma goes to see Lheureux, who claims that Vinçart is quite vicious and will not hesitate to have Emma thrown in jail. She borrows more money from him, on uncertain but unfavorable terms, and tries to make some money by collecting debts from Charles's patients and by selling some of her things. She tries to do financial calculations, but they frighten and bore her, and she borrows more and more.

Emma is practical, to some extent, but she has had no education in numbers or finance. She is not equipped to do battle with Lheureux (as he well knew, when he convinced her to take power of attorney). Emma hurts people carelessly, but compared to Lheureux she is an innocent. He hurts people deliberately, and with pleasure in his profit from it and possibly with just plain pleasure.

Charles tries to teach Berthe to read, and plays with her when she misses her mother. Emma ignores her child and spends all her time and money on Léon. The clerk, meanwhile, begins to think of breaking off the affair and devoting himself more seriously to his career. She is bored by his practicality, and he is bored by her histrionics. For distraction, she stays out all night at a masked ball with some of Léon's friends, dancing outrageously in men's clothes. In the morning, she is appalled and ashamed. When she comes home, she finds a writ ordering her to pay an extremely large sum within twenty-four hours; if she fails to pay, her property will be seized.

Several places in the novel have distinct feminist overtones. Here, the narrator implies that Emma's misery is caused in part by her highly restricted life. She places such a burden of expectation on love because it is her only outlet for joy and satisfaction. Unlike Léon, she cannot turn to a career; unlike a servant-girl, she can't in good conscience enjoy a drunken night of dancing. This aspect of the novel is taken up in Kate Chopin's Awakening.

PART 3, CHAPTER 7

The next day, while Charles is out, the bailiff and two other men take inventory of the Bovary house. Emma travels to Rouen the following morning to try to take a loan from one of the banks, but with no luck. She asks Léon for the money, but, after some half-hearted efforts, he fails to obtain it. She tries to get him to steal from his office, so he puts her off with a false promise and leaves.

Emma has always been spiritually alone in the world, because she has never quite been able to believe in the emotions of other people. Her spiritual aloneness has now led to actual desolation: an overtly moralized decline. Flaubert wants to punish her.


Homais rides the coach back to Yonville with Emma. They see the beggar with the infected eyelids, and Homais prescribes him expensive foods and remedies, and promises to make him a special ointment. The man howls hungrily in response.

Everything in the novel is gathering intensity. Homais's overt hypocrisy, in this scene, is almost a parody. He is obviously trying to seem virtuous without any intent of doing good.

The next morning, Emma notices a sign announcing that her things are to be auctioned off. Her maid advises her to see the town lawyer, Guillaumin, and Emma goes right away. At the sight of his well-appointed house, she feels a pang of righteous anger: "Here is the kind of dining room … that I should have." After listening to her for a long time, Guillaumin implies that he will give her money if she sleeps with him, and she leaves in a huff, proud and angry.

Emma defines herself by her appearance – her beauty, elegance, graceful manners, and propriety. She may have disgraced herself quite often in private, but she has taken care to maintain her looks and social status. Even though that status is crumbling, she is clinging to the quality of her appearance, and believes herself pure and deserving on the basis of it.


She comes home and imagines Charles's reaction to the auction. She knows he will forgive her, and "the idea of [his] superiority [is] exasperating to her." She tries to offer herself to Binet in exchange for the money, but he refuses. Finally she decides to try to get the money from Rodolphe, "oblivious from first to last of her prostitution."

It is difficult to say why Emma refuses Guillaumin but propositions Binet. Perhaps she considers her visit to Guillaumin a social call, an occasion that reflects on her appearance, but then reconceives her visit to Binet as a private matter, therefore subject to different rules. Meanwhile, she continues not to recognize reality, that she is offering herself for money. She still sees herself as someone at the ball when in fact her pursuit of that vision has brought her now to prostituting herself.


PART 3, CHAPTER 8

Emma rushes over to La Huchette, and finds Rodolphe sitting by the fire. He is moderately pleased to see her, and talks to her cloyingly about his reasons for leaving, which she chooses to accept. She takes his hand and pleads with him to start their love anew. She looks beautiful, so he kisses her and declares his love. She begins to cry and asks him for money, but he explains (truthfully) that he has none. She rails at him shrilly about his expensive trifles, accusing him of selfishness and falseness. By now he has become completely cold, and she walks out.

Rodolphe always reacts to Emma as she is in that very moment. When she is beautiful and appealing, he responds lovingly; when she is graceless and mean, he responds coldly. It's an ordinary enough behavior, but taken to an extreme. Rodolphe behaves as though there is no one solid person there, underlying the moment-to-moment. His fixation on appearance prevents him from knowing people as continuous selves.

Emma thinks wildly about her past, tottering under the strain of anxiety. She can think only about her unhappy love, the cause of her misery, and she feels "her soul slip from her." She runs to the pharmacist's house and begs Justin for the key to Homais's private laboratory. He hesitates, but she finds the key herself, walks in, and eats a handful of arsenic. Justin tries to stop her, but it is too late.

Emma may be heartless, but she has a soul. Flaubert pities her, even as he reviles her. Emma has tried to construct a soul out of literary refuse, and she has tried to paste it onto the lace of her skirts, where everyone may look at it. She can finally see her actual soul in the moment of its departure. Justin, meanwhile, is another example of a youth who loves based on appearances.

When Charles had come home, devastated by news of his financial ruin, Emma had been out. He is relieved when she comes home, though she offers no explanations. She writes him a letter and asks him not to read it until the following day. Then she lies down and waits to die, thinking it will as easy as falling asleep.

Perhaps Emma is thinking of Romeo and Juliet when she eats the poison, dreaming of a simple, tragic death at the altar of love (since it is love, and not money, that is on her mind). Her last wish is for a graceful death – a death that is nice to look at.

Soon she becomes thirsty and deeply nauseous. She begins to suffer a great deal, moaning and screaming, and her face turns blue. Charles is wild with panic, and she lets him read her letter. He sends the maid to Homais, who summons two doctors. As he waits with her, he feels himself losing his mind with grief. She manages to say some kind words to him and tries to say goodbye to her daughter, who is scared by her changed appearance. One doctor comes, then the other; Emma takes an emetic and begins suffering even more.

Her death is horrible to look at, and hear and smell. Its ugliness reflects the actual terror of a human being disappearing. The tragedy of it, the pure sadness of Romeo and Juliet pink-cheeked and slumped over, is here connected to the ugliness of the body, a very true pairing, that, for once in the novel, doesn't diminish the impact of either the vulgar or the sublime.

The priest comes to see her, and she becomes a little calmer. But in a moment she goes into her last convulsions, which are frightening and disfiguring. Suddenly, she hears the beggar with the infected eyelids singing the love song about the young girl, and laughs horribly. In a moment, she dies.

That heightened moment passes quickly. The beggar's song exaggerates and parodies the poignant contrast between the high and the low, and voids it of meaning. On every level, Emma dies gracelessly.

PART 3, CHAPTER 9

Charles is insane with grief. On his way out, Homais is stopped by the beggar, who has come to Yonville to get the ointment Homais promised him. Homais tells the man he is busy. He also spreads the rumor that Emma died by accidentally using arsenic instead of sugar in a pudding.

Homais often makes a show of sympathy, understanding, and all the likeable emotions. At first acquaintance, we have no real reason to doubt him (other than his unctuous manners). Here, he shows the full extent of his indifference.

At first Charles does not want to bury Emma, but finally Homais and the priest persuade him. Charles decides that Emma should be buried in her wedding-dress, in three coffins, the last one covered in green velvet. Later that evening, Homais and the priest come to sit with Emma's body. They begin to argue about the use of prayer and then about religion in general. Charles keeps coming in to look at Emma's body, calling to her and trying to bring her back to life.

Charles has always loved Emma in the way he thinks people ought to be loved – for being good, kind, caring. Her death somehow makes it clear to him – consciously or not –that her defining characteristic is a preoccupation with appearances, and he decides to honor her by investing her final appearance with great significance.

The next day, the elder Madame Bovary and the innkeeper prepare Emma's body for the funeral. They think she looks beautiful in her wedding dress. When they lift her up, black liquid comes out of her mouth. The pharmacist and the priest continue their debate. Charles comes in to say goodbye to Emma, and stands there for a long time thinking about the past, especially his wedding-day. He lifts up her veil and screams in horror, then waits downstairs while she workmen hammer her coffins.

Emma's physiological decay, her transformation from person to matter, is natural and realistic. At the same time, it is viciously symbolically charged. That symbolism is crystallized in Emma's literary successor, Oscar Wilde's Dorian Grey from The Picture of Dorian Grey, *whose death reveals both his physical and his spiritual ugliness – whose death finally aligns the one with the other.*

PART 3, CHAPTER 10

Emma's stricken father comes to Yonville for the funeral. Hippolyte is there, wearing his "best new leg," and Justin watches palely for a moment before hiding in the pharmacy. It is a beautiful, fragrant morning. Lheureux is present, lamenting to everyone who will listen. Emma's father leaves after the funeral, deep in grief. Léon and Rodolphe are sleeping peacefully in their beds, but Justin sits crying at Emma's grave.

Everything at the funeral is topsy-turvy. Lheureux, the person most directly responsible for Emma's death, is grieving ostentatiously. Justin, who loved Emma innocently, is heartbroken with guilt. Hippolyte, whom Emma crippled indirectly, is paying his respects. Her two lovers don't care at all. Nothing is as it appears, and nothing appears as it should.

PART 3, CHAPTER 11

After the funeral, many different people come after Charles for money, but he refuses to sell anything that belonged to Emma. Lheureux pesters him with bills, the piano-teacher who never gave any lessons demands six months pay, and even Mère Rolet asks for money for delivering Emma's letters. Félicité steals almost all of Emma's clothes and runs off with a lover.

Charles, one of the only truly (or even only) good-hearted characters in the novel, is punished for his good heart as harshly as Emma was punished for her bad. The novel's moralizing impulse is tempered by its bleak misanthropy and lawlessness, its sense that everything always turns out badly, that those who are good or have ideals are preyed upon by those who do not.

Some time later Charles finds Rodolphe's last letter to Emma, but he forces himself to interpret it as a letter of friendship. He soon has to sell almost everything in the house, but he tries to behave and dress as Emma had wanted him to. Berthe becomes very ragged, but Charles loves watching her and playing with her.

Emma's death is followed by waves of destruction that fall on everyone close to her. Her extravagant habits help to ruin Charles and Berthe from beyond the grave.

The man with the infected eyelids tells everyone of Homais's false promise. Homais writes many poisonous articles in the newspaper denouncing the man as a blight on society, and he is sent to prison. Homais writes in the newspaper more and more often on various subjects, "guided always by a love of progress and a hatred of priests." He is happy and successful, but he badly wants to be awarded the Legion of Honour, a prestigious award. He campaigns for the award and does favors for various officials.

Homais has transitioned in character from annoying but benevolent, to selfish and hypocritical, and finally to malevolent and amoral. His obsession with his own reputation (an obsession absolutely distinct from a desire for meaningful professional achievement) causes him to have a sick, mentally ill man thrown in jail.

One day, Charles looks inside a secret compartment in Emma's desk. He finds a large stack of love letters from Léon and Rodolphe. He stops taking care of himself; he no longer sees patients and rarely leaves the house. Sometimes he takes Berthe to Emma's grave.

Charles may not live in a world of abstractions, like Emma, but he, too, has ideals –a loving image of his wife being chief among them. The love letters destroy that ideal and sever Charles' link to society.

Not long afterwards, Berthe finds Charles dead in the garden. Berthe is sent, penniless, to her grandmother. Soon the elder Madame Bovary dies, too, and Berthe goes to live with a poor aunt and starts work in a cotton-mill. Homais, though, is prospering, and has received the Legion of Honour.

Every innocent person has suffered horribly and lost, and the worst have won. This chaotic vision is the predictable end of a society that fails to truly distinguish between the best and the worst. The completely innocent child Berthe is punished with a hard life of poverty. The canny, self serving Homais is rewarded by society with highest honors.

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