

Romance and Reality in Flaubert's Madame Bovary

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Romance and Reality in Flaubert's Madame Bovary

In the story of Alice in Wonderland we follow Alice down a rabbit hole into a land of pure wonder, where the logic of a little girl holds no sway. In Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary, we witness exactly the opposite as Emma Bovary, a most romantic creature, is purposely cast into a harshly realistic world. In either case, a creature is put into an environment unnatural to her disposition, yet in [Flaubert's](#) example, Emma shares the world we inhabit, and thus the message her story brings is much more pertinent. To convey this message, Flaubert replicates not a world of fantasy, but rather the real world, with all its joy, sadness, and occasional monotony intact. Then he proceeds to dump an exaggeratedly sentimental woman, [Bovary](#), with the training, appearance, and expectations of an heiress, into the common mire and leave her there to flounder in the reality of middle class life as a farmer's daughter. From [Madame](#) Bovary's reactions within this realistic situation, and from the novel's outcome, a message is rendered concerning romanticism itself, and its misplacement in a cacophonous and uncomplimentary world.

Lewis Carroll may have created a whole new world for his Alice to explore, but Flaubert had the harder job. He had to replicate the world that everyone knows, taking time to

explore the very details that make this world real and tangible. Whether it be dust accumulating on furniture, everyday people plodding through mud to get to work, or nagging mothers, Flaubert details images and impressions that most overlook, but which truly constitute reality. Emma tries her best to ignore this reality, but it confronts her insistently, reminding her daily of all the things she dee...

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... no place in a realistic society, and being such a romantic, Bovary is doomed to unhappiness. So, just like the symbolic blind man who reappears at the moment of her death, Emma progresses through life, and eventually dies, blind to the real beauty around and within her because of her romantic notions.

Even in the end she searches externally for the source of her unhappiness.

But what was making her so unhappy? Where was the extraordinary catastrophe that had wrecked her life? She raised her head and looked around, as though trying to find the cause of her suffering. (Flaubert 149)

Thus without ever realizing the actual joys of motherhood, marriage, or life, Madame Bovary, convulsing, gurgles her last life's breath; a most ignoble, and unromantic, end.

Work Cited

Flaubert, Gustave. Madame Bovary. Trans: Lowell Bair. New York: Bantam Books, 1972.

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