

The Portrait of Failure of the Bourgeoisie in Gustave Flaubert's Madam Bovary

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THE PORTRAIT OF FAILURE OF THE BOURGEOISIE IN GUSTAVE FLAUBERT'S *MADAME BOVARY*

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Abstract

The research aims to discuss the social class in French society, that is, Bourgeoisie. The objectives of the research are to portray the failure of bourgeoisie in Gustave Flaubert's *Madam Bovary* and the effects of the failure of bourgeoisie toward two main characters, Emma Bovary and Charles Bovary. The main theories that are used to analyze the data are Marxism, bourgeoisie and setting. While, the method of the research is descriptive method and library research is used as the technique of collecting data. There are four approaches used, that is, moral and philosophical approach, historical biographical approach, psychological approach and sociological approach. The findings of the research are failure of bourgeoisie when Flaubert mocks the bourgeois class's pretensions to knowledge and learning and its faith in the power of technologies that it does not completely understand. Emma becomes discontented and rebellious, while Charles is devoted to Emma and ashamed of his downfall.

Keywords: *Failure, Bourgeoisie, Main Characters*

1. INTRODUCTION

As a product of art, a novel is very interesting to read due to the complete story written by the author. Sometimes, the author of the novel is inspired by his own experience or by the influential society in which he lives. Gustave Flaubert, a French writer is one of the authors whose literary works describe the things that have happened in the society. The hatred of middle-class values is strongly apparent in *Madame Bovary*. *Madam Bovary* is Flaubert's masterpiece. The story is about a woman imprisoned by her middle-class surroundings. Because of the Revolution of 1789, there was the collapse of the aristocracy that was paralleled by the rise of a new middle class or bourgeoisie made up of merchants and capitalists with commercial, rather than inherited, fortunes.

Madam Bovary is a novel that tells about a woman who is influenced by the manifesting life of the bourgeoisie that she knows from the novels she has read. She expects that her life will be such a sophisticated life in the novels. She gets married to a country doctor whom she hopes to be able to make her dream come true. Emma Bovary gets along with the bourgeois. She dreams of becoming one of them through her marriage. Meanwhile, Charles Bovary who can exactly be called as the bourgeois fails to bring his wife to reach her dream and expectation. Both Emma Bovary and Charles Bovary fail to be the bourgeois. Therefore, the research focuses on the portrait of the failure of the bourgeoisie through the two main characters of the novel, Emma Bovary and Charles Bovary.

The research focuses on bourgeoisie that is revealed through the characters of the novel. The theories that are relevant to meet the aims of the research are theories of Marxism, of proletariat and bourgeoisie.

Reading the word “Marxism”, people remember the name of Karl Marx. Marxism is the political and economic ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels as developed into a system of thought that gives class struggle a primary role in leading society from bourgeois democracy under capitalism to a socialist society and thence to communism (Morris, 1969: 802).

Karl Marx was born in 1818. He studied Hegel’s system, whose dialectics inspired his theory of class struggle. He was active in the social action and politic, and also became a journalist and revolutionarist. He continued his revolutionary efforts under the slogan “Proletariats of the world, Unite!” In 1866 he founded the First Socialist International at London which was continued into the Second Socialist International (Thonnard, 1956: 814).

In his view, the development of the individual and of the social life of man depends totally on material and economic conditions (1956: 816). It means that economic conditions become the measure of one’s social life. Karl Marx’s statement quoted by Richard Harland in his book entitled *Literary Theory from Plato to Barthes*, says that it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness (1999: 93).¹⁰ Furthermore, Karl Marx also gives the example, Raphael, an artist at that time, is determined by the technical advances in art made before him, by the organization of society and the division of labor in all countries with which his locality had intercourse (Harland, 1999: 94). This example emphasizes that someone’s consciousness is determined by his social life.

Karl Marx divides the society into two great classes. They are bourgeoisie and proletariat. The bourgeoisie play a most revolutionary part. The bourgeoisie get the upper hand, own the instrument of production, have honoured occupations, reduce family relation just for money relation, expand their market, keep more means of production and property, employ wage-labor, and do not exist without improving the means of production. On the other hand, the proletariat have no means of production and reduces to sell their labor-power in order to live (Bronstein, 1951: 125).

Karl Marx is most famous for his analysis of history in terms of class struggle, as summed up in the opening line of the introduction to *Communist Manifesto*: “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles”. Marx believes that the identity of a social class derived from its relationship to the means of production by themselves produces nothing, while labor power is needed for producing products {“The Bourgeoisie during the 19th century.” p. 3 of 5 (<http://prezi.com/143ybu3kznbn/the-bourgeoisie-during-the-19th-century>) accessed on November 10th, 2015}.

Due to this fact that there are two divisions of class with their conflict, it is possible to the bourgeoisie to exploit the proletariat because the growth of labor power is greater than the worker’s salary. The bourgeoisie gain and keep their productions and properties. Therefore, they become richer and richer. On the other hand, the proletariat becomes poorer than before because they only have their power which is bought by the bourgeoisie. This condition forms one effort of the proletariat which causes the action of struggle to get the higher social class.

In regard with the theory of Marxism, there are two divisions of class. They are bourgeoisie and proletariat. According to Karl Marx,

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guild master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, that each time ended, either in the

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revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes (Bronstein, 1951: 125).

From this statement, it is clear that there is a problem between the bourgeoisie and proletariat. The problem is the exploitation of the proletariat which is done by the bourgeoisie, and it raises the action of struggle to get the higher social class.

The bourgeoisie consist of the merchants, the guild members, the pensioners, and the elite non-nobles (professionals, financiers, and officials) who dominated much of the early modern urban landscape. The proletariat experience the difficulty that is caused by this division of class. The bourgeoisie expand their markets, gain their production, and become too powerful by the development of their production. On the contrary, the power of the bourgeoisie becomes the difficulty of the proletariat. Not only are they the slaves of the bourgeoisie class, and of the bourgeoisie state, they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the overseer, and, above all, by the individual Bourgeoisie manufacturer himself (Bronstein, 1951: 132).

All of the difficulties of the proletariat make them do the efforts to get better life, better economic conditions and the freedom to work. The proletariat's difficulties make them the oppressed, but, they let the proletariat do the effort which finishes exploitation, even abolishes the class division.

In general usage, however, the term "bourgeois," from medieval times through the age of the French Revolution, refers to the non-noble inhabitants of towns, citizens who enjoyed the privileges associated with living in a particular place. According to Adams in his book *A Taste for Comfort and Status: A Bourgeois Family in Eighteenth-Century France*,

But not all "bourgeois" individuals were involved in trade and manufacture. The term encompasses lawyers, doctors, and non-noble officials, sometimes counted on the fringes of, or even at the center of, the elite. It also includes the so-called *bourgeois vivant noblement*, the "bourgeois living nobly" from the proceeds of investments and no longer required to labor for an income. While status in the early modern era was not invariably linked to wealth, wealth could go far in blurring the lines between middle class and elite, at least for those who were involved in the professions and not directly connected to the less noble function of trade (2000: 39).

The bourgeoisie are not the people who own large fortune, but some people who have prestigious professions such as, lawyers, doctors, or educated officials are also the members of the bourgeoisie.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The novel entitled *Madame Bovary* written by a French author, Gustave Flaubert becomes the source of data. The novel was published by an Electronic Classic Series Publication. The novel was originally written in the French language. It was translated by Eleanor Marx Aveling in 2000. The novel consists of three parts with some chapters in each part.

Three approaches are used to help the researcher conduct an analysis. The approaches which are suitable to apply in this research are moral and philosophical approach, historical-biographical approach, psychological approach, and sociological approach. Guerin stated that . . . the large function of literature is to teach morality and to probe philosophical issues (2005: 79). This approach is used because analyzing the failure of bourgeoisie gives a moral message that it is not good to have more desire to reach what the people can not. Besides, dealing with the bourgeoisie, the characters in the novel would like to find the truth that

becoming the members of the bourgeoisie can make them happy. The novel, *Madame Bovary* focuses on the main characters' failure to mingle with the bourgeois society. That failure influences their psychological conditions pure⁸.

Additionally, Guerin in his book entitled *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, states that "Put simply, this approach sees the literary work chiefly, if not exclusively, as a reflection of its author's life and times or the life and times of the character in the work (2005: 51)." In the analysis, the writer needs some information dealing with the poet's historical background and life in order to support the analysis.

The next approach needed by the researcher is psychological approach.

"Psychological approach is an approach to art that can generate three kinds of illumination: First, provide a more precise language with which to discuss the creative process; second, go back to study of the life of an author as means of understanding his art, and third, able to explain factious character" (Scott, 1962: 71-72).

The researcher would like to learn the life of the characters psychologically in which their problems give the explanation for the readers by concerning psychological view.

The last approach is sociological approach. As stated by Scott in *Five Approaches of Literary Criticism*, sociological approach gives an understanding that art's relations to society are vitally important, and that the investigation of relationships organizes and deepens one's response to work of art (1962:123). It means that sociological approach is related to society and gives understanding about interrelationship between one character to another character.

Moreover, the technique of collecting the data uses the library research. It is qualitative research. Punch says that "the possibilities for data in qualitative studies include document, diaries, and journals, other written materials (2000: 58).

The researcher collects the data by applying some steps. The novel is read as a very step in collecting the data. The novel, *Madame Bovary* is read to understand and comprehend the topic of the research. The data are identified by underlining, bracketing, marking, and then numbering the data. As the next step, the researcher inventories the data by listing them into column in several variables. In order to make it easier, it is better to use table to put the identified data in it. Moreover, the data are classified based on the problems that will be answered. The most important is that the researcher analyzes the data. It means the selected data are analyzed with the reasons why the data support the determination of problems.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Madame Bovary is often described as a satire on romantic beliefs and the ineffectual lives of the provincial bourgeoisie of nineteenth-century France. The novel relates the story of Emma Bovary who is a bored and frustrated housewife. Her dreams of romantic love are primarily inspired by popular novels of her time. The dreams are unfulfilled through her marriage to a simple country doctor, Charles Bovary. She attempts to realize her fantasies through love affairs with a local landowner and a law clerk and, later, through extravagant purchases. Unable to pay her debts and unwilling to tolerate or to conform to bourgeois values, she ultimately commits suicide by poisoning herself.

Bourgeoisie is a French terminology that pictures the life style of middle class French. Emma's disappointments stem in great part from her dissatisfaction with the world of the French bourgeoisie. She aspires to have taste that is more refined and sophisticated than¹¹ that of her class. This frustration reflects a rising social and historical trend of the last half of the nineteenth century. At the time Flaubert was writing, the word "bourgeois" referred to the middle class:

people who lacked the independent wealth and ancestry of the nobility, but whose professions did not require them to perform physical labour to earn their living. Their tastes were characterized as gaudily materialistic. They indulged themselves as their means allowed, but without discrimination. The mediocrity of the bourgeoisie was frustrating to Flaubert, and he used Emma Bovary's disgust with her class as a way of conveying his own hatred for the middle class. Emma thinks that by marrying a middle class doctor can change her life, but she has got her wrong. She has only married unsophisticated doctor and finally felt disgust with the way her husband lives. She imagines that her life will be as beautiful as that of the novel she used to read.

Finally, to keep up with the times, he took in "La Ruche Medicale," a new journal whose prospectus had sent him. He read it a little after dinner, but in about five minutes warmth of the room added to the effect of his dinner sent him to sleep; and he sat there, his chin on his two hands and his hair spreading like a mane to the foot of the lamp. Emma looked at him and shrugged her shoulders. Why, at least, was not her husband one of these men of taciturn passions who work at their books all night, and at last, when about sixty, the age of rheumatism sets in, wear a string of orders on their ill-fitting black coat? She could have wished this name of Bovary, which was hers, has been illustrious, to see it displayed at the booksellers', repeated in the newspapers, known to all France. But Charles had no ambition (MB; Part 1: Chapter IX; 2014: 54).

In particular, the details of Charles's awkwardness are greatly magnified. The narrator describes every noise he makes when he eats and every single boring action he does. Flaubert also devotes several paragraphs to a description of Emma's overwhelmingly boring daily routine. Emma's boredom becomes one of the novel's subjects and a means of developing her character.

Moreover, Emma's social class failure is also portrayed when she and her husband are invited in the ball. Although enchanted by the atmosphere of wealth and luxury at the ball, Emma is embarrassed by her husband, whom she views as a clumsy, unsophisticated oaf. She is surrounded by wealthy, elegant noblemen and women, among them an old man who was one of Marie Antoinette's lovers. When the ballroom gets too hot, a servant breaks the windows to let in the air. Emma looks outside and sees peasants gawking in; she is reminded of her life on the farm, which now feels a world away.

Guests were flocking to the billiard room. A servant got upon a chair and broke the window-panes. At the crash of the glass Madame Bovary turned her head and saw in the garden the faces of peasants pressed against the window looking in at them. Then the memory of the Bertaux came back to her. She saw the farm again, the muddy pond, her father in a blouse under the apple trees, and she saw herself again as formerly, skimming with her finger the cream off the milk-pans in the dairy. But in the refulgence of the present hour her past life, so distinct until then, faded away completely, and she almost doubted having lived it. She was there; beyond the ball was only shadow overspreading all the rest (MB; Part 1: Chapter VIII; 2014: 46)...

Emma's relation to her farming roots is also explored in this section. Flaubert places a recollection of the past in the middle of Emma's fantasy evening to show that she can never really escape her origins. At the ball, Emma allows herself to forget that she is not a privileged member of the upper-class world she is visiting, but when a servant breaks a windowpane, Emma sees the peasants outside, and she remembers the simple country life of her youth.

A viscount dances with her, and she feels as though she has been cheated out of the life for which she was born. On the way home, the same viscount passes them on the road and drops a cigar box, which Emma keeps. Back in Tostes, Emma is angry with everyone around her.

Her journey to Vaubyessard had made a hole in her life, like one of those great crevices that a storm will sometimes make in one night in mountains. Still she was resigned. She devoutly put away in her drawers her beautiful dress, down to the satin shoes whose soles were yellowed with the slippery wax of the dancing floor. Her heart was like these. In its friction against wealth something had come over it that could not be effaced. The memory of this ball, then, became an occupation for Emma (MB; Part 1: Chapter VIII; 2014: 50).

Emma is unable to accept the world as it is, but she cannot make the world as she wants it to be. Now that she is married to a middle-class dullard, she cannot accept her lot. She steepes herself in fantasy, and the pressure of her constant rebellion against reality makes her restless, moody, and eventually physically ill.

Flaubert's portrayal of the ball and the events that follow displays the ironic contrast between Emma's experience and reality. Flaubert conveys both the external reality of how Emma looks at the ball as well the psychological reality of how the ball looks to Emma. She is so happy that she fails to realize that no one at the ball is paying any attention to her, and her meaningless dance with the viscount becomes, in her fancy, a tremendous romantic occurrence. In fact, she continues to overlook the well-meaning love of her good-natured but vapid husband in favour of her memories of the ball for weeks after everyone else has already forgotten it.

Additionally, the failure of bourgeoisie portrayed by Flaubert is when he describes Emma's disappointment for having a baby-girl. She hoped for a son; he would be strong and dark; she would call him George; and this idea of having a male child was like an expected revenge for all her impotence in the past. A man, at least, is free; he can explore all passions and all countries, overcome obstacles, taste of the most distant pleasures, but a woman is always hampered.

Emma at first felt a great astonishment; then was anxious to be delivered that she might know what it was to be a mother. But not being able to spend as much as she would have liked, to have a swing-bassinet with rose silk curtains, and embroidered caps, in a fit of bitterness she gave up looking after the trousseau, and ordered the whole of it from a village needlewoman, without choosing or discussing anything. Thus she did not amuse herself with those preparations that stimulate the tenderness of mothers, and so her affection was from the very outset, perhaps, to some extent attenuated (MB; Part 2: Chapter III; 2014: 77).

The birth of Emma's daughter underlines the materialism of her sentiments. Emma desires to be a maternal figure only when it seems as though the role might be glamorous. As soon as she realizes that she cannot buy expensive clothes and furniture for the baby, however, her interest fades, and we see that her only interest in the child is as a vehicle for her own desires. Emma dreams of having a son because she believes that a male child will have the power she lacks. This frank statement shows that Flaubert was aware and perhaps disapproved of the abridged liberties afforded to women in the late nineteenth century. Even though she has married a doctor, it does not mean she can get everything she has expected.

Flaubert, then, shows more severe failure of bourgeoisie when he mocks the bourgeois class's pretensions to knowledge and learning and its faith in the power of technologies that it does not completely understand.

Homais is self-impressed man of the bourgeois class who helps Charles to become established as a doctor in the town. When he urges Charles Bovary to try a new medical procedure on Hippolyte, the patient acquires gangrene and then loses his leg. Homais reads a paper praising a surgical procedure that will cure clubfoot. Under pressure from Emma (who hopes to help Charles's career), Homais, and much of Yonville, the cautious Charles agrees to test this procedure on Hippolyte, a clubfooted servant at the inn. Although Hippolyte is more

agile on his crippled leg than some men are on two healthy ones, he is talked into the operation by the townspeople. The attempt makes Charles a local celebrity—but it fails. Hippolyte's leg develops gangrene and must be amputated. Emma judges Charles incompetent and feels disgusted by him.

“You give way too much! Get up! You coddle yourself like a king! All the same, old chap, you don't smell nice!”

Gangrene, in fact, was spreading more and more. Bovary himself turned sick at it. He came every hour, every moment. Hippolyte looked at him with eyes full of terror, sobbing—“When shall I get well? Oh, save me! How unfortunate I am! How unfortunate I am!”

And the doctor left, always recommending him to diet himself. “Don't listen to him, my lad,” said Mere Lefrancois, “Haven't they tortured you enough already? You'll grow still weaker. Here! Allow this.”...

Who could say if his colleagues would not write against him. Polemics would ensue; he would have to answer in the papers. Hippolyte might even prosecute him. He saw himself dishonoured, ruined, lost; and his imagination, assailed by a world of hypotheses, tossed amongst them like an empty cask borne by the sea and floating upon the waves.

Emma, opposite, watched him; she did not share his humiliation; she felt another—that of having supposed such a man was worth anything. As if twenty times already she had not sufficiently perceived his mediocrity (MB; Part 2: Chapter XI; 2014: 154-156).

Charles Bovary and Emma have been both depressed by this incident, although it is for different reasons. He is ashamed of what he has done and felt that he has been irresponsible. She reproaches herself for ever having had faith in him and decided that she is now absolved of any responsibility to her husband. Flaubert succeeds to portray the characters' failure of fame of being bourgeois. He also shows that the characters have shown off their incapability of being the new members of the sophisticated class called bourgeoisie.

4. CONCLUSION

Emma is the novel's protagonist and she is Madame Bovary, the title of the novel. As a country girl educated in a convent and married to Charles Bovary at a young age, she harbors idealistic romantic illusions, covets sophistication, sensuality, and passion, and lapses into fits of extreme boredom and depression when her life fails to match the sentimental novels she treasures. She has a daughter, Berthe, but lacks maternal instincts and is often annoyed with the child. Emma's desire for passion and pleasure leads her into extramarital affairs with Rodolphe and Leon. In addition, she runs up enormous debts against her husband's property and commits suicide when she realizes she will be unable to repay them.

The research focuses on the failure of the bourgeoisie. The two main characters of the novel are Emma Bovary and Charles Bovary. Both of them are the members of the middle social class so called bourgeois. Unfortunately, they fail to be part of them because of their own incapability. Emma's strong dissatisfaction of her life makes her go beyond what she really expects. It should be noted here that in spite of Charles' dullness and stupidity, he does possess a dogged devotion to Emma. He gives up his practice and remains by her side during her entire illness. Of course, it could be said that his devotion is the same as an animal would have for his master, but it is, nevertheless, a redeeming characteristic in Charles' otherwise flat personality. For a while,

Charles idealizes the memory of his wife. Eventually, though, he finds her letters from Rodolphe and Leon, and he is forced to confront the truth. He dies alone in his garden

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