



SPOILER

Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*

In Part III we view the natural end, the foreseeable consequences, of Emma's philosophy of life. This time she and Léon do not respect convention-- she is no longer an innocent woman, and he is older and urbanized. But when he turns on the old charm, this new Emma proves too experienced and jaded to be enraptured. She schedules their rendezvous in a church to (falsely?) shield herself from Léon's advances; but eventually, in a long carriage ride throughout the countryside, their affair is commenced. Emma deceives her husband into paying for her to take weekly trips into Rouen to see Léon, on the pretense of taking piano lessons in that city. Emma and Léon grow passionate and close, and she finances her trysts by stealing from her husband and borrowing against their possessions. But even here the discontent and staling of the relationship with Léon is discernible. Finally, in a fit of tyranny over her lover, she realizes that she remains unfulfilled. She also seems to perceive that she will never achieve her longings. Her indulgence in what she thinks she desires has brought, not happiness, but yet further unfulfilled desires (III.6). Predictably, however, she returns to her imaginings of a "phantom man" who will take her away from her misery. The mundane matters of her growing debt begin to catch up with her. The lender Lheureux has had enough of her, and arranges for the Bovary house and its belongings to be seized. In a panic, Emma seeks help from any quarter, even sinking to a willingness to prostitute herself for financial rescue. Shamelessly she seeks Rodolphe's aid, but he refuses. When she realizes all is lost, she goes to the pharmacist's stores, swallows a handful of arsenic, and returns home. The frantic Charles and his physician colleagues cannot help her, and she dies. Soon afterwards Charles happens upon Emma's box of love letters. He is struck into a confused miasma, in which he persists until he too soon dies. Meanwhile the pharmacist Homais manages to derive from each somber event some selfish benefit.

