

WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

Madame Bovary

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

With an Introduction by Roger Clark
University of Kent at Canterbury

Castigated for offending against public decency, *Madame Bovary* has rarely failed to cause a storm. For Flaubert's contemporaries, the fascination came from the novelist's meticulous account of provincial manners. For the writer, subject matter was subordinate to his anguished quest for aesthetic perfection. For his twentieth-century successors the formal experiments that underpin *Madame Bovary* look forward to the innovations of contemporary fiction.

Flaubert's protagonist in particular has never ceased to fascinate. Romantic heroine or middle-class neurotic, flawed wife and mother or passionate protestor against the conventions of bourgeois society, simultaneously the subject of Flaubert's admiration and the butt of his irony – Emma Bovary remains one of the most enigmatic of fictional creations.

Flaubert's meticulous approach to the craft of fiction, his portrayal of contemporary reality, his representation of an unforgettable cast of characters make *Madame Bovary* one of the major landmarks of modern fiction.

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MADAME BOVARY

Gustave Flaubert

Introduction and Notes by

DR ROGER CLARK

University of Kent at Canterbury



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MICHAEL TRAYLER
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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth Classics are inexpensive editions designed to appeal to the general reader and students. We commissioned teachers and specialists to write wide ranging, jargon-free introductions and to provide notes that would assist the understanding of our readers rather than interpret the stories for them. In the same spirit, because the pleasures of reading are inseparable from the surprises, secrets, and revelations that all narratives contain, we strongly advise you to enjoy this book before turning to the Introduction.

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INTRODUCTION

Il ne faut pas toucher aux idoles: la dorure en reste aux mains. [We must not touch our idols; the gilt sticks to our fingers.]

FLAUBERT, *Madame Bovary*, p. 216

Few novels have been greeted by more high-voltage and paradoxical reactions than Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Prosecuted in 1857, in the aftermath of its publication, for offending against public decency, Flaubert's novel has over the past century and a half become one of the canonical texts of French literary syllabuses, both in its native country and elsewhere. Steeped in the hallowed traditions of nineteenth-century realism (how after all could a novel that had been published only six years after the death of Balzac not be marked by his influence?), *Madame Bovary* has long been seen as a further manifestation of realism's mimetic ambition (for example, by Erich Auerbach in *Mimesis*, by Anthony Thorlby in his *Gustave Flaubert and*