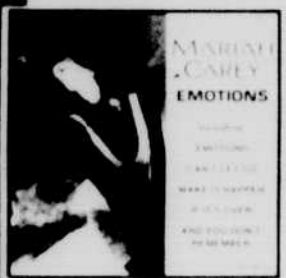
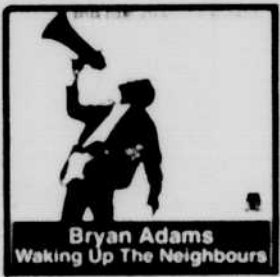


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ENTERTAINMENT

Bovary beautiful but lacking

★★
FILM: *Madame Bovary* is currently showing at the Bijou Art Cinemas.

... don't bother ... wait to rent ... worth the time ... a must see



I just saw a French film. You know, the kind that makes you feel cultured all over. It had subtitles and everything. People spoke in nasal tones and the 'R's' just rolled out into the air from nowhere. Everyone on the screen seemed smarter than me.

But you know what? Those intelligent French people on the screen can keep their tortured lives. I didn't get it.

I haven't read the Gustave Flaubert novel on which the film is based. I'm told by those who have that this film comes as close to the source material as possible.

Indeed, that is what the director Claude Chabrol claimed he wanted to do. He also said that he thought about adapting the novel to the screen over a hundred times and came up with a hundred excuses not to do it. Well, Monsieur Chabrol, I think that means your mind was trying to tell you something.

Madame Bovary has the unmistakable smell of an unadaptable book foolishly being adapted. The simple plot — an unhappy woman has several relationships with men who she think will bring excitement and

meaning to her pointless life — is not, on its own, enough to carry an entire film.

There's far too much internalizing in Emma Bovary's character. The audience needs to know what synapses are going on inside her head. That feat is much better accomplished in a book; where thoughts, emotions and rationalizations can be properly examined.

Since we don't know these things, her actions often seem unmotivated and even stupid. There are so many things we as the audience are not made privy to concerning Emma's thinking that this feeling of ignorance about her continues throughout the film.

Why does Emma leave with the first man who comes to her house? It's a doctor who comes to set her father's broken leg. Did she all of a sudden decide her life needed a man — any man? Since there's no exposition explaining this decision, there's a strong sense that she's getting what she deserves or at least is incredibly poor at judging character.

As she goes from man to man and back again, it grows tiresome. Men use her for entertainment and leave her as soon as they become bored. The only man who seems to really love her is Charles, her husband. But he is dull and predictable. Emma never returns his affections.

There are good things to be noted about *Madame Bovary*. It has a quiet, diffused, rustic beauty about it. It's expertly framed by Chabrol and all the images are easy to take. But it's kind of like eating cheese and drinking wine in a meadow all day and then realizing you had more important things to do than eat cheese and drink wine.

In an adaptation of a literary piece like *Madame Bovary*, it's acceptable and even important to take cinematic liberties. This is not a book and the audience can't read pages of character introspection. It's up to the filmmaker to visually create moments that motivate the character.

Isabelle Huppert turns in yet another heartfelt performance. One of her best assets as an actress is that she seems to always tap into the heart of the characters she plays. She, for one, seems to know all the internal motivations of Emma.

When she is in a scene, she dominates through quiet determination. What goes through Emma's mind is a mystery to me, but because of Huppert's performance, I wanted to understand her better.

This is a noble attempt at a movie that perhaps should never have been made. It means to show the soul of a tortured woman, but only the scenery is well defined.

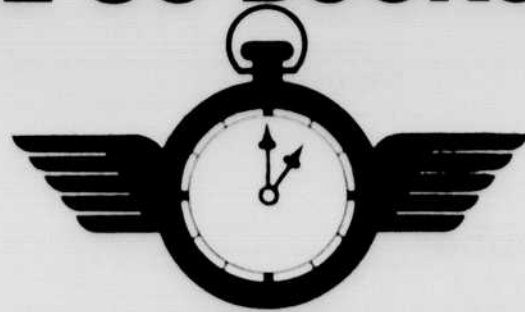
By Lucas J. Gutman
Emerald Contributor

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