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MADAME BOVARY

(PG-13)

(SAMUEL GOLDWYN)

The Film Journal

Color/1.85

130 Mins.

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Cast: Isabelle Huppert, Jean-Francois Balmer, Christophe Malavoy, Jean Yanne, Lucas Belvaux, Florent Gibassier, Jean-Claude Bouillaud, Sabeline Campo, Yves Verhoeven, Marie Mergey.

Credits: Written and directed by Claude Chabrol. Produced by Marin Karmitz. Based on the novel by Gustave Flaubert. Director of photography: Jean Rabier. Edited by Monique Fardoulis. Art direction: Michele Abbe. Costume design by Corrine Jorry. Music by Matthieu Chabrol. A co-production of MK2 Productions S.A., C.E.D. Productions, FR3 Films Production.

Veteran French filmmaker Claude Chabrol succeeds in creating a *Madame Bovary* at once contemporary and true to Gustave Flaubert's original. Expect appreciative audiences in art house venues. 92-09

Claude Chabrol's *Madame Bovary* is a compelling, intelligent and ultimately haunting work. In his faithful adaptation of Gustave Flaubert's masterwork, the director succeeds in bringing to life not only Emma Bovary's tragic story, but the confining context of 19th-century provincial French life, especially for women. And in Isabelle Huppert, Chabrol finds the perfect Emma, by turns cool and passionate, calculating and vulnerable, plain and beautiful. As in the novel, she is often an unsympathetic character, self-absorbed, materialistic, an adulterous wife to a loving if dull husband, and an indifferent mother. But her struggle for some form of self-fulfillment, no matter how deluded, within the hypocritical, bourgeois society depicted by Flaubert and now Chabrol, makes her a genuine heroine.

Although Chabrol's screenplay quotes extensively from the novel both in dialogue and in the occasional use of voice-over narration, it does not capture Flaubert's biting sarcasm or sardonic humor. It is more successful conveying the novel's tone of objective realism, its almost journalistic authenticity. In the famous scene in which Emma is seduced by the charismatic landowner Rodolphe, Chabrol recreates Flaubert's ironic counterpart—the chairman of the town's agricultural fair announcing prizes for the "best manures" and other unromantic categories, in the square outside their window. Whereas it is

shockingly original in the novel, on screen it takes on a more casual, mildly humorous quality. A film, no matter what its length or quality, can never approximate the emotional complexity or richness of language of a great novel. But it can dramatize, and that is what Chabrol and his excellent cast and crew do. Shot near Rouen, the film authoritatively recreates Flaubert's fictional Yonville and environs. The spare use of original music, as well as selections from Strauss, Scarlatti and Donizetti, propel the film's emotional content.

But it is Huppert who dominates the picture. Wearing minimal makeup on her mask-like face, her thin frame tightly corseted in period gowns, she fits Flaubert's description of Emma as possessing a "fearless candor." The actress infuses her every response with such conviction that it makes the well-known story suspenseful. Huppert receives strong support from Jean-Francois Balmer as an extremely sympathetic Charles Bovary, Christophe Malavoy as the charming womanizer Rodolphe, Jean Yanne as the treacherous pharmacist Homais, and Lucas Belvaux as Emma's young lover Leon.

If, in the end, the film leads one back to the book for more, this in no way detracts from Chabrol's accomplishment. The director's tribute is our good fortune.

—Wendy Weinstein