IB English

Works in Translation: A Caution – An Introduction Activity for *Mme. Bovary* (Flaubert)

**Activity 1:**

**MADAME BOVARY**

Written by Gustave Flaubert. Translated from the French by Eleanor Marx-Aveling

**Part I**

**Chapter One**

We were in class when the head-master came in, followed by a "new fellow," not wearing the school uniform, and a school servant carrying a large desk. Those who had been asleep woke up, and every one rose as if just surprised at his work.

The head-master made a sign to us to sit down. Then, turning to the class-master, he said to him in a low voice—

"Monsieur Roger, here is a pupil whom I recommend to your care; he'll be in the second. If his work and conduct are satisfactory, he will go into one of the upper classes, as becomes his age."

The "new fellow," standing in the corner behind the door so that he could hardly be seen, was a country lad of about fifteen, and taller than any of us. His hair was cut square on his forehead like a village chorister's; he looked reliable, but very ill at ease. Although he was not broad-shouldered, his short school jacket of green cloth with black buttons must have been tight about the arm-holes, and showed at the opening of the cuffs red wrists accustomed to being bare. His legs, in blue stockings, looked out from beneath yellow trousers, drawn tight by braces. He wore stout, ill-cleaned, hob-nailed boots.

We began repeating the lesson. He listened with all his ears, as attentive as if at a sermon, not daring even to cross his legs or lean on his elbow; and when at two o'clock the bell rang, the master was obliged to tell him to fall into line with the rest of us.

When we came back to work, we were in the habit of throwing our caps on the ground so as to have our hands more free; we used from the door to toss them under the form, so that they hit against the wall and made a lot of dust: it was "the thing."

But, whether he had not noticed the trick, or did not dare to attempt it, the "new fellow," was still holding his cap on his knees even after prayers were over. It was one of those head-gears of composite order, in which we can find traces of the bearskin, shako, billycock hat, sealskin cap, and cotton night-cap; one of those poor things, in fine, whose dumb ugliness has depths of expression, like an imbecile's face. Oval, stiffened with whalebone, it began with three round knobs; then came in succession lozenges of velvet and rabbit-skin separated by a red band; after that a sort of bag that ended in a cardboard polygon covered with complicated braiding, from which hung, at the end of a long thin cord, small twisted gold threads in the manner of a tassel. The cap was new; its peak shone.

"Rise," said the master.

He stood up; his cap fell. The whole class began to laugh. He stooped to pick it up. A neighbor knocked it down again with his elbow; he picked it up once more.

"Get rid of your helmet," said the master, who was a bit of a wag.

There was a burst of laughter from the boys, which so thoroughly put the poor lad out of countenance that he did not know whether to keep his cap in his hand, leave it on the ground, or put it on his head. He sat down again and placed it on his knee.

"Rise," repeated the master, "and tell me your name."

The new boy articulated in a stammering voice an unintelligible name.

"Again!"

The same sputtering of syllables was heard, drowned by the tittering of the class.

"Louder!" cried the master; "louder!"

The "new fellow" then took a supreme resolution, opened an inordinately large mouth, and shouted at the top of his voice as if calling someone in the word "Charbovari."

A hubbub broke out, rose in crescendo with bursts of shrill voices (they yelled, barked, stamped, repeated "Charbovari! Charbovari"), then died away into single notes, growing quieter only with great difficulty, and now and again suddenly recommencing along the line of a form whence rose here and there, like a damp cracker going off, a stifled laugh.
Directions: Compare the above passage as translated by Eleanor Marx-Aveling with the same introductory passage from our translation of Madame Bovary by Lowell Bair.

1. First, read the passage from Marx-Aveling’s translation and mark 5 single words, phrases or sentences of significance of your choice. Focus on translation choices that you believe make dramatic differences.
2. Read the passage from Bair’s translation and find and mark the same 5 phrases or sentences.
3. Finally, prepare and answer to the following prompt and be prepared to discuss with the whole class:
   - Discuss three things about the two translations that you think affect significant changes to the meaning and tone of the passage.
Part 2:

**Directions:** Consider the dedication page from Marx-Aveling's translation of *Madame Bovary* and compare it to Bair's translation of Flaubert's dedication to Marie-Antoine-Jules Senard (on page xxv of your copy of *Madame Bovary*) and determine which of the two translations is the most effective and why. Defend your critique.

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<th>Marx-Aveling's Translation</th>
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| To Marie-Antoine-Jules Senard Member of the Paris Bar, Ex-President of the National Assembly, and Former Minister of the Interior  
Dear and Illustrious Friend, Permit me to incribe your name at the head of this book, and above its dedication; for it is to you, before all, that I owe its publication. Reading over your magnificent defence, my work has acquired for myself, as it were, an unexpected authority.  
Accept, then, here, the homage of my gratitude, which, how great soever it is, will never attain the height of your eloquence and your devotion.  
Gustave Flaubert, Paris, 12 April 1857 |