

# From Immorality to Immortality

Branding *Madame Bovary* in the Netherlands

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## Abstract

This article analyses the publication history of Dutch translations of *Madame Bovary* within the wider context of Flaubert's reception more generally. In the decades following its publication, *Madame Bovary* was widely criticized due to its 'scandalous' subject matter. Gradually, these moralistic views gave way to a growing recognition of the novel as a modern classic. However, the immorality scandal continued to resonate with readers. We investigate how these diverging views on the novel informed the branding strategies employed by the publishers of its Dutch translations. Combining reception history, translation studies, paratextual analysis, and cultural sociology, we demonstrate how each publisher established a branding narrative that was informed by the status of the translator in question and that targeted a specific readership.

**Keywords:** French literature, Gustave Flaubert, translation, reception, paratext, cultural sociology

## Introduction: The Early Reception of Flaubert in the Netherlands

One of the first items that pops up in a library catalogue search on the Dutch reception of Gustave Flaubert is a publication entitled *Madame Bovary in Holland*, by Taco de Beer. Based on the title, one would expect it to be an account on the reception or the influence of Flaubert's epoch-making debut novel within the Dutch literary field. However, the pamphlet in question makes only a few passing references to Flaubert. It is in fact an attack against

*Lidewyde* (1868), a novel of adultery written by the influential critic Conrad Busken Huet. By framing this book as the Dutch equivalent of *Madame Bovary*, De Beer intends to dismiss it as scandalous. The self-evident presentation of Flaubert's novel as the epitome of French immorality indicates that, within a decade of its publication, *Madame Bovary* had become a household name in the Netherlands. The 1857 trial against Flaubert had been widely reported in the Dutch press and established his reputation as a controversial author.<sup>1</sup>

As a consequence, readers would have to wait until 1904 before the first Dutch translation of this notorious book came out. Compared to other countries, this is exceptionally late; Russian and German translations of *Madame Bovary* appeared as early as 1858 and most other countries followed in the years 1860-1890.<sup>2</sup> Toos Streng (2020: 78-105) has argued that this is a symptom of a larger cultural pattern: between 1830 and 1875, relatively few French novels were translated into Dutch due to their perceived immorality. Her research shows that, within the Dutch critical discourse, the 'French novel' functioned as a distinctive brand, combining a reputation of aesthetic appeal with a sense of moral danger. Within this controversial genre, *Madame Bovary* was one of the most frequently mentioned examples. However, the reception of Flaubert gradually changed with the breakthrough of Dutch naturalism and the so-called Tachtigers ('Movement of the 1880s') whose proponents saw him as a model of artistic dedication and a champion of literary autonomy. By the end of the nineteenth century, the public opinion on the author of *Madame Bovary* had evolved from a widely shared moral reprobation to a general admiration of his literary craftsmanship. This of course made his work a more legitimate and potentially profitable investment for publishers.

This mind shift became particularly evident in 1896, when the famous novelist Louis Couperus published the first ever Dutch translation of a work by Flaubert (an adaptation of *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*). A regional newspaper described Couperus as being besieged by publishers offering big sums of money for more Flaubert translations (*Provinciale Overijsselsche en Zwolsche courant* 1896).<sup>3</sup> Apparently, there was a great

1 For a more in-depth discussion of the *Lidewyde* affair in the context of early Flaubert reception in the Netherlands, see Koffeman 2012.

2 On Flaubert's international translation history, see the Flaubert sans Frontières database hosted by the CÉRÉDI research Center at Rouen University: [flaubert.univ-rouen.fr/jet/public/fsf/recherche.php](http://flaubert.univ-rouen.fr/jet/public/fsf/recherche.php).

3 'De werken van Couperus volgen elkander met groote snelheid op. Het laatst is door hem een vertaling gegeven van Flaubert's verzoeking aan den Heiligen Antonius. In de *Kroniek*

demand for such publications. Since then, virtually all of Flaubert's works have been translated into Dutch, and several of them more than once.<sup>4</sup> *Madame Bovary* tops the list with four different translations totalling 64 different editions up to the present day. Within contemporary Dutch literature and criticism, references to this novel are numerous, showing that it is part of the common cultural repertoire and a major source of inspiration for aspiring writers. Therefore, one could say that *Madame Bovary* has acquired a strong brand equity within the Dutch literary field, a reputation of quality based on its innovative narrative technique rather than the controversial subject matter.

### Translation History and Paratextual Analysis

Research into the critical reception of *Madame Bovary* in other countries, as well as the book covers and illustrations of its translations, has shown that the representations of the novel tended to become less moralistic representations over time; however, the association with the 1857 immorality trial never completely disappeared from the discourse surrounding *Madame Bovary*.<sup>5</sup> In what follows, we will investigate how these diverging visions of the novel informed the way it was presented to the Dutch reading public. Obviously, the earlier critical reception of the novel was a factor to be reckoned with; each publisher who brought out a translation had to decide whether, and how, they would include the notorious literary scandal surrounding the novel in their branding narrative. In order to find out how they dealt with this issue, the paratexts surrounding a number of Dutch editions of *Madame Bovary* will be analysed. Following the definitions coined by Gérard Genette (1987: 11), we will study two types of paratexts, namely the peritexts (cover design, forewords, blurb texts, etc.) and a certain number of epitexts (newspaper advertisements and other promotional materials).

As shown by Sharon Deane-Cox (2012), the phenomenon of retranslating literary classics is particularly interesting in this regard. Analysing the way each new English translation of *Madame Bovary* uses paratexts in order

geeft Bauer ons den auteur zelf te aanschouwen als de Heilige Antonius. Van alle kanten dagen uitgevers op met groote geldbuidels. "Vertaal ons Salammbó, vertaal ons St. Julien, Bovary..." is de algemeene kreet'.

4 For an overview of all Dutch Flaubert translations, see Koffeman 2018 and [www.flaubert.nl/vertalingen.htm](http://www.flaubert.nl/vertalingen.htm).

5 See Lacoste 2008; Jackson 1966; Rouxville 1977; Remak 1954; Gallice 2014; Donatelli 2014.

to position itself with regard to its predecessors and to the source text, Deane-Cox reveals the power struggles which are at play in the literary field. Her approach can be qualified as a fruitful combination between reception history, translation studies and cultural sociology. For the sake of our research, we propose to add to this theoretical framework the concept of cultural branding as a means of drawing attention to publishers' efforts to establish a consistent narrative around a title in order to target a particular readership. According to the field theory of Pierre Bourdieu, publishers' strategies are likely to be aimed at either gaining symbolic capital in the 'sub-field of restricted production' or the accumulation of economic capital within the 'sub-field of large-scale production' (1993: 53-54). In what follows, we will investigate how the branding of *Madame Bovary* within the Dutch literary field relates to these two theoretically opposed *prises de position*.

## Branding Bovary in the Dutch Literary Field

The first Dutch translation of *Madame Bovary* was published in 1904 by C.L.G. Veldt. Unfortunately, we have not found any background information on how this publication came about. We do know that Veldt was a small Amsterdam-based publisher who brought out translations of contemporary European literature but also original Dutch novels and non-fiction books on subjects such as sexuality and socialism. Considering the previous reception history of *Madame Bovary*, it is not surprising that it needed a rather progressive publishing house to take up the challenge of publishing the first translation. Since we have not been able to get hold of a copy of this particular edition, information on the Veldt's branding strategy must be deduced from the epitexts.

The first advertisements for this first translation, entitled *Mevrouw Bovary*, are rather curious. Instead of presenting a proper branding narrative centred on the novel itself, they defend the quality of the translation. In November 1904, Veldt advertised in the newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad*, stating that 'it is forgivable, in these days of book avalanches, to pass a hasty judgment on a translation without even opening the book, but wise people judge by themselves'.<sup>6</sup> This defensive statement was a reaction to an

6 'Een vluchtig oordeel te vellen over een vertaling, het boek daarbij niet eens open te snijden, is in deze dagen van boeken-lawine vergeefelijk, echter verstandige menschen oordeelen zelf'.

article published three days earlier in the same newspaper. The anonymous reviewer criticized the translation, stating that it did not come close to rendering the stylistic quality of the original.<sup>7</sup> The translator in question was Gerrit Hendrik Priem (1865-1933), a regular contributor to Veldt's publication catalogue. He was the author of several novels and poetry collections and had translated or adapted works by Dostoevsky, Maeterlinck, and Nietzsche. Therefore, we can assume that Priem had accumulated a sufficient amount of symbolic capital to qualify as a competent Flaubert translator. However, the epitexts reveal that his work was met with rather mixed reviews. Despite this initial controversy, an advertisement published in *Algemeen Handelsblad* on 18 March 1905, presented Veldt's editions of *Mevrouw Bovary* and Dostoevsky's *Schuld en Boete* (*Crime and Punishment*) as 'books of reputation' that 'had been recommended by the major newspapers and periodicals'.<sup>8</sup> In November and December 1906, *Het nieuws van den dag* placed advertisements presenting *Mevrouw Bovary* as a 'masterpiece of French literature' and a 'respectable St Nicolas present'. Veldt obviously tried to position the book as a modern classic of untainted reputation, but their branding strategies were not very coherent or sophisticated compared to later ones.

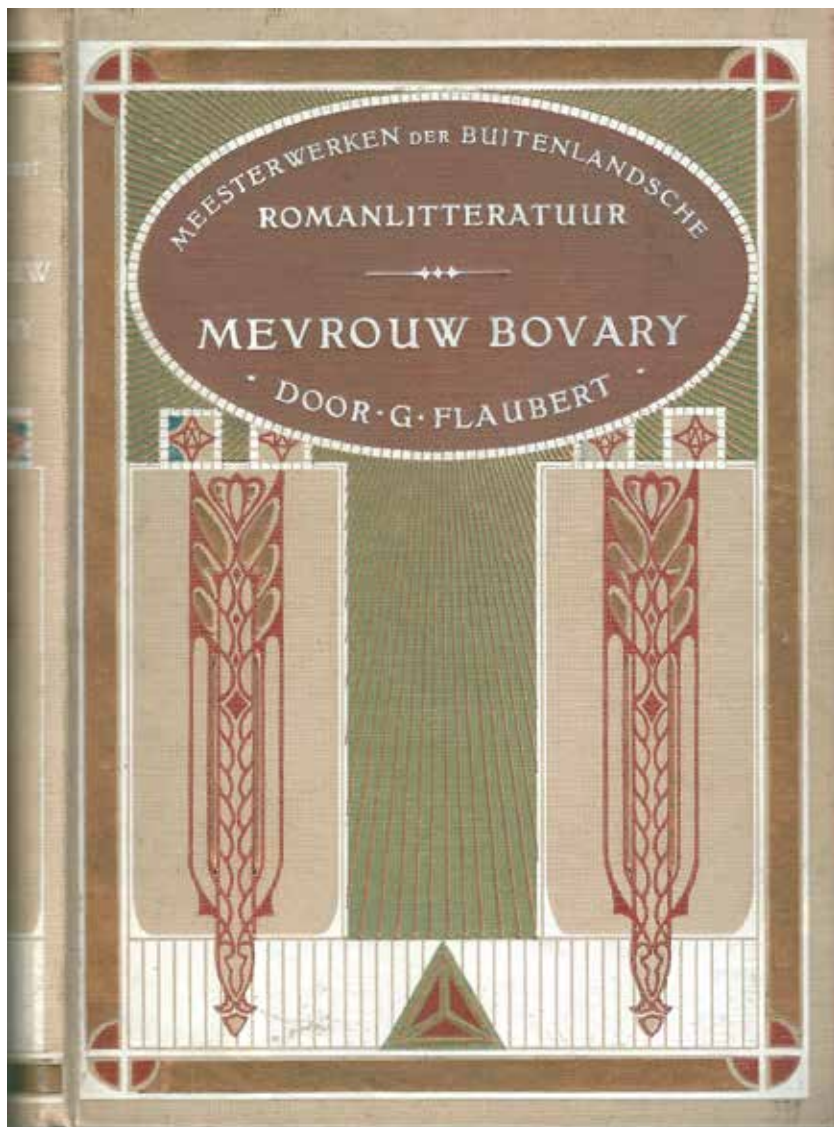
Priem's translation clearly responded to a public demand: it was reissued twice and continued to circulate for several years. The second edition deserves a closer inspection (see Fig. 4.1). It appeared in 1910 with the publishing house Van Holkema & Warendorf as part of the book series *Meesterwerken der buitenlandsche romanlitteratuur* (Masterpieces of Foreign Novel Literature). The book has an elegant hard cover in the art nouveau style and contains a number of interesting paratexts, such as advertisements for other books from the same series and for Priem's own literary works. The translator is thus framed as a man of letters, probably implying that only a real writer can do justice to Flaubert's text. On the title page, a quote by Emile Zola states that 'Flaubert restera toujours la [sic] culte même de la littérature'. Since Zola was one of the best known and most translated French realists within the Dutch literary field,<sup>9</sup> it was a clever move to exploit his symbolic capital in order to claim a reputation

7 'Wie "Madame Bovary" waardeeren kan, verstaat in ons land Fransch genoeg om het in het oorspronkelijk te lezen. Wie dat kan, leze het niet in de vertaling van den heer Priem. Want al staat de heer Priem zeker niet gelijk met de hoopen vertalende juffers a F 2 het vel, toch is ook zijn Hollandsch lang Flaubert in het Fransch niet'.

8 'Boeken van reputatie'; 'Aanbevelingen van deze werken gaven de voornaamste dagbladen en periodieken'.

9 See Streng 2020 (especially 92).

**Figure 4.1** Second edition of G.H. Priem's *Madame Bovary* translation in the series *Meesterwerken der buitenlandsche romanlitteratuur*. Amsterdam: Van Holkema & Warendorf, 1910



for Flaubert. Priem also wrote a short foreword to his translation, stressing the classic status of the novel and presenting Flaubert as one of the best realist authors. Priem praises Flaubert's superior sense of style, only to conclude that making a perfect translation of this masterpiece is an

impossibility.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, he also comments on the lack of earlier translations:

Among the things that have always surprised me a lot is the fact that a superior work that has become a classic, like Flaubert's 'Madame Bovary', has not yet appeared in translation. Was it the national prudishness, which refused to take interest in a book which, according to the French public prosecutor, 'outraged public morality and religion'? I believe that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, public morality and religion are self-confident enough not to oppose the Dutch translation of the book that once established Flaubert's fame once and for all. (Flaubert 1910: 1)<sup>11</sup>

The history of moral controversy around the novel explains why both the publisher and the translator actively contest the reputation of the novel as a *succès de scandale* and try to replace it with a brand narrative revolving around notions of canonicity and literary quality. Rather than targeting a mass audience that could potentially be seduced by the dramatic and 'immoral' subject matter, they choose to claim symbolic capital and thus position it in a more elitist section of the literary field.

This branding strategy can be deduced from a 1913 newspaper advertisement (see Fig. 4.2). Flaubert's novel is presented in the context of a book series, thus suggesting that it qualifies as a 'masterpiece'. The header reads 'gripping novels' and the text goes on to explain that the Meesterwerken series contains the best foreign novels, always in excellent 'adaptations'. Despite the beautiful binding, these books are quite affordable, which suggests that they are aimed at a middlebrow audience with cultural aspirations.

In 1917, J.M. Meulenhoff brought out the third and last edition of Priem's translation. This time, *Mevrouw Bovary* is included in a book series (Meulenhoff-Editie) which presents itself as 'a general library' composed of

10 There is a fascinating parallel between Priem's self-effacing posture and the words of the first English translator, Eleanor Marx-Aveling: 'no critic can be more painfully aware than I am of the weaknesses, the shortcomings, the failures of my work; but at least the translation is faithful. [...] It is pale and feeble by the side of its original' (quoted in Deane-Cox 2011: 4.)

11 'Tot de dingen, die mij altijd grootelijks verwonderd hebben, behoort het feit dat tot nog toe van een klassiek geworden superieur werk als "Madame Bovary" van Flaubert geen Hollandsche vertaling was verschenen. Was het de bekende vaderlandsche pudibonderie, die weigerde de oogen op te slaan naar een boek, waarin volgens het Fransche Openbare Ministerie "de publieke zedelijkheid en de godsdienst werden beledigd?" Ik meen dat, in het begin der twintigste eeuw, de publieke zedelijkheid en de godsdienst voldoende weten wat zij van zichzelf te denken hebben, om niet langer tot sta-in-de-weg te dienen voor de Nederlandsche vertaling van het boek, dat Flauberts roem grondvestte op eens en voor altijd'.

Figure 4.2 Advertisement in *De Amsterdammer*, 10 August 1913

**BOEIENDE ROMANS.**

**Meesterwerken van Buitenlandsche Romanliteratuur.**

In deze serie verschijnen alleen in uitstekende bewerking de beste Romans, die het buitenland ons biedt. Ieder deel is een flink groot boekwerk. Verschenen zijn:

DEEL I.  
**EKKEHARD,**  
 door J. V. VON SCHEFFEL,  
 Bewerking van W. J. MANSSEN. Geïllustreerd, 3e druk.

DEEL II.  
**SCHULD EN BOETE,**  
 door F. M. DOSTOJEWSKY,  
 2e druk.

DEEL III.  
**MADAME BOVARY,**  
 door GUST. FLAUBERT,  
 Bewerking van G. H. PRIEM. 2e druk.

DEEL IV.  
**DE HEILIGE,**  
 door ANTONIO FOGAZZARO,  
 Vertaling van E. J. T. 2e druk.

DEEL V.  
**Het Licht dat verdween,**  
 door RUDYARD KIPLING,  
 3e druk.

DEEL VI.  
**De Triomf van den Dood,**  
 door GABRIELLE D'ANNUNZIO.

Prijs van ieder slechts f 1.50 ingenaaid, f 1.90 in prachtband.  
 Uitgaven van VAN HOLKEMA & WARENDORF, AMSTERDAM

'good books in good dress for little money' (Van Voorst 1997: 50). Compared to the previous edition, it has a less luxurious look and feel and it comes at a lower price. Moreover, the translator's foreword and the references to his own literary oeuvre have disappeared. These paratextual indications suggest that Meulenhoff targeted a more popular audience. It seems, however, that



this strategy was not very successful, since a 1929 advertisement in *Het volk* offered the remaining copies at a reduced price.

We can conclude from this first case study that, by the early twentieth century, there was an obvious market potential for a Dutch translation of *Madame Bovary* and the earlier resistance against French realism had mostly subsided. Flaubert had evolved from the controversial avant-garde of literature to the realm of consecrated classics, thus becoming a safe investment for publishers. As Bourdieu (1980: 283) points out, classics are 'best-sellers over the long run, which owe their consecration, and therefore widespread durable market, to the educational system'. They benefit from a great mindshare, since their titles are widely known by the general public. Thus, from the outset, Dutch publishers try to sell *Madame Bovary* to a culturally ambitious audience by branding it as an undisputable masterpiece. However, our analysis shows that the use of paratextual branding strategies is still in a rudimentary state at this point. Blurb texts, for instance, are completely absent. Whereas the 1910 edition contains a few paratexts that stress the literary status of the novel and its translator, most of them are not continued into the 1917 edition. However, one important aspect unites those editions: both are part of a book series that presents itself as a selection of literary masterpieces. As we will see, this will be the dominant strategy in the branding of *Madame Bovary* within the Dutch literary field.

The second Dutch translation appeared in 1941 and was made by Cornelis Kelk (1901-1981), a generalist man of letters who combined the writing of novels, poems, and plays with translating and literary journalism. Kelk had lived in France until the war broke out. Refusing to join the Nederlandsche Kultuurkamer founded by the Nazis, he was not allowed to publish and survived on translation jobs and the composition of literary anthologies. His *Madame Bovary* translation was published by Contact, an antifascist publishing house that had been founded in 1933 and did relatively well during the Second World War, thanks to the creation of a successful book series called *De Onsterfelijken* (The Immortals).

As Lisa Kuitert (1997) has shown, the marketing of books via series became very common in the second half of the twentieth century. Publishers courted a rapidly growing reading public, hoping they would be enticed to collect multiple volumes of the same series. Cover design, emblems, and other paratexts played a crucial role in the establishment of book series as identifiable brands. In the case of *De Onsterfelijken*, we can gain a lot of information from a 1941 prospectus in which Contact presents its publication programme, conceived as 'a series of masterpieces from world literature, interesting and

**Figure 4.3 Advertisement in *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 28 February 1941**

accessible to the modern man' (Uitgeverij Contact 1941).<sup>12</sup> The best Dutch translators, illustrators, and essayists are said to contribute to the series. With regard to the material quality of the books, the publisher is no less ambitious: they are to be illustrated with wood cuts, set in a distinguished font, and printed on laid paper. Advertisements suggest that, placed together, they will look great in a modern living room thanks to their elegant design (see Fig. 4.3).<sup>13</sup> Brand loyalty is further promoted by offering reductions to customers who buy a set of four books at once. Within this new book series, *Madame Bovary* played a prominent role, since it was among the very first volumes to come out and one of its illustrations is reproduced in the brochure.

If we take a closer look at this first Contact edition of *Madame Bovary*, we find that the publisher has translated the concept of immortality into the material design of the book, which comes in a beautifully designed leather hardcover and dust jacket. The luxurious paper quality and elegant layout provide it with a timeless appeal. The numerous illustrations in the form of wood cuts made by Désiré Acket refer to the nineteenth century, both in the scenes portrayed and in the printing technique.<sup>14</sup> The name of the translator is mentioned on the cover, which indicates that he brings along a literary reputation of his own. The text is further surrounded by a wealth of paratexts stressing the symbolic capital attached to Flaubert's novel, most notably a seventeen-page long introduction by Kelk himself. Quite remarkably, he makes no reference to Priem's translation, a move that may be interpreted as condescending. His introduction is much longer

12 'Een reeks meesterwerken uit den Wereldliteratuur, interessant en toegankelijk voor den modernen mensch'.

13 See Kuitert 1997: 78-79.

14 This book stands in the tradition of illustrated editions of *Madame Bovary* that were in vogue in France in the first half of the twentieth century. See Gallice 2014.

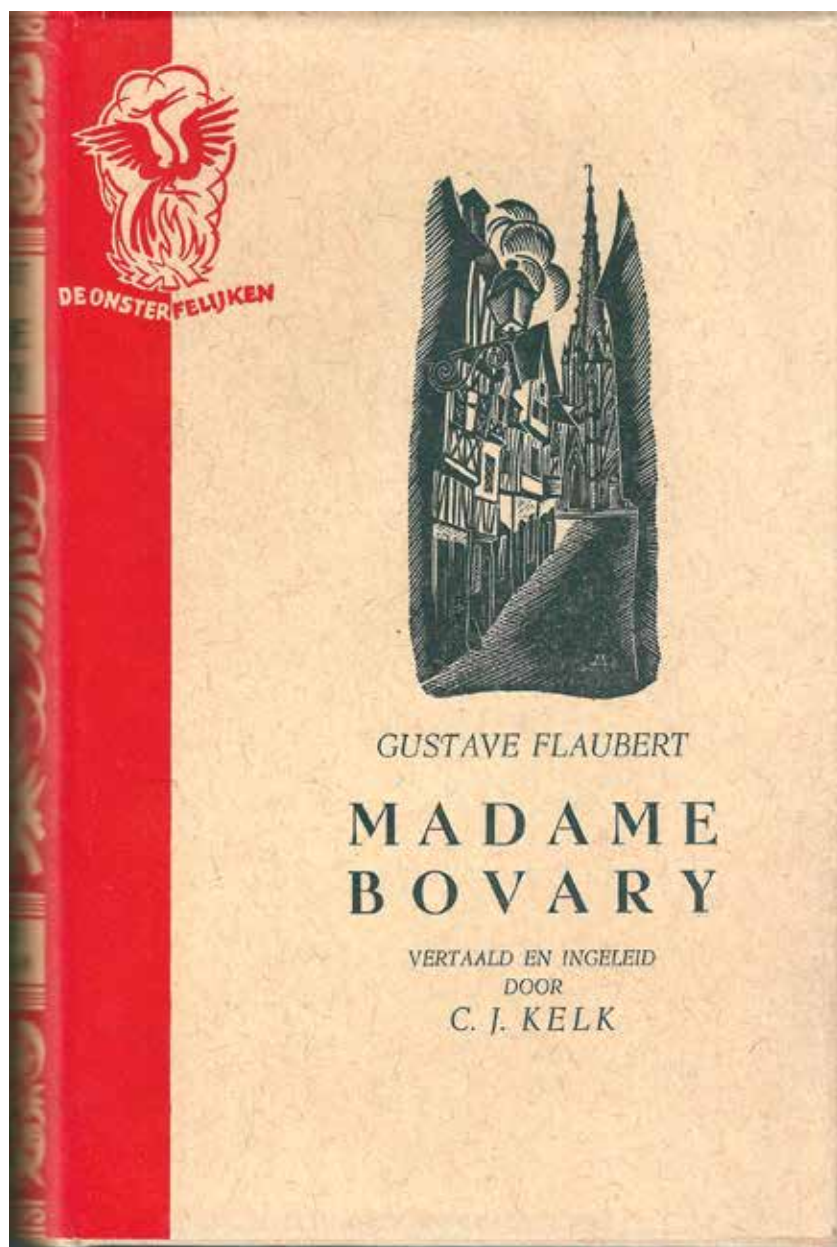
than his predecessor's; Kelk demonstrates his extensive literary-historical knowledge by situating the novel in its context. While suggesting that there is a connection between the author's temperament and Emma Bovary's psychological issues, but Kelk also stresses the ironic distance between the narrator and his protagonist. He then goes on to describe Flaubert's writing method and search for the perfect style and composition. Near the end of his introduction, Kelk comes to speak of the immorality trial, stating that 'the prosecutor was of course, from our point of view as modern men, very wrong' (Flaubert 1941: XIV).<sup>15</sup> Kelk thus takes on the posture of a well-informed literary historian and a defender of the once so contentious novel whose reputation has now evolved into that of an undisputed modern classic. The same opinion had been voiced by Priem, but Kelk substantiates his claims much more extensively.

Between 1941 and 1975, Contact issued eleven different editions of Kelk's translation, mostly hardcover volumes in the series *De Onsterfelijken* but also in a book club edition entitled *De Boekenschat* (The Book Treasure) and, from 1968 onwards, also in paperback. Throughout the different editions, *Madame Bovary* is consistently branded as belonging to the realm of high literature. The Contact publishing house, targeting a sophisticated and well-to-do readership, clearly aimed at acquiring symbolic capital by stressing the timeless quality and universal appeal of the text. The original controversy surrounding the novel is only rarely hinted at and dismissed as being obsolete. In this case, the translator plays a quite prominent role in the branding of the novel. He appears in the paratexts as a cultivated man of letters, well aware of the critical tradition surrounding the novel and of the stylistic challenges posed to him.

In the 1960s, the literary paperback started to conquer the Dutch book market, thanks to the coming of age of the baby boomers, who combined a keen interest in reading with a preference for cheap editions. L.J. Veen, a publishing house dating from the late nineteenth century with a strong focus on foreign literatures, launched a series of cheap pocketbooks (*Amstelboeken*, later renamed *Amstelpaperbacks*). In order to compete with Contact, they chose to target a different audience by means of affordable editions that did not overly stress the canonical status of the books (Van Voorst 1997: 172). It is in this context that the third Dutch translation of *Madame Bovary* saw the light of day. One might ask why L.J. Veen issued a new version of the novel when a respectable one was readily available on the

15 'De aanklager had hierin, naar de zienswijze van ons moderne mensen, natuurlijk grondig ongelijk'.

**Figure 4.4** Dust jacket of the illustrated edition of C.J. Kelk's translation.  
Amsterdam: Contact, De Onsterfelijken, 1941



market. Perhaps they considered that a classics series would be incomplete without Flaubert's famous novel. Since it was out of copyright, there were no legal impediments to bringing out a competing translation of the same title.

For reasons unknown to us, the challenging task of retranslating the novel had been entrusted to Margot Bakker (a pseudonym of Geerdina Aaltje Kuiper, 1917-1992), a rather obscure translator of popular fiction. The quality of her translation is generally considered mediocre, with certain errors revealing a poor understanding of the text and a general lack of rhythmic and stylistic sophistication.<sup>16</sup> Whereas Kelk's literary status is consistently being foregrounded by the publisher of his translation, this is never the case with Bakker. Nor did she write a foreword or any other text reflecting on Flaubert's novel and her work as a translator.

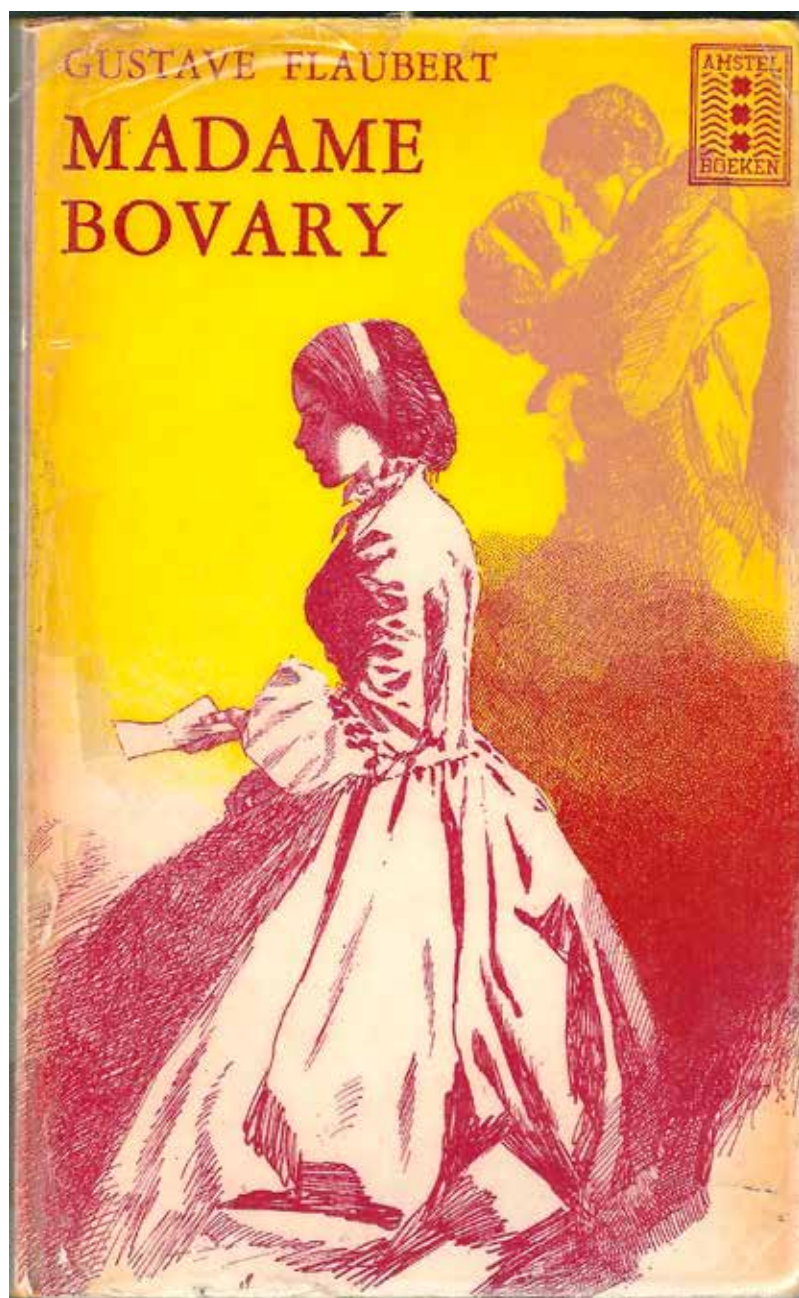
When examining the – not very numerous – paratexts surrounding Bakker's translation, we find that they take a much less intellectual approach to the novel. The first edition comes in a small, cheap-looking paperback (see Fig. 4.5), with a blurb text presenting the book as 'one of the masterpieces of the nineteenth-century novel', before going on to highlight the dramatic aspects of the story: 'Flaubert depicts the moral downfall of a hysterically predisposed girl who, alienated from her own peasant class, marries an insignificant country doctor. In her attempt to escape the banality of her environment, she commits one misstep after another'.<sup>17</sup> Thus, L.J. Veen presents us with a different brand narrative, one which foregrounds the sensational aspects of the story rather than Flaubert's innovative writing technique. The plot summary is presented in a moralistic tone of voice that reminds us of nineteenth-century representations of Emma Bovary as a hysterical seductress. The cover image similarly foregrounds the adulterous plot matter, thus making it look like a lowbrow romance novel. The differences with the branding strategies employed by Contact are striking, which indicate that L.J. Veen tried to conquer a markedly different segment of the potential market for translated novels, one that was much more oriented towards the subfield of large-scale production.

The branding of *Madame Bovary* as a *succès de scandale* is a constant factor in the paratexts accompanying the nine editions of Bakker's translation published by L.J. Veen until 1980. Subsequently, the translation was

16 See Koffeman 2018; Van Pinxteren 2011; Coumans 2010.

17 'Flaubert schildert de zedelijke ondergang van een hysterisch aangelegd meisje, dat, vervreemd als zij is van haar eigen boerenmilieu met een onbeduidende boerendokter trouwt. In haar poging om de banale omgeving te ontvluchten, vervalt zij van de ene misstap in de andere'. Blurb text, Flaubert 1960.

Figure 4.5 The first Dutch paperback edition of *Madame Bovary*, translation by Margot Bakker. Amsterdam: L.J. Veen, Amstelboeken, 1960



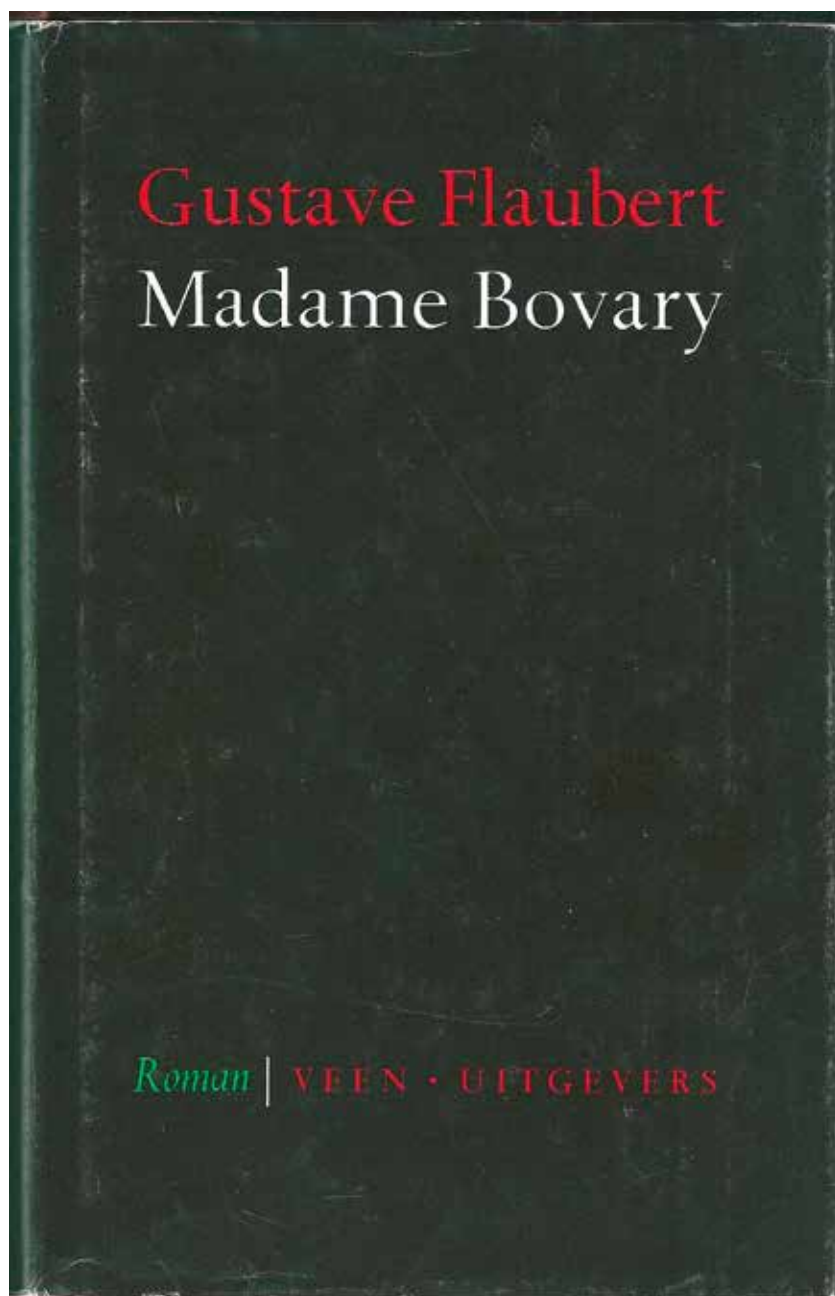
licensed to different publishers where it appeared in very low-profile series such as Skarabee Pockets (a miscellany of controversial literary novels, crime fiction, erotica, and popular non-fiction) and Reader's Digest. In these editorial contexts, not much is left of the author's symbolic capital, whose name is even misspelled ('Gustav Flaubert') on the cover of the 1982 Skarabee edition.

In the meantime, L.J. Veen had approached the renowned translator Hans van Pinxteren (b. 1943) to make yet another version of *Madame Bovary* in Dutch. In 1974, Van Pinxteren had been awarded the Martinus Nijhoff Award for his translation of *Salammbô*. He had gone on to translate several works by Flaubert, in the process becoming a fine connoisseur of his work. Therefore, he must have seemed the ideal candidate for making a new and more prestigious translation of *Madame Bovary*. His version first appeared in 1987 in an expensive and soberly designed hardbound edition (see Fig. 4.6). On the inside flaps, we find a short summary stressing Flaubert's psychological insight and the topicality of his subject matter, followed by a reference to the writing process and the publication scandal. The back flap praises the author as one of the most admired stylists of the nineteenth century and mentions a few canonical twentieth-century authors who considered him their predecessor. It ends by drawing attention to the fact that the translator is a Martinus Nijhoff laureate, which is yet another way of claiming symbolic capital for this edition.

The book itself contains several new elements compared to earlier translations. Firstly, the title page includes the original subtitle (*Provinciaalse zeden en gewoonten*; a literal translation of *Moeurs de province*). On the next page, we find Flaubert's dedications to his lawyer Sénard and his friend Louis Bouilhet. In order to clarify the historical backgrounds of the novel, Van Pinxteren also includes an afterword and a series of explanatory notes. The intention of the afterword is to provide insight into both the writing and the translating process. His training as a literary scholar is evident from his reflections on stylistic issues such as the *style indirect libre* and the way he places *Madame Bovary* in its literary context. The 1857 trial is mentioned in passing, with the emphasis being placed on Flaubert's acquittal and subsequent consecration.

Although Van Pinxteren's translation was published by the same company as Bakker's, the differences in paratextual framing are striking. The publisher replaced its populist branding strategy by one that was primarily directed towards the accumulation of symbolic capital. It thus started to target the audience that had previously been served by Contact. The fact that the respected Kelk translation was no longer on the market may very well have

**Figure 4.6** The first of many editions of the translation by Hans van Pinxteren.  
Utrecht/Antwerpen: L.J. Veen, 1987





motivated this decision. This more highbrow approach did not prevent the translation from also being a great commercial success. Since 1987, it has been reissued approximately once a year and licensed to third parties for school editions (Gouden Lijsters, 2001) and a series of 'Forbidden Books' issued by the national newspaper *de Volkskrant* (Verboden boeken, 2012). Van Pinxteren's translation has been made available in a wide variety of formats, from affordable movie editions in paperback to luxurious hardcovers. Whichever type of readership they target, however, these editions always take a rather intellectual approach to the novel, never failing to reproduce Van Pinxteren's afterword and notes.

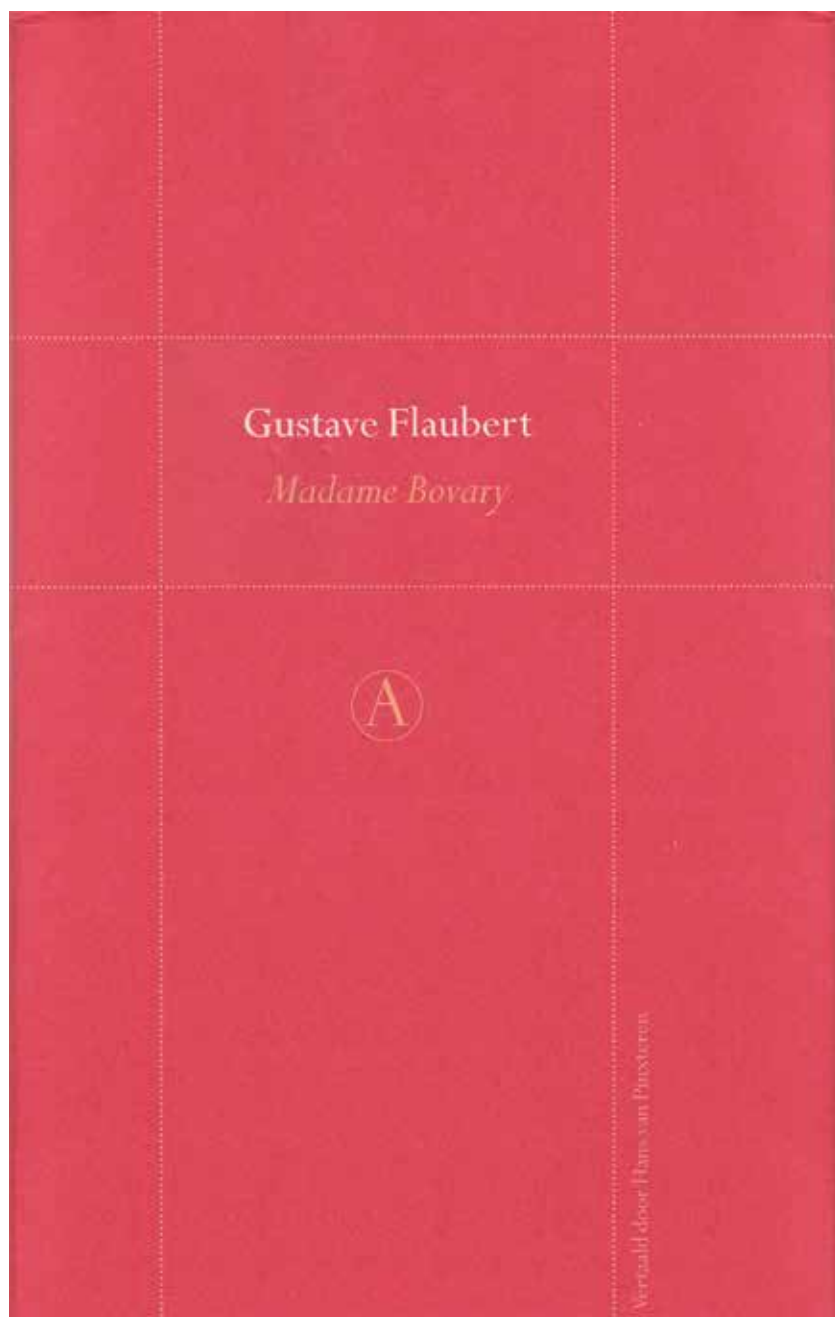
By far the most prestigious edition of Van Pinxteren's translation came out in 2009, as part of the Perpetua project. This book series, launched in 2007 by Athenaeum – Polak & Van Gennep, intends to 'bring out the 100 best books from world literature in the most beautiful design of the Low Countries' (Singel Uitgeverijen 2018).<sup>18</sup> The books have a classic design with a high-quality linen binding and integrated bookmark, beautiful eco-friendly paper, and tasteful typography (see Fig. 4.7). The visual coherence of the dust covers, featuring only the author's name, title, publisher's emblem, and translator's name, incites customers at the high end of the cultural spectrum to collect a personal library of undisputed classics. In order to present these editions as superior to all previous ones, particular attention is being paid to the quality of the text. Often, new translations are made and prominent contemporary authors or literary scholars are invited to write an afterword. In the case of *Madame Bovary*, Hans van Pinxteren was invited to revise and improve his text. His afterword and notes remained unchanged; a second afterword, by the prominent novelist Thomas Rosenboom, was added.<sup>19</sup> Thus, through a sophisticated amalgam of branding strategies, this edition claims a huge amount of symbolic capital for all parties involved (author, translator, book series, and publisher).

Besides being a respected translator, Van Pinxteren has also made a name for himself as a poet and critic. Not only do his essays on French literature contribute to the intellectual prestige of his translations, they also represent strategic position-takings in the literary field. In an article on the ageing of translations, he compares his version of *Madame Bovary* with those of his predecessors, critiquing their translational choices with both

18 'De beste boeken uit de wereldliteratuur in de mooiste vormgeving van de Lage Landen'.

19 Rosenboom's oeuvre is profoundly inspired by nineteenth-century realism and more particularly by Flaubert. His famous novel *Publieke Werken* (1999) contains so many intertextual references to *Madame Bovary* and *Bouvard et Pécuchet* that it comes close to a pastiche.

**Figure 4.7** Luxury edition of the revised translation by Hans van Pinxteren.  
Amsterdam: Athenaeum – Polak & Van Gennep, Perpetua Reeks, 2009



rigour and respect (Van Pinxteren 2011). By demonstrating his meticulous approach and fine understanding of the inner workings of Flaubert's prose, Van Pinxteren comes across as a highly competent translator who is entitled to almost the same literary status as the author. It is fair to say that Van Pinxteren's translation has eclipsed all previous ones and solidly established the reputation of the novel as a timeless masterpiece that inspires some of the most ambitious writers within the Dutch literary field.

### **Conclusion: Between Controversy and Canonization**

Looking back on the history of *Madame Bovary* in the Netherlands, we can conclude that the branding of the once so controversial novel as a timeless literary masterpiece has prevailed ever since the first translation came out in 1904. However, a conflicting representation of the book as a *roman à scandale*, rooted in the first reception of Flaubert, has resurfaced every now and then. Our research has shown that the nature of the branding narratives presented by the paratexts is closely related to the status of the translator and the intellectual profile of the target audience. Branding *Madame Bovary* as a sensational novel of forbidden passion occurs most conspicuously around Margot Bakker's translation, whereas the ones by Kelk and Van Pinxteren are embedded in a discourse that values style over storyline. The material quality of these publications tends to be of an equally high standard. The 1910 and 1941 editions of the translations by Priem and Kelk are both elegantly designed hardcover books, presenting themselves as timeless and culturally enhancing objects, whereas Bakker's 1960 translation comes out as a cheap pocket edition, thus being a much more ephemeral and less prestigious commodity. The first editions of the original and the revised Van Pinxteren translation are published as soberly designed and quite expensive hardcover volumes and, subsequently, marketed as more affordable paperbacks. Its publisher targets different types of book buyers, ranging from middlebrow to highbrow, whilst consistently telling a branding narrative that revolves around the timeless appeal of the plot, the psychological depth of the characters, and the author's widely recognized stylistic mastery.

An interesting aspect of the publication history of *Madame Bovary* in the Netherlands is the frequent inclusion of the novel in a book series dedicated to the classics. This is a form of consecration that contributes a great deal to the reputation of the novel as a timeless masterpiece that every culturally aspiring person should read, or at least proudly showcase

in their personal library. In the book business, branding is thus a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon where brand identities can function on the level of the individual title, author, translator, series, imprint, and publishing house. In the most successful cases, these levels are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. As we have seen, the publisher of the Van Pinxteren translation is able to maximize its symbolic capital by stressing not only the canonical status of the book and the artistic prowess of the author but also the reputation of the translator as a Flaubert specialist and a literary master in his own right. This strategy culminates in the Perpetua edition, which positions the novel in the most prestigious national and international literary context by means of the Rosenboom afterword and the association with the very highest echelons of the Western literary canon. It goes without saying that this transfer of symbolic capital works in both directions.

Finally, the way the different *Madame Bovary* translations were presented to the reading public also provides some insight into the evolution of the book business throughout the twentieth century. The general impression is that of an advancing professionalization and diversification of branding strategies. The numerous editions of Van Pinxteren's translation, varying in design and price so as to cater to different audiences, are a case in point. They also show that *Madame Bovary*, after having been denied access to the Dutch literary field for almost half a century, has since then conquered an unassailable position within that same field, both in terms of economic capital and of literary prestige.

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