

**English 391:  
Adultery in the Modern Novel  
Spring 2021**

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**Course Description:**

Hester Prynne, Emma Bovary and Anna Karenina: these are among modern fiction's most memorable characters. They're also the creation of male novelists ambitious to stand out in a field with many female competitors. The course will first focus on how the figure of the adulteress—as sinner, romantic heroine, bourgeois rebel, embodiment of the inner life—appeals to the



Edvard Munch, *Ashes* (WikiArt)

imagination and technical agility of male writers eager to transform the possibilities of the novel. What did Flaubert mean when he supposedly declared “Madame Bovary, c’est moi”? The course will then turn to two landmark American woman novelists—Kate Chopin and Edith Wharton—and explore their own use of the adulteress character and the theme of adultery in their great novels *The Awakening* and *The Age of Innocence*.

**Proposed Assignments:**

- short free-response papers (10%)
- review of secondary material (20%)
- research-paper proposal/outline (10%)
- research paper (30%)
- final exam (30%)

**Proposed Texts:**

- Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*
- Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*
- Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*
- Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*
- Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*