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Source: *Dalhousie French Studies*, Vol. 30 (Spring 1995), pp. 55-63

Published by: [Dalhousie University](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40838190>

Accessed: 27/09/2014 07:07

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Frederick Busi

Functional character-naming is as old as human expression. It predates literature and it eventually was incorporated into later traditional areas of writing. Character-naming can move from simple to complex configurations. In Flaubert's work these approaches are present but the complex can perform like a musical concerto. In *Madame Bovary* three characters, Félicie, Félicité, and Lheureux are the subjects of this article in order to analyze the onomastic connections they possess.¹

In this novel it is customary to refer to primary, secondary, and tertiary figures. But is Emma Bovary herself the main character? She and many readers believe her to occupy this status. To be sure, the text places much emphasis on Emma, but some critics observe the full title is *Madame Bovary: mœurs de province*. There are three Madame Bovarys: Charles's mother, his first wife, and Emma. The pun of the subtitle suggests that they are all dying from provincial customs. This particular trio, and more importantly the other trio of Félicie, Félicité, and Lheureux, help explain the fascination exerted by this book on the creative imaginations, among others, of James Joyce and Samuel Beckett. A statistical examination of the key words in Flaubert's novel would reveal that its central idea is the various notions of happiness literally expressed in the names of the second trio. The analysis of these names recalls the notion of the *mot-thème* which Ferdinand de Saussure developed in his pioneering research in the functions of alternate suggestions contained in character names in the literature of antiquity.²

Flaubert is aware of character doubles, but in this instance he raises the stakes to introduce a third character who almost passes through the narrative and scarcely receives the attention she deserves. Emma's basic predicament is her awkward quest for happiness. One minor person is the piano instructor Félicie Lempereur in Rouen. It should be recalled that Emma pretends to take lessons from her, but instead she exploits her as a pretext for obtaining funds from Charles in order to have rendez-vous with Léon Dupuis. Félicie Lempereur only makes the briefest of appearances, and it must remain Flaubert's mystery for giving her almost the same name as Napoleon Bonaparte's mother, Laetitia Bonaparte, whose first name in Latin means "happiness." The last name of the piano instructor refers to the exalted title the emperor acquired for himself. Historically Napoleon's mother was known to react with praise to the joy of her brood of overachievers by questioning the duration of their successes. Like a one-woman Greek chorus she was always there ultimately to voice doubt. These historical events were not meant to be repeated by the piano instructor. What counts here is her name in relation to the novel's unfolding plot.

1. All page numbers for *Madame Bovary* are from the Garnier 1971 edition prepared by Claudine Gothot-Mersch.
2. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris: 1975).

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It may be conjectured that Félicie Lempereur is an appropriate model Emma should have followed, a model that comes closest to the sense of happiness she seeks. The piano instructor remains insignificant in spite of her last name. But Emma views herself worthy of higher triumphs and she will unwittingly follow other models in her pursuit of happiness. Emma is so apparently average in reality that she needs these guides without acknowledging the trap into which she begins to descend. To represent this decline Flaubert employs allegorical representation because these antithetical sources of satisfaction appeal to his taste for the medieval theme in literature, a predilection incarnated in such works as *La tentation de saint Antoine*, his life-long labor, and *La légende de saint Julian l'hospitalier*.

Allegorical representation initially suited Flaubert's creative needs because he is mainly concerned with depicting certain character types.³ In the notes on Homais ("Mr. Everyman"), for example, he was first designated as "le pharmacien"; Léon Dupuis, the notary's clerk, was named "Leclerc," indicating that personality was revealed by the name of the profession. It is a witness to Flaubert's creativity that these characters are simultaneously stock figures and believable personalities. At this stage the author fuses the abstract and the concrete, the general and particular temperaments of his creatures. Homais may typify the provincial, liberal, bourgeois hypocrite of self-importance and opportunism, but he also is presented as a living, convincing person in his own right. These specific names have been examined by other critics.⁴ Their discussions are valuable, but what is missing is the onomastic and phonemic relationships among Félicie, Félicité, and Lheureux.

Flaubert's naming genius appears even greater when we consider his ability to express not only the two-dimensional but the three-dimensional manifestations of those characters whose names stand for happiness. By way of onomastic analysis and onomatopoeia he is able to endow this trio of names with a musical tonality that discloses their imagined tasks. He is the master of sounds and subtle development of names. Verbal ability usually surpasses logical plot sequence. However, with Flaubert the two domains of sonority and logic have been integrated. Félicité and Lheureux are supposed to represent different and antithetical levels of happiness, and the melodic connection of Félicie, Félicité, and Lheureux is quite clear.

Familiarity does not require a general review of the novel's surface text. What is in question is the subtext, its significance, both onomastic and novelistic, of those characters whose names stand for the contradictory conflicts which devour Emma. Character names do denote character traits. On this point the penetrating research of Jean Pommier demonstrates the sophisticated

3. Responding to criticism on the verisimilitude of his characters, Flaubert asserts: "j'ai voulu, au contraire, reproduire des types" (*Correspondance* [Paris: Conard, 1927], IV, 192).

4. See R. Bismut, "Quelques cas onomastiques dans l'œuvre de Gustave Flaubert," *Les amis de Flaubert* (May 1976):43-44.

development of Flaubert's imaginative naming dexterity.⁵ As a result of his and Gabrielle Leleu's variorum edition of *Madame Bovary*, new insight is gained into Flaubert's complex creative process with special regard to certain characters' denominations. For all the brilliance of Pommier's seminal article, it was not his intention to develop a comprehensive or definitive interpretation of Félicie, Félicité and Lheureux as they are revealed by their names.

As far as Emma Bovary is concerned, she has trouble adjusting to her married name. Rodolphe Boulanger, in a flit of flirtation, declares: "Madame Bovary! [...] Eh! Tout le monde vous appelle comme cela [...]. Ce n'est pas votre nom d'ailleurs; c'est le nom d'un autre" (160). Emma wishes to be an individual, but she feels tormented by her married name, a name she must share with two other women. Félicie, Félicité, and Lheureux have no problems with their names. The naming problem, in one instance, can confound the reader. *Madame Bovary's* Félicité bears a superficial resemblance to the Félicité who is the central figure of Flaubert's *Un cœur simple*: they are both servants and have lovers called Théodore ("God's Gift") and are unknowingly enveloped in the wings of the Holy Ghost. Apart from these three facts their roles diverge considerably. If the main character of the famous *conte* resembles anyone in the novel, it is Catherine Elisabeth Leroux, the simple servant who was awarded a prize at the agricultural fair for faithful service to her master's family. If Emma's servant resembles anyone in the novel, it must be Emma herself. Her development and gradual transformation become subtly apparent throughout the book. By the novel's end it seems that the function of Félicité is that of Emma's double albeit in a minor key. From her first appearance to Emma's last, their fates are intertwined at different levels. As Alison Fairlie remarks, they "play variations on central themes"⁶ It appears at first like a trivial piece of domestic business, but one of the first things that Emma teaches her new servant is where she leaves the key to the sideboard so that "Félicité chaque soir prenait une petite provision de sucre qu'elle mangeait toute seule dans son lit, après avoir fait sa prière" (61). This innocent habit has its sinister counterpart when Emma finally enters Homais's pharmacy storeroom to swallow arsenic, a white powder of similar appearance which Justin, the latter's helper, had almost once mistaken for sugar.

Between these acts of taking sugar and then arsenic, other episodes occur to underline the parallel character development of these two women. The pharmacist Homais, for instance, mistakes Justin's voyeuristic spying on the Bovary household as a sign of love for the servant when in fact he is smitten with the mistress of the house. By this time Emma is deeply involved with Rodolphe Boulanger, and she favors bribing the servant to facilitate these meetings. Accordingly, the servant can have little doubt about her mistress's affairs. Just as Emma occasionally meets Rodolphe in the garden, the mother of Charles once surprised the servant there with a man about forty years old with a brown beard. Emma steals from her husband to maintain her liaisons with her lovers and

5. See Jean Pommier, "Noms et prénoms dans *Madame Bovary*," *Dialogues avec le passé* (Paris: Nizet, 1967), pp. 141-57.

6. Alison Fairlie, *Flaubert: Madame Bovary* (Great Neck, NY: Barron's, 1962), p. 28.

Félicité takes from her mistress for the sake of her lover, Théodore, with whom she flees to Paris.⁷ The most telling detail linking Emma and Félicité occurs shortly after her death. Charles permits the servant to wear some of Emma's dresses in which she resembles her mistress to such an extent that the widower mistakes her for his deceased wife when he sees her from behind wearing Emma's apparel. This identification is complete when the servant takes the rest of Emma's clothing for her flight with Théodore.⁸ On the same page where this sartorial connection is noted, Charles unintentionally and linguistically links the two women: "parmi les *félicitations* qu'il lui adressa [...] 'Comme ma pauvre femme aurait été *heureuse*!'" (348). Charles evokes the disguised names of Félicité and Lheureux undoubtedly without realizing the full import of his utterance.

The phonemic shape of the piano teacher's name Félicie appears shortened when compared with that of the servant Félicité. As a person Félicité may represent the sort of happiness which Emma perhaps should have appreciated. Félicité manages to escape Yonville with her lover but Emma does not. She remains a geographical and moral prisoner there. She seeks happiness, yet Lheureux is all the beatitude she receives. The sounds of Félicité's and Lheureux's names betray the qualities they exhibit. Flaubert's use of onomatopoeia, the phonemes deriving from natural sounds, attains its greatest height of expression. The physical sound of Félicité's name is flowing and melodic, while Lheureux's name by comparison can be harsh and unpleasant to the ears of others. In these two nominal examples signifier and signified are united in form and meaning. Raymond Chapman observes: "There is already a rich field in all this for the imaginative writer."⁹ In this name-creation physical and nominal sounds fuse in esthetic expression to validate Flaubert's psychological intentions. With these three characters bearing variations of the same name Emma finally enters into the realm of Lheureux who induces her to fall into a spiralling descent of accumulating debts incurred at his prompting.

The role of Lheureux as a total personality has not received the critical attention he deserves. Some observers admit in passing that Emma's eventual demise is prompted more by her financial than by her amorous entanglements. These are exploited by Lheureux. The only critic to devote enough consideration to him is Marianne Beyerle whose insightful book, *Madame Bovary als Roman der Versuchung*, largely restores to him one of the central roles in the narrative. She sees him as the devil in disguise and as such he becomes a part of

7. Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, variorum edition by Jean Pommier and Gabrielle Leleu (Paris: José Corti, 1949), p. 118.

8. For the hagiographical origins of these character names, see Frederick Busi, "Flaubert's Use of Saints' Names in *Madame Bovary*," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 19, 1 (Fall 1990):95-109; and Jonathan Culler, "The Uses of *Madame Bovary*," *Flaubert and Postmodernism*, Naomi Schor and Henry Majewski, eds. (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1984), pp. 1-11.

9. Raymond Chapman, *The Treatment of Sound in Language and Literature* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 42.

contemporary literary traditions. His complete diabolical personality remains to be evaluated, however.¹⁰

The name Lheureux is not uncommon in Normandy. In his work sketches Flaubert often spells it "L'Heureux," suggesting one who is "blessed." On one occasion he gives him the telling first name "Jean-Baptiste," underscoring the religious symbolism permeating the novel and the author's imagination. (Pommier and Leleu, 30). In its Hebrew form, Iaokanaan the herald also figures in the tale *Hérodias*. In having once thought of Lheureux as bearing such a religious name, Flaubert obviously intends to have him be a harbinger of a new age like his biblical counterpart. His official profession as a *marchand de nouveautés* reinforces the suggestion of something original yet to come.

Lheureux is the great tempter. In the Bible the tempter first appears as the Devil who deceives Eve. Eve, or Eva in the shape of Emma, onomastically reinforces this analogy. The second encounter is that of Christ and the Devil on the mountain top where the former resists the temptations of the latter. Flaubert's version of this meeting of opposites, according to Beyerle, is clever and cruel because Emma yields to temptation and is doomed. Her first encounter with Lheureux is revealing. Emma initially meets him on her first trip to Yonville. A close examination of this encounter will show that Flaubert is a master of using apparently mundane circumstances in order to reinforce the symbolic connection with the ordeal of Saint Anthony, the first monk, who is also plagued and pursued by demons in the desert. Before the coach's entry into Yonville the passengers are obliged to get out at one point and search for Emma's dog which breaks loose and disappears. As is her wont, she blames Charles for this misfortune. The sentence assigning blame ends with the word "malheur," and the following phrase begins with the name "Lheureux." In this way Flaubert suggests that whenever Emma is unhappy Lheureux is at hand to boost her morale.

Emma's dog is called Djali, which is an obvious reference to Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* where the same name is given to Esmeralda's pet goat. Emma thinks she has a touch of the gypsy spirit like the fortune-teller and that she will suffer death for violating certain social standards. During her last visit to the office of Guillaumin ("Billy Boy"), the notary, she notices on the wall a portrait of Esmeralda. Emma's dog is a greyhound bitch, and like Esmeralda's

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10. Marianne Beyerle, *Madame Bovary als Roman der Versuchung* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1975). Beyerle is correct in her research into the diabolical origins of Lheureux. There was no intention to explore a possible Jewish influence on his character. However, when Lheureux says to Emma: "nous ne sommes pas des juifs!" (106), he may be employing his linguistic habit of denying his true identity. On this point Flaubert's sources were multiple. One of his closest friends was Maxime Du Camp whose antisemitism grew more pronounced as his life progressed. See the memoirs of Prince Hohenlohe which recall Du Camp who "believes that the Jews are striving after universal dominion." Du Camp advises that rich Jews be executed and their wealth confiscated. "The moment would not be long delayed, for the Rothschilds had already six millions" (*Memoirs of Prince Chlodwig of Hohenlohe-Schillingsfuerst* [New York: Macmillan, 1906], II, 364).

goat this detail has overtones of the Orient and the occult. In a classic study on Bedouin life Alois Musil states for example that evil phantoms materialize in the shape of this specific dog and gender, "the only spirit which appears in the wide level desert."¹¹ It is also noted that Bedouin travelers never whistle in the desert for fear of attracting demons. While searching for Emma's lost dog the coach passengers spend one quarter of an hour whistling for her. On a mythical level a demon dog is being summoned. Immediately after this retrieval attempt, the reader and Emma meet Lheureux the Devil for the first time, and he proceeds to calm her by repeating the tale of the lost dog which made its way back to Paris from Constantinople. The passengers' whistling does not bring back the dog but makes Lheureux appear to Emma for the first time. These minute details are well chosen and indicate the extent of Flaubert's effort to connect Lheureux to the Devil and to associate him linguistically with Félicité and ultimately with Emma. *Madame Bovary* is meant to be read from various perspectives. As a text it is a palimpsest, and at this level the close relationship of key linguistic name combinations tends to prove this onomastic approach.

The next time Lheureux appears he is the tempter disguised as a merchant. Flaubert emphasizes that he is not from Normandy but from Gascony, Montaigne's country. He is not from the northern region, his past is not well known, and vague reports circulate about his dealings in Yonville and elsewhere. The purpose of his first visit to Emma is threefold: he is ostensibly there to show her samples of his wares, he offers to advance her money to buy these items, and he also inquires about the health of M. Tellier, the proprietor of the *Café Français*, who happens to be one of Charles's patients. It turns out that Tellier will be like Emma and other victims ruined by Lheureux's plots. In the novel Emma may seem to be the principal object of his schemes, but in reality she is just a part of his master plan to dominate the business scene of Yonville. There is an air of death about Lheureux, as befits a devil. At the beginning of his first visit he takes off his hat which bears a black ribbon. In his notes Flaubert suggests that he is supposedly in mourning over the death of his wife (Pommier and Leleu, 289). The sample wares he brings Emma are of particular importance on this and other occasions. The first items he displays to her are doubly significant, suggestive portents of her eventual servitude and death. They are a half-dozen of "cols-brodés." This type of neckware presages her eventual bondage and the manner of her death by poison. The exterior and interior aspects of this apparel show a brilliant play on the word "brodé," which is reminiscent of the arsenic she swallows and which flows down her throat past the collar. These collars are in fact known in English as chokers. The image of a similar article of clothing surfaces later in the novel to reinforce Emma's status of a prisoner of her various vanities and of Lheureux's greed.¹²

11. Alois Musil, *The Manners and Customs of the Rwala Bedouins* (New York: The American Geographical Society, 1928), p. 417.

12. The connection between arsenic and old lace in Flaubert's 1857 novel and the 1941 American play of the same title by Joseph Kesselring is probably fortuitous. Both authors used these oxymoronic forms to impress upon readers the easy confusion between two opposed elements holding similar external

After the death of Emma's father-in-law the moneylender redoubles his advances: "M. Lheureux se met, en termes assez nets, à féliciter Emma sur la succession [...]" (259). In this phrase Flaubert combines the name and the verb to reinforce their perverse relationship. Lheureux twists the word "féliciter" to make it suggest just the opposite of what it is supposed to mean. In this seemingly innocent phrase he tries to bend the will of an absent Félicité to make Emma less cognizant of her subservient condition. With the inheritance Emma's buying habits become frantic. This frenzy of consumption only serves to spur her on to more debt and to her own demise.¹³ In this paroxysm of spending Lheureux springs his final trap. The articles he plans to sell her are outwardly the means by which he intends to ruin financially and morally the Bovary family, by forcing it to a public sale of its property. Through his assistant Vinçart, whom he describes as "plus féroce qu'un Arabe," he demands final payment, while continuing to ply Emma with new trinkets such as "trois aunes de guipure" and an item which only appears in the novel's variant edition, "des manchettes en broderie" (Pommier and Leleu, 593). In English they could be termed "refined handcuffs." Here Lheureux comes full circle because these lace items recall the first objects he sold her, the lace collars. She is completely his prisoner and these symbolic tokens of bondage become real for Emma and lead her to suicide. During this encounter Lheureux, proclaiming his rectitude, asserts that he is "rond comme une pomme," the same fruit undoubtedly that the diabolical serpent gave Eve under the tree of knowledge and caused the fall of humankind.

Character links linger after death. Emma takes arsenic at Homais the chemist's workshop shrine. Once dead, accordingly, her family's ordeal continues. To pay his mounting debts, Charles, like Emma before, is obliged to sign more promissory notes to Lheureux. "Elle le corrompait par-delà le tombeau" (349). Immediately after this observation in the variant edition there appear these unpublished words about Charles: "il se fit broder un beau collet [...]" (Pommier and Leleu, 633). The fatal spending habits persist because Charles in his special way is almost as limited as his wife. She suffers more because she is trapped between the psychological and nominal extremes of Félicité and Lheureux.

Many of Emma's activities betray a basic insecurity, an insatiable emptiness that is supposed to be filled by lovers, things, and confused notions of happiness. In his preliminary work sketches Flaubert makes the bold equation: "baisade = le bonheur" (Pommier and Leleu, 101). This erotic force only destroys when she tries to convert it into a spiritual quality, and she is obliged to settle for more vulgar forms of indulgence in her quest for happiness through others. She allegedly enjoys physical pleasure in adultery that she could never

appearances. With Flaubert his choice undoubtedly was based on the antagonism between the sacred and the diabolical, the eucharist and poison.

13. For the impact of consumerism on modern society, see Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), and Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds* (Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1982).

experience with Charles. In his correspondence dated 20 December 1846 Flaubert succinctly expresses in two lines Emma's plight: "quand on cherche le plaisir on le trouve. Mais le bonheur est un usurier." He also adds in a letter dated 18 December 1853: "le bonheur est un mythe inventé par le diable pour nous désespérer." Emma wants love while Rodolphe wants sex. Lheureux craves power and he will have it.

The negative source of happiness, Beyerle demonstrates, is Lheureux. He is a variation of the same devil who rises up in Flaubert's Saint Anthony narratives, and his literary contemporaries are Balzac's Baron Nucingen and Flaubert's Dambreuse, the unobtrusive but powerful banker in *L'éducation sentimentale*. Like Lheureux the latter works in the background and yet exerts great influence on society's direction. Just as Dambreuse is a leading figure in Paris, Lheureux aspires to be no less an influence in the hinterlands of Normandy.¹⁴ For Flaubert as well as Jonathan Swift the provincials, like the rest of humanity, are reduced to the status of pygmies.

Regarding Lheureux's financial activities, the tendency of capitalism to emerge from usury to universal domination reflects his general battle plan for ruining individuals and dominating the commercial and moral life of Yonville. He is supposed to denote the future and bring happiness. He first defeats Tellier and acquires his business, the *Café Français*, and later he targets Madame Lefrançois, the proprietress of the *Lion d'Or*. Given his sensitivity to onomastic themes, Flaubert endows these victims with nationalistic names, suggesting that, like Yonville, all France may come under the sway of the likes of Lheureux.¹⁵

Emma's predicament is more complex and frustrating. Her problem is that of a civilization plagued by consumerism and delusion. She spurns the type of happiness that Félicie and Félicité seem to have, and she is simultaneously forced to sing two opposing roles contrapuntally. Instead she pursues and loses perceived contentment with her lovers, only to be pursued and destroyed by Lheureux, the usurer-devil in modern guise. Flaubert demonstrates these character connections by employing the names Félicie, Félicité, and Lheureux in opposing contexts, and he thereby raises his novel to a higher psychological and artistic value.

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14. For the role of Maxime Du Camp in the creation of characters in *L'éducation sentimentale*, see René Dumesnil, *L'éducation sentimentale de Gustave Flaubert* (1869) (Paris: Malfère, 1936).

15. See R. J. Sherrington, *Three Novels by Flaubert* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970).

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