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In *Le Veau de Flaubert*, Vaillant finds that laughter is the key to understanding *Madame Bovary* as well as all five of Flaubert's novels, the correspondence, and the juvenilia. He exhaustively enumerates Flaubert's specific and embedded puns that compare people to animals, particularly to cows and calves. Thus, not only does the "bô" in "Salammbô" suggest "une promesse de bovinité" (despite containing a closed rather than an open "o"), but the two "m's" in that heroine's name, like the two "m's" in "Emma," convey "une vague allure de mugissement" (47). The *lieu-dit* "La Vaubyessard" would derive from adding "Vau/veau" to "Biessard," a place-name near Flaubert's residence in Croisset. That Vaillant shares Flaubert's crude sense of humor, and "sa véritable obsession bovine" (12) makes his book sprightly and playful, except when the examples proliferate.

Vaillant begins with Ricardou's discussion (1978) of the wordplay designating Charles Bovary as a "nouveau" ("nouveveau") in a way that turns the New Boy's ridiculousness back upon the reader. Vaillant develops his thought in two interesting ways: he associates Flaubert's implied self-depreciation (frequently comparing himself to a cow, 24, 29-41) with Romantic Irony, and often draws upon Freud's insights on punning in *Wit and Its Relationship to the Unconscious*. Parts two through five evoke critics and theorists, but overlook the ironic *héroi-comique* style embodied in the age-old stock character of the *alazon* (the braggart warrior). Part five, "Penser le rire," plausibly describes how laughter in nineteenth-century France slowly evolved from "réalisme satirique" to "la fantasmagorie artistique" (155). Vaillant's reflections thus flow into contemporary discussions of the interrelated grotesque and arabesque (see Dominique Peyrache-Leborgne, 2012).

The last two chapters, "Le Propre de l'artiste" (173-205) and "Trinch" (207-32, alluding to Rabelais), are lively and of considerable interest, but hoist themselves on their own petard of "héroi-criticism" (to coin a word). When Vaillant discusses Flaubert's "grotesque triste" "qui ne fait pas rire," and Flaubert's "onanisme lachrymal" that causes him to jest so that he can be moved, and then leads him to mask the passions that he feels, Vaillant unwittingly characterizes Romantic irony. Rather than emphasize a break with the past, one could stress continuities between Flaubert and earlier literary figures including Byron, Heine, Musset, and Stendhal. More broadly, the punning and veiled allusions Vaillant emphasizes in Flaubert characterize the Self-Conscious Tradition as well, dating back to Cervantes and beyond (e.g., to Archilochus). This tradition inserts signs of the writer within signs of the writing.

Vaillant occasionally fumbles, claiming, for instance, that the appearance of Christ's face in the sun at the conclusion of Flaubert's *Tentation de saint Antoine* is a "blague," "une image pieuse pour communicants" (200). That claim, however, overlooks the equivocal seriousness of similar ecstatic visions in "Un cœur simple" or "Saint Julien l'Hospitalier": Flaubert's mystical velleities were life-long. A more incisive "blague" not discussed is the one pun in *Madame Bovary* that Flaubert flagrantly labels after the fact, and that sums up his attitude toward all his characters except the idealized speaker Larivière and the heartless predators: when Larivière sarcastically reassures Madame Homais about her husband's health, he says "ce n'est pas le sang ce qui le gêne" (le sens qui le gêne), and exits, smiling at his unnoticed witticism.

Vaillant's spirited conclusion, "Trinch!" distinguishes the abundance of nineteenth-century masterpieces of childlike imaginativeness (*Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan*, *Mary Poppins*, *Oz*) in Anglo-Saxon countries from their supposed absence in France, a Catholic country where "il n'était pas question de laisser s'épanouir un imaginaire puéril dont la joie débridée aurait pu faire obstacle à la valeur édifiante du merveilleux religieux" (215-16). This is a surprising statement when one considers Flaubert's own interest in *féeries* (his unstaged *Château des cours*) and the great vogue of fairy tales and fairy plays in France from the latter half of the seventeenth through the nineteenth century.

As *Madame Bovary* evolved over five years of composition, Homais's role burgeoned like a cancerous growth of grotesque satire. Vaillant shrewdly suggests that the whole vast dead husk of text that surrounds the core of disruptive meaning in Flaubert's fiction may itself be playing a literally "hénaurme" prank on the reader (220), as if the secondary plot of Homais's ascension were a supersegmental Shaggy Dog story. However, we must recognize that Flaubert steadily diminished Charles's merits partially to rationalize his suffering (see Graham Falconer's "Flaubert assassin de Charles"). Vaillant does not sufficiently acknowledge that character portraits, generalizations, digressions, and emplotment (culminating in the demonstrated consequences of actions) as well as humor can be vehicles of meaning, exposing the patent injustices of the world. The imminent doom of Charles' orphaned daughter—destined to die of tuberculosis in a factory of the Industrial Revolution—poignantly suggests where Progress will take ordinary people.