

LITERARY NAMES AS COMMON NOUNS AND ADJECTIVES  
IN MODERN FRENCH

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In French, as in other languages, it is common for the name of a person to be used as a common noun--a figure of speech known as *antonomasia*--when the name symbolizes a general category of person. One can say: "Les Molières sont rares," meaning that writers of the caliber or nature of Molière are rare. When a proper noun is so used, it is spelled in the plural with a final s, just as any common noun, but contrary to the usual French practice of leaving the plural of a proper noun invariable when it refers to an individual or family (e.g., Je connais les Dupont, "I know the Duponts.") Nevertheless, proper nouns used in *antonomasia* still retain a capital letter in spelling, unless long usage (or in some cases, a special technical meaning) has made them true common nouns.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, adjectives derived from proper nouns are spelled with initial lower case letters and become true lexical items. Literary and artistic criticism has constantly created such adjectives, usually through the addition of the suffix -ien (feminine, -ienne). Thus we have rabelaisien from Rabelais, balzacien from Balzac, baudelairien from Baudelaire, sartrien from Sartre. Sometimes, the stem is relatinized, i.e., etymological sounds lost in the

Middle Ages are restored, as in cornélien from Corneille and giralducien from Giraudoux. Hugolien is derived from Victor Hugo. Among adjectives derived from the names of foreign authors are kafkaïen (Kafka), brechtien (Brecht), swiftien (Swift), shakespearien (Shakespeare), ibsenien (Ibsen) and plinien (Pliny).

Sometimes other suffixes may be used -- -esque, -ique, or -iste -- as in dantesque (Dante), courtelinesque (Courteline), moliéresque (Molière), goyesque (Goya), rembranesque (Rembrandt), micelangesque (Michelangelo), ossianesque (Ossian); ésopique (Æsop), homérique (Homer), pindarique (Pindar); rousseauiste (Rousseau), calviniste (Calvin), gassendiste (Gassendi), gaulliste (de Gaulle), fouriériste (Fourier); léniniste (Lenin), pétrarquiste (Petrarch), trotzkyste (Trotzky), spinoziste (Spinoza).<sup>2</sup>

In some cases, there are double derivatives, with or without a change of meaning: ingriste, ingresque (Ingres); lamarckiste; lamarckien (Lamarck); marxiste, marxien (Marx); machiavélien, machiavélique (Machiavelli); sadique, sadien (Sade); platonique, platonicien (Plato). In the last three examples, there are differences of meaning. Machiavélien refers to Machiavelli while machiavélique means "crafty" or "perfidious," and machiavélisme means "bad faith" or "perfidy." Sadien refers to the Marquis de Sade, while sadique means "taking pleasure in causing suffering or in seeing others suffer"; other derivatives from Sade's name are sadiquement, sadisme and sadomasochisme. Platonique means "purely ideal," as in amour platonique, or "ineffective," as in une protestation platonique,

while platonicien refers to Plato's doctrines (le platonisme).<sup>3</sup>

The names of some authors have given rise to more generalized literary or philosophic notions or attitudes, as in the last three cases cited. In addition, marivaudage, from the eighteenth century playwright Marivaux, means "overrefined gallantry." Verses imitating the style of Clément Marot, a sixteenth century poet regarded by the seventeenth century critics as elegant but simple, are called vers marotiques. Beylisme, derived from the name of Stendhal (Henri Beyle), stresses extreme egotism linked with a cult of energy. Voltaireien and voltairianisme refer to irreverence and a mockingly anticlerical attitude. Cartésien, from the Latinized name of Descartes--Cartesius--means "clear, logical, rational, methodical."<sup>4</sup>

Aside from philosophy or literature, un voltaire is an arm chair with a low seat and a high back, curved slightly backwards. The name of the nineteenth century pre-romantic writer, François René de Chateaubriand, has been given rise to un chateaubriand, a double thick center cut of tenderloin in which a pocket is cut and filled with seasoning before grilling. The recipe was probably invented by Chateaubriand's cook, and the word also appears in the American Heritage Dictionary.<sup>5</sup> From the name of Blaise Pascal, a seventeenth century writer, moralist and physicist, modern physics in 1946 coined the term pascal, "a unit of pressure equivalent to that exerted by one newton on a plane surface of one square meter."<sup>6</sup> Un cicéro is a printing character of twelve typographic points, or 4.5 millimeters; these are the characters of the first printed edition of Cicero's

works. Un cicérone, from Italian cicerone, is a humorous term for a tourist guide, which alludes to the verbosity of many Italian guides.<sup>7</sup>

From classical mythology and literature, French has taken adonis (a very handsome young man) and narcissé (a man in love with himself), from which narcissique and narcissisme are derived. A very strong man is un hérculé and a book of maps un atlas; the first atlases carried as a frontispiece a figure of the god-Atlas. Céréales is derived from Ceres, goddess of agriculture; volcan (volcano) from Vulcan, god of fire; mercure (mercury) from the god Mercury; jovial from Jupiter or Jove; saturnien (saturnine) from Saturn. The days of the week--mardi, mercredi, jeudi, vendredi--are etymologically the days of Mars, Mercury, Jupiter and Venus. Four months of the year--janvier, mars, mai, and juin--owe their names respectively to the gods Janus and Mars and the goddesses Maia and Juno; juillet is named for Julius Caesar and août for Augustus.<sup>8</sup>

A number of well known French literary works have contributed lexical items in French, and in some cases, in other languages as well. In the fifteenth century Farce de Maître Patelin, a lawyer of doubtful integrity coaxes a merchant to let him have a piece of cloth on trust and invites him to dinner. When the dinner date arrives, Patelin's wife swears that her husband has been sick in bed for some time. Patelin then takes as a client a shepherd who has stolen a sheep from the cloth merchant and advises him to say bée, like a

sheep, in answer to all questions. In court, the merchant recognizes Patelin and demands payment for his cloth. The judge, who understands nothing about it, asks the merchant to "return to his sheep." The merchant loses his case; but when Patelin asks the shepherd for his fee, the latter replies: "Bée."

Un patelin (feminine, pateline) is "a crafty and artful person who, by flattery and insinuation tries to bring others to conform to his wishes." The adjective patelin means "crafty, insinuating, smirking, wheedling." Patelinage and patelinerie refer to craftiness or hypocrisy, and un patelineur is a crafty person.<sup>9</sup> The verb pateliner means to deal craftily with someone, as in "pateliner un vieillard pour capter son héritage" (trick an old man to grab his inheritance).<sup>10</sup> The expression "revenons à nos moutons" has become proverbial, with the meaning: "Let us return to the subject."

Rabelais's good humored and erudite giants, with their enormous appetites, Gargantua and his son Pantagruel, have provided several lexical items: un gargantua, a glutton; gargantuesque and pantagruélique, "gluttonous"; the verb pantagruéliser, "to eat or drink copiously or lead a merry life"; un pantagruéliste, "a supporter of a way of life like Pantagruel"; and pantagruélisme, "the epicurean philosophy as practiced by Pantagruel." In English, according to the Oxford Dictionary, gargantuan means "enormous"; gargantuist, "one who resembles Gargantua"; pantagruelian, "of or pertaining to, characteristic of Pantagruel, represented as a coarse

and extravagant humourist dealing satirically with serious subjects"; pantagruelism, "extravagant and coarse humour with a satirical or serious purpose." An imitator, admirer or student of Pantagruel is a pantagruelist, and he behaves in a pantagruelistic manner.<sup>12</sup>

In Spanish, according to the Enciclopedia universal published by Espasa Calpe, gargantúa is a term "used by some" to designate a person of voracious appetite. In Bilbao, Gargantúa is a cardboard giant placed at a table so that children may amuse themselves entering his mouth and sliding toward a seat. Gargantuesco, pantagruesco, pantagruélico and pantagruelismo are also listed. Un festín pantagruélico (French, festin pantagruélique) is a "sumptuous banquet in which the abundance of food and drink is so excessive that it is distinguished more by its quantity than its quality."<sup>13</sup> The Cambridge Italian Dictionary lists gargantuesco, pantagruelico and pantagruelismo.<sup>14</sup>

The expression les moutons de Panurge, meaning servile imitators, has become proverbial in French. Panurge, a companion of Pantagruel, quarrels with a sheep merchant during a sea voyage. To avenge himself, he buys one sheep and throws it into the sea, whereupon all the other sheep jump overboard, dragging along the merchant, who drowns.<sup>15</sup>

Molière's plays have also contributed a number of lexical items. The name of the main character in L'Avare, Harpagon, has become a common noun in French meaning "miser,"<sup>16</sup> and it also

appears as arpagone in the Cambridge Italian Dictionary.<sup>17</sup> In Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, Cléonte, seeking to impress his sweetheart's father, M. Jourdain, claims to be a Turkish dignitary, a mamamouthi-- which etymologically means "good for nothing," from Arabic ma`menu shi, "not a good thing." The term has remained as a humorous word for an official, and it also appears in the Oxford English Dictionary, but as an unnaturalized form.<sup>18</sup>

Molière's best known contribution to the lexicon, however, is tartuf(f)e, "hypocrite," from his play of the same name. Tartuffe, a swindler parading as a pious man, worms his way into the household of the pious but naive Orgon, who plans to have the swindler marry his daughter. Tartuffe, however, tries to seduce Elmire, Orgon's second wife, and when he is unmasked, he tries to have the family evicted from their house. The wisdom of Louis XIV, however, thwarts the swindler's plot. The name Tartuffe, according to Littré, first appeared in an Italian play, Malmantile by Lippi, in which one character, an evil man, is named Tartufo, the Italian word for "truffle." Tartuffe in French was originally an evil man, but under the influence of Molière's play it gained far wider currency and its present meaning, "hypocrite"; tartufferie means "hypocrisy."<sup>19</sup>

The Oxford English Dictionary lists tartuf(f)e as an unnaturalized noun meaning "a hypocritical pretender to religion, or by extension, to excellence of any kind." Also listed are tartuffery, or tartufferie, tartuffian and tartuf(f)ish.<sup>20</sup> Tartufo (with one f) appears in the Cambridge Italian Dictionary with the meaning of

"hypocrite;" and tartuffo (with two f's) as "a person who always turns up at the right moment when there is something good to eat or a bottle of wine has been opened." Molière's Tartuffe is depicted as having an excellent appetite.<sup>21</sup> In Spanish, the Larousse universal lists tartufo as hypocrite, and in German, Meyers Lexikon lists Tartüff with the same meaning, as well as Tartüfferie.<sup>22</sup>

Voltaire's play Mahomet ou le fanatisme has contributed the noun séide, a fanatical and blind executor of the wishes of a leader, and séidisme, fanaticism. In the play Mohammed seeks to found his empire on religion; and his religion on lies, using the fanatic Séide as his tool. Séide is thus led into a life of crime and eventually death.<sup>23</sup> Seide also appears as a neologism in Spanish in the Enciclopedia universal.<sup>24</sup>

Beaumarchais's plays Le Barbier de Séville and Le Mariage de Figaro have contributed to the French lexicon the familiar term figaro, "barber." The origin of the name, according to some sources, is a deformation of Spanish pícaro (rogue),<sup>25</sup> although it is more probably the Catalan name Figaró.<sup>26</sup> In Spanish, figaro, according to the Enciclopedia universal, is a live wire, a coxcomb, or just a barber. Among personnel in inns and hotels, it is a term for a guest who leaves without giving a tip. In Venezuela, color figaro is a color between deep blue and sky blue.<sup>27</sup> In German, according to Meyers Lexikon, Figaro is a crafty, intriguing type.<sup>28</sup>

In Flaubert's masterpiece, Madame Bovary (1857), Emma Bovary is portrayed as an incurably romantic woman in revolt against the dullness

and insipidity of her small town environment and the obtuseness of her husband. She abandons herself to trivial love affairs and eventually poisons herself when she is unable to repay her enormous debts. The noun bovarysme was created in 1892 by Jules de Gaultier, who first used it in a short essay, and later as the title of a philosophical work in 1902. It is defined in psychiatry as "a feeling of dissatisfaction in the affective and social areas, frequent in certain female neuroses." It is considered comparable to mythomania and hysteria and includes "a basic vanity, exuberant imagination, auto-suggestion and ambitious aspirations leading the subject to represent herself as above her real condition."<sup>29</sup> The Cambridge Italian Dictionary carries a listing for bovarismo.<sup>30</sup>

In 1896 Alfred Jarry, a precursor of the theater of the absurd, staged his play Ubu Roi, in which his main character, Ubu, a cruel, cynical and cowardly tyrant, but also ridiculously comic, grotesque and obscene, has the King of Poland assassinated and becomes King in his turn. He collects taxes from the nobles, executing those who cannot or will not pay, and is eventually overthrown by his enemies in league with the czar of Russia. The adjective ubuesque, derived from Ubu, means "comically cruel and cowardly," and by extension, "grotesque."<sup>31</sup>

Foreign literatures have also produced lexical items in French. From Don Quijote de la Mancha, French has derived un don quichotte, spelled in lower case, meaning an impractical man seeking to redress wrongs, the adjective don quichottesque and the noun don

quichottisme. Un don juan is an unscrupulous seducer, and there is also an adjective, donjuanesque. From Gulliver's Travels, French has taken lilliputien, "lilliputian, minuscule," and from Dickens' Pickwick Papers, pickwickien.<sup>33</sup>

In many forms and contexts, therefore, allusions to literature have served to expand and enrich the common lexicon of an educated public.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Maurice Grevisse, Le Bon Usage, 8th ed. (Gembloux, Duculot, 1964), p. 117.

<sup>2</sup>Paul Robert, Le Petit Robert: Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française (Paris, Société du Nouveau Littre, 1967), pp. 1951-1953.

<sup>3</sup>Robert under the words cited; Nouveau Petit Larousse (Paris, Larousse, 1972) under the words cited.

<sup>4</sup>Robert under the words cited; Nouv. Pet. Lar. under the words cited.

<sup>5</sup>Robert under the words cited; Nouv. Pet. Lar. under the words cited; American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (Boston and New York, American Heritage Publishing Co. and Houghton Mifflin, 1970) under chateaubriand.

<sup>6</sup>Robert under pascal.

<sup>7</sup>Robert under cicéro and cicérone; Nouv. Pet. Lar. under cicéro and cicérone.

<sup>8</sup>Robert under the words cited; Nouv. Pet. Lar. under the words cited.

<sup>9</sup>Pierre Larousse, Grand Dictionnaire universel du dix-neuvième siècle (Paris, Administration du Grand Dictionnaire universel, 1865) under the words cited.

<sup>10</sup>Larousse XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle under pateliner.

<sup>11</sup>Larousse XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle under the words cited.

<sup>12</sup>The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1947) under the words cited.

<sup>13</sup>Enciclopedia universal ilustrada europeo-americana (Madrid and Barcelona, Espasa Calpe, 1928) under the words cited.

<sup>14</sup>Cambridge Italian Dictionary (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press) under the words cited.

- 15 Nouv. Pet. Lar., p. 1584.
- 16 Robert under harpagon.
- 17 Cambr. Ital. Dic. under Arpagone.
- 18 Grand Larousse encyclopédique (Paris, Larousse, 1960) under mamamouchi; Oxf. Eng. Dic. under mamamouchi.
- 19 Raymond Bérnex, Preface and notes for Molière, Tartuffe (Petits Classiques Bordas) (Paris, Bordas, 1970), p.14.
- 20 Oxf. Eng. Dic. under the words cited.
- 21 Cambr. Ital. Dic. under the words cited.
- 22 Larousse universal, diccionario enciclopédico (Paris and Buenos Aires, Larousse, 1965) under tartufo; Meyers Lexikon (Leipzig, Bibliographisches Institut, 1929) under Tartuff.
- 23 Grand Lar. enc. under seide.
- 24 Encic. univ. under seide.
- 25 Meyers Lexikon (Leipzig, Bibliographisches Institut, 1929) under Figaro.
- 26 Juan Eugenio Hartzenbusch, Preface to Rafael María Baralt, Diccionario de galicismos (Madrid, Leocadio López, 1974), p. XIV.
- 27 Encic. univ. under figaro.
- 28 Meyer under Figaro.
- 29 Grand Lar. enc. under bovarysme.
- 30 Cambr. Ital. Dic. under bovarismo.
- 31 Robert under ubuesque.
- 32 Robert, pp. 1951-1953 and under words cited; Nouv. Pet. Lar. under words cited.
- 33 Robert, p. 1952.