

"a simple heart" by gustave flaubert essay sample

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



"A Simple Heart" is a book composed and written by the renowned writer called Gustave Flaubert. The book is based on the life of a kindergarten servant by the name of Félicité. The author dwells on the life, fantasies, affection, and the working life of this diligent woman called Félicité. This is evident in the beginning of the story since it begins with an overview of the working life of Félicité, most of which she spent working for a middle-class widow by the name of Madam Aubain. The book clearly indicates the diligence of Félicité as she worked for Madam Aubain who was not one of the easiest people to interact and work with. That aside, as she worked for this idle-class widow, she proved to be the best housekeeper, "No one could have been more persistent when it came to haggling over prices and, as for cleanliness, the spotless state of her saucepans was the despair of all the other serving maids" (Flaubert and Arthur 4), according to the author who is also the third-person narrator. She was also innocent and enjoyed a saintly relationship; thus, this paper explores Félicité's innocence, and her relationship with religious matters.

To begin, it is noteworthy to indicate that Félicité was a model and innocent servant. This is because she had to go through adversity and anguish in her early life. This was probably because she lost her parents at a tender age, and she had to serve few brutal employers prior to being employed by Madam Aubain. Her innocence and archetypical nature made her strike a relationship or romance with a fairly well-off young man called Théodore. Later on, she was agonized after realizing that Théodore had abandoned her and opted for an old wealthier woman (Flaubert and Arthur 5-7). She struggled to cope with the situation and her determination or selflessness

trait compelled her to look for job elsewhere. And soon after the agony of losing her lover to an old wealthy woman, she was hired to serve or look after Madam Aubain and her two young children. Aubain had two children namely: Paul and Virginie.

As the author of the book titled, *A Simple Heart* would have wanted to portray Félicité as a simple lady leading an obscure life, this was achieved. The tale is quite simple and tells a story of a poor and irreproachable country girl devoted to serve her servant with a straightforward approach. Félicité is portrayed by the author as a loyal servant and a pious woman. This is because Flaubert maintains a chronicle of the manner in which the young girl or servant responds to discontents and major losses. Sometimes, when one reads the Flaubert's book, he/she may conclude that this was an ironic commentary on the life of Félicité. Earlier on, the author describes Félicité as a lady with a thin face and a shrill voice. However, many perceived her to be very old, while she was merely twenty-five years old. She had an upright stance and never spoke and her deliberate movement and innocence gave her the appearance of a woman made from wood and driven by clockwork (Flaubert and Arthur 4-5).

Secondly, looking at the appearance of Félicité, readers are likely to pity her; however, the author also narrates of the dark humorous side of the story.

Flaubert gives an earthly, comic aura to one of the best objects of the devotion and admiration as portrayed through the character of Félicité. It is essential to note that Felicite's saintly status lies squarely on the terms of the awkward symbolism of the parrot. Félicité has a perfect innocence and

goodness and her sainthood might then not be perceived as the highest. In the view of many analysts and metaphorically speaking, the moth-eaten stuffed parrot represents the Holy Ghost. In the presence of Loulou, the life of Félicité moves from profane to the sacred. It also becomes clear that Félicité's saintliness is evident as she achieves a "mystical reunion with the Holy Spirit."

During her fifty years of service at Madam Aubain, Félicité formed a series of deep attachments with religious people around her. Félicité became devoted to Virginie and she decided to follow the church activities of Virginie. Flaubert indicates that Félicité emulates the religious activities or observances of Virginie such as fasting. Félicité fasted and went for confession whenever Virginie went (15). As the years went by, year after year, most of them were characterized by the yearly recurrence of the church festivals. These events occurred until Félicité found a new outlet for her or what can be termed as "natural kind-heartedness" (Flaubert and Arthur 26-28). Later on, Madan Aubain is given a parrot (stubborn parrot, noisy parrot called Loulou), and Félicité begins to take good care of the bird out of her wholeheartedness.

The role that Loulou plays in terms of religious or saintliness is not able to reconcile the role and the religious basis of her interpretation. Félicité becomes religious as she approaches old age and she achieves a mystical reunion with the Holy Spirit as already indicated towards the end of her life. As Félicité dies when she became very old, it becomes clear that the parrot barely embodies any authentic spiritual meaning in the existence of the

owner. Whatever the author and Félicité proves through Loulou or the parrot is the exclusively unnatural, mobile, capricious and here, the book presents the comical and pathetic representation of the religious aspect associated with Félicité. Religious representation portray Loulou as the main figure in the entire story and the noblewoman who brought Loulou is portrayed as having impacted Félicité's life with regard to religious issues. Besides, the paper clearly indicates that earlier on in the story Virginie had also impacted the life of Félicité with regard to religious perspective.

Finally, in numerous responses to Lolou as the central figure, other analysts indicated that the significance of the bird was exaggerated. This is clear because the author of *A Simple Heart* clearly affirmed that we allow the arbitrary link between the parrot and the Holy Ghost. This permit the hypothetically emotional to pass over into the consecrated and it becomes appropriate to affirm that religious pilgrimage of Félicité as inadequate because the emblem of her religious is completely embarrassing. This is clearly indicated in the passage that reads, " Though it is a caricature, the parrot comes to represent the voice of God which speaks in the descent of the Spirit in Felicite's deformed theology" (Flaubert and Arthur 69).

From the above statement, it is apparent that Flaubert set up a dichotomy between the presence and the absence of God in his story. This creates a sense of deadlock or contradictory conflict in the essential import of the author of *A Simple Heart*, and this conflict continues to plague most of the readers. There is big problem created by Loulou, then, which persists in initiating a barricade between the wish of readers to grant sainthood to

Felicite for the accurate reasons. Many readers of Flaubert's account with regard to religious perspective of Félicité are filled with numerous obscure and lack of congruency in his work. It is merely painted by the little portrayal of the parrot as the main figure that shows Félicité's saintliness. This is why the author tries to use his capacity and that of the readers' understanding to integrate the story of Félicité with sanctification into a tale of the workings of the Holy Spirit. This can be considered as being ironically objectified through using tawdry symbol.

In conclusion, it is remarkable to indicate that Félicité was a model and innocent servant, which she showed through the adversities and anguish in her early life. Besides being associated with saintliness, the tale is quite simple and tells a story of a poor and irreproachable country girl devoted to serve her servant. However, to award Félicité the status of " saint" based on simple acts of sacrifice and devoted service, loving and forgiving nature may not be prudent. Even if Félicité went through suffering at the hands of arrogant and insensitive employers, she would barely qualify to be given the title of a saint. Legions of tombstones in immeasurable cemeteries, authentic and fabricated, usually celebrate lives not dissimilar to Felicite's with inscriptions such as the one titled, " Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Flaubert and Arthur 78). The graves these gravestones mark are usually marks that suggest a sense of innocence of the person being celebrated following his/her demise; however, they are completely unreflective. Above all, it is significant to note that Felicite's saintly status lies squarely on the terms of the obstinate symbolism of the parrot.

Reference

Flaubert, Gustave, and Arthur S. McDowall. *A Simple Heart*. New York: New Directions Bibelot, 1996. Print.