

*Rabelais*







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Richard J. Schoeck  
*General Editor*



# *Rabelais*

by

Michael J. Heath

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## NOTE ON REFERENCES

There is no standard edition of Rabelais. The chapter numbers cited in my text correspond to most modern editions and translations, but not to the Droz editions of *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua*, based on the first editions, which had fewer chapters. I have given no page references: Rabelais's chapters are short and it is possible to find references in any edition relatively rapidly. The translations following quotations are my own, but are based as far as possible on the delicious seventeenth-century version of Urquhart and Le Motteux (see chapter 6).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# 1 *Introduction*

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Comic writers often feel undervalued by the reading public. P. G. Wodehouse summed it up when he entitled his autobiography *Performing Flea*. But ironically “Laughter Studies” have been big academic business for millennia, ever since Cicero remarked on the plethora of Greek treatises *On the Humorous*, which were distinguished only by their humorlessness.

The paradoxical fate of the comic writer is well illustrated by the case of François Rabelais, scourge of Victorian vicarages, supplier of “Bawdy Classics” to *Playboy*, and currently patron saint of the scatological satire magazine *La Grosse Bertha*. This latest accolade, from a nihilist organ, reflects the usual French mistrust and marginalization of Rabelais: this pre-classical purveyor of the belly laugh, advocate of untrammled freedom (“Do What Thou Wilt” is the motto of his Abbaye de Theleme), founding father of the French Revolution, presiding genius at the insurrectionary Events of May 1968, and renegade monk is justly rewarded, in Paris, with the truncated *rue Rabelais*, a mere side-turning to the north of the elegant *avenue Montaigne*. Yet more than two hundred scholars, including the cream of French *seizièmistes*, gathered at Tours in 1984 to celebrate his 500th birthday with a congress of matchless erudition.

The little we know of the historical François Rabelais suggests that the academics were right and the municipal authorities wrong. There is little evidence of an anarchic temperament. Son of a prosperous Chinon lawyer, he was probably born in 1483, though possibly as late as 1494. It is likely that he studied law as a youth, but then entered the religious life, spending at least twenty years as a Franciscan friar and a Benedictine monk. Re-entering the world as a secular priest, he studied medicine at Montpellier University, and was appointed physician to an important hospital, the Hôtel-Dieu in Lyon. There he entered the circle of the influential Du Bellay clan, serving

the brothers Guillaume and Jean du Bellay as personal physician, secretary, and probably diplomatic agent, and made several trips to Italy in their entourage. Towards the end of his life he acquired another powerful patron, the liberal Cardinal de Chastillon. He died in 1553.

This sober *curriculum vitae*, encapsulating Rabelais's public career, is hard to reconcile with the genre and style of his only major literary work, the ribald epic of the giants Gargantua and Pantagruel. Perhaps we should follow modern critics who advise us to ignore the biography and the background in order to concentrate on the omnipotent text. Yet the details of Rabelais's earthly existence are helpful, as we struggle with the apparently inexplicable diversity of his books. His origins, and the several branches of professional learning that prepared him for his career, provide the starting point for his apparently unprofessional buffoonery.

Like many contemporaries, Rabelais remains a provincial writer. There runs through his books a vein of nostalgic affection for the smiling countryside of the Loire valley in which he grew up; today his stone effigy gazes benignly across the Vienne at Chinon. The topographical focus of his second book, *Gargantua*, is the country farmhouse of La Devinière, where Rabelais may have been born, but it is magnified into the capital of a principality and the "mighty wars" in that book are fought over a few square miles of the adjoining terrain. This literary microscopy looks like a private joke between Rabelais and those of his readers who knew his home territory, his "pays de vache"; we cannot conclude, as some early commentators did, that the old king Grandgousier therefore represents Rabelais's father Antoine, that Gargantua is François himself, and so on. But it is touching to observe that, for all his fantastical exploration of new worlds of the imagination, especially in his fourth and last book, *Le Quart Livre*, Rabelais keeps his feet on the ground and returns time and again to the sunlit land of his childhood.

As far as we know, Rabelais's early studies were in the then controversial field of the law; it is a mystery why he did not follow in his father's footsteps but turned instead to the religious life. We should not discount the possibility of a vocation, despite the famous cynicism about such things of that malcontent monk Erasmus of Rotterdam, one of Rabelais's intellectual masters. But Rabelais remained deeply interested in the law, and numbered amongst his friends some of its most eminent French practitioners. From about

1510 to 1526, he was attached to the Franciscan house at Fontenay-le-Comte, where a circle of humanist lawyers included André Tiraqueau and Amaury Bouchard. Rabelais later dedicated learned books to both men, and their contrasting writings on the laws of marriage were to influence profoundly Rabelais's third book, *Le Tiers Livre*. Throughout his fictional writings there are allusions to the shortcomings and the glories of the law, as Rabelais observed the struggle of the humanists, particularly in France, to restore the purity of Roman law and cast aside the pedantic accretions of medieval scholarship. He put it rather less politely in *Pantagruel* 5:

Les livres des loix luy sembloient une belle robe d'or, triumpante et precieuse à merveilles, qui feust bordee de merde.

[The books of the law were like unto a wonderfully precious, beautiful and triumphant robe of gold, edged with shit.]

Renaissance humanism involved a struggle against medieval ordure on many fronts beside the legal. It is apparent that from an early age Rabelais sympathized with its aim of enriching contemporary culture by the study of the intellectual landmarks of the past, an impossible task without the two essential languages of antiquity, classical Latin and Greek. Some competence in Latin could be assumed in almost any educated person of the period, though the rarefied Latin of Cicero had still to make its way in official circles and in the Church. Greek, on the other hand, had been submerged for centuries, and its revival by the humanists met with official disapproval since it carried with it a suspicion of subversion. The Latin verb *grae-cissare* (to speak Greek) came to mean "to mutter unintelligibly" or "to conspire." Evidence of the difficulties put in the way of the aspiring Greek scholar emerges from one of the earliest authentic documents concerning Rabelais. It reveals that his Greek books, and those of his monastic companion Pierre Amy, were confiscated by his convent superiors in 1524, in compliance with an edict of the Paris Faculty of Theology forbidding the study of Greek. Although Amy abandoned the house at Fontenay soon afterwards, Rabelais remained and apparently was able to resume his studies.

A knowledge of Greek certainly enhanced his prospects in medicine, the second branch of learning that was to enrich both his career and his fictional works. Rabelais must have studied medicine during his monastic years, since he was registered at the University of Mont-

pellier for only a few weeks before acquiring his medical degree in 1530. The desire to practice medicine, a career forbidden to monks, must have influenced his decision to leave his Benedictine house, an "apostasy" from which he was only absolved by papal dispensation in 1536. Greek was important because up-to-date medicine relied, in accordance with the usual humanist paradox, on the very ancient writings attributed to Hippocrates, the divinely-inspired founder of the medical art, and his disciple Galen; the restoration and study of their Greek texts risked upsetting an establishment that knew them only through medieval Latin adaptations. Rabelais lectured on the Greek text of Hippocrates and Galen at Montpellier, and in 1532 published an edition of some of their writings, based on a manuscript in his possession. Acknowledged as one of France's leading medical authorities, he rapidly found employment in the public domain, at Lyon, and in the private sector, with the brothers Du Bellay, and proudly displayed his professional title even on his fictional works. Not least, his expertise gave him an inexhaustible fund of anatomical vocabulary and lore, and a physician's interest in the undisciplined workings of the human body, which together provide many of his earthiest and most memorable jokes.

The prohibition of Greek studies, which perturbed Rabelais in 1524, was one shot in the continuing battle against heterodoxy waged by the Paris Faculty of Theology, often known loosely as the Sorbonne, which was the primary guarantor of religious orthodoxy in northern France. At times the Sorbonne came into conflict with the monarchy, intermittently sympathetic to the new ideas. Like Henry VIII in England, Francis I, who reigned from 1515 until 1547, sometimes found it expedient, or even congenial, to champion the humanists. In 1530 he established royal lectureships, outside the jurisdiction of the University of Paris, in mathematics and in the three humanist languages; his foundation was in time to become the *Collège de France*. The third language, beside Latin and Greek, was Hebrew. On the evidence of the passage of Hebrew in *Pantagruel* 9, Rabelais made strenuous autodidactic efforts to acquire this still less accessible tongue, and his continuing interest is visible too in the *Quart Livre*.

The principal objectors to expertise in Greek and Hebrew were of course theologians, who saw in it a threat to established interpretations of Scripture based upon the fourth-century Latin Vulgate Bible of St. Jerome. The Greek New Testament published in 1516 by the



great humanist Erasmus, founded on early manuscripts and, in the accompanying Latin translation, frequently at odds with St. Jerome, seemed destined to overthrow many time-hallowed doctrines. The eruption of Luther's protest in the following year only confirmed the worst suspicions of the ecclesiastical establishment. Rabelais's study of Greek and Hebrew, not to mention the adulatory letter he wrote to Erasmus in 1532, suggest strong support for at least some of the new ideas in religion. He also sympathized with the humanists' addiction to syncretism, the theory that the ancient pagan philosophies could in many ways be reconciled with Christian thought. In his letter to Erasmus, Rabelais casually mentions his connections with the bishop of Rodez, Georges d'Armagnac, one of several powerful French prelates with whom Rabelais became associated, and all of whom evinced sympathy for reform—from within the established Church. This biographical evidence suggests a simple (or simplistic) solution to the vexed question of Rabelais's own religious sympathies.

Rabelais was accused in his own time—and more recently—of atheism, but in the light of attempts by extremists on both sides of the Reformation to identify him with their opponents, a more convincing case can be made for Rabelais as an Evangelical. The term is imprecise, as must be expected in an age when the labels imposed on the various sects by later generations were little used or vaguely defined. Sixteenth-century Evangelism consists essentially in the desire to purify Christian worship and life through a return to the original sources of inspiration, and in particular to Christ's teaching in the Gospels (*Evangelies*). Its program, as outlined for example by the movement's leading theorist in France, Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, included checking the worldliness and laxity of the clergy, simplifying and demystifying the forms of worship, and bringing the people into closer communion with the revealed word of God by preaching and translation. It is obvious that humanism had its part to play in this movement, and that Rabelais was one of those best qualified to set Evangelical values before a wide public. The difficulty of his position lay in the fact that in France the Reform made only modest headway. Francis I was lukewarm, despite the support given to Evangelicals by his sister Marguerite, to whose spirit the *Tiers Livre* is dedicated. Rabelais's life and work bear traces of the occasional outbreaks of persecution, like that after the celebrated *Affaires des Placards* in

1534–1535, when a rash of posters attacking the Mass led the king to prohibit all printing in his domains for a time and, like a Roman tyrant, to publish lists of proscribed suspects. *Gargantua* appeared around this time, with an otherwise incongruous conclusion in which the faithful are exhorted to persevere in the face of persecution. Again, Rabelais's first work to be protected by royal copyright, the *Tiers Livre*, carefully avoids the most vexed areas of religious controversy. Nonetheless, Rabelais, who became an ordained priest as well as a friar, was a highly competent theologian and, with his age, automatically gave religious questions pride of place, even in gigantic fiction.

## §

Thus, sober biographical fact often accounts for the content of Rabelais's writing, his interest in spiritual, moral, legal, and medical questions, and for the disconcerting intellectual diversity that he shares with that other specialist in humanity, Michel de Montaigne. Rabelais resists pigeonholing by profession, like Montaigne, who proudly proclaims his autonomy at the start of his chapter on repentance (*Essais* 3.2).

But there is another "Rabelais": the gluttonous renegade monk of merry legend, around whom coalesced, even in his own time, stories of boozing and wenching that his assumed literary style did little to discourage. The fastidious Ronsard could honor his memory no more fittingly than by an epitaph describing the vine growing from his grave, testimony to a life spent wallowing in wine like a frog in the mire. Du Bellay mentions Rabelais in the jolliest of his *Regrets* (135), in the context of the guzzling and sociable Swiss. These are just the earliest tokens of a tradition in which Rabelais is identified not with his noble and even saintly giants but with his low-life characters, the trickster Panurge and the bawdy Benedictine Frere Jan. Here it is a case of reading from the fiction to the man, rather than the reverse.

But this delightful if preposterous image, found in stories, plays, illustrations, and the racier kind of literary journalism, is an extreme manifestation of a fundamental problem that confronts all readers of Rabelais interested in literary history. Why ever did this eminent physician, learned humanist, *et cetera*, decide to express himself in farcical fiction in the vernacular instead of in portentous pages of Cice-

ronian Latin? In fact Rabelais did produce learned editions, and a complete book in Latin on military strategy, now lost. Only one of his few surviving letters (to Antoine Hulot) suggests the sort of bubbling, wisecracking personality that is given to his *alter ego*, the anagrammatic Alcofrybas Nasier, pedant, boozier and narrator of the first two books, *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua*. Many contemporary references to the historical Rabelais eulogize his learning; fewer mention his jesting. But he had belonged to an order, the Franciscans, that was renowned for the quality of its jokes, both within the cloister and in the celebrated sermons of the preaching friars. Consider also the tradition of professional humor: academic jokes, lawyers' jokes, doctors' jokes, all bring welcome relief to the practice of a strenuous vocation, even (or especially) if the humor is impenetrable to outsiders.

For some readers the paradox of the rollicking sage is explained not by history but by politics. "Rabelais" is a text embodying opposition to the world of learning and of seriousness, evoking the Carnivalesque underworld in which the narrator, alongside the mythical Till Eulenspiegel and the legendary François Villon, wages war on the people's behalf against the battalions of the pompous and the powerful. To present Rabelais as a populist, anarchist, or nihilist text is to revive the two hundred-year-old ghost of the free-thinking friar who denounced the Ancien Régime and inspired Revolution. For others, Rabelais is subversive in a different way, undermining the pretensions of language and the norms of style, a deconstructionist *avant la lettre* and a prime example of that textual autonomy that enables the critic to make whatever he will of the text without reference to external factors.

Such readings of Rabelais, discussed further in chapter 6, can seem as arbitrary as those that treat the work merely as an historical document and explore its ideology in isolation from the accompanying laughter. There is, of course, a genre that reconciles laughter and commitment, namely satire, and it is commonplace to describe Rabelais as the first and—more rarely—the greatest of French satirists. But is there not more to his laughter than that corrective and often rather thin-lipped amusement which is the province of the satirist? One problem forever bedeviling Rabelaisian exegetes is that his text *plays* shamelessly with all the various kinds of laughter that were catalogued and discussed in his own day—as they had been in Cicero's. The fact that our reactions may range from caustic mockery to good-

hearted belly-laugh compounds the problem of interpretation. For one thing, humor is notoriously a subjective matter. What is worse, beneath its beneficent exterior laughter is profoundly ambiguous and even destructive: to laugh at anything, a word, a person, or an institution, is implicitly to condemn it by asserting one's superiority. Theorists wonder whether pure, gratuitous laughter can in fact exist; is not laughter always humiliating, and the most effective of condemnations? Montaigne certainly thought so (*Essais*, 1.50) when he described the laughing Democritus and the cynical Diogenes as more severe judges of humanity than the weeping Heraclitus and the hate-filled Timon.

A possible approach to the problem of Rabelais's diverse laughter is to recognize the element of self-conscious play in his writing; it is obvious that a scholar and theologian who chooses to embody his thoughts in a comic tale of gigantic exploits is being consciously unconventional. He knows that to invite laughter, with all its ambiguity, is to court misinterpretation. Rabelais often muses on meaning and the reliability of different forms of communication. From his first book, *Pantagruel*, with its multiplicity of meaningless languages and its disputation using only signs, to his last, the *Quart Livre*, where words and sounds become frozen objects that literally melt away when used, Rabelais shows an interest in epistemology which reminds us that modern discussion of semiotics and semantics is part of a very ancient tradition.

Rabelais's most famous hermeneutical debate dominates the Prologue to his second book, *Gargantua*. In his first three books Rabelais eschews the authorial preface, with its conventional apologetics and expressions of gratitude; the dedicatory epistle to the *Quart Livre* fairly represents that obsequious genre. Rabelais prefers to set out his premises and prejudices in the looser dialogic form of the Prologue, with its theatrical associations. But his adoption of a mask, a *persona*, complicates matters. Can we trust the quack doctor, sometimes doubling as aged pedant, who addresses us in the Prologues to *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua*, under the name Alcofrybas Nasier? While the Prologue to *Pantagruel* has a certain unity in Alcofrybas's hyperbolic efforts to sell us the book, *Gargantua* begins with a Prologue so disconcerting, so apparently self-contradictory, that it has been discussed by critics more often and more earnestly than any other passage in Rabelais's books.

The problem arises halfway through. Alcofrybas has reached a rhetorical crescendo in his sales-pitch, assuring us, as he had in *Pantagruel*, that this outwardly frivolous book is not to be despised; correctly interpreted it will reveal “de tres haultz sacremens et mysteres horrificques, tant en ce que concerne nostre religion que aussi l'estat politicq et vie oeconomicque” [most high sacraments and dreadful mysteries, as well in what concerneth our religion, as matters of the public state and domestic life]. This modest claim is illustrated by the famous metaphor of the “sustantificque mouelle” [the substantial marrow], which has come to stand for the supposed ideological content in Rabelais's books, a concealed deeper meaning that must be extracted with as much effort and diligence as a dog puts into worrying his bone. The concept was especially familiar to the sixteenth-century audience, accustomed to seeking an allegorical or mystical sense in sacred writings—and much else—and Rabelais's references to the “literal sense” and the “higher sense” in the Prologue encourage exegesis. Many commentators, especially in earlier generations, took Rabelais at his character's word and treated the books as a *roman à clé*, a fiction requiring a key to unlock its allegorical references. This tendency is best exemplified in the delightful ten-volume edition of Rabelais published in 1823 by Esmangart and Johanneau, who assembled all the most ingenious commentaries of their predecessors and, with a fine disregard for chronology and logic, identified every character and incident with some historical person or fact.

It is the supreme example of a tendency against which Alcofrybas warns in the Prologue to *Gargantua*. In an abrupt transition, the narrator ridicules those commentators who have allegorized Homer and Ovid with more subtlety than common sense. Homer and Ovid never dreamed of the interpretations foisted upon them by commentators intent on finding what they were seeking. But does this mean that all exegesis is worthless? Not at all: Rabelais also scorns what is now called the “intentional fallacy,” which limits the meaning of a book to the one consciously put there by its author. Books take on an independent life. The implication in this Prologue is that the commentator's role is to elucidate, with discretion and without preconceptions, a text that may well contain more than its author consciously intended. Throughout the Prologue Alcofrybas alludes to the inspirational qualities of wine, claiming to have written only at moments of leisure, whilst eating and drinking. Conventional enough

authorial modesty: such disclaimers crop up in dozens of Renaissance prologues and prefaces. But the Prologue to *Gargantua* begins with an allusion to the most celebrated philosophical drinking-session of Antiquity, recorded in Plato's *Symposium*, and the implied connection between wine and literary inspiration is made explicit towards the end of the piece. In this perspective, Rabelais's reputation as a boozier, founded on such apparently hedonistic passages, hints at something more profound. The book is addressed to fellow-drinkers, those most likely to be in tune with its author; the Prologue's allusion to the hermetic "Pythagorean symbols" also suggests a work fully accessible only to the initiate.

But the question remains: *is* there a specific "higher sense" in Rabelais's works, a level or levels of meaning that have to be teased out by diligent study (or perhaps egregious boozing)? The endless fascination of Rabelais's books is attested by the scores of studies that appear annually. The attraction lies in the elusive ambiguities of comic profundity, but we must always remember Rabelais's sardonic delight in play. It seems sometimes that he set out deliberately to mystify, to entrap the enthusiastic exegete of a later age. How else to explain that within a couple of pages of his exhortation to break the bone and suck out the substantial marrow of his message, the author devotes a whole chapter (2) to the "Fanfreluches antidotees" [Convuluted conundrums]? The poem looks like an *énigme*, a rhyming riddle, but the author breaks the rules of this popular genre by forgetting to provide the necessary key. The many hints of topical allusion are in the end overwhelmed by a torrent of gibberish; the style resembles that of the equally impenetrable pleadings in the lawsuit between Baisecul and Humevesne (*Pantagruel* 11-13) which could only be resolved in terms of more gibberish. No satisfactory key to the "Fanfreluches antidotees" has ever been found. What is more, *Gargantua*, usually considered the most explicit of Rabelais's books, ends with another *Enigme*, to which Rabelais provides not one but two equally plausible solutions. The author again exercises his prerogative to change the rules of the game for his own amusement.

The presence of "Alcofrybas" also muddies the water. As in Erasmus's most famous and most intriguing work, the *Praise of Folly*, the uncertain perspectives provided by an unreliable narrator hinder unequivocal interpretation. Folly admits her fickleness; Alcofrybas's mind seems to wander. The fact that they both address us in person

is no guarantee that we will understand them; to the ambiguity of laughter is added the ambivalence of first person speech, with all its potential for rhetorical distortion or deceit. Rabelais's books contain a higher proportion of dialogue, and especially monologue, than any comparable work, and his insistence that his characters speak for themselves adds an extra layer of uncertainty; in particular, it produces disconcerting changes of tone.

A good illustration is Rabelais's fondness for the inserted letter. In *Pantagruel* 8, *Gargantua* 29, and *Quart Livre* 3-4, the narrative is halted to permit one of the giants to write down his thoughts on a more or less relevant topic. Are we to take them seriously? It can be argued that, given the otherwise burlesque context, particularly in *Pantagruel* and the *Quart Livre*, Rabelais is merely parodying the *gravitas* and self-importance of the heavy epistolary style favored by philosophical humanists. The same could apply to the set-piece orations scattered throughout the text. Why does Panurge couch his urgent request for help (*Pantagruel* 9) in elegant terms in thirteen different languages? Is Ulrich Gallet's ultimately futile ultimatum (*Gargantua* 31) mere pompous posturing? In the *Tiers Livre*, is the narrator's eulogy of the miraculous herb Pantagruelion (49-52) more or less of a spoof than Panurge's praise of debt (2-4)? Who is spoofing whom? The characters and their creator, carried away by the exuberance of their own verbosity, batter the reader into a state of dizzy incomprehension. Of course, there is often a moral to be drawn, but the reader's delight lies in the artistry of the dialogic path that led towards it:

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Rabelais is a master of dramatic dialogue. He creates the convivial atmosphere of a party merely by recording its disconnected small talk (*Gargantua* 5); he conjures up imminent shipwreck by transcribing the cries of the sailors (*Quart Livre* 19-20). Not for him the minute description of a Balzac or a Zola: the living word ousts the omniscience of the realistic novelist. It is probably misleading and certainly anachronistic to call Rabelais a novelist at all. More often than not his writings resemble theater, to the extent that occasionally and unexpectedly they drop into the exact form of stage dialogue (e.g., *Tiers Livre* 36, *Quart Livre* 6). In a rare autobiographical glimpse (*Tiers*

*Livre 34*), Rabelais admits that at Montpellier he acted in *The Farce of the Man Who Married a Dumb Wife*; student companies were fond of the native farces. The texts of some of these lowbrow entertainments have survived, and the grotesque characterization of the naive or transparently scheming protagonists is reflected in the portrayal of such Rabelaisian idiots as the Great Lady of Paris in *Pantagruel* or the timorous tyrant Picrochole in *Gargantua*. The *soties* or Fools' Plays, with their taste for gormless parody, provided further inspiration, as did the portrayal or personification of vice and folly in the *moralité*. We also find a distant ancestor of Panurge in the wily manipulative slaves who throng the Latin comedies of Terence and Plautus. Rabelais's debt to the various forms of comic theater is manifest: an artistic advantage, but again, perhaps, an interpretative drawback. If didactic drama (Brecht, Sartre) can often be enjoyed innocently as theater, how much more true will this be of Rabelaisian farce?

Rabelais also found dramatic dialogue, adapted to satirical as well as artistic ends, in Lucian, the Ancient author to whom he was most often compared by his contemporaries. It was not necessarily a compliment. Lucian of Samosata, a Greek writer of the second century AD, was one of the great rediscoveries of the Renaissance; Erasmus and Thomas More, among many others, were devotees of his style. He specialized in satirical dialogues, and among earnest Christians his wholesale mockery of men and gods earned him the unsavory reputation of an atheistic scoffer. To call Rabelais the modern Lucian did him no favors in certain circles. He certainly exploited techniques of satire developed by Lucian; direct speech, he recognized, is an ideal tool for exposing a target's folly. No need to denounce him: just let him condemn himself out of his own mouth. A number of Lucian's dialogues depict Cynic philosophers, Diogenes or Menippus, maliciously egging on the great men of this world to chatter unself-consciously about their megalomaniac dreams. Erasmus used the same technique in his *Colloquies* and in the *Julius exclusus e coelis* [*Julius excluded from heaven*], a racy satire of the warrior-pope Julius II, a frequent target of Rabelais, too, as both unchristian and anti-French. In Erasmus's dialogue, Julius freely admits the most horrid crimes at St. Peter's prompting. The technique works superbly in Rabelais's satire of the pretentious student from Limoges (*Pantagruel* 6), of the Sorbonne theologian Janotus de Bragmardo (*Gargantua* 19-20), and of the bumptious sheep-salesman Dindenault (*Quart Livre* 5-8).



But Rabelais improves on Lucian artistically by using all the registers of French, interspersed with such comic signals as dialect, cursing, and foreign languages. One of the difficulties—but also one of the glories—of Rabelais is the diversity of his language. He invents monstrous words, adopts archaic spelling, deploys a richer vocabulary than any French writer before or since. Armed with this impressive but occasionally impenetrable linguistic equipment, he succeeds in conferring individuality on his characters solely through their speech, another technique practiced more often on the stage than on the page. It is above all their words, their attempt to communicate or, more often, to impress, that render Rabelais's characters laughable. Self-betrayal is a feature which gives unity to his style and unity to his satire, in its effect of deflating egotism, or the *philautia*, love of self, that is explicitly the moral target in the *Tiers Livre*. The wealth and variety of Rabelais's dialogic languages take his characters far beyond the rhetorical requirement of *copia*, abundance, by which every schoolboy was instructed to give amplitude and dignity to his topic. On the contrary, language and its users are divested of dignity in the apparently uncontrollable gushing of their words.

Rabelais's books have been associated with another type of Ancient satire, the Menippean, a heterogeneous genre named after a Cynic philosopher (third century BC) whose works are lost. It permits ample stylistic licence, and recalls by its diversity the supposed derivation, much quoted in the Renaissance, of the word "satire" from *lanx satura*, an overflowing dish of diverse tasty morsels. A peculiar feature of Menippean satire is the intermingling of verse and prose, found for instance in the most famous *Satire Menippée* of modern times, the collection of "Rabelaisian" lampoons published in 1594 to mock the opponents of Henry IV. But the mingling of genres is also a feature of moralizing works of Rabelais's period, including several by his friend Jean Bouchet, and we need not seek models in the lost works of Antiquity.

It is remarkable how often Rabelais breaks into verse, if not into poetic song; what songs there are in his books tend to be vulgar ditties about sex, as sung, for instance, by all the best and most serious contemporary musicians in the Prologue to the *Quart Livre*. Rabelais's poetry is undeniably unpoetic. If his prose sometimes reaches heights of expressivity and resonance, his verse bumps along at the bottom of the literary scale. It has something to do with the rigid

poetic forms and aesthetic norms of his generation; Clément Marot, an acquaintance of Rabelais and the best poet of his time, was only just beginning to throw them off. French poets of the early sixteenth century, regarding poetry as a branch of rhetoric, were taught to impress their audience with ingenious wordplay rather than displays of imaginative sensitivity. A characteristic example is the inscription placed on the gateway of the Abbaye de Theleme (*Gargantua* 54). In its final stanza, for instance, the convoluted rhyming, punning, and alliteration (impossible to convey in English), obscure the sense and seem, to modern eyes, grotesquely inappropriate as a means of evoking honor and Charity:

Or donné par don  
 Ordonne pardon  
 A cil qui le donne,  
 Et tres bien guerdonne  
 Tout mortel preud'hom  
 Or donné par don.

Elsewhere of course Rabelais deliberately parodies and vulgarly debases the formulae of serious verse, as in the *rondeau* of *Gargantua* 13 (love poetry) or the *dizain* of the *Quart Livre* 44 (moralistic verse). It is interesting that the Fifth Book (*Cinquiesme Livre*; on its authorship, see chapter 6) ends (46) with allusions to poetic frenzy, inspired by Bacchus and much prized by the younger generation of Ronsard and Joachim du Bellay, although the verse that it inspires in the Rabelaisian characters is not much improvement on the examples here.

Sometimes what looks like a poem turns out to be a list. It is another mark of Rabelais's technical audacity that he can often use enumeration, the most tedious of rhetorical devices, more expressively than verse. The strange juxtapositions, for example, in the anatomy of the monster Quaresmeprenant (Lent: *Quart Livre* 30–32) can exert a hideously surreal fascination; the list of children's games (*Gargantua* 22) so delighted Rabelais's early translators that they scoured the local playgrounds to discover more. We are reminded of Pieter Breughel's *Children's Games*; Rabelais's lists often function like a painting, in that the closer we look, the more we discover. But they also impress us by their weight, making original use of the new typography to convey the utter idleness of the young Gargantua, or the merciless gluttony of the Gastrolâtres (*Quart Livre* 59–60).

These recurrent techniques suggest a certain cohesiveness within Rabelais's works, but it can be argued that his writing is in constant evolution, and that each of his books represents a stage along the road to the artistic assurance and stylistic originality of the *Quart Livre*. In this view *Pantagruel* (1532) is little more than an experiment, with *Gargantua* (1534) a more sophisticated reworking of similar material. After a long gap, the *Tiers Livre* (1546) finds Rabelais emancipated from the gigantic past and experimenting with the boundaries of fiction, before applying all his experience to the triumph that is the *Quart Livre* (1552). It is undeniable that Rabelais was a conscientious artist, despite the relaxed attitude of his *alter ego* Alcofrybas. He revised each of his books at least once for a new edition; this was not, as is sometimes said, mere prudence, since far more of the changes are stylistic refinements than suppressions of controversial material. The process is most obvious in the expansion of the hasty, incomplete, and rather feeble *Quart Livre* of 1548 into the complete work of 1552.

## §

The next four chapters will examine these books in turn, since each has a distinctive character as well as recurrent Rabelaisian themes and techniques. But first we must look briefly at the mysterious circumstances in which each book appeared, whilst completing the biography of their author, whose fate becomes increasingly bound up with that of his fiction.

*Pantagruel* first appeared at Lyon, probably in autumn 1532. At the time Rabelais was working at the public hospital, and it is almost possible—for once—to take seriously the conventional authorial assertion that the book was hastily thrown together in a few idle moments. Rabelais was never a professional writer; there were hardly any at the time, though the occasional poet laureate, such as Marot or Ronsard, contrived to make a living out of literature. But in 1532 Rabelais was clearly seeking a reputation as a scholar, with his editions of Ancient texts and his correspondence with such luminaries as Erasmus (who never replied) and Guillaume Budé (who did). It is all the more remarkable, then, that Rabelais should have turned to the vernacular (Latin was the almost exclusive vehicle of learned discourse) and to a popular genre. Much has been made of the connec-

tion between Rabelais's first book and a series of cheap comic publications circulating in Lyon in the early 1530s, often grouped under the heading *Les Grandes Chroniques*. It has even been suggested that Rabelais had a hand in their publication.

The tales concern a naive but powerful giant called Gargantua and his exploits in the service of King Arthur. The name Gargantua, with variations, has been traced in Breton and Italian folklore, and is vaguely connected with misty legends of prehistoric sun-worship. Little of this prestigious past is reflected in the books themselves, which rely on heavy-handed parody of the romances of chivalry, the most popular reading-matter of the day. These romances were often read aloud (see *Gargantua* 23), but the versions published in the sixteenth century lacked the grandeur and oral vivacity of the *chansons de geste*, being prose reworkings of their themes, with endless and tedious accounts of battles and rescues. But they went on being published (and condemned by schoolmasters) for centuries.

The *Grandes Chroniques* were, at least, comparatively short, and had some claim to originality in portraying a beneficent giant whose size often provoked laughter instead of terror. This comedy of disproportion may seem less humorous now, but Rabelais's own frequent exploitation of the technique suggests that it was a sure-fire rib-tickler in his time. The joke was richer for those of Rabelais's contemporaries who had come across Pantagruel (spelt "Pentagruel") as a mischievous dwarf appearing in the *Mysteries*, whose speciality was throwing salt into the open mouths of snoring drunkards: an unconventional explanation of one of the symptoms of hang-over. Rabelais attributed the same thirst-provoking property to his giant, and the role contributes much to the atmosphere of merry-making and drinking that dominates this first book. If Rabelais did write it, as he claimed, to amuse his patients, they may have found in it some slight compensation for the absence of anaesthetics in the contemporary operating theater. Rabelais the physician returned more than once to the therapeutic properties of laughter.

It used to be assumed, in times more bibliographically naive than our own, that *Gargantua* was written before *Pantagruel*, because the father must precede the son; editions of Rabelais's complete works still place *Gargantua* first. In fact Rabelais followed the success of his first book with the *Pantagrueline Prognostication*, published by François Juste in Lyon in 1533; Juste was to be Rabelais's accredited pub-

lisher for a decade. This short book is a debunking of the contemporary vogue for judicial astrology, which claimed to foretell the future by study of the heavens. The first edition also contained accurate astronomical information for 1533, in the style of the scientific almanac; Rabelais was to produce several genuine almanacs in the years to come. But the *Pantagrueline Prognostication*, later republished “pour l’an perpetuel” [for all time], is a satire that ridicules the style and the pretensions of the judicial astronomers by predicting the most banal or absurd events: crabs will walk sideways and fleas will be black (on the whole). The pamphlet also foreshadows a major theme of the *Tiers Livre* by condemning humankind’s curiosity, our obsession with peering into the future, instead of putting our trust and our hopes in the Lord. Other astrologers, blasphemously, used to nominate one of the planets (named, of course, after pagan deities) to be *Dominus anni*; for Rabelais, God is the “Lord” of this and every year. The *Pantagrueline Prognostication* underscored Rabelais’s Evangelism, and at the same time gave scope to his talents for parody and lampoon.

Those talents were exploited to the full in *Gargantua*, published by Juste alongside a revised and expanded *Pantagruel*, probably in 1534 (few of these early editions are dated). By that time Rabelais had entered the orbit of the humanist prelate and diplomat Jean du Bellay, whom he accompanied on trips to Italy in 1534 and 1535–1536. While in Rome he took steps to regularize his canonical position, and obtained (for the usual fee) relief from the penalties imposed for having abandoned his monastery. By 1536, following the secularization of Jean du Bellay’s Benedictine abbey at Saint-Maur-les-Fossés, Rabelais was officially free to roam the world as a secular priest permitted, for one thing, to practice medicine. But not to marry: perhaps the greatest mystery of Rabelais’s mysterious existence is his relationship with a woman, possibly a widow (which complicated the matrimonial position still further) who bore him three children in the 1530s. We know the children’s names: Théodule, who died an infant, and François and Junie, who were legitimated by Roman decree in 1540. Rabelais’s experience of fatherhood, relatively late in life, helps to account for his interest not just in education but in the malodorous minutiae of child care, evident especially in *Gargantua*. His eulogy of marriage in the *Tiers Livre* was no mere theoretical contribution to the heated Reformation controversy on the subject.

We may also surmise that his association with Jean du Bellay and his brother Guillaume, soldier and statesman, awoke Rabelais's interest in the world outside the professional domains of law and medicine, which had provided the background to *Pantagruel*. Both *Gargantua* and the *Quart Livre* bespeak a lively concern with high politics and frequently echo the political and diplomatic stance of his patrons. Rabelais's gossipy letters from Rome, three of which survive, also reflect the fascinations of public life. Even the *Tiers Livre*, which takes place in a private intellectual world rather than on the public stage, begins with a recipe for humane colonization, doubtless inspired by Guillaume du Bellay's operations as viceroy for the French crown in Piedmont from 1538 until his death in January 1543. Rabelais was at his side for at least two of those years, and makes several touching allusions to his patron's noble death in both the *Tiers Livre* and the *Quart Livre*. There is evidence that Rabelais published a book on Guillaume du Bellay's military career, though both the Latin original and the French translation, published in 1542, are now lost.

It was also in 1542, during a period of comparative stability in his life and in that of the kingdom (France was never far from a major war with the Emperor Charles V during Rabelais's adult life) that he published with François Juste revised editions of both *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua*. These are the versions usually reprinted nowadays. Although Rabelais made some apparently conciliatory changes, such as removing all specific reference to the Sorbonne, the books were condemned by the Faculty in a list of censured books published in 1545. Around this time Rabelais was attacked in print both by orthodox Catholics and by Calvin; he replied in the Prologue to the 1548 *Quart Livre* and in a particularly exasperated passage of the 1552 *Quart Livre* (32).

By early 1546, when the *Tiers Livre* was published by the eminently respectable Parisian printer Chrestien Wechel, Rabelais had left France, in mysterious circumstances, for Metz, then an imperial city well beyond the jurisdiction of the Sorbonne. That his "exile" was not entirely voluntary is suggested by a surviving letter to Jean du Bellay in which Rabelais pleads for funds, complaining of his poverty despite adopting the most frugal lifestyle imaginable. It is unclear how long Rabelais remained in Metz, for we next hear of him in Rome with Jean du Bellay in June 1548. At some intervening point the Lyon printer Pierre de Tours had acquired and published

the manuscript of the first, unfinished *Quart Livre*, possibly without Rabelais's permission.

An interesting document to emerge from Rabelais's third and last stay in Rome is *La Sciomachie* [*The Mock Battle*], a published "letter" by Rabelais describing the lavish entertainment presented by Jean du Bellay to celebrate the birth of Henry II's second son. It was the kind of thing ambassadors were expected to do—at their own expense—to maintain their nation's prestige abroad. The elaborate combat, with accompanying bullfights, comedy acts and fireworks, was to have been preceded by a mock naval battle on the Tiber, but this was canceled owing to an unexpected flood tide. But after the battle a banquet of truly Gargantuan proportions lasted well into the night. Rabelais based his account partly on an Italian news report of the event, though clearly he was also an eye-witness. The journalistic style—flatter the patron, cite all the names, include every detail—makes his account duller than it should be.

Such official duties did not prevent Rabelais from working on his final book, the *Quart Livre*, which appeared in its definitive form at Paris in January 1552. Unlike the *Tiers Livre*, this book reflects Rabelais's position in public life, with its discussion of the contemporary political scene, and particularly France's current dispute with the papacy which seemed about to result in war. Rabelais's movements around this time are as hard to follow as ever, though we do know from the epistle prefixed to the new *Quart Livre* that he resided for a while with the convalescent Jean du Bellay at Saint-Maur-les-Fossés. It was there and in Paris that Rabelais made contact with the new patron to whose protection the *Quart Livre* was entrusted, Cardinal Odet de Chastillon. This new Maecenas may have helped Rabelais obtain two benefices, in January 1551, at Meudon near Paris, and at St. Christophe-du-Jambet in Anjou. There is no evidence that he resided in either, though some French writers regularly call him the "curé de Meudon," and a statue was erected there in 1887. If these livings, presumably farmed out to some underpaid hireling, gave the ageing and perhaps ailing Rabelais some financial stability, it lasted only two years, as he resigned them both in January 1553, a few months before his death. No reliable record exists of his death or burial, but a number of "famous last words" are attributed to him: "Tirez le rideau, la farce est jouée"; "Je m'en vais chercher un grand Peut-être" [Ring down the curtain, the farce is over; I am off to seek

a great Perhaps]. These utterances belong of course to the legendary free-thinking Rabelais rather than to the sober Evangelical Christian.

The fluctuating scenes of Rabelais's life are echoed in the fluctuating form and content of his books. But if we must impose unity on his diversity, there are two elements—one formal, the other thematic—that recur and develop throughout his literary career. It is convenient to describe the characteristic form of his books as an absence of form, but the element of parody, of playing with established genres and exposing their arbitrary logic, is observable from the beginning. *Pantagruel*, the burlesque epic, is succeeded by *Gargantua*, the satirical romance; the *Tiers Livre*, with its mock eulogies and abusive rhetoric, resembles a philosophical dialogue gone wrong, while the *Quart Livre*, with its impossibly epic voyage and incredible adventures, returns to full-blown parody of at least three different genres. Secondly, amid Rabelais's multitudinous interests and concerns, one constant is the strain of Evangelism, tinged with Stoicism, that is lightly sketched in *Pantagruel* and comes to a satisfying maturity only in the last chapters of the *Quart Livre*.

So much for scholarly analysis: a third and overriding constant, which has assured Rabelais's place in the affections of the public, is that he continues to make us laugh.



# 2

## Pantagruel

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In 1532 Franciscus Rabelaesus Medicus had three learned editions published by the famous Lyon house of Gryphius: the second volume of the medical letters of his Ferrarese colleague Manardi, some books of Hippocrates and Galen, and—an exciting find—a surviving example of an ancient Roman will (later, alas, proven to be a forgery). At about the same time, someone apparently called Alcofrybas Nasier published a mock-epic with an arresting title, *Les horribles et espouventables faictz et prouesses du tresrenommé Pantagruel, Roy des Dipsodes, filz du grand geant Gargantua*. The public already knew Gargantua, gigantic hero of a series of cheaply-printed comic books going the rounds in Lyon, but this was the first they had heard of his “most renowned” son Pantagruel, king of the Dipsodes, and his “horrific and fearsome deeds and feats.” It was also the first appearance in print of his chronicler, and few would have associated the anagrammatic Nasier with the learned physician of the Hôtel Dieu, the principal public hospital in Lyon. The content of the book hints at its author’s profession, though in fact Rabelais says less about doctoring in *Pantagruel* than in the later books. Perhaps, as a relative newcomer, he felt unqualified to indulge in the professional humor of the old hand.

In fact, if any one profession attracts our attention in *Pantagruel*, it is the law, an earlier enthusiasm of Rabelais and one that dominated his circle of extra-monastic friends. There is a long satirical tradition of depicting lawyers as rapacious crooks, prepared to sell their eloquence to the highest bidder with scant regard for justice. Although this theme is exploited in Rabelaisian works, especially in the *Chats Fourrez* [Furry Fatcats] episode in the *Cinquiesme Livre*, *Pantagruel* deals with more strictly contemporary concerns. In parallel with Erasmus, pioneering a philological approach to the Scriptures, humanist scholars such as Budé and Tiraqueau were struggling to re-

store the purity of Roman law. It had been befouled, so they claimed, by the glosses of the medieval commentators, like Bartolo of Sassoferrato and Accursius who are vilified in chapters 5 and 10 of *Pantagruel*. The obfuscations of the unenlightened legal hacks are satirized throughout the first part of the book, especially in the catalogue of St. Victor's library (7) and in the inarticulate lawsuit between Baisecul and Humevesne (10-13). Is the book then addressed primarily to Tiraqueau and Bouchard and other like-minded friends, some of them mentioned in chapter 5? A hint is given by the appearance of the title page, for which the printer chose an elaborate frame previously used for legal textbooks, a private joke inaccessible to anyone but students of the law.

Other purchasers were no doubt attracted by the promise, also on the title page, of a continuation of the Gargantuan chronicles, whose simple humor greatly appealed to an audience only recently introduced to the joys of literacy. That the book found favor with a wide public is attested by scattered references in diaries and letters and especially by the number of pseudo-Rabelaisian works and pirate editions of *Pantagruel* itself. Clearly readers found the book as a whole sufficiently amusing to discount the parts of it that were unintelligible—except to an elite of scholars sharing Rabelais's Graeco-Latin culture and legal, theological, and medical learning. What, by contrast, did the scholars make of the book's ostentatious ribaldry? We must not assume that they had no sense of humor; many witty satires and coarse jests lie concealed among the moldering Latin tomes in our great libraries. What could be more intriguing and delightful for a learned specialist, off-duty for a while, than to apply his expertise to deciphering an episode in a farcical tale of giants?

Paradoxically, Rabelais's jests have survived the fate reserved for most humanist humor because of his decision to write in French. In his own time, of course, that decision restricted his readership and denied *Pantagruel* to foreign scholars well qualified to appreciate it; the book could not, for example, achieve the European fame of Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* or Teofilo Folengo's *Baldus*. Rabelais's decision may have been influenced by patriotism, at a time when the use of the vernacular was receiving official encouragement, especially in the field of the law; national dignity, in this period of centralizing monarchy, demanded that French become more than a vehicle for the purchase of groceries or the exchanging of insults. Rabelais also

draws on vernacular literature and native genres. Not only does he parody the pseudo-Arthurian romances, the *romans de chevalerie*, which provide the narrative framework for *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua*, but he also imports characters and idiolects from the contemporary French stage, with its satires, *soties* (fools' plays) and farces. These influences, more than his humanist learning, give Rabelais's first book its shape and its characteristic tone of ribald gaiety.

The title page promises "prouesses," feats of chivalry. But, as in all the best heroic fiction, these are postponed until after a recital of the hero's origins and training, designed—one might think—to enhance psychological verisimilitude. Rabelais improves on the traditional "enfances" scenario by tracing his hero's antecedents back almost to the Creation. Similarly, Pantagruel's bizarre birth and childhood capers are given fuller treatment than usual; only when he has received a grounding in all the arts of civilization is the giant permitted to fulfill his traditional role by going out and hitting someone! Thus a full "biography" of the giant provides a loose frame for the successive episodes, where the spotlight is turned from the protagonist to a series of dummies incarnating various kinds of foolishness. This is to become Rabelais's standard satirical technique: by choosing a loosely coherent plot-line—a life-story, an intellectual quest, a voyage—his works acquire a flexibility that will accommodate the most diverse and digressive episodes. No one reads Rabelais—surely—to enjoy the complexity of his plots.

Nor the subtlety of his characterization. The influence of the contemporary theater is visible in the procession of comic stereotypes who proceed to center stage, perform their turn, and disappear for ever. The popular stage type of the pedant, the "escumeur de latin," (frother of scummy Latin), for example, is thinly disguised here as the Escolier Limousin, the student from Hicksville (6). The funny foreigner, the comic litigant, the hoity-toity dame: all have their counterparts in farce from the medieval to Molière. However, the recurring characters who surround the hero belong to the Arthurian mode. Like the paladins of yore, each has a speciality to be exploited in time of need (24): Carpalim the swift, Eusthenes the strong, Epistemon the sage—and Panurge, a more complicated case.

The others' names, derived from Greek, encapsulate their qualities, but *panourgos* has ambiguous overtones of deceit and imposture as well as the etymological willingness to do anything and every-

thing. Panurge has no single literary ancestor. Homer's epic provides Ulysses, the crafty fixer to Achilles's noble brawler. The *romans de chevalerie* often feature tricksters, like Mawgis, the magician and sidekick of the *Quatre Fils Aymon*, who is mentioned by Rabelais in *Gargantua* (27). In *Pantagruel* Rabelais twice cites "Merlin Coccaie," the pseudonym of the Italian humorist Teofilo Folengo; in his mock epic *Baldus*, the eponymous hero employs, besides the usual officers, a cunning rogue called Cingar. But whereas Cingar is a utilitarian figure designed to advance the plot, Panurge prolongs the native French tradition of the *farceur*, the student or criminal (the legendary François Villon filled both roles) whose mission is mayhem, who bamboozles the Establishment for no better reason than that it entertains him—and his acquiescent audience. Panurge retains this anarchic quality almost to the last: in his final appearance as a knave, he dismisses the cost of a prank as a small price to pay for amusement (*Quart Livre*, 8). But by then Panurge, embogged in a mid-life crisis of staggering intensity, is no longer the carefree rogue of Rabelais's first book; all the more reason to savor his antics in *Pantagruel* as he surpasses his predecessors in riotous skulduggery.

Folengo had also provided a gigantic companion for Baldus, the aptly-named Fracasso [Smasher], but his role is taken in *Pantagruel* by the strongman Eusthenes. Rabelais's brain-wave was to elevate the giant from his habitual secondary position in fiction, as fearsome ogre or benign simpleton, and to give him the central role; but the break with tradition is more complete in *Gargantua*, since in the first book *Pantagruel* has to share the limelight with Panurge. In later books both characters undergo personality transplants that drive a wedge between them, but here they are partners in an archetypal literary double act, with *Pantagruel* the ideal straight man to Panurge's comic hustler. Though happily capable of provoking mirth in his own right, particularly by exploiting his size, the giant is available too as the repository of common sense when the need arises.

Gigantic comedy is just one of the brands of humor—more or less sophisticated, more or less successful—used by Rabelais in what is, for many readers, his most obviously jocular book. It is in *Pantagruel*, in particular, that the notorious Rabelaisian bawdiness is most evident, and we may pause a moment to consider the charge of obscenity so often leveled against Rabelais by critics ranging from the Sorbonne to Victorian vicars. It seems difficult to defend Rabelais's

childish delight in lavatorial humor and his demeaning of women in such episodes as Panurge's venereal recipe for the walls of Paris, accompanied by a lurid fable (15), or the rogue's humiliation of the great lady of Paris (21-22). Critics (Demerson and Duval, in particular) have allegorized these stories in various ways, though such specialized *apologiae* will scarcely touch the average reader. Rabelais's apparent obsession with the lower bodily functions has also been read (by Bakhtin, most notably) as the subversive response of the carnivalesque populace to the taboos of official seriousness, or—quite the opposite—as betokening the sinfulness of fallen humanity in those who take delight in such things. Already Rabelais has, in his cunning way, provoked a plethora of conflicting interpretations, to which we may add the historicist view that our era is more delicate than was his, when, for example, the king's erudite and saintly sister Marguerite could tell tales of hair-raising vulgarity in her *Heptaméron*. That crudity was endemic in medieval tales cannot be denied, though it is hard to see anything prurient about it; pornography and erotica are equally hard to find in Rabelais, unless one's tastes are particularly bizarre. On the rare occasions when Rabelais describes sex, it is briefly, as a gleeful frolic, "joyusement se frotans leur lard" [joyfully rubbing their bacon together, *Gargantua*, 3: none of your unsmiling gymnastics à la Henry Miller], and usually within wedlock, as a means of producing the all-important heir.

These points have their merits, but neglect the defense of "artistic justification" which has figured in obscenity trials on both sides of the Atlantic in recent years. Some of the most manifestly offensive passages, such as those mentioned above, or the story of Soeur Fessue in the *Tiers Livre* (19), are also masterpieces of comic storytelling; swept along by Rabelais's dialogue and his witty characterizations, we may forget the vulgar basis of the anecdote. For example, the fable of the lion and the fox (*Pantagruel* 15) turns upon the size of an old woman's *comment a nom* (a deliberately transparent euphemism); but surely realism, and the consequent charge of ageism as well as sexism, is exploded by the grotesquely precise sixteen and a half bales of moss that it swallows, and above all by the comedy of the talking animals (this being a fable). The lion and the fox cast off their traditional personae, as popularized by Machiavelli. Instead of oozing power and cunning, they are characterized, in their incongruous dialogue, as naive and well-meaning, the very picture of Christian chari-

ty; as the lion piously reminds the fox, it is our duty to help one another. Similarly, the great lady of Paris suffers for her pride the sort of undignified fate reserved for the unsympathetic victims of farce down the centuries. But the tapestry of Parisian life in the background and the parody of amorous literary dalliance reduce the trick itself to minor importance. Characteristically, Rabelais foregrounds dialogue and characterization at the expense of mere narrative interest.

Rabelais's unsavory reputation rests above all on his unusual frankness about those necessary human functions which held no terrors for him as a physician. His cheerful dispensation of feces and urine in gigantic quantities reflects his professional familiarity with those essential diagnostic tools. There is no question of prurient half-concealment, apart from the occasional comic euphemism: the lower body is described in the lowest register. In chapter 19 Panurge descends to a still more basic form of communication, in the Disputation by Signs with the Englishman Thaumaste. The irony here is that language conceals the vulgarity by its clumsiness; the effect of Panurge's rudeness to the visitor is blunted by the tedious prose that conceals a surprising number of recognizably coarse gestures. The meaning of gestures is often a matter of convention, but in some cases unmistakable messages can be conveyed and continue to be recognized across the centuries. It epitomizes fittingly the way in which Rabelais's "obscenity" has touched his readers, to their discomfort or their delight, ever since he took up his quill.

### §

Rabelais's debut in French was made in a tightly-printed little book whose Gothic typography is reminiscent not only of chivalric romances but of the old-fashioned books of law and theology that Rabelais was to satirize so often. Many contemporary books begin with a heavy-handed dedicatory epistle or preface, including the ritual *captatio benevolentiae*, a hunt for compliments in which the author seeks to convince the audience that the book's imperfections (if any) are due to lack of time rather than lack of talent. Rabelais, or his anagrammatic *alter ego* Alcofrybas Nasier, will have no truck with such defensive tactics. His Prologue is an unblushingly immodest paean of praise for his book, which outshines even that runaway success, the chronicles of Gargantua (not, of course, Rabelais's second

book, but the popular comic books circulating in Lyon at the time).

*Pantagruel's* literary genre is apparently established by an opening apostrophe to the chivalrous champions and gentlemen who have regaled their ladies with such stories—though only when they were “hors de propos,” unable to think of anything else; the courtly scene is instantly undermined. The author, posing here as diligent chronicler to the aristocracy, is a protean figure. At first his earnest protestations of veracity and hints of deeper meaning reflect standard literary self-promotion. But by the end he is threatening unbelievers with the most ghastly diseases in the hectoring tones of the quack doctor hustling his wares in the market-place, intriguing the crowd by alternate praise and abuse. Elsewhere Alcofrybas appears as a doddering pedant or as an alchemist, awarding himself the title “Abstracteur de Quinte Essence” [Abstractor of the Fifth Essence] in later editions.

The farcical Prologue sets the tone for the rest of the book but also encourages reflection. For example, Alcofrybas's claims that such books relieve suffering of mind and body, from toothache to syphilis, seem outrageous in detail, but in a broader sense connote the therapeutic qualities of laughter, as expounded more directly in the Prologue to the *Quart Livre* of 1548. Similarly, stray remarks alert us to the dangers of the times: the oft-quoted “Je le maintiens jusques au feu *exclusive*” [This I do maintain, up to but excluding the fire/stake], refers in context to the author's incredible boasts, but it has come to epitomize Rabelais's awareness of the growing perils of religious dissent. Those perils were more manifest in 1542, when Rabelais revised the text. For instance, he deleted an ill-advised comparison between belief in the Scriptures and in the *Chroniques*, but added a word of scorn for his intolerant critic Calvin: “prestatateurs” [predestinators] now appeared between the “abusers and seducers” who refused to welcome his revitalizing works.

The oral style of the Prologue, with its dizzying shifts of subject and style, is generated by an original dialogic art of which Rabelais is already a master. It might therefore seem disappointing that the opening chapters of the book embark on a subject of startling conventionality, relating the antecedents, birth and childhood of the hero. But at once Rabelais embellishes these narrative banalities with picturesque detail and extravagant irony, establishing norms of abnormality. In chapter 1 the meticulous chronicler of the Prologue returns to bury veracity under an avalanche of bogus precision and

spurious science that is entirely undermined by the very last sentence ("And if you don't believe it, neither do I, quoth she").

It is noticeable how rapidly Rabelais resorts to his favorite device, enumeration, a rhetorical figure so static as to threaten the death of narration. Two superfluous roll-calls of grotesque figures, captured in all their comic vulnerability, remind us of a Bosch or a Breughel painting. The monstrous figures afflicted by elephantiasis after, ironically, eating the insignificant medlar, are made comic by hyperbole; the poor creatures tormented by thirst (chapter 2) become a mere excuse for the contrived etymology of the giant's name. The formal enumeration of Pantagruel's outsize ancestors has a veneer of relevance, but since it includes giants from every conceivable source, scriptural, mythological, literary, and fanciful (the last few belong to Rabelais's scabrous imagination), it simply reminds us that giants are to be found in nearly every culture—though usually as villains. Looking at his forebears, we see that Pantagruel's cheerfulness is far from atavistic. Amid these comic rigmaroles, it is startling to stumble on a very precise note of Evangelical humility. The giant Hurtalet, whose survival of the Flood Rabelais actually based on a Hebrew tale, was responsible for saving Noah's Ark, "*après Dieu*" [after God]; it is a foretaste of the synergistic theology expounded by Rabelais, notably in the altogether more elaborate storm scene of the *Quart Livre* (18–24).

In the chivalric romances, which provided some of Pantagruel's ancestors, the hero was traditionally born in some bizarre or miraculous way, amid strange portents. The Gargantua of the *Chroniques*, for example, was made by Merlin the magician from whale bones, blood, and nail-parings. Pantagruel was engendered more conventionally, and the unprecedented drought at his birth had a topical and realistic ring, since France had been exceptionally dry for some years. But the drought also recalls the original Pentagruel, the dwarfish devil whose specialism was the power to induce thirst, a quality that the giant is to exploit on several occasions. The salty procession that precedes him from the womb is given a magical, almost prophetic resonance—deflated by the cackling midwife's revelation that "*s'il vit, il aura de l'eage*" [If he lives, he shall grow old].

The potentially pathetic death of Pantagruel's mother in childbirth is undermined by Rabelais's first use of another characteristic comic tool, the self-revelatory monologue (3). Gargantua's rhetoric is



not improved by the first of Rabelais's unpoetic poems, but in any case this parody of a scholastic debate, with the giant torn between the proprieties of mourning and his delight in fatherhood, abounds in clichés and incongruities, not least in the grotesque endearments which impair the dignity of his "sophistical arguments." The tragic ironies of death and life cannot survive "my tender peggy, my cod-piece darling, my bob and hit, my slipshoe-lovie."

Gigantic humor predominates in the account of Pantagruel's childhood (4); Rabelais adds an element of parody by situating his extravagant tales amid genuine landmarks, like the "Giant's Trough" at Bourges. This interweaving of fantasy and reality is a favorite device of mock verisimilitude, on a par with the narrator's frequent appeals to the authority of "the ancient historiographers and poets." The same technique produces the story of the graffiti-ridden dolmen at Poitiers, the resort of idle students, erected by the indulgent Pantagruel on his educational tour (5). Pantagruel is the first recorded giant to attend one university, let alone nine, but we need not conclude that Rabelais did the same. The chapter abounds in topical references, most poignantly to the recent burning at Toulouse of the suspected Lutheran Jean de Caturce: another warning against overt dissent? The chapter is also rich in private jokes, as the giant passes through Rabelais's home territory, stays at his monastery, greets his friends—but avoids his medical faculty at Montpellier on the grounds that its alumni smell of suppositories. Pantagruel's final decision to study law at the humanist faculty at Bourges indicates where Rabelais's sympathies lay in the debate over Roman law.

These early chapters establish Rabelais's comic credentials, but his satiric bent is scarcely exercised, bar a few scattered digs at lawyers and theologians; he is finding his range. With the Limousin student in chapter 6 we encounter the more characteristic Rabelaisian mixture of slapstick and satire as, with the narrative marking time, a procession of ludicrous misfits begins to cross the stage. The student is the first of many to address us in a semi-comprehensible idiolect which exposes his foolishness. This type of comedy works in two stages, with the immediate theatrical humor of a strange-sounding jargon that fails to communicate being succeeded by a more intellectual literary amusement as we decipher and analyse its incongruities. The Escolier Limousin is an *escumeur de latin* [frother of scummy Latin], a well-known type in the farce, still going strong in Molière

(*Le Malade imaginaire*). But his speech is more than mere idiotic babble: we discover, after painstaking analysis, that all this fine language describes a very routine student day, visits to the brothel, tasty snacks and all. A satirical edge is added by the pretentious fool's account of his mechanical devotions, "submurmuring my horary pre-cules" [muttering my Hours]. For the first time the narrator draws an explicit conclusion, at the end of the episode: "Il nous convient parler selon le langage usité" [It becometh us to speak according to the common language]; he introduces the theme of communication and the Renaissance passion for semiology.

Throughout this book Rabelais exploits the deficiencies and frailties of language to provoke laughter: comic laughter at the ambiguity of a pun or the strangeness of a foreign tongue, or satiric laughter when the misuse of language exposes pretentiousness or delusion. He does not set out formally the linguistic theories on which these laughable confusions are based, though it is obvious that, on the age-old question as to whether language is natural or purely conventional, he inclines towards the latter. In the *Quart Livre* he was to extend the debate to include signs, portents and the language of divine revelation.

The language of signs, potentially a more dependable form of communication than words, has a part to play in *Pantagruel*. At the end of this episode, the student's psychological state is communicated, comically but unmistakably, by the loosening of his bowels. His outburst in his native patois also indicates his terror, but Pantagruel's comment: "A ceste heure parle tu naturellement" [Now thou speakest naturally], essentially reinforces the narrator's conclusion that communication is best served by using an *appropriate* register. The Limousin's mistake is to dignify with fine language a mere visit to the brothel; in loftier contexts, Rabelais himself was not averse to the Ciceronian style in French.

The episode of the Limousin reminds us that Rabelais moved in a bilingual culture and that playing with Latin was another kind of professional humor. This is one link between the Limousin and the library catalog of St. Victor's Abbey (7). The student's efforts to communicate were frustrated by an ill-digested and above all unnatural mixture of the two languages. Many of the library's books suffer from this defect in reverse: they are written in Latin with a large dose of the vernacular, despite the supposed gravity of their subjects.

Humanists loved to mock the debased medieval Latin of the theologians and lawyers who are the authors and, presumably, the readers of these memorable tomes. Rabelais goes further and questions their morals, hygiene, and sobriety, with *The Bibbings of the Tippling Bishops* and *The Fat Belly of the Presidents*. His titles often parody the symbolism of works of moral edification (*The Castle of Virtue*, etc.) with such gems as *The Codpiece of the Law* and *The Kettle of Magnanimity*. The form is audacious but apparently successful: who but Rabelais would have dared to transcribe a library catalog for our amusement, and to go on augmenting it, with a hundred extra titles added in the later editions? The chapter appears forbidding but, like all Rabelais's enumerations, it repays study; even a few titles, taken at random, reveal the breadth of Rabelais's comic technique. Urquhart's translation enters into the spirit of this merciless skit on medieval learning and education.

At first sight sanity is restored by Gargantua's letter to his son (8), where a dramatic change of tone ushers in a celebrated "hymn to the Renaissance." However, recent critics such as Brault, looking to preserve a somewhat un-Rabelaisian unity in the book, have pronounced the letter fraudulent, as much a parody as the library catalog; the clichés of the Middle Ages are succeeded by those of the Renaissance. This assumes that the clichés of the Renaissance were well enough established for them to be parodied; Rabelais's chapter is often cited in anthologies as an *early* example of the period's unusual penchant for self-congratulation. To the argument that Gargantua's Latinate style is as ludicrously ornate as that of the Limousin, it may be replied that the high style here is more appropriate to the context and the genre, an epistle of counsel rather than a squalid tale of debauchery.

There can be no certainty here, but if the letter is a hoax, it is a very elaborate way of making a single joke. It is quite characteristic of Rabelais to use a contrastive diptych to hammer home a satirical point; one could argue that this chapter represents the climax of Pantagruel's academic education, since in the next chapter the irruption of Panurge changes the course of the book forever. It is ironic, though, that Pantagruel takes up with the rogue immediately after receiving Gargantua's advice to "shun the conversation of those whom thou desirest not to resemble." Perhaps Pantagruel is following his father's more pious exhortation to "be serviceable to all thy neighbors, and love them as thyself"—however unworthy they may be.

An attractive hypothesis, supported by the curious fact that in the original edition two chapters are numbered 9, is that this letter was an afterthought, inserted at the last minute and thus poorly integrated both thematically and physically. This would bring it closer in time to the composition of *Gargantua*, where such set-pieces of rhetoric are more common, and where there can be little doubt of their humanist inspiration. Moreover, it is unlikely that Rabelais would use ironically such careful theological language in speaking of God the *plasmateur* [molder] of men's bodies, of Christ and of the Last Days; the discredited hypothesis of Rabelais the Lucianic mocker of religion would need to be revived to turn such phraseology into parody.

The letter's major themes may have had a peculiar importance to the historical François Rabelais. He had recently become a father for the first time, though his canonical status denied him the full process of wedlock; hence the opening eulogy of marriage and procreation. An excessive enthusiasm for humanist learning is equally understandable in one whose studies had been undertaken amid suspicion and hostility. In fact, the letter's exhaustive curriculum seems more likely to produce a bookworm than a prince, despite a last-gasp injunction to study chivalry, warfare, and the exercises of the field. But the moral dimension is covered by one of Rabelais's most celebrated epigrams: "Science sans conscience n'est que ruine de l'âme" [Knowledge without conscience is but the ruin of the soul]. That phrase, though derived from medieval church tradition, captures exactly the increasing practicality of the humanist enterprise.

Panurge's first appearance (9) is in its way as disconcerting as the letter. Nothing has prepared us for his entrance. Pantagruel's instant solicitude and recognition of Panurge's sterling qualities (he uses the well-tried "science" of physiognomy) are unreasonably deflected by the latter's replies, apparently as inappropriate as the Limousin's ridiculous jargon. Panurge's many languages expose the shortcomings of the word, or its superfluity, since Pantagruel has already recognized, by outward signs, the penury that Panurge describes in the tongues of the world, and some not of the world. The humor is primarily aural, and perhaps cumbersome by modern standards: are the sounds of Scots or Danish as comically barbaric as they seemed then? More sophisticated amusement may be had by likening the exchanges to a game whose outcome is already known but which the players

continue for the sake of the game itself. If we take the characters at their face value, Panurge knows at once that French is the appropriate language, but is content to control the exchanges and wait for the "right" question. The others play along, though of course they understand several of the languages, since they include Italian, classical Greek, and Ciceronian Latin. Thus the exchanges are reduced to a display of genial virtuosity, in which the playful atmosphere belies Panurge's increasingly anguished complaints; language and reality are once more at odds.

The same phenomenon pervades the lawsuit between Baisecul and Humevesne (Kissbreech and Suckfizzle). The episode, comprising four chapters (10-13) in later editions, was originally a single chapter, the second to be numbered 9. It could, logically, follow chapter 8, being a practical test of Pantagruel's education, which would make Panurge's display of languages the interloper. But since Rabelais himself never saw fit to revise the order, we must be content with a kind of oscillation between Pantagruel and Panurge as protagonist, however much that may offend the tidy-minded modern reader. Let us simply assume that Panurge is sleeping off his heavy dinner throughout the case.

The tone of the episode is itself hardly consistent. It begins (10) with a slashing attack upon the tardiness and incompetence of the lawyers, entrenched in their professional malpractices. But this is no traditional, generalized satire: too many actual practitioners (one or two recently deceased, admittedly) are named for there to be any doubt about Rabelais's desire to intervene in the contemporary debate and champion the progressive side represented by his real-life friend Briand Vallée, seigneur du Douhet. Pantagruel's humanist diatribe naturally stresses the importance of linguistic competence and humane learning, but Vallée's plea that the law should embody "équité evangelicque et philosophicque" [Evangelical and philosophical equity] adds an unexpected moral and theological dimension.

However, this moment of solemnity is instantly succeeded by another foray into the Land of Nonsense (11-13). Pantagruel himself restores the farcical atmosphere when, in an echo of the *Grandes Chroniques*, he threatens to revert to gigantic type and rip the litigants' heads off should they lie. We may thus be sure that the accounts given by the Seigneur *de* Baisecul and the Seigneur *de* Humevesne (Alcofrybas is particular about giving the nattering noblemen

their *particule*), will be true, even if we cannot understand them. There follow pages of gobbledegook which may be the layman's equivalent of the lawyer's arcane prolixity. Many readers feel that the episode is overlong, but it is hard to see how Rabelais could achieve the desired effect without three equally incomprehensible speeches. Not that everyone has found them incomprehensible: Rabelais's penchant for gibberish has always made him vulnerable to the really determined exegete, and eighteenth-century commentators identified the litigants here as Louise of Savoy, Francis I's mother, and the rebellious Constable of Bourbon—or, alternatively, as the lords of Guelders and Julliers, who were in dispute over their armorial bearings. The difficulty lies, of course, in the fact that the speeches make complete sense grammatically and none at all semantically. The only possible resolution is Pantagruel's equally nonsensical judgment.

Vital to the comedy of this episode is the presence of an audience of bemused onlookers, representing conventional wisdom. A leitmotif of *Pantagruel* is that the protagonists should be observed by an audience within the book, as well as by the reader. This device is normally used in fiction to condition the reader's response, but in *Pantagruel* it serves to expose the culpable incompetence of the fictional spectators who are, as often as not, the true target. While the laymen Baisecul and Humevesne come off with a certain dignity—despite their names—and are last seen departing in harmony and good humor, the pettifoggers who had so lamentably failed to make anything of the case are last seen being revived from their ecstatic trance with vinegar and rose-water and restored, ironically, to their “accustomed sense and understanding.”

The next ten chapters all feature Panurge and also depend to some extent on the presence of an audience, either admiring or disapproving, before whom the rogue can perform his tricks or display his eloquence. Rabelais tries out a series of contrasting narrative techniques, some of them developed in the later books. Disappointing exotica, for example, are to be a feature of the *Quart Livre*, but Rabelais had essayed the genre in Panurge's story of his escape from the Turks (14). What should be a harrowing yet gripping tale of suffering bravely borne becomes, in Panurge's telling, a farcical romp with himself as the master of ceremonies. The Turks, the implacably fearsome foe who routinely impale and eat their Christian captives, become obese, whimpering incompetents or sly, gluttonous dwarfs. This enables

Panurge to record a rare Christian triumph by a combination of his own incomparable brashness and divine intervention: his roaster falls asleep despite Panurge's ear-splitting prayers! This incongruous but theologically irreproachable tale mingles realism and fantasy in the (by now) familiar way. Rabelais's attempts at Turkish local color have been approved by the specialists, but the exotic setting is deliberately blighted by intrusions of the trivial and the trite. The dialogue lacks epic grandeur, to say the least, and the slaving dogs who provide the hero's final test of valor foreshadow the farcical fate of the noble lady in chapter 22.

Now that Panurge is provided with a past, however fragmentary and incredible, the story might move forward. Instead it defies chronology with a series of barely-connected anecdotes, epitomized by the transparently all-purpose title of chapter 16, "Des meurs et conditions de Panurge" [Of the qualities and conditions of Panurge]. Chapter 15 takes place "one day" as Pantagruel returns from a motiveless stroll; the desultory conversation includes a story embedded within the story, another fruitful technique for the later Rabelais. Thaumaste arrives "these same days" (18). Rather than advance the narrative, Rabelais gives an airing to characteristic devices and themes. Panurge's bizarre architectural fantasy (15) takes a celebrated piece of Ancient lore, Agesilaus's remark that the best walls are the stout hearts of the citizens, and renders it anatomically preposterous. Literal performance of proverbial wisdom was to be a great comic standby for Rabelais. Similarly, Panurge's championing of the mighty codpiece, that most Rabelaisian of fashion accessories, looks forward not only to Alcofrybas's claims (*Gargantua*, Prologue) to have published a book *On the Dignity of Codpieces*, stolen no doubt from Panurge, but also to the similar discussion in the *Tiers Livre* (7) which prefaces the debate over Panurge's marriage.

It is not that Rabelais was already planning his later books, but that certain themes had an irresistible comic attraction for him, and he was never averse to a little judicious recycling of his own and other peoples' jokes. Chapters 16 and 17, for instance, purloin material from countless medieval tales of knavery and fling them into one impossibly riotous sequence, held together by the slightly dazed presence of the narrator Alcofrybas. We are here in the lawless world of the carnival, as Panurge inflicts gratuitous and indiscriminate humiliation upon the righteous representatives of order, male and female, lay

and clerical. But carnival freedom has its limits: Rabelais carefully removed allusions to "theologians" in 1542, when it was no longer prudent—even in a book—to make the denizens of the Sorbonne vomit on the pavement.

Pantagruel is absent from these scenes, and his brusque reappearance, in the role of the modern Solomon, at the beginning of chapter 18, reinforces the rhythm of alternation between the protagonists. Halfway through the episode of Thaumaste (18–20), the giant voluntarily abdicates his central role to Panurge; by viewing Thaumaste's quest for enlightenment from their antithetical perspectives, we are invited to ponder once more the uncertainties of communication. On the one hand, Thaumaste and Pantagruel exchange dignified compliments, and confer profoundly on the prestige of signs, infinitely preferable, in the search for truth, to mere verbal pyrotechnics or sophistry (as practised, for example, by the Sorbonne). This exquisite courtesy is succeeded by Panurge's vulgar signs, which must be performed to be appreciated. Is Thaumaste the familiar other-worldly professor, too caught up in his esoteric ecstasies to cope with the reality of Panurge's universally recognizable obscenities? Worse, is Thaumaste, would-be exponent of suspect arts like astrology and alchemy (banned from the curriculum in chapter 8), a vainglorious impostor whose presumptuous desire for enlightenment through magical signs deservedly exposes him to humiliation? If so, he covers his disappointment well and resorts with good grace to the therapeutic pleasures of the bottle. An extra ounce of satire is once more added with the fictional audience of goggling scholars, theologians, doctors, and lawyers, who fail miserably to follow the debate, but suffer the fetid consequences of Thaumaste's uncontrolled mental rapture.

Two absurd sequels confirm Thaumaste's inconsequentiality and Panurge's triumph. First, the narrator refrains scrupulously from revealing to us Thaumaste's earth-shattering conclusions; he must not infringe copyright in the Englishman's forthcoming book, where Thaumaste will set down—in words, paradoxically enough—the inef-fable message of the signs. We are still waiting. Secondly, Panurge becomes, unexpectedly, a literary lion, which expands his scope for conquests among the groupies of Paris. This provides a neat enough transition to the "haulte dame de Paris," where farcical humiliation of the self-important coquette combines with parody of amorous



rhetoric and insipid literary courtship, whose clichés Panurge adapts to his overwhelming physical needs. But as in the best farce, our hero is nearly as unsympathetic as his victim; if the lady is a snobbish hypocrite who “cries out, but not too loud,” Panurge is exposed as a natural coward and makes the first of many hasty exits. It is indicative of the degraded atmosphere that one feels most sorry for the innocent bitch in heat who was dismembered to procure Panurge his frightful revenge.

It is as well that the martial trumpet sounds to end this unedifying episode. Gargantua's sudden translation to Fairyland precipitates, in an appropriately novelettish atmosphere, the transition from romance (a little tattered) to epic, from love to war. Aptly, at his country's call Pantagruel abandons his own Parisian mistress (of whom, strangely, we have heard nothing before), being reminded by Epistemon of Aeneas's desertion of Dido. But before the giant is quite free to pursue his heroic destiny, there is a further excursion into futile cryptography (24) as Panurge tries to decipher the lady's final message by every method known to humanism. Is there a parallel with Thaumaste's blinkered esoterism in that Panurge, the expert on deception, simply fails to look in the obvious place? The results are in any case disappointingly meagre, since the message is a simple rebus of the kind Rabelais was to condemn in *Gargantua* (9), and was not even his own invention. The message conveyed by the false diamond and the Hebrew quotation (“Dy, amant faulx, pourquoy me as tu laissée?” [Say, false lover, why hast thou forsaken me?]) is borrowed from an Italian story and was hardly worth the decipherment. Thus far, the semiological games have not borne much rewarding fruit.

Readers have often compared and contrasted the episodes concerning war in *Pantagruel* (24–29) and *Gargantua* (25–50), usually to the detriment of the former. It is apparently little more than a harum-scarum parody of the chivalric romances, whereas in *Gargantua* Rabelais comments soberly on contemporary warfare, strategy and tactics, on kingship and diplomacy, and makes obvious allusions to the international politics of the period. *Pantagruel* seems thin stuff intellectually, however comical its jumbling of epic, romance, and farce.

The story of a battle against three hundred giants led by King Anarche (a less transparent name than now) has obvious affinities with the tales of derring-do so popular with the French public

from Francis I downwards. More scholarly readers would enjoy the epic paraphernalia, such as the narrator's likening of Pantagruel's companions, each with his speciality, to the legendary heroes of Antiquity (24), or his invocation of the Muses before describing the battle (28). Less expected are the scattered allusions to the justice and necessity of the war, which culminate in Pantagruel's prayer before combat (29). Not only is his language pious and theologically precise, but his sentiments clash with the ambience of a battle against infidel giants who swear, as tradition demanded, by "Mahom" and "Golfarim." Pantagruel's prayer reflects the current distaste, amongst both Reformers and Evangelicals, for exhortations to holy war; it is worth recalling that Luther's original protest was against Indulgences sold to aid Pope Leo's proposed crusade. If Panurge demystified the Turks, Pantagruel deglamorizes the crusaders.

In this dense passage the giant's campaign is justified as a secular and defensive war against a wicked usurper, the sort of campaign that even Luther had been brought to accept by the Ottoman invasions of the 1520s. In this way man may co-operate to a modest extent in the working out of the divine plan, a synergistic theology that Rabelais was to expound more fully in *Gargantua* and especially in the storm episode of the *Quart Livre*. But there can be no question of usurping God's prerogative in matters of the faith, except in taking advantage of any victory He may grant to preach His word "purement, simplement et entierement." The last phrases of the prayer represent the high point of Rabelais's low-key Evangelical propaganda in this book. Pantagruel's piety is acknowledged by a voice from heaven intoning: "Hoc fac et vinces" [Do this and thou shalt prevail]. Rabelais conflates two phrases—Christ's words in Luke 10.28, and the divine approval bestowed on the Emperor Constantine—so apt and so prestigious as to banish all thoughts of parody.

In fact by now the reader of *Pantagruel* should be inured to these quicksilver transformations, the sermon juxtaposed to the farce, the grave to the whimsical. The real and the fictional worlds interpenetrate, reality shades into fantasy. A good example is the itinerary of Pantagruel's fleet (24), which follows for a while the Portuguese route to the Indies round the Cape of Good Hope, before disappearing into lands named Nothing or Nowhere. Their destination, *Utopie* [No Place], and Anarche's victims the Amaurotes [The Barely Visible] recall Thomas More's famous book, a more transparent allegori-

cal fiction, which also protests against the sort of chivalric bellicosity glorified in the romances and encouraged by Francis I and Henry VIII. More's Utopians allow only wars of self-defence or in support of beleaguered allies, such as Pantagruel is duty bound to undertake here. The deliberate echoes of a polemical allegory whose form and opinions were much admired in humanist circles suggest how Rabelais was encouraged to experiment with fiction as propaganda.

It is even possible to interpret Pantagruel's tactics and strategy, for all their farcical appearance, as exemplifications of a Morean or Erasmian program. Erasmus repeatedly urged that war, once it had been reluctantly undertaken, must be ended as quickly as possible, with the least bloodshed, and preferably by ruse and stratagem rather than by head-on assault. Grandgousier quotes Erasmus in *Gargantua* 29, but Pantagruel and Panurge already exemplify his principles, however grotesquely, throughout their campaign against the Dip-sodes, the "Thirsty Ones," natural prey of the thirst-provoking giant. Panurge's "ruse" using ropes and gunpowder disposes of Anarche's scouting party (25). Disinformation given to the prisoner, together with a box of dessicating drugs, sows confusion in the enemy's camp; it is compounded by sabotage wrought by the speedy Carpalim, a minor character enjoying his finest hour (28). Exemplary soldiering, but it is disconcertingly mingled with farce, as the characters' minds turn from military conquests to more mundane victories, namely, to sex and food. Their anticipation of enjoying the whores in Anarche's camp (a real enough phenomenon in sixteenth-century armies) is equaled only by their lip-smacking enjoyment of the feast provided by Carpalim, decidedly the hero of the hour (26).

The intrusion of comic physical needs into the epic context (Carpalim's hunting exploits have distant parallels in the *Aeneid*, for example) is epitomized by the twin trophies erected in chapter 27. Pantagruel's inscription, nobly phrased and lofty in sentiment, anticipates his solemn prayer before battle. He confesses that victory lies in God's hand, and implicitly rebuffs the triumphalism normally embodied in such commemorations. His final exhortation to hope through faith in the Lord is reinforced by his subsequent advice to the terrified prisoner (28); the giant's celebration of victory has deep theological resonance. Panurge's visual and verbal parody of his master's work restores comic gaiety to the scene, and Rabelais indulges in a joyful display of his versifying versatility, using the same

rhyiming sounds to convey a very different message. Celebration of victory over physical necessity provides a human counterpoint to the giant's ideals.

The climactic duel between Pantagruel and the champion of evil, Loupgarou, is enlivened by a similar hodge-podge of genres. It is prepared by the farcical destruction of Anarche's camp by fire—and by liquid (28). Pantagruel's uncontrollable urination, brought on by another ruse of Panurge, revives a traditional gigantic pleasantry, sufficiently side-splitting to be repeated—twice—in *Gargantua*. But it is here dignified by mythological allusions of high calibre: Deucalion's flood, Ulysses's persecution by Poseidon, Aeneas's rescue of Anchises (from the *fire* of Troy, admittedly). Small wonder that the narrator requires the Muses to help him tell his tale, though apparently a jar of fine wine might also do the trick.

The single combat (29), whose distant ancestor is that between Aeneas and Turnus in the *Aeneid*, is akin to earlier confrontations between hero and dupe, with the usual chattering audience looking on. Like most stereotyped villains of fiction, the arrogant Loupgarou has the advantage in size and strength and, as the law of suspense demands, he almost prevails. Fortunately divine protection is in the end a match for diabolical magic, as Pantagruel takes the opportunities he is granted. In this contest Good does not triumph by chivalry, the skillful lance, or the elegant sword; outweaponed by his adversary, Pantagruel resorts to foul blows and ends the match with a mighty kick to the belly. His massacre of the remaining giants, using Loupgarou's body as a club, shows scant respect for a fallen foe. This scrambling, shambling brawl is a far cry from the ritual warfare of the epic, where bloodshed is just another Olympic sport. But realism is undermined by farce and the whole episode, punctuated by comic byplay from the audience, ends in bathos as Loupgarou (deceased) claims his final victims, a few burlesque animals squashed by his descending body.

Epistemon's descent to the Underworld and resurrection (30) continue the convulsion of genres. His resurrection was at one time thought (by Lefranc) to parody the miracles of Christ, but the incident has a close model in a chivalric romance, the *Quatre filz Aymon*, and the surgical details of Panurge's cure recall the quack doctor who threatened and cajoled us in the Prologue, rather than holy writ. A descent to the Underworld is of course an essential feature of the

*Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*. But whereas those celebrated episodes featured the hero himself, in quest of prophetic reassurance, in *Pantagruel* it is a minor character who reports back on scenes more reminiscent of Lucian's *Menippus* and *Dialogues of the Dead*, where despised philosophers posthumously lord it over the mighty of this world. Rabelais's inclusion, in this universal role-reversal, of such characteristic French *farceurs* as Pierre Pathelin, François Villon, and the jester Triboulet recalls also the Carnival tradition of a world temporarily upside down; more seriously but more distantly, the exaltation of the humble evokes the Sermon on the Mount.

Like the opening enumeration of Pantagruel's gigantic ancestors, Epistemon's remarkable catalog of the damned draws on several traditions: the Knights of the Round Table jostle their ancestors from Greek mythology; ancient conquerors mingle with their equally aggressive and despotic descendants—seven carefully-chosen anti-French popes! Once more the fictional and the real worlds effortlessly interpenetrate. We can only guess at the appropriateness of the slavish tasks assigned to Rabelais's victims here; some are simple puns, but the rest seem just random humiliation for comic effect. At the end, a few satirical jabs at the papacy are perhaps complemented by the rather incongruous passage on usurers, who abounded in Rome. The humiliations inflicted by Panurge on the defeated Anarche (31) are a continuation of the Lucianic or carnivalesque theme, and contrast strikingly with the careful preservation of kingly dignity and legitimacy in *Gargantua*, where the rightful heir is restored to his absent and defeated father's throne. In *Pantagruel*, farcical uncrowning gets the last word.

Two puzzling episodes conclude the book: Alcofrybas's journey in Pantagruel's mouth, and the remarkable treatment of the giant's stomach disorder, perhaps brought on by Alcofrybas's unhygienic behavior on his journey. The episodes seem curiously irrelevant, even in so deliberately episodic a work, and look like mere page-fillers in the first edition of *Pantagruel*. On the other hand, the discovery of a new world, albeit inside Pantagruel (32), has overtones of the epic quest, a heroic theme mocked in the last chapter of *Pantagruel* and throughout the *Quart Livre*. Again, Lucian's *True History* included a similar journey inside a whale's mouth. Giant literature also offers several parallels, and this is an element of traditional humor not so far exploited in *Pantagruel*. Escape into a utopic world might even

provide a fitting conclusion, as in *Gargantua*; indeed, a few features of the Abbaye de Theleme—tennis courts, galleries—are to be found atop Pantagruel's teeth. But, ironically, the most notable feature of this "other world" is its ordinariness, with its cabbage-planters, plagues, and brigands. It may well illustrate, as Alcofrybas suggests, the old saying that one half of the world doesn't know how the other half lives (Rabelais always enjoys activating proverbs), but the narrator's tale implies that we would be disappointed if we did know. The most remarkable feature of Pantagruel's cure (33), setting aside another irresistibly comic urinary flood and the prophetic use of primitive bathyspheres, is the fact that for once the doctors get it right. Rarely does Rabelais's own profession escape so lightly.

The epilogue (34) reverts to the style of the Prologue. The huckster Alcofrybas has finally succumbed to the ravages of his vinous inspiration, but promises an enticing sequel, an exotic blend of romance, adventure-story, and even science-fiction. In the original version the book ended on the exhortation to forgive the author's imperfections, and recognize our own. In the 1534 edition, Rabelais added an interesting postscript which gives some hint of *Pantagruel's* reception. The reproaches attributed to the audience suggest that the learned humanist doctor had been charged with frivolity (*balivernes*), perhaps by more serious-minded colleagues. The obvious reply is that they should not have wasted their precious time reading his book. But the key passage takes up the increasingly familiar defence that the book is mere harmless entertainment, aimed at all good Pantagruelists, who live "en paix, joye, santé, faisans tousjours grande chere" [in peace, joy, health, making yourselves always merry]. The counterpart is a diatribe against the humorless hypocrites who apparently spend their days calumniating poor Alcofrybas, almost certainly an allusion to the Sorbonne's unsuccessful pursuit of *Pantagruel*.

The book can still arouse controversy: in recent years it has been read as a legist's satire, a demolition of learning, a condemnation of curiosity, a meditation on wisdom and folly, persuasion and conviction, an exercise in *epanorthosis* [self-correction], an allegory of the redemption. These readings all imply a rather negative earnestness; but for most readers the solemnity is still overpowered by the fun.

# 3

## Gargantua

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For the modern reader, *Gargantua* is Rabelais's least mysterious book. The structure is recognizable: a linear plot recounting chronologically the life of a single central character, with no intrusions by Panurge, as in *Pantagruel*, no brusque temporal shifts, as in the *Quart Livre*. The themes are familiar: who is not interested in education and war? Moreover, Rabelais speaks out on these topics in a series of set-piece chapters whose meaning cannot be mistaken: none of the hesitations we may feel in assessing Gargantua's educational programme for his son in *Pantagruel* 8, no ambiguous mock eulogies, as in the *Tiers Livre*. It is Rabelais's best-loved book, with its crackling good humor, centering around the unforgettable Frere Jan, and with its optimistic conclusion describing the humanist paradise of the Abbaye de Theleme.

It is perfectly possible, and legitimate, to reach these conclusions after a cursory reading of the book, which has done so much to ensure Rabelais's place, suitably bowdlerized, among the classics even of school literature. But (there is always a *but* with Rabelais) on closer scrutiny certainty begins to waver: our conclusions apply only to the obvious passages, and half the book, perhaps, must be set aside or forgotten. We underrate Rabelais if we reduce his narrative to the structural simplicity of the *Grandes Chroniques* and his ideas to humanist commonplaces. There are of course elements of the *Chroniques*: the names, the gigantic humor, the specific episode of the Bells of Notre Dame (17). There are allusions to humanist thought, and to the writings of Erasmus, in particular, on education and warfare. But Rabelais's extraordinary originality was to bring these disparate sources into creative collision to produce an unrecognizable and inimitable new genre; his achievement is best measured by comparing his fiction with these increasingly distant models.

It is not hard to point to disruptive elements in *Gargantua*. While

in broad terms the narrative follows the developing career of the gigantic hero, certain aspects are unexpectedly foregrounded at the expense of others: four chapters (3-6) on his mother's pregnancy, and no less than seven (7-13) on his pre-school antics. These stages in the heroic progress are usually dispatched relatively rapidly. It is perhaps understandable that two versions of Gargantua's education are required, to emphasize the satirical contrast, but they are separated, or linked, by the episode of Janotus de Bragmardo, which takes us back into the Parisian world of *Pantagruel* and away from the essentially Tourangeau atmosphere of *Gargantua*. The educational theory itself is presented less as a carefully arranged curriculum paper than as a practical demonstration, and yet it relies heavily on the theoretician's technique of enumeration.

In the chivalric romances, most space is naturally given to warfare, and the Picrocholine war in *Gargantua* seems to conform to type, occupying nearly half the book. But appearances are deceptive, as the Prologue has warned us: intrusive digressions on monasticism and pilgrimage are flimsily linked to the narrative, and above all the style is subject to disconcerting variations. Evangelism, humanism, chivalry, and fantasy mingle and collide: the pious protestations of Grandgousier (28-29), the sober humanist rhetoric of Gallet and Gargantua (31, 50), the realistic siege of Picrochole's stronghold (48) converge with Frere Jan's farcical massacre of a whole army (27), with Gargantua's gigantic demolition of a fortress (36), and with an armored monk hanging by his helmet from a tree (42). Is the Abbaye de Theleme, a refuge from persecution as well as a Renaissance palace, an entirely appropriate conclusion to the book? It is extraordinary that the book should end, not with the fairy-tale weddings of Theleme's inmates, who "lived happily ever after," but with the ambiguous Enigme (58) with its two equally possible interpretations. But then the book had begun with the impenetrable *Fanfreluches antidotées* (2), luring the eager exegete to his doom and getting the book off on absolutely the wrong foot.

This is not to say that the book defies interpretation. At one level it has a simple Christian and humanitarian message that is easily placed in its historical context. In November 1532 Rabelais had written to Erasmus to express his intellectual debt to the great Dutch humanist, and part of this debt is repaid in *Gargantua*. Amongst Erasmus's many interests, education and war occupied a prominent



place and they were topics on which he was quoted, imitated, and opposed throughout Christendom. His educational theory is expounded essentially in the *De pueris instituendis* [*On the Education of Children*] and the *Institutio principis christiani* [*The Education of a Christian Prince*]. The latter also contains a portrayal of the tyrant in which the lineaments of Rabelais's Picrochole are clearly visible, and its last chapter is an essay "On Starting War" which Rabelais illustrates almost to the letter. Erasmus's thoughts on politics and war appear in other less obvious places, such as the *Adages* and the *Colloquies*. The latter, first published in 1518 and much augmented in the 1520s, probably influenced the form as well as the content of Rabelais's satire. Erasmus's colloquies, originally conceived as a school handbook of conversational Latin, developed into one of the enduring comic masterpieces. Their dialogic method which, like Lucianic satire, allows complacent fools to reveal their own folly, and their targets, moral and theological, are both echoed in Rabelais's second book.

Like Rabelais, Erasmus had been a cloistered monk, and his former profession comes in for a satirical thrashing. Like Rabelais, he had observed the University of Paris in action, and reserves particular sarcasm for the Collège de Montaigu, as does Rabelais in *Gargantua* 37. The college's regent was the arch-reactionary Noël Béda, sometimes identified as the prototype of the ineffable Janotus de Bragmar-do (18-20). Erasmus's controversies with Béda and his fellow theologians of the Sorbonne were legendary for malice and ill-will on both sides; Rabelais's satire is scarcely any kinder. In the *Colloquies* Erasmus lets fly at the superstitious cult of saints, the veneration of relics, and the costly and useless institution of pilgrimage: readers of *Gargantua* will have no trouble in detecting parallels. It is not always a matter of direct influence, though that is discernible, for example in Grandgousier's letter to his son (29), but of Erasmus as representative of that Christian humanism which is manifest in so many pages of *Gargantua*.

Rabelais did not merely embrace the negative aspects of Erasmian satire; he espoused the humanist and Evangelical principles of which Erasmus may once again be considered the prime representative. The contentious theological implications of episodes such as the birth of Gargantua and the treatment of the pilgrims can be traced to Erasmian attitudes; the religious content of Gargantua's education under

Ponocrates derives from that veneration of the scriptures, as guide and safeguard of our spiritual and moral development, which is paramount in Erasmian pedagogy. In more secular areas, the rich heritage of classical scholarship, as epitomized by Erasmus's *Adages*, underpins many an episode, and Rabelais's partiality for proverbial wisdom as a source both of comedy and of enlightenment owes something to the world's biggest collection of proverbs.

Erasmian humanism was an international movement, and *Gargantua* sometimes reflects its supranational ideals. But it is also a book that breathes the spirit of France, and in particular of Rabelais's *patrie*, the fertile and prosperous Touraine, the "garden of France" (*Pantagruel* 9). It was at about this time that Rabelais became closely associated with the Du Bellay family, whose roots also lay in Touraine, and no doubt the plethora of local references in *Gargantua* was designed to entertain this privileged audience. But nostalgia too plays a part: Rabelais depicts in his fiction something of the values of the semi-feudal provincial France in which he grew up, but that he was now abandoning for the courts of the mighty. That rural France was, in any case, under threat from the rise of the towns and of the new moneyed classes who, as Rabelais was to hint in the *Quart Livre*, were ambitiously eyeing the privileges and the property of the old landed nobility. Thus Grandgousier is depicted less as a king of France (and still less as a Renaissance prince like Francis I) than as a country gentleman of the old school, who has entered into a social contract with his subjects (or tenants) and behaves towards them with a gentle paternalism that was becoming out of date in an age of autocratic, centralizing monarchy. Two passages in particular, associated with Grandgousier, may illustrate this unexpectedly lyrical and nostalgic vein; they are brief, but perhaps the closest that Rabelais came in any of his books to formal description of atmosphere in the modern style.

The first appears, abruptly, as a sequel to *Gargantua's* education, which concludes with a rare day off, spent in the countryside, surrounded by books on agriculture (24, end). The next chapter opens with an appropriately rustic evocation of the real world outside the schoolroom:

En cestuy temps, qui fut la saison de vendanges, au commencement de automne, les bergiers de la contrée estoient à garder les vines et empescher que les estourneaux ne mangeassent les

raisins. Onquel temps les fouaciers de Lerné passoient le grand quarroy, menans dix ou douze charges de fouaces à la ville. (25)

[At that time, which was the season of vintage, in the beginning of harvest, the country shepherds were set to keep the vines, and hinder the starlings from eating up the grapes. Then the cake-bakers of Lerné happened to pass the great crossroads, taking ten or twelve loads of cakes to the town.]

The indications of time and place are curious, since the previous chapter was set in Paris and described the daily routine of Gargantua without reference to season. In fact the scene evokes a timeless countryside at the most fruitful season, when the shepherds can forsake their normal duties for the less strenuous role of scarecrows. It would require local knowledge to identify Lerné as a hamlet southwest of Chinon, the "town" in question; without this identification, this is an archetypal rural scene, with its local specialities (the *fouaces* are a type of gingerbread) and its winding roads that intersect in the middle of nowhere. But the pastoral scene rapidly acquires moral significance, when this glimpse of Arcadia is submerged in the "great wars" that break out over those same cakes.

The second scene describes domestic bliss in the gigantic household:

Le vieux bon homme Grandgousier . . . après souper se chauffe les couilles à un beau, clair et grand feu, et, attendant graisler des châtaines, escript au foyer avec un baston bruslé d'un bout dont on escharbotte le feu, faisant à sa femme et famille de beaux contes du temps jadis. (28)

[The good old man Grandgousier . . . after supper warmeth his ballocks by a good, clear, great fire, and, waiting upon the broiling of some chestnuts, writes in the hearth with a stick burnt at one end wherewith they did stir up the fire, telling to his wife and household pleasant stories of times past.]

This touching simplicity, so far removed from the grandeur of Fontainebleau, evokes life as perceived by a child in the rustic farmhouse of La Devinière; the household, including servants, gathered round the focal point of the hearth, source of heat and light, is a microcosm of Grandgousier's paternalist rule. This world of tranquillity, too, is about to be shattered by the outbreak of war.

Such vignettes are rare in Rabelais. More often he captures atmosphere through his characters; in the case of the French peasant society, through the picturesque and earthy speech of the party guests (5), the shepherds, the pilgrims, and indeed Frere Jan. The abundance of real but obscure place-names, and the fleeting appearances of real people just traceable to the Chinonais in Rabelais's time, would mean nothing to all but Rabelais's intimates, but they contribute to the impression of a self-contained society at once familiar and fictitious. Thus this book more than the others has an undeniable sociological interest; Marxist critics used to find in it a paradigm of Ancien Régime class stratification. But to limit a comic fiction to its historical context is, of course, to diminish it. If *Gargantua* is less boisterous than *Pantagruel*, less esoteric than the *Tiers Livre*, less formally challenging than the *Quart Livre*, it must not be interpreted simply as an encyclopedic portrait of France in 1534.

### §

As noted in the introductory chapter, the Prologue to *Gargantua* warns against such univocal readings. More ink has been spilled over these few pages than over anything else Rabelais wrote, because they promise the key to his intentions, yet fail in the end to satisfy our human yearning for certainty. On the other hand, the Prologue cannot be faulted as a guide to the variegated tones of the book. The merry old scholar Alcofrybas draws us into a world where the syphilitic *verolez* occupy the same sentence as Plato, Socrates and Alcibiades; a book on the *Dignity of Codpieces* keeps company with the Scriptures and Homer's *Iliad*. At the end, like every Renaissance pedant, he undersells his book as a mere by-product of his leisure hours, thus inviting flattering rejoinders. But Alcofrybas develops this conventional disclaimer by harping on the theme of drinking, a leitmotif from the first words to the last. The ambivalence of wine, which made Noah insensible (Genesis 9) but inspired the Dionysian prophets, is less appreciated now than in Rabelais's time. Wine taken in moderation had medicinal and therapeutic qualities, well known to physicians, and its association with divine frenzy and inspired literature was familiar to humanist scholars. Thus to address a book to "Buveurs tresillustres" [Thrice-illustrious boozers] is not to limit its readership to the saloon bar; similarly, the poxy "Verolez" may be

as much under the influence of Charity as of Eros. What is clear is that Rabelais is not merely mocking his audience, as in the apostrophic opening of *Pantagruel*, but hinting already at ambiguities to come.

The role of Alcofrybas himself in this book contributes to the confusion of perspectives. In the first chapter, for example, allusions to the great moral commonplace of Fortune's wheel and, more directly, to the vital political and eschatological tradition of the transfer of the World Monarchy from one nation to another, are reduced to the trivially subjective level of the narrator's desire to be rich. Similarly in chapter 3, the panoply of the law is invoked to legitimize long pregnancies—and then to assuage the narrator's desire for lusty widows. Other examples of authorial intervention confirm that, unlike the participating narrator in *Pantagruel*, Alcofrybas here plays the more conventional role of audience's mentor and guide, except that his interruptions usually produce a laughably bathetic change of tone. His presence is particularly strong in the opening chapters, where the simple tale of the hero's birth and childhood is stretched to unimaginable lengths by the bumbling scholar's mania for detail. However, these digressions, frequently dismissed as peripheral, can be shown, like certain sections of *Pantagruel*, to reflect the scholarly preoccupations of Rabelais and his circle.

After the mock-prophecy of the *Fanfreluches antidotées* (2), we might expect the discussion of eleven-month pregnancies in chapter 3 to be equally farcical, with a string of bogus references and fantastical precedents. In fact, the erudition is generally sound and pertinent, being borrowed from Rabelais's lawyer friend Tiraqueau; even the reference in abbreviated Latin to seven-month pregnancies (*l. septimo ff. De stat. homi*) belongs to a relevant section of the lawbooks. Despite Alcofrybas's impolite application of all this law to his own desires, the question was of great importance in a period when litigation over the validity of marriage and the legitimacy of offspring often decided the destiny of great estates and even of kingdoms. Moreover, it involved a mixture of legal and medical learning tailor-made for Rabelais, who was in fact called upon a few years later to give his professional opinion on a case of this kind.

It is similarly tempting to dismiss chapters 9 and 10 as mere burlesque: could anyone take seriously a discussion of the meaning of the prince's colors, white and blue, backed up by sumptuous erudi-

tion spilling off the page in italics? Yet heraldry, in which colors play an important part, was much discussed at the court of Francis I, and Rabelais links with it the equally contemporary passion for emblems. Scholars connected these eloquent pictures (often accompanied by an explanatory caption) to the venerable hieroglyphs of the ancient Egyptians, regarded as belonging to an initiatory tradition stretching back to Moses. In chapter 9 Rabelais (or Alcofrybas) becomes uncharacteristically angry about the desecration of this hallowed tradition by court dandies. The equally jokeless chapter 10 makes an impassioned if somewhat rocky case for Rabelais's interpretation of the colors, another tradition sullied, he claims, by recent fashions. The narrator stops short when it comes to the meaning of blue, both because there was much less to say, and because it does not lend itself to the same type of argument by antithesis: what is the opposite of blue?

Remembering the hermeneutic debate that lies behind so much of Rabelais's writing, we cannot be sure that these ventures into the worlds of symbolism and exegesis are merely frivolous. There are also traces in these early chapters of the sympathetic magic ("white magic") that continued an ancient tradition by attributing a secret harmony to the natural world. The occult properties of colors and of stones are illustrated, for example, by the decoration of Gargantua's mighty codpiece with a huge emerald, signifying fertility. In the same chapter (8) his hatbadge (another fashionable accessory at the contemporary court) combines the propitiatory qualities of inspired language and emblematic representation. The giant's aspirations are expressed by means of a picture, described with proper Rabelaisian detail, of Plato's Androgyne, a powerful symbol of psychological equilibrium, and by the attached quotation of St. Paul's definition of Charity, who "seeketh not her own" (1 Corinthians 13.5). Gargantua, at peace with himself, will also incarnate ideal Christian love for his fellow-creatures.

Again, the naming of Gargantua (7) according to his father's first utterance (amazed by the little fellow's gaping gullet, he cries: "Que grand tu as!" [How big it is!]) appears quite farcical. But it probably alludes to the scriptural account of the birth of John the Baptist and to theories concerning the mystical significance of proper names, to which Rabelais was to return in the *Quart Livre* (37). Similarly, the birth of Gargantua through his mother's left ear, which can still raise

hoots of laughter, is accompanied by reflections on the nature of religious faith so controversial that Rabelais felt compelled to modify them in later editions. In the first edition he had accused the "Sorbonistes" to their faces of equating faith with credulity; in 1542 he excised the accusation, though he retained the implied Evangelical definition of faith as "trust in the promises of God," with tacit allusions to the faith of Sara and of the Virgin.

This last case is one of the few where Rabelais's message may truly be said to be concealed, requiring to be teased out with the aid of contemporary texts. But it would be misleading to limit a reading of the first dozen chapters of *Gargantua* to these passages of more or less serious scholarship, juxtaposed incongruously with farcical incidents. Rather more startling here is the portrayal of the young giant, which conveys an image of childhood, unsanitized and perverse, unique in literature. Pantagruel's boyhood was by comparison a model of gigantic and heroic routine: devour a cow here, dismember a bear there. Gargantua, despite his size, from which Rabelais squeezes the expected humor of disproportion (8), emerges as a child closer to the experience of human parents, including presumably his creator. Contrary, grubby, talkative, endlessly inquisitive, and a slave to physical sensation, he is as far as possible from the image of the ideal Renaissance prince. The portrait has a moral function, no doubt: it highlights the changes to be wrought by education. But this cannot account for Rabelais's delight in portraying the gulf between the world of adults and that of the pre-pubescent child, which led him, for example, to multiply in the final edition Gargantua's perverse activities (11), as the gigantic child innocently performs the impossible or ridiculous feats prohibited by the normative adult wisdom of proverbs. How to convince young Gargantua that he should not literally put the cart before the horse or fall between two stools? Infantile sexuality (11) and anal fixation (13) centuries before Freud: Rabelais, doctor and proud parent, indulges his talent for mingling observation and fantasy in this farcical *enfances Gargantua*.

The charming anecdote of Gargantua's hobbyhorses (12), where the two worlds collide, and the adults come off worse, needs no other justification, though we may admire Gargantua's princely common sense in not revealing his father's heavy weaponry to a potential enemy. But it is worth pausing on the notorious chapter 13, a prime candidate for the censor's scissors in days gone by. Even now the sto-

ry of Gargantua's toilet training, in which empirical enquiry is put to such extraordinary ends, has the power to shock as well as to amuse. It is legitimate to trot out again our defence (chapter 2) against the charge of obscenity; the poetic naiveté of the young giant parallels that of the lion and the fox in *Pantagruel* (15). The moralist will find here an illustration of unregenerate mankind's obsession with the things of earth (and worse), or of the need for the kindergarten; Erasmus recommended, precisely, that education be started between three and five, Gargantua's age here. But we must add to all this Rabelais's affectionate portrayal, couched in appropriate dialogue, of a confiding father-son relationship, his parody of erotic poetry, using the established forms of the epigram and the rondeau (graffiti that the earnest child commits to memory like so many nursery rhymes), and the surreal list of objects that the unknowing child submits to the fundamental test. Far from being mere schoolboy humor, or a threat to decent values, the episode has much of the charm and resonance of Rabelais's most rewarding chapters.

The first quarter of *Gargantua* hardly deserves the neglect it has suffered; it is understandable, however, that epitomists and hasty readers should prefer the clearer and cleaner lines of the next eleven chapters, where education in a more conventional sense takes over, and where the targets of Rabelais's amusement and indignation are apparently more obvious.

In the original edition, Rabelais specified that Gargantua's first tutor, Thubal Holoferne (a worldly barbarian persecutor, to judge by his name) was a theologian; in 1542 the term was replaced by "sophist," designating the despised hack philosopher of the Greeks. But since Rabelais did not excise many other revealing passages, including the whole episode of Janotus de Bragmardò, no one could have much doubt that Thubal, the incarnation of dusty and useless pedantry, represented the Paris Faculty of Theology, known for short as the Sorbonne. It does not really matter whether the educational system practised by Thubal and his successor Jobelin Bridé ("Blinkered Idiot") had any currency or any real connection with the teaching of the Faculty: Rabelais's satire is aimed elsewhere. The Sorbonne symbolizes the kind of reactionary obscurantism in matters of doctrine and observance that drove reformers to despair and created dangerous discontents that were to result all too soon in schism, as Rabelais records morosely in the *Quart Livre* (35). Chapter 14 is written more



in humor than in anger: the books that Gargantua studies so profitlessly for so long were already discredited in Rabelais's time. Such details as Gargantua's use of Gothic rather than humanist handwriting, in this pre-printing age, make it plain that the episode reflects the usual humanist rhetoric, which dismissed the preceding era as a Dark Age—lighted only by such comic events as Thubal's ignominious rhyming demise:

Et fut l'an mil quatre cens et vingt,  
De la verolle que luy vint.

[ 'Twas in the year of 1420,  
Of poxy sores in copious plenty.]

The burden of Rabelais's satire is borne by the episode of Janotus de Bragmardo (18–20), at first sight a somewhat superfluous reiteration of distaste for the outworn system. In fact it adds many new charges that do not apply to the relatively harmless Thubal and Jobelin, indicating Rabelais's support for Francis I in his current struggle with the Sorbonne, which had led him to exile Noël Bédard. Most revealing is chapter 20, where rage and despair drive Janotus, like many a Lucianic character before him, to speak more candidly than he realizes:

Raison (dist Janotus), nous n'en usons point ceans. Traistres malheureux, vous ne valez rien; la terre ne porte gens plus meschans que vous estes, je le sçay bien. Ne clochez pas devant les boyteux: j'ai exercé la meschanceté avecques vous. Par la ratte Dieu! je advertiray le Roy des enormes abus que sont forgez ceans et par voz mains et menez, et que je soye ladre s'il ne vous faict tous vifz brusler comme bougres, traistres, heretiques et seducteurs, ennemys de Dieu et de vertus!

[Reason? said Janotus. We use none of it here. Miserable traitors, you are not worth the hanging. The earth beareth not more arrant villains than you are. I know it well enough: halt not before the lame; I have practised wickedness with you. By God's rattle, I will inform the king of the enormous abuses that are forged here and carried underhand by you, and let me be a leper, if he do not burn you alive like bougres, traitors, heretics and seducers, enemies to God and virtue!]

This confession of treachery and fanaticism, added to the Deadly Sins of Envy, Avarice, and Anger that have brought about the dispute, and to the ignorance and materialism revealed by Janotus's "fine speech" (19), complete the caricature of an institution whose reform, with the king's blessing, seemed imminent. Had not Francis's own sister been a victim of its disapproval? In 1533 the Sorbonne had attempted to censor Marguerite de Navarre's spiritual poem *Le Miroir de l'âme pécheresse*. The fact that in 1542 Rabelais toned down, however slightly, his attacks on the Sorbonne, indicates that all had not gone as the humanists and Evangelicals hoped; if anything, the power of the Paris Faculty of Theology to censor books had increased, and the king, concerned by the growth of "heresy" in his domains, had not demurred.

These echoes of the politics of 1534 must not blind us to the episode's comic value. Janotus de Bragmardo ("Hayseed de Cock"), as the Faculty's finest orator, is another representative of the Dark Ages before the Renaissance dawn, but his speech is a set-piece borrowed from the theatrical repertoire. Like the Escolier Limousin in *Pantagruel* 6, he turns Latin from the language of sophisticated communication into a comic patois, though the technique here is closer to the book catalog of *Pantagruel* 7. Janotus's attempts to illustrate his theme with appropriate quotation, a desirable academic exercise at all times, suffer from a form of automatism. The mere mention of "prier," to beg, but also to pray, sets him off on the liturgy, and "Render unto Caesar" (Luke 20.25) is clearly the only Scripture he knows containing the magic word "Reddite," his mission being to seek the "return" of the bells of Notre Dame. When he launches into Latin of his own, by literally translating from French, the ludicrous effect is enhanced by his evident self-satisfaction. He gabbles a string of non-existent parts of speech based on the non-Latin root *clocha*: "Omnis clocha clochabilis, in clocherio clochando, clochans clochativo, clochare facit clochabiliter clochantes," and cries in triumph: "Ha, ha, ha, c'est parlé cela!" [Well said, well said!] His confidential asides, his attempts at bribery, his confessions of failure, his coughing (which gets more prolonged: "grrenhenhasch" must be spoken to be believed): all contribute to the classic portrait of the wheezy scholar who is out of his depth. So comical does he become, not least to Gargantua's servants who provide the usual fictional audience, that it requires the satirical stiffening of the next chapter for the Sorbonagre

to emerge as something more sinister than a buffoon.

In this episode Rabelais's dislike of Paris resurfaces. Not only should the king do something drastic about the Faculty of Theology, he should act against the idiotic, superstitious, and seditious people, already reviled in *Pantagruel* 7, who will run into the street to see a juggler or a seller of indulgences, but will ignore an Evangelical preacher (17). Some of these charges were not unfounded, as the later civil wars were to prove, though in Rabelais's frequent mockery of the Parisians there is also a hint of the envious provincial outsider. But such remarks would obviously go down well in Lyon, where his books first appeared. Not content with taking gigantic revenge, as another fatal flood of urine drowns 260,418 Parisians "beside the women and children," the narrator reproaches the king whose patience—and in the first edition, "stupidité"—makes France's neighbors gape with astonishment. Direct rebukes to his king being very rare in Rabelais's books, we must assume that the issue was important.

The Parisian interlude is a satirical development of its comic counterpart in the *Grandes Chroniques*, which also recounted the theft of the bells, and invented Gargantua's gigantic mare. Rabelais gets some innocent fun from her size in chapter 15. Her destruction of the forests en route for Paris contrives one of his silliest puns: "Je trouve beau ce" [I find pretty this], comments the ungrammatical Gargantua, thus naming the treeless province of Beauce. The giant is also responsible for the naming of Paris, having drowned the populace "Par rys," for a joke. Pure buffoonery, it seems: but is it more unlikely than that the city should have been founded by a descendant of the Trojan Paris? Contemporary chroniclers were apt to produce unconvincing etymologies to illuminate the dark places of history; Rabelais argues elsewhere (*Quart Livre* 37), quite seriously, that names are imposed arbitrarily or, in rare cases, by divine inspiration.

Ostensibly, Grandgousier sent his son to Paris to observe the educational system of the capital, but in fact the setting plays a minor role in the chapters (21–24) devoted to Gargantua's reformed education. As befits an Evangelical physician's prescription, the emphasis in these chapters is on health, physical, mental, and spiritual. The structure is that of classic satire: the old and the new, the bad and the good, are juxtaposed and contrasted in considerable detail. Despite appearances, chapters 21 and 22 do not simply repeat chapter 14, Gargantua's ordeal under Thubal Holoferne. Ponocrates' wish to see

the literally stultifying pedagogy of Thubal in action leads to a practical demonstration rather than a repetition of the core curriculum outlined in the previous episode. Here we actually see how the Deadly Sins of Sloth and Gluttony were encouraged by Thubal, who also taught Gargantua the art of sophisticated self-justification: lying in bed never harmed Pope Alexander (the notorious Roderigo Borgia!), and a good slosh of wine “eases the kidneys” (21). Mental inertia has rendered Gargantua inarticulate, bestial even, so that when his learning is put to the test, in time-honored fashion, by having him make a speech: “Il se print à plorer comme une vache et se cachoit le visaige de son bonnet, et ne fut possible de tirer de luy une parolle non plus qu’un pet d’un asne mort” (15) [He fell to crying like a cow, and cast down his face, hiding it with his cap, nor could they possibly draw one word from him, no more than a fart from a dead ass]. It took Thubal three pages to transform the bright, inquisitive, chattering child of chapter 13 into this oafish dunce. Perhaps more disturbing, Gargantua’s soul too was borne downwards: his “twenty-six or thirty masses” (21) per day indicate his spiritual torpor, “mumbling, nodding and doddling his head.” While chapter 21 uses standard satirical hyperbole, the form of chapter 22 is audacious: the list of childish games, which Rabelais and his translators all expanded, exploits typography to emphasize their massive futility. These are not the educational games recommended by Erasmus, nor the martial exercises practised by Gargantua in the next chapter—which are also enumerated at tedious length, but set out in paragraphs and thus designed to be read.

Ponocrates’s reformed curriculum (23–24), once his pupil is medically cured of Thubal’s madness, is short on theory and long on practice; we may tease out his principles, if we wish, from the practical contrasts between the two systems. They are obvious enough, from the early start to the pious evening prayers. The leitmotif is health: Ponocrates prescribes hygiene of body and soul and even, perhaps exaggeratedly, of language. When Gargantua proceeds to the necessary offices (accompanied by his reader, that no time be lost!), he is far removed, linguistically, from the ass-wiping antics of chapter 13: “Puis alloit ès lieux secrets, faire excretion des digestions naturelles” [Then went he into the secret places to make excretion of his natural digestions]. Contrast his early-morning exudations, from every orifice, under Thubal’s regime: “Puis fiantoit, pissoyt, rendoyt sa gorge,

rottoit, pettoyt, baisloyt, crachoyt, toussoyt, sangloutoyt, esternuoit et se morvoyt en archidiacre" (21) [Then he dunged, pist, spued, belched, farted, yawned, spitted, coughed, yexed, sneezed and snotted himself like an archdeacon]. It is equally noticeable that Rabelaisian banqueting has been temporarily suspended; the careful dietary prescriptions strike an incongruously modern note. The physician's care over hygiene, temperature and humidity remind us that, in an age of high infant mortality, precious royal children had no guarantee of immunity.

As for intellectual development: it can be objected that Gargantua still endures the monotonous rote-learning that the old system employed. Of course, the substance of his lessons is improved, particularly in the spiritual domain, where he is exposed directly to the inspirational texts of the scriptures. But cultivation of the memory was still prized in the Renaissance scholar, and was essential to the orator. Despite the advance of printing, the use of books as reference tools was slow to develop. Not every contemporary book, for example, includes that handy device, pagination. Gargantua has learned by heart the lessons of the previous day, a rather terrifying three straight hours of indoctrination. But the giant is encouraged to go further: "et y fondoit quelques cas practiques et concernens l'estat humain, lesquelz ilz estendoient aulcunes foyes jusques deux ou troys heures" (23) [And upon them he would ground some practical cases concerning the human condition, which they would develop sometimes for two or three hours]. This is the practical education of a prince: hence also the martial exercises that occupy the (very long) afternoons, and the on-site observations of civic life (24) that equip the future ruler with further useful knowledge and skills. As much as one day a month is allowed for frivolity, but even that is tempered by learning. It is not surprising that some readers have found this overstuffed pedagogic program hard to swallow: only a giant could survive it. The episode, like chapter 8 of *Pantagruel*, may be tinged with irony; another senile giant imposes an intolerable burden on his suffering son. It is certainly true that, unless the whole exercise is a gigantic spoof, there are precious few jokes to be found in it.

The same complaint could be made about some episodes in the Picrocholine war. Grandgousier's letter to his son (29), Ulrich Gallet's ultimatum (31), and Gargantua's oration to the defeated enemy (50) are apparently bereft of jokes, unless we take the chapters to be ironi-

cal: the letter as the quavering of a doddering coward, the ultimatum as the vaporings of a futile rhetorician, and the oration as idealistic froth unsupported by a single historical precedent. Erasmus accents resound in all these pieces: the desire to avoid war if it is humanly possible, the use of negotiation in good faith, the need for restraint on campaign and clemency in victory. But as the tale unfolds, it appears that human wickedness and folly, cooperating with the devil, cannot be deflected merely by noble ideals; reason and appeasement, as we too have cause to know, rarely succeed in averting war. Fortunately, God and Rabelais have ordained that Good shall be represented by a prince of gigantic brain as well as brawn, and Evil by an incompetent buffoon.

Thus, on one level King Picrochole ["Bitter Bile"] embodies a traditional Christian pessimism about human nature which, as Grandgousier says, will turn toward evil unless constantly guided by divine grace (29). But this limits the episode to a single ideological context; one might argue equally well that the identification of the evil king with France's great adversary, the Habsburg Emperor Charles V, strikes a note of political optimism, as the tyrant is swept away and subjected finally to clownish humiliation. This allegorical interpretation has, for once, solid evidence in its favor: there are deliberate allusions, in both Gallet's ultimatum and Gargantua's speech, to Charles's harsh treatment of Francis I after the latter's capture at Pavia in 1525. It is also conceivable that Picrochole, king of Lerné, represents the real-life *seigneur de Lerné*, Gaucher de Sainte-Marthe, who had been involved in a lawsuit in which Rabelais's father represented his opponents. But even this remarkable discovery, made in the local archives by Abel Lefranc, must not blind us to the complexity of Picrochole who is, ultimately, no one but himself, an amalgam of unkingly qualities. His arrogance and ambition liken him to the tyrant depicted in the abstract by Erasmus, and the moral lesson is reinforced by his entourage of jealous and foolish councillors, against whom Erasmus and Thomas More (and Machiavelli!) had also warned. They double as incompetent commanders: Toucquedillon's one stroke of generalship, for example, is to seize the peace-offering, five cartloads of cakes, to provision the citadel against a siege (32). Picrochole's tatterdemalion feudal army, incorporating levies of inferior vassals and waging war by plunder, evokes the ineffective medieval monarchy fast disappearing in this period of absolutism and centrali-

zation. But his gullibility and timidity, especially in the famous Council scene (33), turn him into a farcical puppet-king from the stage.

Rabelais contrives to make us laugh rather than shudder at the tyrant, and even at warfare, an unpromising source of all but the grimest kind of humor. The cartoon-like violence can scarcely be taken tragically, and the enemy are such men of straw that the outcome can never be in doubt. Even when, in the final battle, Gargantua is reduced to human size, he conducts an improbably successful siege, thanks to the idiocy of the defenders, who sally forth at the wrong moment, led by their laughably incompetent chief, and leave a vital spot unguarded (48). Earlier the comic atmosphere of the *Grandes Chroniques* had prevailed, as the giant demolished a fortress single-handedly and his mare contributed the penultimate specimen of that infallible rib-tickler, the flood of urine (36). An ironical variation on this stock gigantic humor, accessible only to initiates like the Du Bellays, is Rabelais's choice of ground for these "mighty wars." Battles, skirmishes, sieges, the deployment of enormous armies: all take place within a very few miles of Rabelais's country home at La Devinière which is, naturally enough, the base for Grandgousier's operations; here Lilliput collides with Brobdingnag. In a similarly bathetic vein, many colorful touches ensure that high politics amongst the royals become entangled with episodes of low comedy amongst the peasants, such as the recital of "defamatory epithets" by the cake-bakers, lovingly embellished in Urquhart's translation (25), or Gymnaste's comic rout of the staring clowns who make up Picrocholé's peasant army (34-35).

However, the focus of humor during the Picrocholine war is Frere Jan. Gargantua, the duly educated Christian prince, is no longer a source of easy laughs, but in Frere Jan Rabelais provides a more than adequate replacement. Before examining his comic contribution, we should pause to consider Frere Jan's motives, since they also illustrate the synergist theology outlined briefly in *Pantagruel* and fully developed in the *Quart Livre* (18-24). On hearing of the enemy's approach (27), the monks of Seuillé, with one heroic exception, take refuge in the chapter-house, stammering and mumbling ritual prayers of questionable efficacy. Frere Jan alone leaps into action, massacring thousands with sweeps of his battered cross. Leaving aside his casual brutality, rendered farcical by the sheer impossibility (and technical incomprehensibility) of the wounds he inflicts, are we in-

vited to applaud his action? It is instructive to observe Grandgousier's reaction to the same situation in the next chapter: he too decides that action must be taken, convoking his council (not something Picrochole had thought to do) and recalling his warrior son. But, significantly, his first thought is for God, whose counsel and aid he implores before all else. The precondition of Christian action is prayer, a lesson confirmed by Pantagruel in the *Quart Livre* (19). Frere Jan's thoughts are on the vine, rather than the divine, and although his heart is in the right place, we may fear for the health of his soul.

It is worthwhile to enter this caveat, since in other respects Frere Jan tends to bowl readers over with his selfless energy, good humor, and artless prattle. He is the most endearing of Rabelais's creations, with none of the shadows that fall across Panurge. He cheerfully accepts his limitations as a man of God: he knows his breviary off by heart, but is not always sure of the meaning of the Latin. Witness the atrocious pun in chapter 39, where he confuses the scriptural Jesse with the similar-sounding "J'ai soif" [I'm thirsty]. His mind is never far from a drink: would he be so keen to defend an abbey *without* a vineyard? He is an admirable foil to Gargantua in the curious digression into the world of monasticism (39–40) that marks one of the pauses in the war. He incarnates the ignorant gluttonous monk of medieval fiction and, perhaps, of Rabelais's own experience. But he is no parasite or social outcast, unlike the majority of his brethren—in Rabelais's version of them. It is useful to remember that Rabelais was far from impartial here, and was swimming with a tide that was very soon to engulf the English monasteries, dissolved by Henry VIII in 1535–1536. Henry's royal commissioners produced the required evidence of vice and sinfulness, but English society lost many centers of comfort and charity for the population at large. Gargantua's vision (40) of an ideal society in which all have their respective parts to play, to the exclusion of monks, did not win universal assent in his day.

There is probably less to be said in favor of those other parasites who flit in and out of the battle, the pilgrims. In his advice to them Grandgousier, having earlier (28) evoked the social contract between monarch and people, completes his portrait of social cohesion:

Allez vous en, pauvres gens, au nom de Dieu le createur, lequel vous soit en guide perpetuelle, et dorenavant ne soyez faciles à



ces otieux et inutiles voyages. Entretenez vos familles, travaillez, chascun en sa vocation, instruez vos enfans, et vivez comme vous enseigne le bon apoustre saint Paoul. (45)

[Go your ways, poor men, in the name of God the Creator, to whom I pray to guide you perpetually, and henceforward be not so ready to undertake these idle and unprofitable journeys. Look to your families, labor every man in his vocation, instruct your children, and live as the good apostle St. Paul instructeth you.]

If Grandgousier's rudimentary Evangelical vision seems more utopian than anything Thomas More envisaged, we can be grateful that Rabelais the amateur sociologist is always accompanied by Alcofrybas the consummate comic narrator. His pilgrims, however banal their moral function, are literally caught up in the gigantic humor and provide a delightful vignette of farcical misfortune bravely borne (38). Though a commonplace butt of Reformation satire, the pilgrims also belong to the world of the medieval *conte*, with its timorous cuckolds and lustful monks. In chapter 45 Frere Jan sums up the fate of the pilgrims and the accomplishments of his own profession in one of Rabelais's most memorable images: "Seulement l'ombre du clochier d'une abbaye est feconde" [The mere shadow of an abbey steeple is fruitful]. Throughout the war a similar blend of Evangelical wisdom, satire and buffoonery enables Rabelais to surpass both the triviality of the *Grandes Chroniques* and the stuffiness of the humanist treatise, whilst keeping a toehold in both.

Rabelais's inability to keep a straight face for long makes the Abbaye de Theleme episode (52-58), his most formal attempt at utopian writing, all the more peculiar. Unless we view the whole episode as a parody of fashionable utopianism, it is the longest sequence in Rabelais's books to be bereft of jokes, caricature, and even much in the way of satire—after the opening chapter. There a factitious link with the war is established, since the abbey is supposedly Frere Jan's reward for valor. As it turns out, this elegant and learned institution would be a little tame for him, and it is in fact Gargantua's creation. After making two appalling puns Frere Jan retires gracefully until the last chapter. His influence is felt at first, perhaps, in that Theleme starts life as an anti-monastery, where the pettiness and futility of monastic regulation are exposed to ridicule by the adoption of their opposites. But the abbey quickly takes on independent life,

as Rabelais sweeps us away to an elaborate Renaissance palace swirling with glamorously-clad courtiers enjoying the fruits of prosperity—and exploiting a network of toiling peasants, cry the Marxists! Neo-classical architecture, the latest fashions, hunting, tennis, and books: the ideal Renaissance court, as imagined by Baldassare Castiglione in his *Book of the Courtier* and as aspired to by Francis I in the Loire châteaux, is brought to life in all its sumptuousness. It is linked by antithesis to the rest of the book: not only is it a riposte to the abbey at Seuillé, but its refinement exposes the coarseness of the unregenerate court of Grandgousier, with its uncouth parties (5) and medieval garb (8). While it may be considered a fitting climax to the book's journey from the "Gothic shadows" to the sunlit Renaissance, the episode is sufficiently self-contained to have been published separately, in modern times; was it perhaps composed independently, and carelessly tacked on to *Gargantua* as an afterthought?

Even in this idyllic episode Rabelais, characteristically, finds ways to disconcert the reader. The most famous is the single rule of the abbey, which stands in contrast to the multitude of petty laws, statutes, and rules governing other monasteries: "Fay ce que voudras" (57) [Do what thou wilt]. Apart from the eccentric reading of this phrase as an echo of the black magicians' credo (see below, chapter 6), it has often caused great worry or delight because it looks like a prescription for anarchy—when divorced from its context. In the early editions it was not written in capitals on a separate line, as is usual now, and thus it was easier to see that the rule of freedom is restricted by a series of stiff conditions imposed on those it governs. Only people born and educated in the style of Gargantua himself, and thus bound by the rule of honor, are deemed capable of exercising this ultimate freedom which, as the practice in Theleme shows, demands the subordination of individual desire to the will of the community. This essentially Stoical theme will be developed in the *Tiers Livre* and the *Quart Livre*; thus Theleme, while rounding off *Gargantua*, prepares the ground, allusively, for the books that are to come.

There remain the allusions to persecution. The inscription (54) is a poem in the contemporary style, meaning that wordplay sometimes overwhelms sense. The antithetical structure is characteristic of Rabelaisian satire: the poem excludes the malign, the ignorant, and the ugly, and welcomes the noble, handsome, and joyous. Those proscribed include some of Rabelais's familiar targets, monks, hypo-

crites, lawyers; but amongst those to whom Theleme offers its hospitality are, surprisingly, Evangelical preachers. No mention of this group elsewhere in the episode; no sense that Theleme is in any way a "refuge and bastion" against the enemies of God's holy word. These two stanzas look very much like an afterthought.

This impression is reinforced by the Enigma in the last chapter (58), whose interpretation also casts an unexpected shadow across what should be a triumphant conclusion. The Enigma is rather crudely tacked on to the fairy-tale ending: "D'autant se entreaumoient ilz à la fin de leurs jours comme le premier de leurs nopces. Je ne veulx oublier vous describe un enigme . . ." (57) [And so they loved one another to the end of their days, as much as on their wedding day. I must not forget to set down a riddle . . .]. The enigmatic poem itself was originally written by the contemporary poet Melin de St. Gelais and, as Frere Jan correctly guesses, playfully described in apocalyptic terms a game of tennis; such literary exercises were common enough. But Rabelais added several lines of his own, imbued with scriptural references used to encourage the faithful to persevere; these changes allow Gargantua's less than cheerful interpretation of the puzzle.

The most convincing explanation of these disconcerting elements in the episode of Theleme is that Rabelais wished to comment, at the last moment, on the tension surrounding the two *Affaires des Placards*, which occurred in October 1534 and January 1535, when a group of extremists aroused royal suspicion against all reformist ideas. The prospect of indiscriminate persecution inspires Rabelais to provide a literary refuge for his right-thinking readers. However, with a final pirouette, he gives the last word to Frere Jan, and the good-humored atmosphere is precariously restored: "Et grand chere!" [Cheers!]

# 4

## Le Tiers Livre

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When Rabelais's first book in twelve years was published early in 1546, its appearance may have surprised faithful followers of Maistre Alcofrybas Nasier. The title promised a continuation of "the heroic deeds and sayings of the noble Pantagruel," and facetiously requested the gentle reader to refrain from laughter until the seventy-eighth book. But the title-page also bore the author's real name and profession, and was printed in roman and italic type rather than the Gothic letter used for the previous books. It came from the famous Parisian house of Chrestien Wechel, rather than from Lyon, and was protected by a royal Privilege, a primitive copyright document, valid for six years. We may conclude from all this that, despite the social unrest and religious turbulence that marked the last years of Francis I's reign, Rabelais was confident of his book's reception in the circles that mattered. The new work alludes to its predecessors' titles and characters, but tones down their outrageous and possibly subversive satire, reflecting Rabelais's entry into the contemporary Establishment.

The book was an instant success, with two further editions in 1546 and at least eight others in Rabelais's lifetime, but the uninitiated reader may feel disappointed, even disorientated, as the work unfolds. Without creating a fourth generation of giants (*Son of Pantagruel?*), Rabelais could hardly use the same biographical framework as in *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua*, and we quickly realize that the "deeds" promised in the title are to be few and far between. The opening chapter perfunctorily links the *Tiers Livre* to the end of *Pantagruel* by describing the colonization of Dipsodie, conquered in 1532. But after that the book remains static, the interest centering around the confrontation between two characters called Pantagruel and Panurge who are scarcely recognizable as the protagonists of the earlier book. The proportion of direct speech, already large in the

previous works, grows overwhelming, as the book becomes a dramatized debate rather than a chronicle of action; the absence of an identifiable villain, a successor to Anarche and Picrochole, is the surest indication of this unexpected departure from the narrative tradition.

The subject of the debate is not immediately obvious. Panurge's self-interested praise of debt (3-5) postpones the revelation that is to color the rest of the book: Panurge wishes to marry. The carefree rogue of 1532 is growing old with his creator, and wants to enlist with his former victims (the aging husbands who were traditional butts of medieval humor) on the understanding that he himself should not suffer the (unfailingy comic) indignity of becoming a cuckold. The book's movement is generated by Panurge's increasingly desperate efforts to reassure himself that he will be exempt, effortlessly and undeservedly, from the humiliating fate he had inflicted on so many others. The last chapter of *Pantagruel*, in its list of forthcoming events, had foretold that Panurge would be married, and cuckolded within a month; but Rabelais now finds it much more interesting to portray a pre-nuptial Panurge. It enables him to discuss not only the particular question of Panurge's somewhat discreditable desire to take a wife, but the whole complex and highly controversial question of marriage, and also the related topic of the nature and status of womankind. His previous forays into these fields had been limited essentially to the projection of bar-room stereotypes.

It is hard to exaggerate the importance of marriage in Reformation controversy; Henry VIII's solution to the problem of its indissolubility is but the most notorious example. It was not merely a question of matrimony's sociological role as the cement of society, though Rabelais's discussion of eleven-month pregnancies in *Gargantua* (3) already reflects the importance of legitimate wedlock in the transfer of power and wealth. The legal and theological ramifications of the topic were vast: nothing caused Erasmus more trouble and drew more censure upon him from orthodox theologians than his eulogy of marriage, *Encomium matrimonii*, published in 1519. He replied to vitriolic criticism from the Sorbonne and elsewhere with the *Christiani matrimonii institutio* [*The Institution of Christian Marriage*, 1526], dedicated with unforeseeable irony to Catherine of Aragon. Erasmus aroused ecclesiastical anger by apparently preferring marriage to celibacy, and by questioning the sacramental character of the institution, thus opening up the possibility of divorce and remarriage.

This had implications also for monks, who had taken vows of celibacy, and priests, who had taken the sacrament of holy orders. Similarly, opponents of Luther claimed that he had only raised his protest, rejected papal authority, and left his monastery because, consumed with lust, he could find no other way to assuage his passion for his Catherine than to marry her. Many of his clerical followers also took themselves wives, as if to demonstrate their rejection of Rome's authority.

This brings us close to Rabelais's own predicament. As a loyal son of the Church and a professed monk, he could not make a legitimate marriage with the mysterious woman, perhaps a widow (still more legal complications!), who bore him three children. Rabelais did the best he could by them, having the two survivors, François and Junie, formally legitimized by papal dispensation, a costly and time-consuming business. His interest in the legal side of marriage (hardly separable in fact from the theological, since it was acknowledged that matrimony lay primarily in the province of canon law) was also aroused by an argument between two of his closest friends, André Tiraqueau and Amaury Bouchard. Tiraqueau's learned book *De legibus connubialibus* [*On the Laws of Marriage*, 1513] contains in its early editions complimentary references to Rabelais which were expunged—in the 1546 edition, interestingly enough. This suggests that Rabelais sided with Bouchard, whose book, *On the Female Sex* (in Latin with a Greek title, 1522), is in part a Platonizing defence of women against the slights of Tiraqueau. The latter's reaction is important in that Rabelais has often been considered an anti-feminist; Tiraqueau, well-placed to know the truth, seems to have disagreed.

The rival lawyers' books also contributed to a revival of the ancient dispute over Womankind, the *Querelle des femmes*, which may have influenced Rabelais's choice of subject: being largely a literary and philosophical argument, it gave him a relatively uncontroversial theme, in those hazardous times. In the Middle Ages, the almost ritual anti-feminism of prose fiction was balanced by the respectful banalities of courtly love poetry. Late in the fifteenth century a mighty blow was struck for women by the Florentine scholar Marsilio Ficino, who translated and published the rediscovered works of Plato. In particular, his translation and commentary on Plato's treatise on Love, the *Symposium*, was greatly influential, both among Platonizing Christians, who compared its subject with Paul's eulogies of Charity, and among poets of love, who found it a fertile source of

imagery and conceit. In the 1540s, two French poets attached to the circle of Marguerite de Navarre, Antoine Héroët and Bertrandon de La Borderie, revived the *Querelle des femmes* with their contrasting poems, *La Parfaicte Amye* and *L'Amye de Cour*; the idealized woman of the first was brought down by the scheming courtesan of the second. It is interesting that the *Tiers Livre* is dedicated to the spirit of that excellent poetess and powerful exemplar of the capable woman, Queen Marguerite de Navarre. It is also tempting to identify Rabelais's soothsayer, Her Trippa (25), with another recent participant in the debate, Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, occult philosopher and author of the *De praecellentia sexus foemini* [*On the Pre-eminence of the Female Sex*, 1529], whose extravagant claims for womankind make one suspect a certain irony in an author who also wrote *On the Uncertainty and Vanity of All Learning!*

The frequent republication of such works suggests that in his third book Rabelais was jumping on a speeding bandwagon. But the debate on women and marriage also enables Rabelais to discuss issues that are still more profound. Panurge's dilemma and Pantagruel's advice define the limits of human action and free will, and the series of consultations raises epistemological questions: how far is it given to mankind to know the future, and how reliable is human intelligence as an interpreter of signs and hermetic language? Similar problems arise in the *Quart Livre*, where Rabelais provides more clear-cut answers.

Mocking narrative orthodoxy, as usual, Rabelais provides the answer to Panurge's dilemma at the outset. Pantagruel's wise advice tells him all that he needs to know:

N'estez vous asceuré de vostre vouloir? Le poinct principal y gist: tout le reste est fortuit, et dependent des fatales dispositions du ciel. (10)

[Are you not assured within yourself of what you have a mind to? The chief and main point of the whole matter lieth there. All the rest belongeth to fortune, and totally dependeth upon the fatal disposition of the heavens.]

Like the Stoical Thelemites, Pantagruel believes that our will alone is ours to control, and accepts the inscrutability and immutability of fortune, determined by a higher council of which humankind is but rarely given a glimpse. Pantagruel's advice effectively renders super-

fluous the series of consultations that follows. Had Panurge taken it, we should have been deprived of much laughter at his expense, as he seeks to twist to his own advantage words and portents which, though not conclusive, all point towards the disastrous outcome that Panurge so fears: he will be cuckolded, beaten, and robbed.

Of course, this Panurge is not the character whom we last saw in *Pantagruel* (30–31) triumphantly resurrecting Epistemon and arranging a suitable marriage for King Anarche. No longer the leader of the pack, the once-resourceful trickster retains only his golden tongue. His verbal ingenuity still enables him to turn black into white, but his gifts are now applied to self-preservation, or rather the preservation of his fading image of himself, rather than to providing amusement for himself and his master. If the old Panurge belonged to an ancient tradition of *farceurs* going back to the slaves in Roman comedy, the new character who bears his name is no stereotype, but a complex and evolving figure who incarnates much that is dark and intimidating in the human psyche. His gradual decline into melancholic madness is remorselessly unfolded.

By contrast, Pantagruel remains a relatively uncomplicated figure. Although his gigantic size is barely referred to, and is revived only fleetingly in the *Quart Livre*, his function as righter of the world's wrongs is merely transferred from the physical to the intellectual plane. Pantagruel incarnates stable, common-sensical wisdom as much as Panurge represents its opposite. In this book the relationship between the two is in a sense a more traditional one. They are now antagonistic rather than complementary, and the conflict between them should ensure that a clear moral viewpoint emerges: our sympathies lie with Pantagruel. But by a leap of the critical imagination, some readers (see Schwartz) identify Panurge's as the controlling voice in the book, by arguing that he is *covertly* aware of the weakness of his arguments, and is ironically and maliciously leading his serious-minded companions astray. An attractive hypothesis for the anarchist school, which allows Panurge to remain unchanged since *Pantagruel*, but denies Rabelais's artistic progress and depends upon making anachronistic assumptions.

Some justification for this reading might, however, be found in the book's structural similarity to *Pantagruel*. In the earlier book, a procession of dupes, many representing humorless intellectual or social authority, passed across the stage to be subjected to the teasing or



scorn of Panurge, directing the audience's laughter against them. Similarly, the *Tiers Livre* consists of a series of episodes, linked by Panurge's quest, which throw the spotlight in turn upon some representative of supposed truth, learning or wisdom; are these characters also caricatures? If so, the mature Rabelais was determined to make them less obviously foolish than the grotesques of his first book. The reactions of Panurge and his companions are horror, awe, anger, but rarely laughter. The physical characteristics of the consultants are, with one or two exceptions, only vaguely sketched, and their speech also lacks the risible peculiarities of their predecessors. The one character who reminds us of the empty eloquence of the Escolier Limousin, of Baisecul and Humevesne is—Panurge.

The *Tiers Livre* lacks the rollicking humor for which Rabelais's books had become famous: gigantic laughter, slapstick, bawdiness are subordinated to more subtle psychological and linguistic comedy. Satire too plays a reduced role. Although there are several episodes with theological resonance, only in the Raminagrobis episode (20–22) do we find that overt scorn for fossilized institutional religion that was so frequent a target in the earlier books. Rabelais's caution may be explained by Francis I's relapse into reaction towards the end of his life, and by the dwindling influence of the king's sister, Marguerite. Rabelais's patron, Jean du Bellay, was less powerful than his late brother Guillaume had been, and his reactionary rival, the Cardinal of Tournon, more often had the king's ear. Rabelais was able and willing to return to the attack in the *Quart Livre*, when French policy had changed; for the moment it was imprudent to venture too far, even against such traditional targets as grasping and materialist monks. Despite these precautions, the *Tiers Livre* joined *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua* on the Sorbonne's *Catalog of Censored Books* late in 1546, though for reasons unspecified.

## §

Rabelais's Prologue, the first written in his own name, betrays a fear that the new book will seem strange to his audience. At the end, he retells Lucian's story about the dusty reception that the Egyptians gave to King Ptolemy's attempt to please them by exhibiting a black camel and a parti-colored black and white slave. Rabelais is afraid that fear, anger, and mockery may greet his own offering, less be-

cause it is monstrous, perhaps, than because it is unexpected and irrelevant. The Prologue is curiously defensive throughout. In the opening section Rabelais evokes the strenuous activity of the French, currently fortifying their frontiers against an expected invasion by Charles V. He is sensitive to charges that this is hardly the time to be publishing comic books. His defense is that his role is to provide refreshment, and here the theme of therapeutic laughter is combined with the restorative qualities of wine; his book is a barrel into which all who wish may dip. But in an equally defensive aside, he denies any desire to coerce, advising all his thirsty critics—thirsty for blood?—simply to ignore his writings if they find them distasteful. This disingenuous point is reinforced by the now traditional diatribe against his enemies in the crude language of the marketplace. The Prologue ends with imprecations reminiscent of *Pantagruel*, as the good doctor wishes hellish disease upon his opponents!

Their crime is to have perversely misinterpreted Rabelais's writings—all his Prologues allude to exegetical problems—instead of approaching them in the spirit of Pantagruelism. Rabelais here deepens the definition of this estimable attitude. In the first book it had meant no more than “vivre en paix, joye, santé, faisans tousjours grande chere” [living in peace, joy, good health, making always merry: *Pantagruel*, 34]. Now the term applies to generosity of spirit, “moienant laquelle jamais en mauulvaise partie ne prendront choses quelconques ilz congnoistront sourdre de bon, franc et loyal courage” [by virtue whereof they will never take in evil part any thing that they know floweth from a good, free and loyal heart]. The giant himself takes magnanimity further, approaching a truly Stoical indifference, for example, in chapter 2 when he views Panurge's manic prodigality with untroubled tolerance. In the Prologue to the *Quart Livre*, Rabelais will marry joy and merriment to Stoical indifference in a final elucidation of the term.

A thematic review, of course, tells only half the story. The most memorable image of the Prologue, and one of Rabelais's artistic triumphs, is the portrait of the Cynic philosopher Diogenes. Identified by Erasmus as one of those unworldly Ancient philosophers who came closest to a knowledge of things divine, Diogenes was celebrated for his unconventionality and is thus a suitable patron of Rabelais's unprecedented new book. But his actions are ambiguous: his contribution to the warlike preparations of Corinth is to maltreat the

clay barrel in which he lives, to the point where it is almost broken. Are we to interpret this as a warning to the Corinthians? We may recall Agesilaus's maxim, so horribly deformed by Panurge in *Pantagruel* 15, that a city can have no surer fortification than the prowess and virtue of the inhabitants. It might appear unpatriotic to recall this at a time when fortresses seemed the answer to the national peril. Or is barrel-rolling simply the only contribution the artist can make at such a time? Certainly the form of this tale should arouse the desired laughter; in one of his most successful exploitations of enumeration, Rabelais evokes the whirlwind of Diogenes' agitation with a tongue-twisting frenzy of associative verbs, to parallel the frantic activity of the scurrying Corinthians. As so often with Rabelais's enumerations, the full effect can be obtained only by reading aloud.

The Prologue includes many of the comic, stylistic and thematic elements of its predecessors, and at first it seems that the narrative itself will continue in the same vein. For instance, in chapter 1, on the colonization of Dipsodie, it is clear that Rabelais has kept his taste for silly numbers, though in fact 9876543210 is a less than inspired example of the technique. He also recycles the comic use of the biblical formula "without the women and children," used earlier to multiply the victims of a flood of urine. But there are to be no farcical deaths here; on the contrary, the first chapter harps on the importance of procreation, a hint of the discussion to come. Rabelais ponders for the last time the fundamentals of statecraft and, not unexpectedly, produces a eulogy of monarchy, divinely instituted for the benefit of prince and people. It is possible that Pantagruel's ideal method of colonization owes something to the liberal regime established by Guillaume du Bellay as viceroy in Piedmont; certainly there is a rebuke to Machiavelli and his recent advocacy of repression in conquered states. Rabelais's Erasmian insistence upon mutual love and respect between governor and governed strikes an attractive but antediluvian note in the new age of *raison d'état*, power politics.

But the first chapter is a link with a past that is quickly forgotten. Panurge resurfaces in chapter 2, as castellan of Salmiguondin, which had been assigned to Alcofrybas in *Pantagruel* (32); the narrator yields it up without a murmur. Panurge has already spent three years' revenue in a fortnight, by throwing parties and, like the young Gargantua, performing literally such proverbial indiscretions as burn-

ing logs to sell the ashes, buying dear and selling cheap, and eating next year's seed-corn. At first sight Panurge is his old carefree self, and there is a bizarre similarity between his insouciance over the disposal of his worldly goods and the philosophical detachment that Rabelais attributes to his master. To the narrator's assertion that there is nothing under heaven worthy to move us, Panurge adds a scalding diatribe against good husbandry, which Marxists have read as a denunciation of bourgeois aspirations. The difference between master and man is that Panurge scorns the things of this world by squandering them on worldly pleasure, in imitation, so he claims, of the university and Parlement of Paris; this isolated satirical shaft is rapidly submerged in a welter of self-justification, the celebrated Praise of Debts (2-4).

The mock-panegyric or satirical eulogy was a well-established Renaissance genre, the game being to take some unpromising subject—a vice, a disease, an insect—and praise it to the skies. The most famous is Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*, which itself looks back to classical models such as Lucian's *Parasite* and *Fly*. Erasmus's work has more subtlety than any other, since the ambiguous personality of Folly, the speaker, introduces disconcerting shifts of perspective; at times she embodies an unearthly wisdom. A modern audience, familiar with a macroeconomic system that makes a virtue of debt, might similarly be inclined to accept at least part of Panurge's reasoning. Even Pantagruel's disapproval (5) does not necessarily disqualify the central thesis, that in a sense "debt makes the world go round." However, the windy extravagance of Panurge's oration, which takes up nearly three chapters and encompasses every branch of learning, puts us in mind of the eloquent fools of the earlier books. It also establishes the new character of Panurge as a resourceful but self-seeking dialectician.

His performance is nonetheless a stunning achievement. He finds analogies in mythology, history, the law, scripture, theology, moral science, and especially medicine; he uses all the tricks of the rhetorician's trade, restrictions, definitions, enumeration, exclamation, and the classic "rhetorical question." He runs the whole gamut of expression from humility, comparing himself to the hermit who exists on grass, to bombast, with indebtedness elevated to the guiding principle of the universe, the sublime soul that the Ancient philosophers sought in vain. The range of his reference is all-embracing, from the

macrocosm of the universe to the microcosm that is man, from ancient philosophy to modern medicine. For example, his human paradigm involves an extraordinarily detailed account of bodily exchanges, based upon contemporary physiology; the only thing missing is the circulatory system, unknown at the time. His final expatiation (4, end) upon procreation, which he depicts as a selfless loan to those yet unborn, unexpectedly recalls the first chapter and foreshadows the next phase. The argument is also curiously reminiscent of Gargantua's paternal pieties in *Pantagruel* 8. The most striking rhetorical device is Panurge's sublime use of antithesis: the apocalyptic vision of the world without debt is succeeded by the elegiac picture of its opposite, in a vein that recalls Erasmus at his most lyrical on the delights of peace. Rabelais's artistry has Panurge teetering several times on the brink of the truth, only to back away. His evocation of the theological virtues and of mutual interdependence degenerates into hyperbole, as he affects to see no intermediate stage between Christian conduct and diabolical villainy (3); his vision of the reign of Charity dissolves into a nightmare of superstition (4).

If such paradoxes were not enough to alert us to the shakiness of Panurge's argumentation, the attitude of *Pantagruel* leaves little doubt. Panurge is encouraged to continue by his master's silence, until even the saintly giant can restrain himself no longer. In chapter 5 he gives a measured response, at first, with synergistic overtones, but when Panurge continues to prattle, resorting to infantile punning on "paix" and "pets" [peace/farts], *Pantagruel* is obliged to repeat, brusquely, his command to drop the subject. The giant hints, however, that Panurge's arguments could be given an ideal Christian slant, if the debt were to be a debt of love. "Rien à personne ne doibvez, fors amours et dilection mutuelle" [Owe nothing to anyone, save love and mutual affection], said St. Paul (Romans 13.8), echoing Christ's second commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Panurge, we are to learn, has got no further than the love of self, *philautia*, which is to produce his downfall.

*Pantagruel* and Panurge are now permanently at loggerheads. When Panurge appears in a bizarre costume (7), an affronted *Pantagruel* is unappeased by yet another bout of punning self-justification from the playacting Panurge. The giant's response weaves together related concerns: Panurge looks more like a monk, vowed to celibacy, than a lover, and this willful eccentricity hints at the aberrance of

his motives for marriage. Pantagruel, with his exposition (6) of the Mosaic law on procreation and remarriage (discouraged at present by canon law), thinks at first that Panurge is aiming to produce the all-important heir. But we discover (9) that Panurge, advancing in years and none too nimble, now fears that he will catch a beating from an outraged husband, or the pox from a careless wife; yet he still burns with lust, which is apparently the significance of the comically expensive flea encased in his earring.

Pantagruel's reaction (7) to the costume and to Panurge's startling new urge to marry somewhat clarifies Rabelais's semiology. The interpretation of signs, such as Panurge's dress, may vary according to the interpreter's moral disposition, and the meaning is not fixed in itself. In a very dense passage, Pantagruel develops this observation into a principle of moral freedom that in effect provides the answer to Panurge's dilemma. He must make up his own mind on marriage, which is one of the many "choses foraines, externes et indifferentes" [things extraneous, external and indifferent] over which we have no control beyond our attitude towards them. As the giant urges later (10), Panurge must simply launch himself into the adventure, as if blindfold, commending himself to God. But Stoical resolution is not Panurge's strong suit, and the comedy of the ensuing chapters derives from his clownish desire to be certain about something on which there are absolutely no guarantees.

Before embarking upon the busy yet futile round of consultations, the narrator for once fulfills a promise made in an earlier book (*Gargantua*, 8), and produces his much-advertised treatise *On the Dignity of Codpieces* (8). Here is a characteristically Rabelaisian mixture of laughter and learning. Panurge's eulogy of that most ludicrous and superfluous of Renaissance ornaments recalls the Praise of Debts in its lyrical evocation (imitating a famous passage of Pliny) of mankind's peaceable nature, and in its use of the most bizarre evidence, such as Adam's fig-leaf, allegedly the original codpiece. Is there no subject on which Panurge cannot waffle entertainingly? Here there is a brief satirical intervention from his creator: we are supposed to scoff at Panurge's misguided and undignified view, shared by some contemporary doctors, that semen is manufactured in the testicles, whereas Dr. Rabelais knew that it derived from superfluities of the brain.

The dozen consultation scenes that follow fall roughly into two groups. In the first, up to and including the advice of Frere Jan (28),

Panurge seeks enlightenment at random, on his own particular dilemma; he will ask anyone and everyone whether he should get married. The second half of the book treats the question of marriage more generally and poses a more fundamental and more controversial question: should anyone get married? While the earlier part has the loose episodic structure of Rabelais's previous books, the second part builds quite logically to the climactic meeting with Triboulet, the divinely-inspired fool who is in a way the counterpart of the scripturally-inspired wise man whom Panurge had consulted at the very outset, Pantagrue himself. Their replies are equally unwelcome to Panurge. In the echo dialogue (9), Pantagrue's deliberately infuriating willingness to agree with the last thing said, quite literally, mirrors his advice that Panurge should make up his own mind. For what it is worth, Pantagrue's first instinct is to advise Panurge that he should marry, no doubt for the good legal and medical reasons expounded throughout the book. Some of these appear in Panurge's own shopping list of motives for matrimony, but in this case his ability to see both sides of the question is an insuperable obstacle to decision-making. Moreover, as Pantagrue rather imprudently points out in chapter 10, experience shows that marriage can be anything from heaven to hell.

Panurge now turns elsewhere for some clues to his future prospects. It is noticeable that he ignores the most notorious form of divination, judicial astrology, which Rabelais had already proscribed in *Pantagrue* 8 and satirized in the *Pantagrueline Prognostication*. But condemnation of that branch of the divinatory sciences does not necessarily mean that Rabelais rejected all such methods, and that Panurge's quest is doomed to failure from the outset. Classical and even scriptural precedent suggested that some problems could be resolved with the help of lots, for example, and Roman law allowed recourse to Fortune's judgment if all else failed. It is thus legitimate for Pantagrue himself to take the lead here, though he warns that even the approved methods must not be considered infallible. In this case, though, they are fairly convincing, since all the oracles, when interpreted by anyone but Panurge, point to the same conclusion: that if he marries, he will be beaten, cuckolded, and robbed. An alternative view is that both Pantagrue and Panurge are participating in a game in which their opposing roles and conflicting interpretations are already decided; as with Panurge's first appearance in *Pantagrue* 9, the

games they play are more important than the conclusions they reach. But by Renaissance standards, at least, Pantagruel incarnates normative wisdom, while Panurge's flights of fancy grow ever wilder as his desperation increases.

A good illustration is the consultation of the Virgilian lots (10–12). Pantagruel waxes unusually loquacious in supplying a plethora of classical precedent (10); a parody of humanist erudition, perhaps, and even a mockery of Rabelais's former friend, Tiraqueau, whose *De nobilitate* supplied most of the material. But then Pantagruel concludes with a "private" example, that of Rabelais's fellow monk, Pierre Amy, who apparently used Homeric lots to help him in the momentous decision to leave his order. On the few occasions that Rabelais permits us a glimpse of his private life, the context is invariably serious, as with the references to Guillaume du Bellay here (21) and in the *Quart Livre*. The writings of Homer and Virgil enjoyed a prestige that is hard to imagine today, and these inspired books must clearly be preferred as oracles to the dice (of which Panurge naturally has an endless supply) and knuckle-bones, with their associations with medieval low-life trickery and gambling. Rabelais's personal views presumably surface, via Pantagruel, in an otherwise inexplicable outburst of anger. As with the *Blason des couleurs* in *Gargantua* 9, he lashes out at what he considers a perverse and dangerous book which not only devalues ancient learning but imperils the very souls of its readers. We have the first hint of Panurge's involvement with the Devil who, according to Pantagruel, inspired Lorenzo Spiritu's book on dicing, published in France as *Le Passetemps des dez* [*The Game of Dice*]. Blind Fortune must determine the pages of Virgil to be consulted, though dice may be used for the anodyne task of selecting the lines on the page. Both Pantagruel and Panurge apply erudite exegesis to the first line selected, even if Panurge's mythological expertise does degenerate into boastful invective. But scholarship rapidly gives way to the farce of mere contradiction, underlined by Panurge's repetition of his talismanic phrase "Au rebours" [On the contrary]. Panurge speciously rejects Pantagruel's literal reading of the remaining Virgilian lines and then, presumably conscious of the feebleness of his case, threatens to appeal against Fortune which, as Pantagruel points out, is both logically and legally impossible.

Divination by dreams (13–15) also has a long and varied pedigree. To illustrate its reliability, the syncretic Pantagruel again cites not only



the Ancient authorities assembled by Renaissance encyclopedists like Cornelius Agrippa and Caelius Rhodiginus, but also scriptural and medical precedents. We may be tempted to dismiss Pantagrue's unusual erudition and eloquence, along with Panurge's, as so much hot air; the giant, however, is not attempting to justify some dubious conduct of his own, but to bring relief to his hard-pressed friend. This difference of perspective is underlined by Epistemon's odd outburst at the end of the episode (15), when he cites Aesop's fable to underline the egotist's preoccupation with the faults of others; the contrast between Panurge's *philautia* and Pantagrue's charity is subtly reaffirmed. Panurge's grouchy reluctance to dine modestly, in order to encourage truthful dreams, dramatizes his childish desire to be reassured without cost to himself.

The core of the episode, which should be Panurge's (rather obvious) dream, almost disappears in the tangle of moral and medical observation that the issue provokes; Rabelais's familiar narrative nonchalance resurfaces. But the dream provides a good example of Panurge's Pavlovian verbosity; at first he offers no interpretation, perhaps fearing the worst, but, having heard Pantagrue's brief commonsensical explanation, he is galvanized to contradiction and the flow of verbiage is resumed. In passing, Pantagrue has a swipe at ritual fasting, and highlights the awesome power of the Belly: both themes to be developed in the *Quart Livre*. His lesson of "mediocrité" [moderation] is reinforced by the satirical account of monkish gluttony and hypocrisy in which Frere Jan, in the familiar Lucianic style, unself-consciously participates (15).

The visit to the Sibyl of Panzoust (16-18) is the first episode to take us into the world beyond the walls of Theleme, and to introduce one of those grotesque characters in whom Rabelais had specialized. Rabelais also extends his range by giving a large role to the scholarly Epistemon, whose doubts about the wisdom of the trip are dissipated instantly by the sight of the Sibyl. Comically, Rabelais juxtaposes his erudite eulogy of her, infused with rare if slightly scatological Greek learning, with a realistic picture of the hideous hag stirring her cabbage soup. A delicious parody of the consultation of the Sibyl in Virgil's *Aeneid* 6, including the frightful revelation of the proverbial Sibyl's Hole, results in Panurge being filled, not with religious awe, but with terror plain and simple. Nonetheless, once restored by the journey home, he is able to twist the message of the

Sibyl's prophecy to his own advantage, particularly sexually, and this farcical episode ends with an appropriately scabrous myth, which Panurge learned from a passing monk, concerning female lust.

A crucial point in the career of Panurge has now arrived (19). For the first time, Pantagruel pronounces a weighty and unfavorable judgment upon him: "L'esprit maling vous seduyt" [The malignant spirit beguileth you]. From this moment the gulf between Panurge the puppetmaster and this dazed, battered, and confused creature becomes increasingly obvious; for the rest of his career he will be dogged by fear, superstition, and diabolical madness.

The next episode reiterates Rabelais's determination to exploit the philosophical implications of Panurge's quest to the full, however much the narrative may suffer. The consultation with the deaf-mute Nazdecabre (19-20) goes a long way toward resolving the linguistic problems so often outlined before. Pantagruel asserts baldly that words (Panurge's principal asset, of course), depend for their meaning on convention, thus proclaiming his adherence to the nominalist school, which held that words are mere words. Panurge's main reply consists of more tales of female lust, a decided obsession of his, which illustrate that predispositions of body or mind lead to misunderstanding even over signs, often regarded as more reliable than words. A satirical extension suggests, glancingly, that too many people, like the religious in the story of Soeur Fessue [Sister Fatbuttock], prefer the arbitrary prescriptions of mere mortals, such as the statutes of a monastic order, to the divine commandments.

Rabelais's final position on the vital question of the communication of truth is not made plain until chapter 55 of the *Quart Livre*, but it may be deduced from his insistence that the deaf-mute to be consulted should have been afflicted from birth, and should thus have had no chance to learn conventional signs. Such complete disability also increases, in Renaissance theory, the possibility that Nazdecabre has been divinely compensated for his handicap with the gift of prophecy. When the deaf-mute sneezes, Pantagruel immediately invokes Socrates's demon, generally regarded as evidence of that admired philosopher's special gifts; are we to assume that Nazdecabre has been similarly enthused by a divine spirit? Are we also to take seriously the learned glosses of Pantagruel, based on the apparently arbitrary number-symbolism of Pythagoras? Amongst Renaissance hierophants the Pythagorean system, admired by some Christian

Fathers and given recent currency by Cornelius Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia* [*On Occult Philosophy*], enjoyed an exceptional reputation, as a science so ancient and so all-encompassing that its divine origin might be inferred. But after the sneeze, an apparently irrefutable sign of coming disaster for Panurge, the consultation degenerates into farce, rather like the disputation by signs in *Pantagruel* 18–19. The uncomplicated humor of flailing arms and irate threats is epitomized by Frere Jan's characteristic suggestion that a punch on the nose will convey Panurge's displeasure to Nazdecabre more clearly than any other sign. The theatrical scene played out here, with its farcical miming, follows what is to become the standard pattern as Panurge progressively loses his wits: at first delighted with the advice he receives, his pleasure turns to anger as he imprudently and hopelessly seeks absolute reassurance. It is especially noticeable that here, for the first time, Panurge has no rational or rhetorical counter to put forward.

The visit to the dying poet Raminagrobis (21–23) is, appropriately, the book's most lyrical episode. Unconvincing attempts have been made to identify him, but his family connections—his second wife is Dame Pox (“la grande Guorre”), and his children the law-clerks' drama club (“la Bazoche”)—suggest that his name is a farcical mystification, which throws into relief (or undermines) Pantagruel's earnest enthusiasm for him. The giant's Platonically-inspired evocations of poetic and prophetic frenzy, allied to the elegiac legend of the dying swan's song, create an appropriately meditative atmosphere for his Stoical description of death as a “port tresceur et salutaire” [a most sure and safe haven]. As in the *Quart Livre* (27), a solemn moment is embellished by an allusion to the death in 1543 of Guillaume du Bellay, which Rabelais witnessed. If Pantagruel is guilty of paganizing pedantry, this final allusion must be considered to be in the worst of bad taste.

In fact, the philosophical mood continues into the visit itself, with the poet's joyful acceptance of death, and his humble benediction of his visitors. The spell is broken, of course, by Panurge and his superstitious awe of the monks who, as in Erasmus's colloquy *Funus* (*The Funeral*), have been chased from the death-bed, where they were hindering rather than helping the dying man's entry to the next world. The related satire of monastic formalism recalls the ritualistic monks of Seuillé in *Gargantua*, but an old-fashioned comic tale (23)

reminds us that the charge was a traditional one: Friar Couscoil's sudden attack of conscience about "carrying money" results in a farcical ducking for his luckless passenger. Ironically, Panurge forecasts that Raminagrobis is destined for the insanitary place in hell that was traditionally reserved for hypocritical monks! But then Panurge is the expert, having studied black magic ["diabolologie"] at Toledo; perhaps this accounts for his predisposition to diabolical madness, which breaks out here in a gibbering monologue of funk, full of devilish oaths and misapplied formulae of exorcism. As for the advice on Panurge's marriage, which is once more almost submerged in the torrent of loosely-related deviations, it takes the form of another borrowed poem, this one the work of the unfortunately-named Guillaume Cretin. But its contradictory advice ("Take her, or not"), a joke in the original, anticipates the Pauline wisdom of Pan-tagruel (29) and the theologian Hippothadée (35), and confirms the relative respectability and reliability of this consultation.

By contrast, the next two consultations seem to end in blank walls, compelling Panurge to seek professional help. Epistemon, the classical scholar, has little to offer, beyond advising Panurge to avoid public ridicule and take off his ludicrous costume (24). That Panurge is wearing fancy dress in pursuance of a vow reminds us that rash or incongruous vows were another frequently-satirized aspect of religious formalism, again associated with monks. But beyond this advice, Epistemon cannot recommend an oracle from among the multitude on offer in Ancient times; all have fallen silent, as is expounded more fully in the Pan episode of the *Quart Livre*. He will not therefore countenance a visit to the pagan oracle off St. Malo, which the gullible and superstitious Panurge endows with the most fabulous and unlikely qualities. It is an ample illustration of his mental deterioration.

But if the Ancient sources are no more, there is a veritable cascade of modern ones, enumerated in the farcical episode of Her Trippa (25). His name and nationality may well evoke Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, who not only wrote on the occult sciences, but also on the pre-eminence of the female sex. But Her Trippa is also a caricature from the stage, with elements both of the mad professor (like Thaumaste) whose mind is so fixed on higher things that he alone does not notice his wife's infidelities, and of the quack doctor, ever eager to offer another remedy, and so intent on his patter

that he ignores Panurge's remarkably offensive remarks! Trippa's methods of predicting the future include divination by sieve, by cheese, by ass's head, and he can cite authorities and precedents by the dozen. But the sheer weight of the enumeration, which Rabelais greatly increased in the 1552 edition, robs them of much credibility. In any case, the merest glance at Panurge is enough to convince Trippa of Panurge's fate: no need to go further! It is open to debate which of the characters is the more deluded, as Panurge expatiates on Trippa's self-love, heaping on him all the moral opprobrium that he might have applied to himself.

The last individual consultation revives Frere Jan, and provides a delightful comic interlude before the grave conference of the experts. As we would expect, Frere Jan's suggestions are direct and earthy: his most valuable piece of advice is that Panurge should submit humbly to his fate (28). Otherwise, in his thoughtless way, he merely increases Panurge's self-doubts. He goads Panurge into an hilarious bout of sexual boasting, which temporarily revives the latter's spirits and eloquence (27), but then casts him down again with his enumerative *blason* (28), a pitiless recital of Panurge's sexual inadequacies, which contrasts sadly with Panurge's extravagant eulogy of Frere Jan's bristling potency (26). The common-sensical Frere Jan has instinctively perceived Panurge's fear of approaching senility. He will find no comfort in the fable of Hans Carvel's ring, a well-known skit on that favorite figure of fun, the aging and impotent husband of a young wife.

Panurge's dilemma is unresolved, since he will not accept the conclusions even of Raminagrobis's inspired poem. Pantagruel therefore convokes a brains trust, to elicit the best advice on marriage in general from the professionals who have studied its effects on our tripartite existence: a theologian for the soul, a doctor for the body, and a lawyer for the property. But Rabelais disrupts his own neat scheme by making the lawyer unavailable: would he have lowered the tone, given Rabelais's long-standing scorn for the pettifoggers' profession? In fact the old judge Bridoye is reserved for a different and more elevated function later. Replacing him is the Pyrrhonist philosopher Trouillogan, whose advice, perhaps representing the intellect, chimes in neatly with that of Hippothadée the theologian and Rondibilis the physician.

Hippothadée has often been identified with Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, liberal theologian and inspiration of the Evangelical move-

ment. Certainly his advice to Panurge, essentially a dissertation on Christian marriage, reflects progressive views in the debate over marriage and celibacy (30). An attractive figure distinguished by his "exceeding modesty," Hippothadée replies succinctly, recommending marriage since Panurge, by his own admission, has not received the rare gift of continence. Hippothadée makes St. Paul's dictum that "it is better to marry than to burn" (1 Corinthians 7.9) a more positive endorsement of marriage than was usual; for traditional theologians and for such advocates of celibacy as the monks, Paul's text characterizes marriage as the lesser of two evils.

Panurge's delight with this unambiguous advice, which is what a pious Evangelical would expect to find in scripture, is however dashed by the reply to his "trifling" supplementary question concerning cuckoldry. As usual, his enthusiasm turns quickly and comically to despair and abuse. Yet Hippothadée has more to offer him than simple submission to the divine will, under which Panurge may or may not be cuckolded. Although Panurge ignores it, Hippothadée's advice on choosing and cherishing a wife offers a recipe for blessed marriage, whose scripturally-inspired idealism reflects Erasmus's pleas for tolerance, honor, and mutual respect within marriage. But it just makes Panurge tug neurotically at his moustache.

By contrast, the advice of Rondibilis (31-33) is often cited as evidence of Rabelais's anti-feminism. As Rabelais himself complained in his Prologues, selective quotation can prove almost anything. Rondibilis certainly recites like a catechism the contemporary medical perception, in fact going back at least to Plato, that woman is a creature of whim, dominated by the waxing and waning of the moon—and by her wandering womb! His description of the womb as an independent animal capable of suffocating its host may seem as fantastic to us as his view that sperm is manufactured from the superfluities of the brain. But both theories were commonplace in contemporary medicine, and Rondibilis's task is, after all, to give counsel on the physical conditions pertaining to marriage.

Nonetheless, the doctor's suggestion that man can dominate his sexual urges, by five disparate means, whereas woman cannot, seems to establish the female as irredeemably inferior: inferior even to such a creature as Panurge, who will only accept, but with alacrity, the fifth remedy for concupiscence—unbridled lechery. Monks and hermits also go for that one, adds Frere Jan, in another stab at celibate

carnality. What is sometimes overlooked is that Rondibilis concludes his grisly analysis of female physiology with an allusion to the “preudes femmes, les quelles ont vescu pudiquement et sans blasme, et ont eu la vertu de ranger cestuy effrené animal à l’obeissance de raison” (32) [honest and good women who, living chastely and without blame, have had the power and virtue to curb that unbridled animal to an obedient yielding unto reason]. Such women, “greatly to be praised,” resemble the good woman described by Hippothadée, and the theologian’s advice on the honorable treatment of a spouse is reinforced by Rondibilis’s fable of the god Cuckoldry. These elements, more practical and realistic than the idealization of woman in the courtly or Petrarchan modes, also play against the stereotyped woman found in the earthy narrative tradition of the *fabliaux* or the *contes*. But of course these farcical genres are bound to crop up in a comic book on marriage: in this episode, tales of womankind’s insatiable curiosity and loquacity (34) provide a characteristic Rabelaisian counterpoint.

The climax of Panurge’s quest for enlightenment from the wise of this world is the discussion that follows the initial consultation with Trouillogan (35). The sceptical philosopher’s apparently enigmatic replies, like Raminagrobis’s contradictory poem, make perfect sense when submitted to all the fine brains here assembled. The company is even joined by Gargantua, last heard of being transported to Fairyland (*Pantagrue*, 23), but now happily restored to add his weight to the deliberations. The true place of marriage in the divine plan is at last defined in a syncretic exegesis of Trouillogan’s puzzling advice. Should Panurge marry or not? “Both; neither the one nor the other,” replies the philosopher. The company rapidly show that this answer is not so outlandish as it appears. Gargantua supplies a gloss from the pagan philosopher Aristippus; Pantagrue gives another based on a classical anecdote; Rondibilis reveals that modern medicine and philosophy too can accommodate such apparent contradictions. Hippothadée makes the expected allusion to St. Paul’s “marriage chapter” (1 Corinthians 7.29): “They that have wives be as though they had none.” Finally Pantagrue focuses this amalgam of Ancient and scriptural wisdom: in practice, Trouillogan has warned against uxoriousness. A wife, however desirable, must not deflect a man from his other obligations, especially towards God and the state.

A satisfying conclusion, except that it is no answer to Panurge’s

problem. As always, he must press for absolute reassurance, and Trouillogan cannot, of course, go beyond the very reasonable advice he has already proffered. The only results of this farcical dialogue of the deaf are that Gargantua stumps off fulminating against the philosophical fads of the younger generation, and that Panurge gets madder than ever, exhibiting unmistakable signs of dangerous melancholia: "en maintien d'un resveur ravassant et dodelinant de la teste" (37) [with the carriage of a fond dotard, lolling and nodding with his head], like Gargantua driven mad by his tutors (*Gargantua*, 22).

There remain two "consultations," on the surface the most bizarre of all. Since wisdom has failed to satisfy Panurge, perhaps folly can do the trick. Panurge is afflicted with a pathological or diabolical madness, causing him physical and mental distress; the last two consultants will represent, by contrast, two kinds of "good" madness. The close connection between them is established by the interpenetration of the two episodes: the visit to the ancient judge Bridoye postpones for a while the climactic consultation with the jester Triboulet.

Like Erasmus in the *Praise of Folly*, Pantagruel makes clear (37) that the nature of folly is complex. He expounds the Pauline theory (e.g., 1 Corinthians 3.18-19) of divine madness, contrasted with worldly wisdom, and highlights the connection with Stoical apathy, since a fool too is emptied of earthly affections and his spirit is purged of all human cares. Characteristically, Rabelais illustrates this profound principle with the farcical story of Seigny Joan, who ordered that the smell of the roast be paid for with the sound of money; its relevance, however, is that the fool's decision resolved a perplexity that the law was unable to decide. The enumerative chapter 38 reinforces our awareness that Pantagruel takes Triboulet very seriously, assigning him supernatural qualities, while Panurge cannot see beyond his (real-life) status as a jester.

But first, Bridoye. Here is a less exalted form of madness, better described as holy simplicity. Rabelais again demonstrates his talent for exploiting the most unlikely characters for satirical purposes. Through Bridoye, the doddering simpleton who for forty years has decided the cases before him by rolling his dice, Rabelais develops the critique of legal procedure that had surfaced briefly in both *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua*. The details of Bridoye's defence of himself, when his aberrant practice accidentally comes to light, are beyond all



but the most erudite modern reader, and Rabelais's contemporaries must have found them hard going; easier to treat Bridoye's citations as a parody of legal mumbo-jumbo, and a skit on the mania for citing precedent even on the most obvious topics. In fact, Rabelais's juridical erudition is as precise as ever; more surprisingly, under Roman law it was entirely legal for Fortune, in the shape of lots or dice, to be consulted when there seemed no other way to resolve a case. The joke, of course, is that Bridoye has used no other method, and innocently believes that his colleagues do the same: "Comme vous aultres, Messieurs" [Like the rest of you, gentlemen] is his catchphrase.

In the Lucianic fashion, Bridoye ingenuously incriminates himself and his colleagues as he describes judicial procedure. He explains the appalling tardiness of civil justice by the need for due formality and for cases to come to a proper maturity, not to mention the healthy exercise of weightlifting with the sacks of evidence. The ripening of lawsuits is illustrated by a whole interpolated chapter (41); Rabelais experiments with the technique of imbrication that is to become his standard practice in the *Quart Livre*. The story of Perrin Dendin (41), whose name Racine borrowed for his farce *Les Plaideurs*, adds two further complaints that echo down the centuries. The law ignores natural justice: Dendin, who resolves cases so amicably, is not a judge but a "good man." The law is ruinously expensive: Dendin is most effective when the litigants cannot afford to continue.

Chapter 42 broadens the discussion to include criminal justice, and here the satire becomes more subtle and perhaps less harmlessly technical. Unlike the interminable civil cases, criminal trials tended to be summary, particularly when the accused had been caught *in flagrante delicto*, red-handed; Bridoye's temporising in these cases is the opposite of the usual practice. The vivid tale of the Gascon soldier, which illustrates the benefits of allowing anger to cool, hints at the rough justice to be had under a system where defendants were often denied representation. Clément Marot's contemporary satire *L'Enfer* makes much the same point—from personal experience.

Bridoye having been allowed to shamble off, it remains only for Pantagruel to pronounce an eloquent absolution of his methods (43), and to link him explicitly with his earlier eulogy of wise folly: in the continuing success of Bridoye's methods, "il y a je ne sçay quoy de Dieu" [there is I know not what savoring of God]. His simplicity, purity, and selflessness have been rewarded; he embodies a lesson in

Christian humility that would be of great service to Panurge were he able to recognize it. But it is noticeable that Panurge has all but dropped out of the episode.

The final consultation, with the royal fool Triboulet (Fleurial, who died in 1536, and enjoyed posthumous fame as Rigoletto), is also the shortest; Rabelais refrains even from recording Panurge's questioning of him, in inappropriately "elegant and rhetorical language." By contrast, the exegesis of Triboulet's brief utterance and accompanying signs is long and detailed. To modern eyes it seems perverse to devote a whole chapter (45) to the meaning of a head movement, but Triboulet's jerking of his head (as opposed to Panurge's "lolling head" in chapter 37) is a vital indication that the divine spirit has entered into him and that his utterance is the product of prophetic frenzy. Rabelais is borrowing for his fiction the very real erudition garnered by Guillaume Budé for his legal treatise, *Annotations on the Pandects*, on the important question of the sanity of witnesses.

The conflicting interpretations of Triboulet's response by Pantagruel and Panurge take account both of the fool's words and gestures, which seem to confirm one another in this exceptional case; elsewhere Rabelais shows how words are often belied by signs. Pantagruel's rapture over the additional detail that Panurge will be cuckolded by a monk seems overdone, though it will of course make Panurge's fate all the more ignominious. Panurge's interpretations are the most insubstantial that even he has managed (we are interested to learn that married couples often affectionately punch one another's noses), and reflect the demoralized state into which he has fallen. But even this final and most authoritative evidence that his marriage is destined to be a disaster fails to convince Panurge. He clutches at a last straw, the bottle that Triboulet had emptied (wine being often associated with prophetic frenzy). It reminds him of a final source of enlightenment, which will enable him to postpone the moment of decision a good deal longer; and thus the journey to consult the oracle of the Holy Bottle is decided.

There the *Tiers Livre* might have ended, setting up the sequel that did indeed appear, at least in part, only two years later. Gargantua's tirade against clandestine marriages (48) and the eulogy of Pantagruelion (49-52) may appear to have been tacked on gratuitously. Rabelais had a penchant for ending his works with accessory episodes having little organic connection with the rest of the book. Gargantua is rein-

troduced rather factitiously—for the second time—since the dutiful Pantagruel must seek his permission to undertake the voyage. However, their harmonious discussion of Pantagruel's future marriage, which will of course continue the dynasty and ensure the peaceful transfer of the inheritance, recalls the vital political and social importance of matrimony. It contrasts comically, too, with Panurge's agonizing over his own marriage, which by comparison rates nowhere on the political and financial scale.

In this episode Rabelais gives his discussion of matrimony a final, absolutely contemporary twist, and indulges in one of those explosions of anger that seem inexplicable to the modern reader because our values have changed. The similar tone in which Epistemon (in the first edition it was Pantagruel) had berated the allegedly corrupt jurist Tribonian (44) is equally the product of an indignation that does not touch us. It seems bizarre now that Gargantua should insist upon parental consent with such ferocity, and threaten with horrible death those who engineer clandestine marriages. But his rage against people who condemn innocent girls to a life of cruel suffering is no more violent than that of the peaceable Erasmus in his *Institution of Christian Matrimony*. Rabelais has at least three motives here. One is his usual contempt for monasticism. Monks were often associated with clandestine marriages: remember Friar Laurence in *Romeo and Juliet*. Secondly, as Gargantua makes clear in a carefully-worded passage, Imperial law (that is, Roman law) made much of parental consent, whereas canon law, as interpreted at the time, did not. The Council of Trent was to bow to this kind of pressure in 1563 and tighten up the procedure surrounding marriage, though it did not declare clandestine marriages totally invalid. Thirdly, Rabelais is supporting royal policy; Francis I had set in train the process that led to Henry II's famous edict against clandestine marriages of 1556.

The *Tiers Livre* might have ended here, too, with this reminder that Rabelais's comic world interacts and overlaps constantly with the harsh, hustling world beyond its boundaries. But at the end of each of his books, the serious work over, Rabelais takes leave to play: this is the most obvious way to read his eulogy of that strange plant, Pantagruelion (49–52). It is tempting to foist an allegorical meaning on it, as in some ways it resembles the inviting yet infuriating enigmas scattered about Rabelais's work. But the episode belongs really to the genre of the mock eulogy, like Panurge's praise of debts,

its neat counterpart at the beginning of the book. Rabelais is playing his favorite game with the narrative norm: just as the praise of debts delays the discussion of marriage, so Pantagrueion postpones the launch of Pantagrue's fleet, now reserved for the *Quart Livre*.

All commentators agree that this new myth is based primarily on the multiple properties of hemp and the connected plant flax, with which asbestos was also associated, erroneously, at the time. The distant inspiration for Rabelais was thus Pliny's *Natural History*, with its lengthy account of the uses of these plants, and a more immediate source was the flax industry flourishing in Rabelais's home region. The municipal museum at Chinon displays some ancient machinery connected with this industry (alongside some patently inauthentic portraits of Rabelais). The meticulous description of the plant in chapter 49—it is essential to keep a straight face at the start of a mock eulogy—gives way to a digression (50) on the naming of plants. This unexpected leap from botany to linguistics takes us back to Pantagrue's conclusions on the arbitrariness of language; names seem to be imposed quite unpredictably.

This rich mixture of history and mythology prepares the way for the essential element in this kind of spoof: the recital of Pantagrueion's miraculous applications (51). The game consists of concealing the most mundane objects behind a screen of heroic verbiage: sheets, tablecloths, sacks, string, and rope are all given the grandiloquent treatment. Like the praise of debts, the eulogy moves towards a cosmic climax; not only does Pantagrueion (by means of linen sails) bind the ends of the earth together, but it makes the very gods tremble for fear of what Pantagrue's descendants may discover. The Lucianic vision of the conquest of space (51, end)—in terms of humans visiting celestial taverns and cuckolding the gods—could be surpassed only by conquest over death itself, and in the final chapter Pantagrueion's triumph over the flames of the funeral pyre makes a fitting finale.

The book ends with an unforeseeable patriotic flourish, awakening a distant echo of the Prologue and its account of the contemporary fortification of France. Pantagrueion's only serious rival in incombustibility was apparently the Piedmontese larch, which enabled the good folk of Larigno to obstruct Julius Caesar's march into Transalpine Gaul. Now that another Caesar (one of Charles V's courtesy titles) is threatening the kingdom, Rabelais shouts defiance,

not least in the *buitain* that rounds off the book, where Pantagruelion outshines the fabled riches of the Indies, source of Charles V's wealth. Happy the kingdom that is blessed with the miraculous herb!

The episode makes perfect sense as a mock eulogy, but as usual Rabelais drops that teasing hint of allegory. Pantagruelion has been identified as the scientific optimism of the Renaissance, the unlimited potential of humankind, the weapon of covert Evangelism and even as Indian hemp, the substance that unlocks the imagination—so it is said—and that made life in Theleme so infinitely blissful in Jean-Louis Barrault's hippy stage version (see below, chapter 6). The least that can be said is that the liberating plant provides a transition from the static world of the *Tiers Livre* to the endless adventure of the *Quart Livre*.

# 5

## Le Quart Livre

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We shall never know how or why an incomplete draft of the *Quart Livre* was published by Pierre de Tours at Lyon in 1548. The most likely explanation is that the publisher somehow got hold of a manuscript, knew the value of anything bearing the magic name of Rabelais, and had it printed, rather carelessly, without the author's permission. Literary piracy was commonplace, and purchasers would discover too late that the text ended in the middle of a chapter, and indeed in the middle of a sentence. Rabelais himself was far away in Rome, ministering once more to the ailing Cardinal Jean du Bellay; he had been summoned from Metz, then an imperial city, and thus a safe refuge from the Sorbonne, which had condemned the *Tiers Livre*. According to one of his few extant letters, Rabelais endured desperate poverty in Metz, even though he was probably still working as an agent of du Bellay, who had many interests and contacts in the region.

The *Quart Livre* of 1548 differs considerably in tone and content from the complete book of the same name which appeared in Paris in January 1552. The earlier work contains a prologue, replaced in 1552, and a mere ten and a half chapters, which Rabelais rewrote and expanded to twenty-four for the 1552 book. He polished the style, improved the jokes, and inserted two new episodes, the landing at Medamothi (2-4) and the story of the Seigneur de Basché (12-16). He also reworked the storm episode (18-24) in order to clarify its theological implications. The *Quart Livre* of 1552 has sixty-seven chapters of which the last forty-three are entirely new, and take the travelers into waters obviously uncharted in the incomplete manuscript published by Pierre de Tours. Although the 1548 *Quart Livre* is unquestionably authentic, Rabelais must have been unhappy about its premature appearance and had no further dealings with Pierre de Tours, the successor to his old friend François Juste.

Rabelais prefaced the *Quart Livre* of 1552 with a dedicatory epistle, the only one in his fictional works and a sign of his increasing self-assurance. Dated 28 January, it is addressed to a new patron, the cardinal and statesman Odet de Chastillon, brother of the Huguenot hero Gaspard de Coligny, and himself destined to flee to England and espouse Anglicanism in 1564. Chastillon's portfolio as a Privy Councillor included supervision of the book trade, and he was instrumental in procuring for Rabelais the particularly fine Privilege, for ten years, which adorns the *Quart Livre*. The dedicatory letter conforms in part to the rules of the genre, addressing fulsome compliments to the cardinal, and name-dropping shamelessly. Rabelais boasts the support not just of Chastillon, but of the French monarchy, since the late king Francis I found no fault in Rabelais's writings (read to him by the bishop of Mâcon), and his successor has granted Rabelais the protection of his Privilege. But Rabelais also takes the opportunity to defend his books, characteristically, as "folastries joyeuses" [joyful tomfoolery], and to launch a furious attack on his misanthropic critics. Borrowing from the now abandoned 1548 Prologue, he proclaims the therapeutic value of laughter and discourses eruditely upon the psychology of the bedside manner; like a cheerful physician, the good Doctor Rabelais presents only a smiling face to the well-disposed reader. For the other sort, however, he reserves a waspishness that warns against taking his book too lightly.

For one thing, the *Quart Livre*, more than Rabelais's other books, is a commentary on the contemporary political situation. In 1551, as Rabelais was writing, the so-called Gallican Crisis was at its height: the strained relations between Henry II and Pope Julius III threatened a repetition of Henry VIII's Anglican schism. The supposedly ecumenical Council of Trent, increasingly a purely Italian forum boycotted by the French, seemed intent on undermining privileges granted to the French monarchy by earlier popes. The French Church's revenues were disappearing across the Alps, and Julius III's intrigues against the Francophile Farnese in Parma had led to the dispatch of French troops and the virtual outbreak of war. Not surprisingly, Rabelais's book echoes the views of his patrons. Chastillon agreed with Du Bellay that moderation, diplomacy, and tact were to be employed in international relations and in the search for reconciliation with the Reformers (supposedly the aim of the Council), but that France's essential interests must not be sacrificed. Rabelais's tim-

ing was slightly awry; by the time the book appeared, a papal legate was in Paris to negotiate and rapprochement was in the air. The book was temporarily removed from sale by the Paris Parlement on 1 March, though there is no real evidence that the ban was seriously pursued in the courts. But hostility to Rome subsided and some of Rabelais's gibes lost their impact.

In fact the book's satire of Italians has a broader base. If the Gallican Crisis is reflected in mockery of Trent as the Council of Fools ("Chesil": 5, 18), and in ridicule of the pope's temporal pretensions in the Papimanes episode, other allusions to the cradle of humanism pander to traditional French prejudices (and envy?), now exacerbated by the influence of Henry II's Florentine queen, Catherine of Medici. The Genoese, for instance, combine avarice and impiety (Prologue), the Romans are sadists and poisoners (12), Italian is spoken at the fete court of Cheli and by the masochistic Chiquanous (10 and 16), and the very incarnation of materialism, the Belly, has an Italian title, Messere Gaster (57). Even the final chapter contains a caricatural Italian in an embarrassing posture, beside a scatological anecdote to the disadvantage of France's other traditional foe, the English. The Prologue also includes a more subtle example of Rabelais's role as national publicist. The god Jupiter, to whom Henry II liked to be compared, reviews recent events on the international stage. In every case, including that of Parma, French diplomacy has triumphed, or is about to prevail, against the plots of "un petit homme tout estropié" [a paltry diminutive crippled fellow], a transparent allusion to the villain of *Gargantua*, Charles V, still dreaming vainly of world monarchy.

Despite the mythological fancies of Henry II, it still seems odd to allow a council of the ancient gods, installed in somewhat fly-blown majesty on Mount Olympus, to sit in judgment on the men and the deeds of 1551. This is less a humanist whim, however, than evidence of Rabelais's disregard for mere chronology, logic, and the rules of artistic composition; it is in the *Quart Livre* above all that Rabelais proves his mastery over his text, his dominion over form and language, in ways barely dreamed of by his contemporaries and audacious even by modern standards. Nowhere is this more visible than in the Prologue.



## §

Floyd Gray invented the untranslatable *désécrit* [dis-written?] to describe this Prologue. It begins with the usual exchange of pleasantries with the audience, and an almost conventional exposition of the book's philosophical core. But to illustrate his theme of "médiocrité," moderation, Rabelais unleashes both imagination and erudition, constantly undermining the reader's assumptions by shifting temporal, spatial and ideological perspectives in a dizzying display of inventiveness. This formal and philosophical frenzy revolves around the absurdly simple fable of the woodcutter: a few lines in Aesop become in Rabelais's hands a writhing and apparently uncontrollable monster of a tale. Couillatris, the earthily-named protagonist (*Well-hung?*), a compatriot of the author, is at once a contemporary of Aesop and of Charles V; the ancient gods observe professorial politicking at the Sorbonne, and meet a party of Renaissance composers of church music, singing bawdy songs; great world events (the Sultan of Turkey versus the Shah of Persia) are jostled by vulgar puns (the axe and its handle). Rabelais offers a gallery of comic characters: the pious but deafening Couillatris, the Lucianic Jupiter, short-tempered and forgetful, Priapus, whose costume so clearly reveals his function; a banquet of witty dialogue and the full range of comic devices from irony to smut. One tale evokes another, gratuitous detail multiplies, and on this giddy discursive roundabout the moral point is almost lost from view. Moreover, all this prepares us, as a prologue should, for the book that is to come. How feeble, by contrast, is the thin and obvious Prologue of 1548!

Yet the 1552 Prologue also lays down the ideological basis of the book. Disconcertingly, the central theme conveyed by this return to the comic mayhem and stylistic extremism of *Pantagruel* is . . . moderation. In the Prologue, "Pantagruelism" is given a definitive, though apparently paradoxical, formulation: "Certaine gayeté d'esprit conficte en mespris des choses fortuites" [A certain jollity of mind, pickled in the scorn of fortune]. This line can be used to elucidate both the moral stance and the outlandish form of the *Quart Livre*. *Ataraxia*, philosophical indifference to the world, recommended by both Christian asceticism and ancient Stoicism, must be tempered by laughter which, as the epigraph to *Gargantua* reminded us, is "le propre de l'homme" [the special property of humanity]. How better

to justify the freakish mixture of outrageous humor and profound seriousness that is the "special property" of Rabelais?

Pantagruelism, the *tempering* of Stoical indifference by "certain gayeté d'esprit," also illustrates the theme of moderation, the vital syncretic principle of this book. As the Prologue implies, the Ancient philosophers' Golden Mean is akin to Christian humility; Aesop's pagan fable of the woodcutter's axe is complemented by scriptural tales, and Couillatris, Zacchaeus, and the prophet's son in 2 Kings 6.6, are all used to point the same moral: be modest in your prayers. But the principles of Pantagruelism apply to more things than prayer. To avoid perturbation, ordinary mortals need practical advice; as Montaigne also recognized, most of us are physically and temperamentally unsuited to the extreme, rigorous discipline of a Cato or a Christian hermit. In the *Quart Livre*, Pantagruel's sailors become a self-sufficient social entity whose harmony and good humor enable them to withstand the extremities of wind and weather and to avoid the perils of monomania and fanaticism, as they plot a careful course between the islands of the doctrinaire.

Clearly, Pantagruel's perfect *ataraxia* contrasts with the monstrous zeal and materialism visible on all sides. But we may also learn from a new character, the pilot Xenomanes, who has, like Ulysses, acquired the experience and practical wisdom of the seasoned traveler. Realizing, for example, that even a giant has his limitations, the pilot persuades Pantagruel not to intervene in the war between those inveterate enemies Lent and Carnival, Quaresmeprenant and the Andouilles (35). Under his prudent guidance, the voyagers observe the societies they pass, but do not linger. At the end they refuse even to make landfall, preferring a eucharistic banquet on board to another encounter with the "choses fortuites," the accidents of fortune which they are powerless to influence. It is a striking end to a journey undertaken ostensibly to resolve Panurge's dilemma by consulting the Holy Bottle of Cathay. It suggests that the remedy to the world's perplexities lies closer at hand; and of course Pantagruel had long before provided the true answer for Panurge. The new definition of Pantagruelism, with its warning against the "choses fortuites," echoes the giant's assertion in the *Tiers Livre* (10) that "tout le reste est fortuit" [all the rest belongeth to fortune; see above, page 67, for the full quotation], and that the remedy lies in dominating one's will.

In aesthetic terms, also, the end of the book is unexpected. The travelers' failure to consult the Holy Bottle—and this pretext is all but forgotten after the first few chapters—robs the *Quart Livre* of an obvious, satisfying narrative resolution. We are told at the end of the first chapter that they arrived at their destination in less than four months, but readers were to be deprived of the Oracle's advice for twelve more years, until the appearance of the *Cinquiemesme Livre* in 1564! A closer look at the first chapter, however, alerts us to the possibility that the tale of the voyage is as deliberately "désécrié" as the Prologue: it offers the same nonchalant mixture of genres and styles, switching effortlessly from the language and themes of the epic poet to those of the Evangelical preacher, the sea-captain, or the newspaper columnist. The opening notation of time, establishing the date, oddly enough, as that on which Virgil's hero Aeneas completed his journey, the list of the voyagers, and particularly of their ships (cf. *Iliad* 2): all these belong to the epic genre. But the (distinctly Protestant) service, the navigational details, the mockery of the Portuguese route to the Indies, which is about to be superseded—in Rabelais's imagination—by the French discovery of the Northwest Passage: these belong to quite different registers and suggest already that the book will be, to put it mildly, a hybrid.

We might think at first that the *Quart Livre* is the fulfillment of the project announced at the end of *Pantagruel* (34), where we were promised a more than epic voyage in which the giant would visit the Caspian mountains, the Atlantic Ocean, the Cannibal Isles, Prester John, the Underworld and, as a modest finale, the moon. The *Quart Livre* does not take us so far, but fits into a similar literary tradition—or into several. Rabelais's originality is to parody, in one book, the stock-in-trade of three fashionable genres where the journey motif plays an important role: the epic, the romance, and the travel-book proper. Fashionable genres: in the *Deffence et illustration de la langue françoise* (1549), Ronsard and Joachim du Bellay plotted to provide France with an epic to rival the Homeric and Virgilian archetypes, and Ronsard was already preparing the literary world for his *Franciade* (which appeared, sadly incomplete, in 1572). Meanwhile, medieval romance, with its leitmotif of the quest, was still going strong, most recently in the shape of the Spanish *Amadis de Gaule*, a superior soap-opera in umpteen parts which remained a best-seller for decades. Equally popular were travel-books, the narratives of the great Renaissance explorers; Rabelais had probably

read the accounts of the Frenchmen Cartier and Roberval, at least. These more or less scientific works, which included technical data alongside the exotica, were supplanting medieval fantasies such as *Mandeville's Travels*.

What have these genres in common, apart from the motif of the journey? All require the protagonists to confront hideous dangers as they travel through a hostile world and observe its strangeness; the narrative, linear and roughly chronological, is designed to generate suspense. Rabelais discards this traditional artifice: the very first chapter coolly informs us that the expedition reached its destination in four months, in perfect safety, without even the inevitable shipwreck and routine loss of expendable crewmen. Revising this chapter in 1552, Rabelais was forced to make an exception, having apparently forgotten the storm episode in 1548. But even this (equally traditional) trial holds no terrors for the reader, since the title of the chapter (18) quietly kills suspense: "How Pantagruel *escaped* from a storm at sea."

Elsewhere, danger and suspense are blunted by absurdity. The traditionally hazardous encounter with a bloodthirsty tribe (on Savage Island, 35) is less alarming when the natives turn out to be sausages, who shed fat rather than blood and are vanquished with ease by squads of greasily-named scullions and their Trojan Pig. Where but in Rabelais's world would the cannibals themselves be destined for the pot? Equally soothing is the customary battle with the sea-monster (33-34): in a promising spate of purple prose, Rabelais's Spouter bears down on the powerless ships and the quaking reader . . . until the narrator, bursting with erudition and self-importance, steps between them to tell increasingly long and decreasingly relevant tales of Ancient marksmanship. It remains only for the unerring giant to perforate his enemy, like an expert darts player, and the foaming monster is just another dead fish: no contest!

Disrespect for narrative tradition surfaces everywhere as Rabelais's digressions undermine the tension and unfamiliarity that are the hallmarks of his models. Were travelers ever so learned, so chatty, so fond of a yarn? Ulysses, of course, was a teller of tales (e.g., *Odyssey* 9-12), but only on request. In the *Quart Livre*, the flimsiest pretext will start the characters or the narrator on a feast of reminiscence, projecting us backwards in time and space, or into the parallel universe of scholarship. Renaissance humanists, eager to explain the

world, assembled vast compendia of anecdote and aphorism, like Erasmus's *Adagia* and Rhodiginus's *Antiquae lectiones*; seemingly encyclopedic learning often came from encyclopedias. Mockingly, Rabelais exploits these anthologies to authenticate and then to overwhelm the most absurd of tales. Merely to mention the strange demise of Bringuenarilles (17), the gigantic swallower of windmills who choked on a knob of butter (prescribed by the ever-trusty physicians), is to provoke a heterogeneous catalog of comparably improbable or ludicrous deaths. The Andouilles's surprising shape prompts the meticulous chronicler to devote an entire chapter (38) to Sausages of the World, since the Creation. Only then can the epic battle take place.

Throughout the *Quart Livre* Rabelais thwarts his readers, disappointing their expectations and fully developing the narrative nonchalance he had displayed occasionally since *Pantagruel*. But the parody has a slight moral edge where it mocks human curiosity, as Rabelais had already done, in a different context, in both the *Pantagrueline Prognostication* and the *Tiers Livre*. In the *Quart Livre* the promise of exotica, so powerful an attraction in Rabelais's models, is belied by both hyperbole and deflation. This is especially evident in the early chapters.

### §

The travelers first make landfall in Medamothi (2). It is not just that, following a tradition that includes of course Thomas More's *Utopia*, the island's name signifies Nowhere; Rabelais takes the name more literally than allegorically and recounts a series of impossibilities, but within a realistic frame. If the description of the island and its market recall the style of the many contemporary *Cosmographies*, the objects for sale take us into the realm of the imaginary and beyond even the utopian fantasy of Theleme (of which we are deliberately reminded), with the concretization of the abstract in the paintings, and the metamorphosis of the banal into the miraculous. The humble reindeer, under its Latin name, *tarandrus*, turns into a chameleon-like creature to set beside the fabulous unicorns. But the chapter ends in bathos: the *tarande* curiously resembles the workaday donkeys of Meung. Deflation continues with the arrival of the courier from Gargantua—a mere three days out—and the exchange of elegant, pious, but hardly

urgent correspondence. Perhaps these jewels of the epistolary genre (3-4) recall Pantagruel to his duty, dispelling the charms of this Vanity Fair and advancing the claims of improving literature: Gargantua's gift of books provides another threat to narrative, as the narrator offers to transcribe them for us, if we wish. The travelers hasten to their ships, obedient servants of their fictional destiny, though in retrospect Medamothi will seem the least perilous of their ports of call, a land of the literary imagination almost untouched by irony or satire.

After this glimpse of the exotic, the travelers are returned emphatically to the real world in the most famous episode of the *Quart Livre*, the encounter with the used-sheep dealer, Dindenault (5-8): in France the easily-led "moutons de Panurge" have become proverbial. This story dominated the brief *Quart Livre* of 1548, and is linked to the *Tiers Livre* by its allusions to Panurge's quest and to his fear of cuckoldry, that sensitive spot which Dindenault strikes, thereby sealing his doom. Panurge's death-dealing trick was not invented by Rabelais, being found in Folengo's mock-epic *Baldus* (1517). In any case, the trick, being a mere narrative, is of less interest to Rabelais than the characterization of the merchant, who is a dull stereotype in Folengo.

Like all Rabelais's memorable buffoons, Dindenault lives through his speech, distinguished by coarseness, ignorance, and pride. His salesman's patter also performs the Rabelaisian trick of imaginatively or comically transforming the banal into the miraculous with mere words. Dindenault's matchless ovine erudition, as he draws like a rare humanist scholar upon the riches of history, mythology, and the natural world, together with his single-minded abuse of rhetoric in the pursuit of profit, create the monomaniac type beloved of all satirists, and stand comparison with Panurge's eulogy of debt in the *Tiers Livre*. But the dénouement is more redolent of the medieval *conte* or of the farce, in whose world insufferable arrogance and greed may justly be punished by ignominious death. The confusion of genres is compounded by parody, as Panurge mimics the ascetic sermon or the *memento mori*, to palliate his heartless conduct in the final scene. But in this episode, for once, suspense is sustained quite conventionally; with Epistemon and Frere Jan, the reader holds his breath as Panurge hints at retribution, but otherwise remains uncharacteristically silent. Another oddity: this relatively light-hearted epi-

sode ends, in the 1552 edition only, with an unexpected and ominous remark from Frere Jan, who recalls enough scripture, for once, to rebuke Panurge in Pauline terms (Romans 12.9) for usurping the prerogative of the Lord; are Panurge's subsequent misadventures attributable to the vengeance of a justly-angered God? This portentous moment aside, the tale of Dindenault is a masterpiece of comic storytelling. . . . But what of the journey, its dangers and wonders? Have our travelers come all this way just to meet a sheep dealer from Saintonge?

The next three episodes seem at first to slake the reader's thirst for exotica. The landing on Ennasin, Alliance Island, has created interest even amongst anthropologists: does it describe a kinship system unknown to contemporary Europe, or the medieval extended family, or (more prosaically) the Eskimos of Greenland? It appears that the natives enjoy, through the arbitrariness of language, an unrestrained choice of partners that sweeps aside conventional relationships; but as on Medamothi an apparently realistic if unfamiliar premise is undermined by incongruity. The system deteriorates with a series of increasingly coarse and banal puns; linguistic triviality even infects Pantagruel's companions, to the point that the giant almost loses his sangfroid. His indifference is threatened particularly when, in a disconcertingly acute display of cultural relativism, the islanders' headman treats our humanist prince as a credulous barbarian from across the water!

The travelers pass on rapidly to an island that seems to sum up that interpenetration of the exotic and the banal, the real and the imaginary, which characterizes these opening chapters. To some extent the satire of materialism on Cheli ("Lips," 10-11), an episode already present in the 1548 edition, overlaps with that of the Gastrolâtres (58-60), and Rabelais had already jeered at the traditional gluttony of monks (e.g., *Gargantua*, 38). But other forms of intemperance are evident here: Frere Jan embodies the traditional vices of his profession, of course, but at times he also represents the supposed native virtues of the common-sense Frenchman. His protest against the (Italianate?) refinement of King Panigon's court, though crude and violent, reflects in an exaggerated form that manliness and frankness which the French liked to claim for themselves, and to contrast with the effete and slippery decadence of their neighbors: see Joachim du Bellay on contemporary Roman morals in the *Regrets*! Chapter 11,

which transports us momentarily to Italy, suggests a similar ambiguity: is the earthy Frere Lardon, sighing after the steakhouses of Amiens, any more ridiculous than the maundering tourists extolling the sights of Florence?

In these chapters, once again, the epic voyage is progressively forgotten. As the narrator lets slip at the end, the episode is composed mainly of anecdotes (“*menuz devis*”), since these travelers prefer gossip to sightseeing. Pantagruel is anxious to be off and, paradoxically, only Epistemon’s story, set in far-off Florence and possibly based on Rabelais’s own memories, recalls the style of the travelog. As for the epic, Homer is indeed mentioned—in the context of frying eels. An analogy between Cheli and the Land of the Lotus Eaters (*Odyssey* 9) has been suggested, but unlike Ulysses’ companions, our travelers, marshalled by the purposeful Pantagruel, are in no danger of succumbing to its temptations.

The visit to Procuracy [Prosecution], the third exotic island in succession, takes us ever further back in space and time, especially in the expanded 1552 version. A classic technique of satire is to isolate one’s targets and transform their faults into obsessions that rule their lives. The Chiquanous [Bailiffs] incarnate the venality and avarice of minor legal officials in France, apparently prone to provoke their victims to violence and sue them for assault. In this fictional world, the procedure is simplified to circumvent the law’s delays, as advertised by Bridoye in the *Tiers Livre*, and to establish the relationship between a beating and compensation without hypocritical pleadings by expensive attorneys. This amusing but limited idea can evolve both satirically and artistically because, conveniently, it reminds Panurge of the story of the Seigneur de Basché. Thus, four chapters (12–15) are added in 1552, including another story within the story; Basché’s imbricated tale of François Villon takes us further into the past and deeper into the heart of feudal French society. This nostalgic excursion into an idealized past is not gratuitous, however. Basché’s persecution by the litigious fat Prior probably reflects a profound social change, which Montaigne also observed with trepidation. Increasingly the old landed aristocracy (*noblesse d’épée*) was being marginalized in France by the rising *noblesse de robe*, the new men, often men of law, in alliance with a greedy Church. The Chiquanous will serve anyone, “monk, priest, usurer or lawyer,” who decides to attack a “courageous, virtuous, magnanimous, chivalrous” gentleman such as



Basché, the old warrior devoted to his king's service, the benevolent feudal lord whose "household" provides a vignette of the dying social order. Basché is being systematically squeezed by his avaricious ecclesiastical opponent. The anticlerical theme is underlined in Basché's story of Friar Tappecoue (13), first embodiment in this book of the religious formalism that is to color the portrayal of Quarresmeprenant and the Papimanes.

This is not the first time that Rabelais has attacked blinkered men of the cloth, and indeed grasping men of law, but here the form is audacious. Rabelais dares to tell the same story three times, and we are simultaneously distanced—twice over—from the epic journey. The challenge is intensified by the fact that the mechanics of the plot against the Chiquanous, based on a good old French wedding custom of the kind the lawyers were conspiring to uproot, are revealed at the outset. As in the Dindenault episode, Rabelais puts less into the intricacies of plotting than into the creation, especially through dialogue, of original and memorable characters. Above all, he avoids repetition by concentrating on the minor details: the victims are ever more willing, and Basché's servants ever more ingenious in inflicting punishment which produces increasingly horrendous injuries. Nonchalantly, the narrator invites his audience to decide the final fate of the Chiquanous, in whom he loses interest once they have left the stage. It is useful to remember the theater in considering the spiraling violence of these scenes, together with the grotesque dismemberment of Tappecoue, though the latter is also reminiscent of the gory scenes of epic battle. Basché's violence is of the slapstick kind, a hail of blows from Punch's cudgel on the wooden heads of his fellow-puppets. Rabelais distances reality still further by using impenetrable clinical terms and inventing monstrous onomatopoeic verbs to confound the sensitive reader. Not that Basché and Villon escape all censure: Pantagruel will not laugh (16) and his morose response seems to echo Frere Jan's warning in chapter 8: "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord."

After three landfalls, a brief transitional chapter leads to the essential episode of the storm at sea. But Bringuenarilles's story in chapter 17 is not without relevance: the litany of unforeseen deaths prepares us for the storm's lesson of humility, and for the discussion of the soul's destination in the following episode of the Macreons. Even the fact that Bringuenarilles swallows windmills has unexpectedly grim undertones: without flour, how will the people survive? But farce re-

surfaces: the splendidly insouciant conclusion to the chapter, steering the fleet past six islands in as many lines, and relating news as incomprehensible as it is probably inconsequential, will have only the incurably curious reaching for their gazetteers.

If we may safely ignore the kings of Asshole, Wasteland, and Nothing, and their associates, at the end of chapter 17, the episode of the Tempest (18–24) requires our full attention. It is of course an obligatory feature of the epic, and Rabelais recalls corresponding scenes in Homer and Virgil. Storms also occur with suspicious frequency in travel-books: the cosmographer (and noted liar) André Thevet even plagiarized this episode in the shipwreck scene of his autobiographical *Cosmographie de Levant* (1554). Comic writers, including Rabelais's favorites Lucian and Folengo, also find storms irresistible. But the episode's satire, especially of the futile superstition embodied by Panurge, is clearly inspired by Erasmus's colloquy *Naufragium* (Shipwreck).

Lest we miss Rabelais's point, he takes the unprecedented step of glossing the fiction in a later chapter (23), where Epistemon expounds in unmistakable terms the Pauline basis of Rabelais's synergistic theology. The system had already been shown in action at the outbreak of the Picrocholine war (*Gargantua* 27–28), to which Rabelais, unusually, gives a cross-reference in this episode (23). But the storm scene, written at a time when Calvin's doctrine of predestination was stirring controversy everywhere, makes the clearest possible case for a theology radically opposed to what Rabelais considered a forbidding and dispiriting principle. Synergism implies working together with God—Epistemon translates the *synergoi* of 1 Corinthians 3.9 as “co-operateurs avecques luy” [co-operators with Him]—to carry out the divine plan, except in cases where God specifically forbids it. The giant's prayer in *Pantagruel* (29) had indicated one of those cases, the so-called holy war. The models for human conduct are of course Christ and the Apostles, and their precedent allots a role to both piety and action. Panurge errs in clinging only to the former, Frere Jan to the latter: his active virtue is vitiated by his foul mouth. Pantagruel follows his grandfather Grandgousier (*Gargantua* 28) by resorting first to prayer; having recommended himself to God and sought His counsel, he then sets to work confident of divine favor and protection.

The three protagonists represent perfectly the conflicting atti-

tudes. Panurge, blubbing in the scuppers, will not raise a finger to help; Frere Jan roars round the deck cursing, pulling on any rope that comes to hand; Pantagruel, a calm in the center of the action, prays briefly and grips the mast (or tiller). When all human effort appears vain, the master having ordered that the ship be allowed to run before the storm, the giant resigns himself humbly to his fate, with a prayer composed of two most appropriate scriptural texts (Matthew 8.25 and Mark 14.36). As the storm reaches its climax, the theme is underlined by contrasting "prayers" from Panurge, who, far from resigning himself, asks for a personal—and pagan—miracle, and from Frere Jan, who swears by a modest thirty million devils.

But of course the storm scene is more than a theological allegory. For the first time in the book Panurge returns to center stage as the butt not merely of Rabelais's pious contempt but of the reader's laughter. His risibility here depends less on his windy and self-deluding rhetoric, as seen in the *Tiers Livre*, than on his superstitious cowardice, another facet of his overwhelming *philautia*, or self-love. Superstition surfaces at the outset, when Panurge bubbles with glee at the auspicious sight of no less than nine boatloads of monks bound for the Council of Chesil (meaning "fools" or "fire": either is appropriate for the great heresy-hunting assembly of Trent). Panurge's over-optimism ("exces de joye") is instantly and comically deflated by the onset of foul weather. Pantagruel, by contrast, remains thoughtful and melancholic, a more traditional reaction to the sight of monks, according to *Gargantua* (40), but perhaps also a response to a "pressing retraction" in his soul, one of those divine admonitions he describes in chapter 66.

Panurge's mounting terror is conveyed in various ways. He jabs rhetorical, literary, and liturgical tags whenever inappropriate, but his babbling, belching, excretory physical paralysis exhibits conclusively his psychological state, despite his later denials (23). Above all, he seeks salvation in the most inept, not to say impious, expedients: pleas and promises (revocable later) to the saints, prayer used as incantation, attempted bargains with God. At the height of the tempest, he wishes, successively, to make his will, to confess and, best of all, to take a collection to subsidize a pilgrim who will—eventually—save them all. The later chapters (23–24) in which the poltroon seeks to gloss over his conduct merely embellish the comic portrait.

This important episode has an unexpected structural unity, with

hardly a digression in sight. Even the subsequent debates on the psychology of fear and on the making of wills are related directly to the action and to the theological argument. But the story is told in characteristic style: after a solitary descriptive passage, which includes a little too much erudite meteorology to be convincing, the progress of the storm is conveyed almost entirely in direct speech. The copious technical language of seamanship, which even Panurge and Frere Jan have apparently absorbed in their few days at sea, is not in truth an obstacle to understanding. The barely-comprehensible cries of the crew contribute to the sense of confusion and tumult, and act as a frame for the purposeless babblings of Panurge, the all too intelligible coarseness of Frere Jan, and the few limpid utterances of Pantagruel. According to the experts, Rabelais—by chance or by design—confuses the distinct nautical patois of the Atlantic and of the Mediterranean: it scarcely matters.

Appropriately enough, having survived mortal danger, the travelers arrive at the island of the Macreons (25–28), “the people who live long,” according to the glossary (*Briefve Declaration*) added to some early editions of the book. But the Macreons are survivors in another sense, since they speak Greek and preserve the relics of Ancient civilization. The learned Epistemon feels thoroughly at home. Pantagruel, laconic during the storm, finds his tongue, whereas Panurge and Frere Jan play tiny roles; after making the episode’s only jokes (25), they are allowed to disappear. All this underlines the importance of the episode, placed at the heart of the *Quart Livre* and distinguished both by learned syncretic discourse and by a moving demonstration of Evangelism in action.

On the immortality of the soul, Rabelais distances himself from those feverish humanists who, in their zeal for Antiquity, risked subverting fundamental Christian doctrines; they too would benefit from a good dose of Pantagrueline moderation. Drawing initially upon Plutarch’s impressive essay, *On the Cessation of Oracles*, the travelers and their host discuss Ancient psychological theory, according to which all souls eventually die, or are absorbed into the world-soul. Pantagruel firmly refutes these errors, unacceptable to any Christian, and simply dismisses both the Stoic theory and the evidence assembled by Plutarch (27, end). However, in the debate on portents, which to the modern mind might appear equally inadmissible, Rabelais allows syncretic parallels to be made, not least because

here Plutarch's examples were confirmed by the author's personal experience. In an exceptional moment, Rabelais names himself—stripped of all pseudonyms and anagrams—as a witness to the prodigies and portents that foretold the death in 1543 of his master Guillaume du Bellay. The solemnity of the moment is increased by Epistemon's simple yet moving eulogies of the great man. The brooding presence of death, which has hovered around the travelers—though sometimes in farcical disguise—since the drowning of Dindenault, closes in.

But unexpectedly the story of the death of Pan (28) dispels the gloom. Pantagrue's monologue banishes care and the fleet sets sail, "our men in better humor than before," and Pantagrue himself recovers something of his "jollity of mind." These remarkable results are achieved by the giant's meditation on the death of Christ, which of course represents for the faithful triumph over death. The starting point, once again, is Plutarch: Pantagrue reinterprets his mysterious account of the death of Pan (*On the Cessation of Oracles*, 17), which was traditionally glossed as the demise of the Ancient pantheon, overthrown by Christianity. Instead, the giant applies history and scripture to prove that the story allegorizes the communication to the pagan world of the crucifixion. This syncretic reading is reinforced as Pantagrue assimilates the good shepherd of scripture to the shepherd-god Pan and to a prophecy in Virgil's rustic *Eclogues*; Christ is also the *πάῦν* eulogized by St. Paul (Romans 11.36, Colossians 3.11), whose death convulsed the world. The episode ends with Pantagrue's tears, a dramatic illustration of the role played in the spiritual and emotional life of the pious Evangelical by meditation upon Christ. But in the context of the book, these enormous tears have a cathartic effect, or act as a kind of lustration; in the last line, the perky narrator re-enters his tale to herald the return of comedy and satire.

To rekindle our laughter, the last forty chapters of the book crawl with monsters. Of the remaining tribes, only the Papefigures and Papimanes are recognizably human, but their spiritual deformities more than make up for that. In these chapters Rabelais returns to his most prolific and characteristic vein: religious satire, embodied in a parade of grotesque representatives of all that he found spiritually and morally debilitating in contemporary observance.

A case in point is King Lent (*Quaresmeprenant*, 29–32). The Lent-

en fast was often cited, and not only by the Reformers, as a pious institution that had degenerated into empty ritual. The point is made, for example, in Erasmus's colloquy *The Fish Eaters (Ichthyophagi)*, and in chapter 60 of the *Quart Livre*, where the Gastrolâtres gorge themselves with caviar on meatless days. But the Council of Trent seemed intent on reinforcing dietary regulations (see 35, end) and so once more the satire could hardly be more topical. Quaresmeprenant, literally the embodiment of Lent, is accused first (29) of formalism and misanthropy, practising joyless and unhealthy Lenten customs and prohibitions. Towards the end (32) he is compared, so inhuman are all his attributes, to the monster Antiphysie, Anti-Nature. The generalized satire takes a personal turn when Rabelais names, amongst the offspring of Antiphysie, those who had recently attacked him in print, from both sides of the religious divide: Guillaume Postel ("Pistolet"), in his *Alcorani concordiae liber* of 1543, the "demoniacal" Calvin (*De scandalis*, 1550), and a monk of Fontevrault, Gabriel Dupuyherbault (*Theotimus*, 1549). All represent the intransigent extremism so alien to Pantagrue lists.

Between these two essentially satirical chapters is placed, like the central panel of a triptych, the enumerative portrait of Quaresmeprenant, which recalls the carnival tradition and that favorite subject of contemporary painting, the battle between Carnival and Lent. But this portrait owes little to the grotesque realism of Dürer or Breughel: if anything, surrealism springs to mind. Doctor Rabelais, the celebrated anatomist, lists the parts of his subject's body, internal and external. But each is compared to an apparently random object and the similitudes, based on an association of ideas or sounds, yet curiously echoing the methods of empirical science, are generally impenetrable, if occasionally evocative. Another trap baited for the literal-minded exegete? Suffice it to say that the intellectual qualities of Quaresmeprenant (30, end) are those of a booby, and that his actions (32) suggest the same. Like the naïve young giant in *Gargantua* (11), or like the gallery of fools in Breughel's *Flemish Proverbs*, he takes metaphors and proverbs literally. But in this case foolishness may have a satirical edge: did not Evangelicals reproach the strictly orthodox for observing only "the letter that kills" (2 Corinthians 3.6)?

Lent is separated from his traditional foe, the meat of carnival, by the Physeteres or Spouter (33-34); aside from Rabelais's by now familiar dislocation of narrative structure, perhaps this episode represents

a symbolic (and unwonted) victory for the carnival. The monstrous sea-creature, the fishy dream of every Lenten abstainer, is defeated and dissected on the shores of the Sausages, allies of Mardi Gras (Shrove Tuesday). But in the battle satire gives way to comedy: Frere Jan and Panurge return to replay their respective roles in a more light-hearted vein. Panurge's useless erudition resurfaces and his superfluously syncretic evocation of biblical and mythological monsters only adds to his terror. In a single moment of lucidity, he urges a return to the Chiquanous, the one tribe who posed no threat to the drivelling coward, since they let themselves be beaten, for money. The anti-climactic battle against the Spouter, the outcome of which is divulged—again—in the chapter title, is notable mainly for the returning good humor of Pantagruel, who lets fly with an horrific pun (Perséus/Persé jus) as well as 107 darts. But in the last of the intervening digressions, on the hermetic message sent to King Darius, we are given a foretaste of the semiotic debate which is now to play an increasing role in the *Quart Livre*, not least in the episode of the Andouilles.

This farcical and parodic tale (35–42) includes one remarkably unfunny chapter (37) on the mysterious significance of proper names, another branch of the ancient and fundamental linguistic debate between nominalists and realists to which Rabelais sporadically alludes. Here the debate is inaugurated, comically, by the ridiculous and manifestly invented names of Frere Jan's lieutenants. But the prestigious views of Plato and Pythagoras shape an erudite discussion on language and revelation, to be resumed in the episode of the thawing words (55–56). We met Rabelais's friend Briand Vallée in *Pantagruel* (10), and presumably his curious divinatory performance here was witnessed by Rabelais. As with Guillaume du Bellay's death in chapter 27, personal sympathy accounts both for Rabelais's enthusiasm for the principle and for the warm eulogy that accompanies it. In the recital of classical examples of prophetic names, Rabelais cuts Pantagruel off in full flow ("If only there were time . . .") but implies, by evoking the celebrated Hebrew tradition of naming, that a fully syncretic case could be made for the validity of this arcane practice.

Briefer digressions litter the episode of the Andouilles, many of them returning us to Europe and to French triumphs, like the capture of Bergerac in 1378 and the victory of Marignano in 1515; it is thus tempting to allegorize the whole tale as a patriotic endorsement

of current French policy. The first chapter (35), with its allusions to sectarian war and to the *Concile* which ought to “reconcile” Quaresmeprenant and the Andouilles, reflects Rabelais’s Gallican pessimism about the Council of Trent; its latest decisions seemed to guarantee a lasting schism. Xenomanes’s attempt at conciliation “four years ago” looks like an allusion to the Interim of Augsburg of 1548, an effort to establish provisional agreement between the factions in Germany; such tentative moves towards religious toleration seemed increasingly at risk as Trent ground out its orthodox decrees. Noting numerous allusions to the Swiss, some commentators identify the Andouilles with the Calvinists; why else should the name of the belligerent mountain-dwelling Saulcissions (35) echo that of the Swiss (38), the most feared pikemen in Christendom? Rabelais had no love for Calvin and, as with the Papefigues (45–47), may be hinting that an intemperate taste for controversy and revolt could lead to disaster. The du Bellay policy of tolerance and reconciliation is implicit in all this.

But we should not burden the oozing, phallic Andouilles with too much meaning: whereas the allegorical Papefigues still groan beneath their adversaries’ yoke, the Andouilles are rescued by their tutelary god, the Flying Pig, bearing the life-saving mustard. The remarkable resurrection of the fallen happily concludes their story with a touch of the miraculous borrowed from the romance (like Epistemon’s resurrection in *Pantagruel* 30). Other Arthurian details abound, such as the naming of Gymnaste’s sword (41) in the fashion of Excalibur, though not quite! Rabelais also decorates his grotesque tale with epic parody (the Trojan Pig) and incongruously realistic detail: in battle the Andouilles use skirmishers, clumps of pikemen, cavalry, and we are reminded that culinary imagery was already being used to describe the butchery of war. Echoes, too, of contemporary colonization, as the savage tribe is defeated by superior technology, offers tribute, and sends hostages to Europe in exchange for the derisory gift of a penknife (42). But in these chapters farce predominates as Rabelais far outshines in manic invention the presumptuous and anonymous author of the *Disciple de Pantagruel*, the pseudo-Rabelaisian work of 1538 in which the Andouilles had made their literary debut.

For the next episode, Ruach (“Wind” or “Spirit” in Hebrew; 43–44), Rabelais turned to another trusty source of humor which he had made his own, the proverb, that traditional repository of unimpeachable wisdom. Rabelais’s characters will often treat a proverb with



comic literal-mindedness: a few pages back (41) Pantagruel performed the proverbially impossible feat of "breaking sausages at the knee." Here his creator goes a stage further and founds an entire society on the proverb "to live on wind," meaning to live frugally, without apparent means of support. One might think that such behavior has much to commend it, in a book on moderation; are not the Ruachites preferable to their greasy, bulging neighbors the Andouilles? Not a bit of it: they earn a dishonorable place among the gluttons and guzzlers of the *Quart Livre* because they too are monomaniacs, as obsessed with the quality and value of their aliment as the most dedicated gourmet. Their reward is chronic ill-health, appropriately enough in the eyes of Doctor Rabelais, who knew from Hippocrates the dangerous properties of bodily wind and gas. As so often, medicine is inseparable from scatological humor: the narrator embarks on an anthology of puns, anecdotes and allusions to wind as he describes, in the approved cosmographer's manner, the physical and social habits of this alien tribe. His style coarsens as we progress further into this society of misguided materialists who blindly pursue "les choses fortuites," the literally ephemeral pleasures of this world. Panurge's vulgar and flatulent *dixain* is a fitting celebration of their paradoxical grossness; it also reminds us of Rabelais's habit, even in the new age of Ronsard, of depoeticizing poetry.

Contrasting with the burlesque exoticism of Ruach is the temptingly allegorical visit to the downtrodden Papefigues (45-47). Commentators identify their sad fate with that of the Vaudois "heretics," the victims of Catholic massacre at Mérindol and Cabrières in 1545 who had been formerly under the protection of Rabelais's patron, Guillaume du Bellay. Less specifically, the Papefigues are apparently punished for having demonstrated their dissidence too openly. Like the irreconcilable hostility between Quaresmeprenant and the Andouilles, this reflects the darkening religious picture in Rabelais's time, while in the context of his fiction, it prepares us for the fanatical Papimanes. But of course all is not gloom: the narrator compensates with the lively, old-fashioned tale of the laborer and the apprentice devil, during which Rabelais amusedly mocks some familiar targets: corrupt monks, rapacious lawyers, ignorant theologians, all devoted to the Devil's service. To caricature he adds a hint of rare optimism: the students, equally traditional prey to Lucifer, have recently taken to Evangelism and may yet elude him. Moreover, the

breezy tale, with its cheerful characterization and ribald conclusion, recalls the storytelling of *Pantagruel* (e.g., 15); earthy joviality is returning to Rabelais's writing as a contrasting strand to the other worldliness of *Pantagruel*.

Vulgarity has a part to play also in the episode of the Papimanes (48-54), the book's most clear-cut political satire. The strained relations between Henry II and the papacy in 1551, and Rabelais's experiences in Rome, inspired this portrayal of a theocracy dominated by materialism, and particularly by the Deadly Sin of Gluttony. The Papimanes's feasting reminds us that Jean du Bellay nearly beggared himself in Rome throwing the obligatory party to celebrate a royal birth, as Rabelais recorded in the *Sciomachie* (1549), and that the current pope, Julius III, was notorious for his love of spicy food, according to the epitaph in Joachim du Bellay's *Regrets* (104). The Papimanes are also idolaters, prepared to worship anything connected with the pope, whom they blasphemously treat as both God and Messiah; their fanaticism threatens persecution and war. They practise a brand of superstition that makes Panurge feel, for once, completely at home, and a determined formalism which, for example, would impose a three-day fast on the famished sailors.

What distinguishes this satire of the papacy from so many others is that Rabelais directs his fire principally against the *Decretals*. This anthology of papal judgments, forming the second part of the *Corpus* of Canon Law, must not be confused with the first part, the *Decretum* of Gratian, whose collection of scriptural and patristic precedents was generally approved by Rabelais and the Gallicans. But the decisions enshrined in the *Decretals* were being abused, they believed, both to justify papal interventions in the secular domain, and to award needless privilege to the clergy. It took but a slight satirical distortion to make them the basis of a whole new civilization; for the Papimanes the *Decretals* replace the Scriptures and govern every thought, word, and deed. Ironically, many of Bishop Homenaz's pronouncements (e.g., 51, end) would be soundly Evangelical were they inspired by scripture rather than by papal edicts. But his fastidious charity and perverse ecstasy expose him instead to ridicule, and scatological humor in particular acquires a satirical dimension. The normally dispassionate Epistemon, for example, is afflicted with diarrhea while listening to Homenaz (51), and reading or otherwise using the *Decretals* produces the most unpleasant (or miraculous) physical

symptoms (52). Homenaz, carried away by enthusiasm like Thaumaste long ago, loses control of his bodily functions (53).

The bishop of the Papimanes is a dangerous version of Dindenault, a blinkered specialist who assaults us with passionate eloquence, misguided erudition (49), and extravagant threats. But his fate is quite different: Dindenault was drowned, slightly surprisingly, whereas Homenaz, maybe more surprisingly, is praised and rewarded by Pantagruel, who calls the Papimanes "good Christians." Can this be merely an excuse for a joke about the Bon Chrétien pears that grew in Rabelais's beloved Touraine? It appears rather that the giant is mocking the Roman habit of calling "good Christians" the simple folk who flocked to Rome to be fleeced; Pantagruel is thus twisting the Romans' supercilious irony against them. Another puzzle is the giant's sharp rebuke to Frere Jan for blasphemy (50): why this extreme reaction from a prince who is merely ironical about the Papimanes's idolatry? Perhaps excusable at such times of crisis as the storm and the battle with the Spouter, Frere Jan's blasphemy cannot be forgiven when it merely provides the punchline of a joke; Rabelais knew the excesses of monkish humor. *Noblesse oblige*: polite towards his hosts, Pantagruel can be ruthless towards his own team.

Like the storm and the Spouter, the episode of the thawing words (55-56) provides an interlude between landings, where for a time the satire of monomania is suspended. But the episode is no mere space-filler; it contains the book's most penetrating study of communication, of the role of language and signs in uncovering truth. The dramatic entrance of the mysterious disembodied sounds is enough to revive all of Panurge's terror, of course, despite the fact that travelers had often reported similar phenomena, attributed sometimes to the groaning of the ice in northern latitudes. In any case, the danger is illusory, being no more than a matter of words, and the mystery is dissipated by two kinds of discourse: a Pantagrueline monologue on the nature of language and truth, and a comic scene which undercuts the pretensions of language by exposing its ambiguity. In chapter 56, metaphors are comically concretized ("giving one's word" and "selling words") and puns realized ("mots de gueule": either "heraldic red" or "joyful" words).

But first Pantagruel reopens the epistemological debate of the *Tiers Livre*, invoking Plato, Aristotle, Homer, Orpheus, and Moses to recall the ancient theory of divine inspiration. He juxtaposes syn-

cretically the pagan philosopher Petron's cosmological theory (found in Plutarch) with Gideon's experience (Judges 6.37), to conclude that in rare instances divine truths are revealed to humankind, though it is by no means certain that they will be understood. Gideon's sign suggests once more the efficacy of non-verbal communication, but here at least Rabelais exploits the image of "catarrh" in Plato's *Cratylus* to suggest that at times even "parolles," words, can drip down to enlighten humankind, alongside forms and patterns from the seat of truth. However, the thawing sounds which represent last year's battle between the Arimaspians and the Nephelibates (the Scythians and the Cloudmen) are onomatopoeic and thus unmistakable. The composer Jannequin had actually used some of them in his famous tone-poem on the Battle of Marignano, which apparently filled sixteenth-century audiences with martial enthusiasm. Are non-verbal signs more reliable, more communicative than words? We recall Panurge's babbling and excretions, the injured Chiquanou's mumbling, Pantagruel's silences, and a host of eloquent signs in this and previous books; Rabelais will return to the theme in the last episodes.

Similar questions are immediately raised at the travelers' last port of call, the very fatherland of the materialism whose disciples they have met so often: its governor, Messere Gaster [Milord Belly], communicates only by signs. The episode (57-62) has the usual combination of the picturesque and the epic, the real and the surreal; it begins with a cosmographer's description of the appearance and customs of the isle and ends in a welter of myths and impossibilities. The land of the Belly offers two satirical targets, ventriloquy and gluttony. The first is no harmless music-hall act, but a supposed means of divination, associated with demonic possession, which Rabelais had probably observed in Italy (where else?). Like some methods of divination condemned in the *Tiers Livre*, it is a snare set by the Devil to entrap unwary folk seeking the truth—having failed to heed the warnings in the previous chapter! The condemnation of the gluttonous Gastrolâtres in their monkish dress is no less obvious, being based on a memorable passage of St. Paul (Philippians 3.18-19), who wept over those for whom the Belly was God. No innocent carnival festivity here: in a book replete with banquets, the feasting of the Gastrolâtres, even on fast days, is exceptional, and Rabelais simply copies out the menu. Like other Rabelaisian fools, the Gastrolâtres take a proverb literally and "sacrifice to the belly" (i.e., eat), little

realizing how their idol mocks them with scatological sarcasm (60, end).

Pantagruel condemns the idolaters unreservedly, but Gaster himself receives the ambiguous tribute of another satirical eulogy. Platonists praised Love as the "master and governor of the world"; the satirist Persius transferred the titles to the Belly. Rabelais follows suit: although Gaster, by his own admission, is "a poor, vile, wretched creature," he also incarnates the irresistible instinct for self-preservation. Since, as another proverb puts it, "the belly has no ears," he cannot be swayed by reason in the struggle to survive. Unlike the guileful ventriloquists, the Engastrimythes, Gaster speaks the plain truth, without words. Complementing the semiological observations of previous episodes, Gaster epitomizes the kind of non-verbal communication whose meaning is transparent: when he rumbles, all must listen, and when his governess Penia [Need or Poverty] stalks the land, all laws and conventions tumble before her. Naturally, Gaster is an egotist, the supreme victim of *philautia*, and hence the ambiguity of the panegyric. A kind of burlesque Prometheus, Gaster is so far from being a Pantagruelist that he seeks incessantly to control the "choses fortuites," the material environment. All too often, Gaster's inventions, designed to safeguard and increase his food supply, simply create new problems. With his disciples set to devour the entire animal kingdom, the island is an ecologist's nightmare.

In this morose analysis of the human condition, which used to enchant Marxist critics, the humanist *topos* of the "diabolical" invention of gunpowder (61) is deprived of its consoling counterpart, the "divine" invention of printing (cf. *Pantagruel* 8). Gaster's efforts to remedy the ills of humanity seem doomed, but in the last chapter (62) the narrator restores our spirits with a comic display of imagination, which turns murderous technology into fantasy, under the aegis of the magical Abbaye de Theleme. The recital of natural impossibilities that closes the episode is inspired by that "fluent liar" Pliny (*Gargantua* 6). But the final anecdote, concerning music, is given an allegorical interpretation and takes us once more into the realm of Pythagorean symbols, this time with Evangelical overtones. The earthy Gaster is left behind as the narrator invites us to lift up our hearts and voices to God. Like good Pantagruelists, we must turn from the material world—where, in fact, Rabelais's travelers will never again set foot.

Since we are not, under the new Rabelaisian rules of fiction, to hear the oracular words of the Holy Bottle, it is appropriate that the journey should end with the most frustrating of traditional maritime scenes: the ships are becalmed and so is the book, as Rabelais evokes the boredom of the crew in another series of gestures and attitudes that speak louder than words. Similarly, the time has come for the dénouement, but Pantagruel “explains all” in a most appropriate if unexpected fashion. To the crew’s idle questions he replies, not with “a long needless train of pedantic cant,” but by “signs and gestures” (63), by another banquet, in fact, but a modest one. The list of creatures here (64) is not of species endangered by the Gastrolâtres’s gluttony, but a sardonic reminder of the unpleasant effects of fasting: according to another of Pliny’s tales, fasting renders human spittle venomous, particularly to other venomous creatures! Pantagruel’s feast, which comically guarantees the serpents’ safety, is at another level an act of communion, an Evangelical supper, accompanied by “canticles in praise of God Most High.” It produces the desired effect and revives even Panurge, who for a moment rediscovers psychic and physical equilibrium, praising God with unexampled piety.

The decision not to land at Ganabin, the Isle of Thieves (66), has important Evangelical and syncretic implications. Pantagruel explains—at last—the workings of divine admonition within him: “Je sens en mon ame retraction urgente, comme si feust une voix de loing ouye” [I feel a pressing retraction in my soul, as it were a voice heard from afar]. This phenomenon, which has served the giant frequently and well, is the final and most authentic of non-verbal signs, and its prestige is enhanced by syncretic association when Epistemon evokes the mystic daemon of Socrates, the sign of his holy inspiration.

This solemn moment of revelation might have been the climax and conclusion of the book, but Rabelais is loath to end his comic tale on so portentous a note. For the last time he depicts his exemplary trio: the Socratic Pantagruel, the earthy Frere Jan, and Panurge the poltroon, whose encounter with the ship’s cat provides a thoroughly stercoraceous Rabelaisian finale (67). All the author’s personae come into play: the good doctor explains the physiological manifestations of fear, the humanist scholar provides fifteen synonyms for them, the patriot associates them with foolish foreigners, and the philosopher proves the primacy of sign over language, as Panurge’s

shirt-tails belie his protestations of courage. . . . But the last word lies with Rabelais the comic artist, unwilling to crush for ever his most complex creation. Even at the end of this Iliad of woes, as the Erasmian adage has it, Panurge bounces up, bubbling with self-esteem, to persuade us that black is white, that shit is saffron or, if not, then that we should join him in a goblet of wine. The "beuveurs tresilustres" and other Pantagruelists can hardly refuse his last request.

# 6

## Postscript

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Rabelais's death in 1553 did not put an end to Rabelaisian writing. Already during his lifetime a number of works had appeared exploiting the fame of his characters; the most interesting is the anonymous *Disciple de Pantagruel* of 1538, which anticipated the voyage of the *Quart Livre* and provided Rabelais with some names and incidents for his own book—an amusing case of the biter bit. Unauthorized editions of his authentic works were also very common, despite Rabelais's efforts to protect his copyright.

Interest did not abate with his death. Readers may have felt slightly cheated by the apparently inconclusive conclusion to the *Quart Livre*, though in many ways it is as satisfying, artistically and thematically, as it could be. But those who longed, like Panurge, to hear the words of the Holy Bottle, were not to be frustrated indefinitely. The first installment of a sequel, sixteen chapters entitled *L'Isle Sonante* [*Ringing Island*], was published in 1562. Its main features were violent satires of the Roman Church in its pomp and of grasping lawyers. Then in 1564 came the complete book, in forty-seven chapters, *Le Cinquiesme et dernier livre des faicts et dictz heroïques du bon Pantagruel* [*The Fifth and Last Book of the Heroic Words and Deeds of the Good Pantagruel*]. It conducts the travelers, via a dozen exotic islands, to Lanternland, seat of the Holy Bottle. Neither work bears a publisher's address, and the only editorial explanation for their appearance is a teasing epigram at the end of the complete book. Matters are complicated by the existence of a late sixteenth-century manuscript of the text which not only contains a large number of variant readings but even a whole new chapter.

The authenticity of the *Cinquiesme Livre* is another of the great Rabelaisian conundrums. Some readers were suspicious from the start, but the book has always appeared in complete editions of Rabelais, despite the misgivings of some editors. Much early discussion of



the problem was impressionistic, revolving around what was or was not considered "Rabelaisian." More recently, statistical analysis of vocabulary and syntax has produced the theory that the basis of the work may well be some drafts by Rabelais (perhaps rejected from earlier books), cobbled together by a fairly able pasticheur who nonetheless transcribed whole passages from the *Disciple de Pantagruel* and another work that occasionally inspired the authentic Rabelais, Francesco Colonna's *Dream of Poliphilus*. Jokes and phrases are also lifted from Rabelais's four authentic books. At present, in the continuing absence of any miraculously conclusive proof, the most that we can say is that the *Cinquiesme Livre* is not the finished book that Rabelais would have produced, had he lived, but that it is superior in literary quality to the numerous pseudo-Rabelaisian works. It seems safest to attribute it, like a disputed Renaissance painting, to the "school of" Rabelais.

As for the content: the first part, the *Isle Sonante*, finds the travelers in familiar territory. The exotic birds that flock there represent an obvious allegory of the Roman Church, an institution dedicated, like the Papimanes of the *Quart Livre*, to the veneration of the Pope, the *Papegaut* [Popehawk], who perches atop a pyramid of retainers with equally transparent names. The satire of clerical sloth and gluttony is also unmistakable. The travelers next visit a couple of surreal islets, Ferremens [Tools], where the narrator's bewilderment at the end of the chapter may be echoed by the reader, and Cassade [Sharpening] which allegorizes the perils of gaming. The last episode in this part, another fierce and transparent satire, is aimed once more at the Men of Law. It develops the Chiquanous episode of the *Quart Livre* (12-16), but goes further, and less humorously, into the venal procedures of the law. The rapacious Chatz Fourrez (Furry Fatcats), with their hideous Archduke Grippeminault, are depicted simply as grisly monsters, and this invective satire provides little of the amusement we might expect, though the opposite reactions of Frere Jan and of Panurge recall their roles throughout the *Quart Livre*. A chapter only present in the *Isle sonante* of 1562 depicts the equally grasping Apedeftes [Ignoramuses], a satire on the tax-gatherers of the *Chambre des Comptes*.

From this point the *Cinquiesme Livre* is less a satire than a comic cruise through a set of bizarre but unthreatening societies, united by their delight in festivals and banquets. The heterogeneous episodes in-

clude a skit on Aristotelianism in the land of Entelechie, queen of the Fifth Essence, and two examples of that favorite theme, the world turned upside down, with the Frères Fredons [Quavering Friars], who do everything backwards, and the Pays de Satin [Land of Satin], proverbial site of all impossibilities. In these episodes the comedy of the incongruous becomes sadly predictable, as their little oddities are paraded one by one. In the final episode set in Lanternland, the extensive descriptions and enumerations are largely borrowed from Colonna and also betray an unmistakable decline from the inventiveness of the *Quart Livre*. The characters, too, plod rather mechanically through their assigned roles.

However, the revelation of the Oracle, attended by all the paraphernalia of mystic initiation, is an interesting scene, and the single word, or sound, uttered by the bottle: "Trinch" ["Drink" in German], reopens the question of the symbolism of wine so often raised in the four authentic books. It is hardly an unambiguous answer to Panurge's dilemma, but then the question of his marriage had been resolved in its essence early in the *Tiers Livre* and had certainly faded from view in the *Quart Livre*. The ribaldry of Panurge's "inspired" efforts at verse reveal that his attitude towards the opposite sex has not changed one iota through all his misadventures. But the priestess's final advice that they should tread the paths of wisdom with "guide de Dieu et compagnie d'homme" [God's guidance and man's company] breathes the spirit of Pantagruelism: humility and sociability have been the watchwords of Rabelais's giants throughout their many journeys.

### §

The popularity of Rabelais's writings is evident from the many pastiches, and from the number of editions published. There were over a hundred in the sixteenth century and, after an understandable drop to about twenty editions in French in the seventeenth, the number has risen steadily, so that the present century will see as many different editions as Rabelais's own. His influence on other writers, both at home and abroad, has been considerable, and it is also interesting to glance at the various causes, political, social, and religious, in which his name and reputation have been invoked.

In his own time, of course, Rabelais fell foul of those whom his

moderation seemed to threaten, the partisan ideologues on each side of the religious divide. But he won the support of influential patrons and, to judge by stray allusions in diaries and inventories, of humbler folk who enjoyed a good story well told. Although Ronsard produces a caricatural version of Rabelais in the epitaph written soon after his death, du Bellay compliments him several times (classing him, a little mysteriously, as a poet—but Marot had implied the same ten years earlier). Montaigne put him in good company (*Essais* 2.10) alongside Boccaccio and the neo-Latin poet Janus Secundus, amongst the authors who provided worthwhile entertainment. Montaigne did not say as much, in the years of his maturity, for such masters as Ariosto and Ovid. Any number of lesser writers, particularly *conteurs* like Noël du Fail and Guillaume Bouchet, found inspiration in Rabelais's style and gave a new lease of life to his outrageous humor.

The list of his later admirers in France contains some surprises. In the classical period, La Fontaine and Molière could be expected to find inspiration in the greatest of French humorists, and the witty Madame de Sévigné “nearly died laughing” when her son read extracts to her. But even the austere Racine fell under Rabelais's spell to the extent of borrowing several lines, and two characters, for his only comedy, *Les Plaideurs*, which is, appropriately, a skit on the law. In the Age of Enlightenment, Diderot harps ironically on Rabelais's role as “high priest of the flask,” but echoes his narrative style in *Jacques le Fataliste*. Voltaire is similarly ambiguous: his scorn for Rabelais, an inferior version of Jonathan Swift, in the *Lettres philosophiques*, is in part retracted in later correspondence and quite belied by the “Rabelaisian” style of much of his fiction.

Such modified rapture produced a reaction, as might be expected, from the Romantics. Alfred de Vigny was “ravished” by Rabelais, Théophile Gautier considered him a “Homère moqueur,” and the two masters of the movement, Chateaubriand and Victor Hugo, raised him to the heights. The former places him among the “génies-mères [qui] semblent avoir enfanté et allaité tous les autres . . . Rabelais a créé les lettres françaises” [mother-geniuses who seem to have borne and suckled all the others . . . Rabelais created French literature]. Hugo similarly puts Rabelais among the fourteen inspired geniuses (“les Mages”) who have brought honor to humankind; he incarnates the mystical “Gaul” of Hugo's imagination. But it is doubtful whether these judgments were based on much reading of

the text. More substantial tributes were paid, for example, by Balzac, whose *Contes drolatiques* are a homage to his fellow Tourangeau, and by Flaubert, whose correspondence bubbles with Rabelaisian references and who wrote a juvenile essay on *Pantagruel*. His youthful enthusiasm was echoed by André Gide, whose diary proclaims exultantly that a young man need read no more than Aristophanes, Shakespeare, and Rabelais, and by Anatole France, who published a very readable study of Rabelais.

In recent times enthusiasm amongst fellow-writers has been patchy. In a straw poll conducted in the 1960s, Manuel de Diéguez found that contemporary writers' reaction to his insidious question ranged from a shamefaced admission that the culprit had never read a word of Rabelais to delighted acknowledgment of the "first Surrealist." Probably the most prolific adept of Rabelais in recent years has been Raymond Queneau, whose broad humor and linguistic inventiveness owe a measurable debt to France's greatest joker. With the relaxation in moral standards of recent decades, to admit in France to an interest in Rabelais is no longer to be greeted with a slightly raised eyebrow. Perhaps the turning-point came in 1972 when, in the teeth of some doughty if ill-informed municipal opposition, Rabelais's "local" university at Tours became the Université François Rabelais.

### §

On the whole, the reactions cited above are to Rabelais's zest, invention, and humor. But there is another side to his influence. Almost from the beginning, his name and sometimes his style have been associated with subversion. One of the earliest references to *Pantagruel* occurs in a Lutheran pamphlet of 1533, *Le Livre des marchands*, and Reformers throughout the sixteenth century, including Henri Estienne and Marnix de Sainte-Aldegonde, deliberately used Rabelaisian allusions and satirical devices to bolster their propaganda. That remorseless Calvinist Agrippa d'Aubigné found a use for Rabelaisian pastiche in his antipapist satires *Les Aventures du Baron de Foeneeste* and *La Confession de Sancy*.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Rabelais's text itself became something of an underground work, summed up in La Bruyère's regret that Rabelais, a writer capable of achieving moral and literary excellence, was guilty of pandering to the lowest instincts

of the mob. Jumbling genres was not an approved seventeenth-century pastime. But this demotic or democratic tendency of Rabelais came into its own with the collapse of the Ancien Régime. If Beaumarchais's Figaro was an immediate precursor of revolutionary egalitarianism, Rabelais's Panurge was not far behind. The most eloquent testimony came from the historian Pierre-Louis Ginguené, who in 1791 published (ostensibly from the press of Theleme, in Utopia) *De l'Autorité de Rabelais dans la Révolution présente* [*On the Authority of Rabelais in the current Revolution*]. It is a fine example of the ravages wrought on an unresisting text by a humorless ideologue. The giants' modest debauches become a paradigm of monarchical extravagance, Frere Jan incarnates clerical incompetence, and Panurge emerges as spokesman and savior of the masses. But one cannot miss Ginguené's point that Rabelais's civil and ecclesiastical targets were still there to be shot at in the last days of the Ancien Régime.

The Romantics, including Hugo and above all the historian Michelet, continued this trend, though in more general terms, celebrating in Rabelais the genius who encapsulates his own age but also represents the future of France, the golden age of science and progress. The aggressively rationalist view of Rabelais was given academic respectability by the writings of Abel Lefranc, credited with the revival of serious Rabelaisian studies at the turn of the century, but also the proponent of a theory of Rabelais's atheism which owed more to Lefranc's Third Republic radicalism than to an understanding of sixteenth-century humor. At the same time, a more anarchic reading of Rabelais was being made by Alfred Jarry, whose *Ubu* plays recreate the wild humor and exotic language with which Rabelais, according to Jarry, scarified the bourgeoisie of his own time; Jarry himself adopted the lifestyle and idiolect of the legendary Maistre François.

If Jarry's *fin-de-siècle* antics reflect contemporary restlessness and nihilism, another dramatic treatment of Rabelais's supposed iconoclasm emerged from a later outburst of French unrest. For having sided with the dissident students during the Events of 1968, Jean-Louis Barrault was dismissed from his post at the Odéon theater. His riposte was to stage a previously-prepared libertarian version of *Gargantua and Pantagruel* in a wrestling hall in the Paris suburbs, and subsequently on a world tour. This "Hippy Rabelais," with Pantagruelion translated into *Indian* hemp and the Abbaye de Theleme a

paradise of Free Love and self-expression, made a spectacular show and introduced a version of Rabelais to a new audience. It was the most political reading among a spate of adaptations for theater and television from the 1960s onwards. Indeed, Rabelais's works, with their theatrical roots and dramatic dialogue, have always invited more or less (usually less) faithful stage adaptation, including puppet shows, ballets and comic operas (Jarry was the librettist for a 1910 *Pantagruel*).

The anarcho-populist Rabelais has also been accorded academic respectability, notably by the influential Soviet critic Mikhail Bakhtin. Rabelais had been given a stimulating if implausible Marxist reading by Henri Lefebvre, unconsciously echoing Ginguéné and interpreting Rabelais's literary portrayal of a semi-mythical society as a faithful if involuntary account of the sixteenth-century class struggle and the growth of capitalism. Bakhtin's analysis, written in 1940, became available in the West in 1969 and generated enormous interest; his earlier writings were exhumed and incorporated in a new school, and several studies of Rabelais acknowledged his influence. His Rabelais is a text embodying the carnivalesque resistance of the people to official culture and public seriousness; the fertile vigor of the lower body, in which Rabelais takes such unusual delight, symbolizes the eternal and ultimately successful struggle for survival and conquest over the material world. The boisterous laughter of the people is more productive than the watery and negative snigger of satire.

### §

Bakhtin's remarkable evocations of Russian folklore to illuminate the universal carnivalesque elements in Rabelais are just one illustration of Rabelais's world-wide appeal. Rabelais has always found a particular welcome amongst Anglo-Saxon readers, despite his invariably hostile treatment of England, France's inveterate enemy. It is tempting to suggest that the British, having endured only a brief and superficial brush with Cartesianism and neo-classicism, are more in tune than the French with Rabelais's formless and vulgar style or, in Huntington Brown's memorable but now unrepeatable phrase, with his "gay and hairy ribaldry." As it happens, the Germans had him in the vernacular earlier, with the 1575 adaptation of *Gargantua* by Johann Fischart, and Goethe did him the honor of sketching a continuation

of the *Quart Livre*. But no complete German translation appeared until that of Gottlob Regis in 1832, whereas two monuments of the English language had imprinted Rabelais vividly on the Anglo-Saxon mind many years earlier.

The first of these is a dictionary. Randle Cotgrave's *Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* (1611) is imbued with the language and the spirit of Rabelais, and often provides the only reliable gloss on his most far-fetched neologisms. Cotgrave's book is a treasury of proverbs and metaphors, in both languages, and many are ascribed simply to "Rab." The work was indispensable to Sir Thomas Urquhart, an eccentric Scottish baronet (1611-1660), who died laughing, we are told, at the news of Charles II's Restoration, and to whom we owe the best English translation of Rabelais. The first two books appeared in 1653 and the third, posthumously, in 1693. Temperamentally and stylistically, Urquhart and Rabelais were made for each other; Urquhart's is the only translation to preserve and even embellish the authentic flavor of Rabelais, and his minor infidelities are a small price to pay for having the great French humorist naturalized so completely. The quality of Urquhart's work can be judged by the less inspiring continuation, due to the Huguenot refugee Pierre Le Motteux, who added translations of the *Quart Livre* and the *Cinquiesme Livre* to Urquhart's books in 1694. But the more pedestrian Le Motteux has the distinction of having inaugurated the allegorical school of Rabelaisian criticism, in the "Remarks" he added to the text.

There is plenty of evidence, however, that Rabelais was known in Britain before the advent of Urquhart. It seems unlikely that Shakespeare read him, despite the appearance of the pedant Holofernes in *Love's Labour's Lost*, but there are unmistakable allusions to Rabelais in contemporary satires by Gabriel Harvey and Sir John Harington. The more illustrious names of Ben Jonson, Francis Bacon, and Sir Thomas Browne can be cited as admirers and occasional imitators of Rabelais. After the brief Augustan interlude, Rabelais came into his own in the England of Swift (*A Tale of a Tub* as well as *Gulliver's Travels*), Smollett (*The Adventures of an Atom*), and especially Laurence Sterne. *Tristram Shandy* is the closest that English literature has come to reproducing the farcical gusto and self-conscious disorder of Rabelais's fiction, and "Shandeism" is the natural offspring of Pantagruelism.

Early in the next century that chronicler of eccentricity Thomas Love Peacock found in Rabelais a congenial precursor, and Thomas Southey was not immune to his Romantic charms. But Victorian England, in the golden age of the novel, was on the whole infertile ground for boisterous humor, in public; Dickens, for example, shared none of Balzac's enthusiasm for Rabelais. As in seventeenth-century France, Rabelais went underground: characteristic is Trollope's Archdeacon Grantly (*The Warden*), who had to indulge his taste for the Frenchman behind a locked door.

One of the great blows struck against literary prudery was *Ulysses*, and it is no accident that Joyce's mock epic alludes to Rabelais several times, and that Arnold Bennett, in a double-edged compliment, thought its *Circe* episode "as good as Rabelais." The allusion in Molly Bloom's notorious soliloquy is the most revealing: "like some of those books he brings me the works of Master François somebody supposed to be a priest about a child born out of her ear because her bumgut fell out a nice word for any priest to write . . ." *Gargantua* was still a forbidden book, especially in a respectable Catholic household. Rabelais's cause was not helped at this period by the antics of the "Picasso of the Occult," Aleister Crowley, who proclaimed Rabelais a high initiate of the Dark Path, assimilating the Thelemite rule "Fays ce que voudras" to the black magician's credo "Do what thou wilt." Rabelais's Stoico-Christian ideal becomes in Crowley's hands an injunction to self-indulgence, as a means of piercing to the immanent meaning of life. In fact, Rabelais has attracted the attention of occultists down the centuries, and the breadth of his fictional canvas has also incited those modern magicians, the psychoanalysts, mythographers, and anthropologists, to treat him with majestic seriousness. On the literary front, Rabelais has continued to inspire novelists, such as Robertson Davies (*The Rebel Angels*, 1981, revolving around Rabelais's lost *Stratagemata*), Bamber Gascoigne (*Cod Streuth*, 1986, based on chapters 26–28 of the *Tiers Livre*), and Anthony Burgess, Rabelais's doughtiest Anglo-Saxon champion in recent years.

Burgess sometimes regretted the annexation and colonization of Rabelais by the academic world, but there is today a revival of the equally myopic tendency to associate him solely with mindless hedonism. In the Loire valley, courtesy of the ever-vigilant tourist industry, we may relax in the *relais Rabelais* and wash down our ome-



*lette Gargamelle* with a glass or two of chilled *Grandgousier*. We are encouraged to forget that the Gastrolâtres's orgiastic engulfment of the world was superseded by Pantagruel's last banquet, with its modest enjoyment of the good things the Lord provides for our sustenance. But it would be inappropriate to end an essay on Rabelais on a censorious note. Rabelais has survived and even prospered because he is above all an enjoyable author, and that enjoyment can take as many forms as there are readers. Laughter is the special property of humankind, "le propre de l'homme," and it arises from our unique ability to compare theory with practice, appearance with reality, shadow with substance, text with subtext. Rabelais's inimitable books teach us how to laugh at the world's pretenses and, if need be, at our own.



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**François Rabelais**, France's most renowned and controversial comic writer of the Renaissance, has provoked every reaction from pious outrage to unbridled delight. This concise but comprehensive essay highlights the consistent playfulness of his work, but otherwise allows Rabelais's seeming contradictions (fantasy and realism, laughter and erudition, sex and spirituality) to coexist and complement one another.

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**Michael J. Heath** is Reader in French at King's College, University of London. He has published numerous editions, translations, essays, and other works of Renaissance scholarship.





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