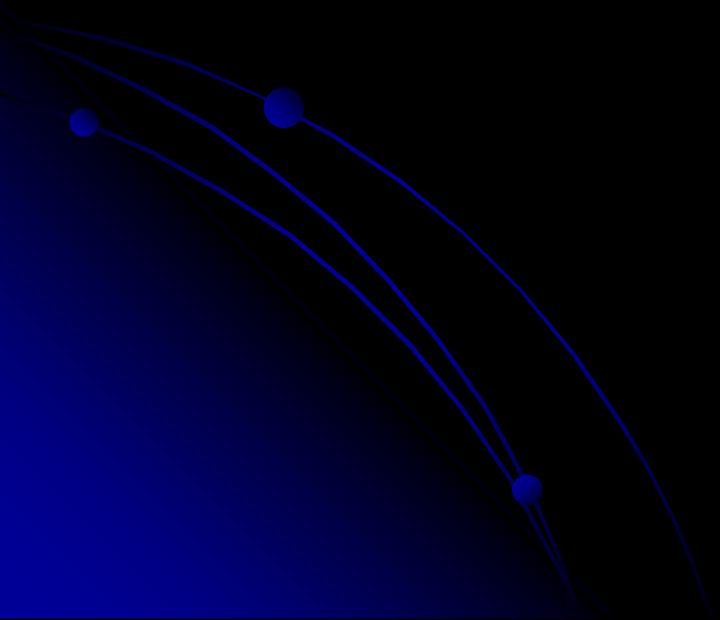


Rabelais and the Humanist Evangelistes

Alan Haffa



Biography



- Francois Rabelais (1490?-1553)
- Franciscan Monk; left order when forbidden to study Greek; Joined the Benedictines with Papal Dispensation from Clement VII
- 1530, studied medicine
- Head Physician at hospital in Lyons
- Had a child who died young
- 1536, Paul III absolved him and allowed him to practice medicine

Gargantua and Pantagruel

- Pantagruel, 1532
- Gargantua, 1534
- Le Tiers Livre (third book), 1546
- Le Quartieme Livre (fourth book) 1552
- Le Cinquieme Livre (fifth book)
posthumously, 1561

La Bruyere on Rabelais' Writing

- ‘Marot and Rabelais are inexcusable in their habit of scattering filth about their writings. Both of them had genius enough and wit enough to do without any such expedient, even for the amusement of those persons who look more to the laugh to be got out of a book than to what is admirable in it. Rabelais especially is incomprehensible. His book is an enigma,—one may say inexplicable. It is a Chimera; it is like the face of a lovely woman with the feet and the tail of a reptile, or of some creature still more loathsome. It is a monstrous confusion of fine and rare morality with filthy corruption. Where it is bad, it goes beyond the worst; it is the delight of the basest of men. Where it is good, it reaches the exquisite, the very best; it ministers to the most delicate tastes.’

Encyclopedic in Scope

- Mikhail Bakhtin considered it the first Novel
- Novel is about Challenging Social
- “Carnivalesque” is also seen in the Grotesque, the Scatalogical and the Excess of the novel
- Polyglossia versus Monoglossia
- Complex world view, not simple; Connected with the Present more than the Past
- Genre is unique and impossible to categorize; L'histoire or Chronique (History and Chronicle) and mock Epic.

Evangelistes

- Erasmus, Thomas More, and Rabelais,
- Christian Humanism: belief that to be truly Christian meant to try and live in a Christ-like manner; to show charity and love to your neighbor
- Translating and Disseminating the Bible.
- NOT Schismatics, but reformers
- After the Reformation began, the Evangelistes themselves were critical of the Protestant Reformation and Luther

Rabelais' Patrons

- Cardinal DuBellay: a close advisor to Francis I and a supporter of the Evangelistes and Humanists
- Marguerite de Navarre: Sister of Francis I and a supporter of Rabelais and other Humanists; author of the *Heptameron*.
- Condemned by the Sorbonne, 1534



Prologue

- Alcibiades calls Socrates a “Silenus”; a silenus is a box used to store precious drugs and ointments
- Socrates was ugly outside but beautiful inside and full of “divine wisdom” “A monk’s robes hardly determine who the monk is.”
- Metaphor of a Dog sucking the marrow out of bone: the book as the bone and the reader as the dog
- Homer and allegory.
- After inviting the reader to read deeply he scorns such a reading: “some scabby beggar said the same thing about my books, but shit to him! But the bouquet of good wine—ah, how sweet, near—what a happy treat, incredibly more delicious, more heavenly than oil”
- Concludes with the main principle of the Evangelistes: “Interpret everything I do and say in the most gracious light; show proper respect for this cheesy brain, which pleases you with all this charming nonsense...”

Gargantua's Genealogy

- Recalls the genealogies of the Bible and Homer
- Challenges traditional ideas of Class
(Remember the threat of the Peasants)
- “ I suspect I might be descended from some rich king or prince of olden times—because you'll never see anyone who'd rather be a king, and rich, than me, so I could spread good cheer everywhere, and never work...and pour down gold on my friends and all good and learned men.”

Gargantua's Supernatural Birth

- Feast, 364,014 Oxen slaughtered and Gargamelle, his mother, ate so much tripe, “her intestines fell out... Gargantua was born from her ear.
- Strange Birth and Christ
- Response to Sorbonne’s Definition of Faith: “An Argument for things which no one can prove.”



Gargantua's Name

- His first words were “Drink, drink, drink”
- Father said “What a grand gargler you’ve got”
- To pacify the baby they give him something to drink and baptize him and name him
- Example of Cornucopia: His mother could pump out milk to fill 1402 casks...



Love: Caritas, Agape

- Hat, with a emblem that says in Greek, “Charity Does not Seek its own Reward”
- Inscribed on it is a figure of Plato’s Lover’s from the Symposium; “two-headed human body, the heads turned to face each other, and four arms, four feet, and two pairs of buttocks...”
- Love is the central idea of the Evangelistes

Scatological

- “Arse Wipes” Chapter
- When Gargantua peed on Paris and drowned some of the people by accident’
Called Pa-ris “for a joke” afterwards
- Took the bells of Notre Dame as cow bells
for his Horse; The faculty of the Sorbonne
are sent to argue for the return of the Bells
(satire of Scholastic argumentation)

Abbey de Theleme (Desire)

- Anti-Abby: No Walls; No Hours (clocks or sundials are forbidden)
- Beautiful, handsome, and cheerful men AND women to be allowed only (in contrast to the typical nuns and monks)
- Come and Go as you like
- Marriage, money, and freedom in contrast to vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience
- Only rule: “Do what you Will”: “because free men and women, wellborn, well taught, finding themselves joined with other respectable people, are instinctively impelled to do virtuous things and avoid vice...”

Epistemological Uncertainty

- Impossible to pin down the “meaning” of Rabelais on anything
- Yet, the problem of translation, interpretation and Faith are central to the concerns of Evangelistes Reformers
- End of *Gargantua*: Prophetic Inscription found in Foundations of Abbey de Theleme: Gargantua claims it refers “the Nature of divine truth and how to preserve it.” Friar John, “That’s not how I take it...as far as I’m concerned, all we’ve been reading is a description of a game of tennis, written in an obscure language.”
- Reading and Understanding the Bible; the inscription; the text of *Gargantua* itself; all three are problematic.