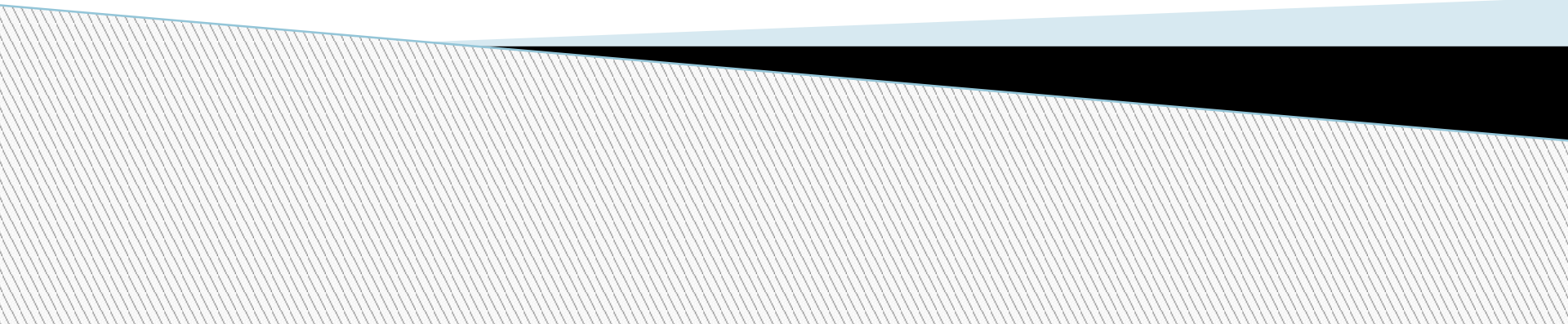


Rabelais and the Humanist Evangelistes

Alan Haffa



Learning Outcomes

- Appreciate that Rabelais is an **Evangeliste**, a French Humanist and satirized Medieval Scholasticism
- Appreciate his use of **Cornucopia**, **Scatological**, and **Carnavalesque**
- Grasp how Rabelais develops problem of “**communication**” in *Pantagruel*
- Grasp how Rabelais questions the idea of **Faith** in *Gargantua*
- Two main points: The centrality of **Grace** and **Forgiveness** in Christianity

Francois Rabelais,

1490?-1553



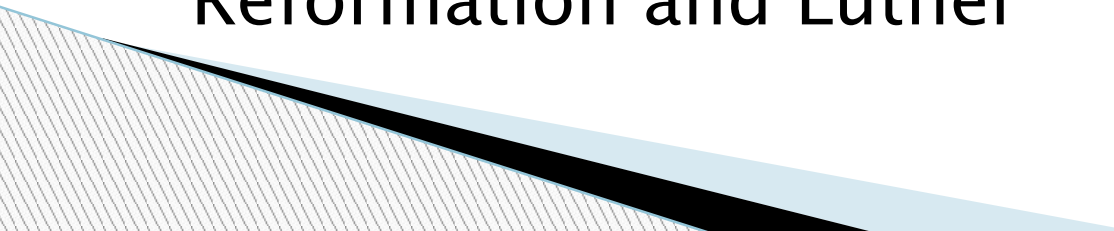
- Contemporary of Luther; 15 years senior to Calvin
- Franciscan Monk; left order when forbidden to study Greek; Joined the Benedictines with Papal Dispensation from Clement VII
- 1530, studied medicine; Head Physician at hospital in Lyons
- 1536, Paul III absolved him and allowed him to practice medicine
- Renaissance Man: Linguist, theologian, classical scholar, lawyer and diplomat, and medical doctor.

Writings and Patrons

- Pantagruel, 1532
- Gargantua, 1534
- Le Tiers Livre (third book), 1546
- Le Quartieme Livre (fourth book) 1552
- Le Cinquieme Livre (fifth book) posthumously, 1561
- Condemned by the Sorbonne, 1534
- Patrons: Cardinal DuBellay, close advisor to Francis, & Marguerite de Navarre, Sister of Francis I



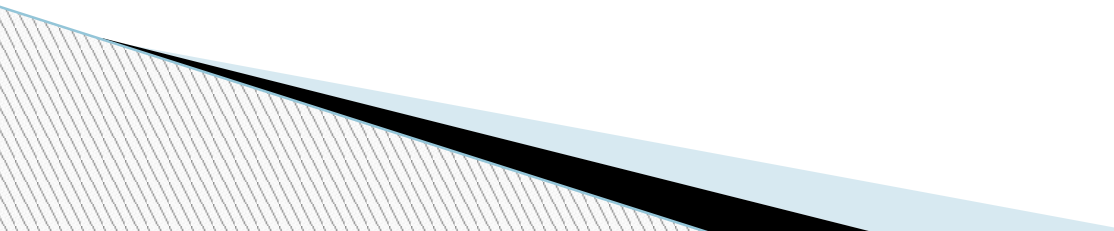
Evangelistes

- 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
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Literary Style

- Mikhail Bakhtin considered it the first Novel
- Novel is about Challenging Social Norms
- Carnivalesque: Carnival; Challenging social norm; Satire
- Scatological: literary trope that focuses on the grotesque human body, and bodily excrement—Potty Humor
- Cornucopia: Excess; a medieval trope; Example: Long genealogies; Lists of “arse wipes”; Lists of games and drinks; Excessive drinking and eating
- Genre is unique and impossible to categorize: L’Histoire Chronique (History and Chronicle) and mock Epic.


Prologue: Interpretative Complexity

- 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
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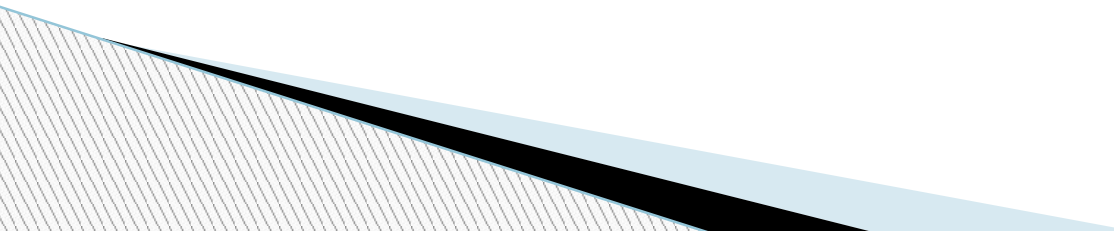
La Grace—Grace, or Charity

- ▣ **Scatological:** 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...”

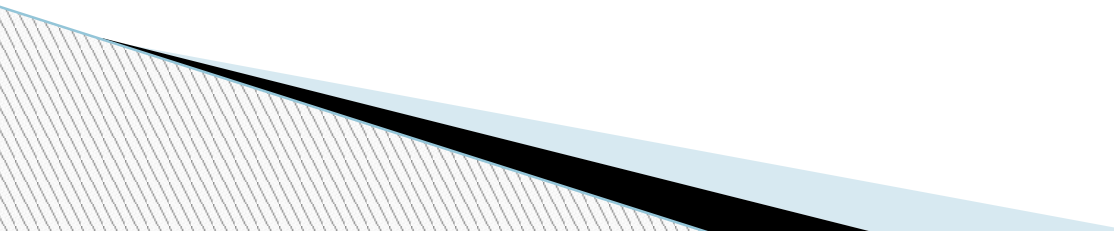
Gargantua's Genealogy

- 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.”
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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
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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)
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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...”

Pantagruel Meets Panurge: Communication and Meaning

- ▣ **Panurge** (All Desires) appears as a beggar
- ▣ Pantagruel addresses him and asks him questions
- ▣ Panurge answers in one language after another; No one can understand
- ▣ Finally, in French: I'll gladly tell you everything that's happened to me, which is more marvelous than the adventures of Ulysses...but there will be more convenient times, and more leisure, to tell you everything, because right now I have a singularly urgent need to eat. My teeth are sharp, my belly is empty, my throat is dry, my appetite is eating me alive: everything's ready."
- ▣ **Highlights Christian obligation to relieve suffering of the needy**
- ▣ **The learned may know many languages but can they communicate the most basic idea?**

Pantagruel Settles Legal Dispute: Satire on Legal System

- ❑ Two men come to court after judges cannot settle their case: Lord Kissmyass and Lord Fartsniffer
- ❑ Pantagruel dispenses with the reams of written briefs: “why the devil bother ourselves with this rubbish heap of papers and copies of papers? Isn’t it better to hear from their own living voices what they’re quarreling about rather than to read about it in all this monkey business, which is simply tricks and legalistic devices designed to evade and subvert, not to carry out the rules and principles of law?”
- ❑ They speak longwindedly—gibberish
- ❑ Pantagruel renders an equally long winded, unintelligible judgement in legalese, then concludes: Let it be decreed that henceforth they shall be friends, exactly as they were, with no costs awarded, and this entire judgement given for good cause.”

Panurge debates with Thaumaste: Satire on Scholastic Debate

- ▣ Thaumaste, an English Scholar, challenges Pantagruel to a debate and posts questions (Martin Luther)
- ▣ Panurge assumes the challenge: wears a codpiece full of ribbons and a ripe orange
- ▣ Debate with Signs, no words allowed
- ▣ Panurge, using insulting gestures, defeats the English scholar
- ▣ Thaumaste concedes: he has shown and then solved for me other problems of inexpressible difficulty and importance...opening the deepest, purest well of encyclopedic learning...

Conclusion: Epistemological Uncertainty and Pardon

- 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.”
- Key Idea at end of *Pantagruel*: “Author’s Apology,” “Farewell, gentlemen, Pardonnate my, excuse me, as they say in Italy, and don’t think as much about my faults as you do about your own.

If you say “Master, it doesn’t look like you are very wise, having written all this non-sense and lies,” I’ll answer, “you don’t seem much wiser yourself, since you read them and had a good time doing it.”