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Donne's Rabelais

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Inhabiting several disparate territories in the imagination of Renaissance England was a crowd of men called François Rabelais, some of them not entirely unrelated to the French writer of that name whose works were greeted in England with disgust, delight, confusion, or anger, both by those who actually read them and by those who accounted unfamiliarity with texts no barrier to judgment. One Rabelais belonged to John Donne, even if the evidence for the extent and nature of his response is sometimes ambiguous. In this essay I would like to meditate on that evidence and consider what, aside from fashion and curiosity, might have drawn Donne to Rabelais.

Fashion and curiosity, to be sure, must have played a role, for many men connected with Donne in one way or another read Rabelais.[1] There was Robert Hayman (lover and colonizer of Newfoundland) and also Francis Bacon (who retailed anecdotes about Rabelais). John Selden reported on Rabelais's word for penis, distaste for shitty commentaries ("brodée de merde"), and legal jargon. Joseph Hall, in his pre-episcopal youth, imagined a dead tosspot's shade toasting Pantagruel; Ben Jonson owned Rabelais's *Oeuvres*, glossing some words in the margin, and working allusions to him into his own work. Or there was Tom Carew, whose god of ridicule, Momus, claims to have sucked Rabelais's milk; Sir John Harington, whom Gargantua and his toilet-paper goose helped metamorphosize Ajax into the modern john; and Jasper Mayne, in whose *Citie Match* a clever spark describes marrying an unsuspecting English couple in a Huguenot church by reciting passages from *Gargantua et Pantagruel*. And

there was King James, who wrote Robert Cecil that the French ambassador, evidently a talented sponger, should write a book on the art of begging and shelve it in Rabelais's imaginary library at the abbey of St. Victor.

In sum, throughout Donne's adulthood Rabelais was known to amused students and authorities in the legal world, to many in the universities, court, and élite theater, to polemicists such as Nashe, and to satirists affecting punitive moralism or laughing urbanity. Missing, at least as admirers, are Spenserians, clerics when putting on the whole armor of respectability in pulpit or print, the theater at its most public and popular (despite some allusions to the Gargantua who starred in a now lost chapbook), Petrarchan or Neoplatonic stragglers still writing sugared sonnets, "divine poets" in the Bartasian vein, and, alas, women, although a sick Joseph Howell ironically willed his knowledge of French to Lady Cor so she could read Rabelais.

In my book on Rabelais and Renaissance England I have somewhat arbitrarily divided English response to and appropriation of Rabelais into three areas of focus: language, the body, and the fantasy (yes, these are indeed related to each other). Donne's particular appropriation, though, does not parallel his culture's collective interest in or horror at Rabelais, and precisely because it is selective it is interesting. What seems to have fascinated him was, on the one hand, how in *Gargantua et Pantagruel* words relate to things or—just as intriguing—to no-things, and, on the other hand, how one figure famous for words but also for sexual dysfunction (I refer of course to Panurge) relates to dangerous words and even to words that one might trace back through the generations to the Word itself.

I begin with some words found in Rabelais's *Fourth Book* (chapters 55-56), words that can be quickfrozen into silence at one time but thawed and heard later. Pantagruel's friends, you may recall, sail the northern seas on their way to ask the Oracle of the Bottle if the aging Panurge should get himself a wife despite the risk of being beaten, robbed, and cuckolded. To their astonishment, they discover some once frozen but now thawing noises and words, momentarily visible but fast turning audible. Some are still solid enough to be picked up and

warmed in the hands before they evaporate into noise. Rabelais, sailing along with the rest of the company and serving his "master" Pantagruel, must be stopped from trying to preserve a sample word in oil. He had not, as author, invented the notion of icy sound that can liquefy into significance, although *these* gelid noises sport heraldic colors and, whatever they sound like when melted, look to the eye like puns. For example, "Motz de gueule" are both "gueules" (which Randle Cotgrave's 1611 French dictionary defines as "gules; red, or sanguine, in Blazon") and come from the "gueule" (throat), which makes these red remnants of bloodshed appear as jokes (a "mot de gueule," says Cotgrave, is "a jeast, or merrie word").

In his essay, "Progress in Virtue," Plutarch recalls how Antiphanes had humorously compared Plato's conversation with young men to words in a certain city that, when spoken in winter, at once congealed, becoming audible in summer; so too, only in old age, if then, did Plato's auditors finally hear his meaning.[2] Castiglione adapts the tale for *The Courtier* when, in Book II, Il Magnifico laughingly cites, as an example of outrageous lying, the tale of a Tuscan merchant in Poland who bargains with some Moscovites across the frozen Dnieper: when Russian words freeze in mid air, the Poles build a fire right on the ice and melt them. Rabelais's episode also seems to evoke reports about the icy reaches of the North Atlantic and islands resounding with strange voices.[3]

Rabelais's frozen words, then, have multiple textual and thematic associations: with theories on the materiality of words, with pedagogy, with travelers' dubious accounts, with recent arctic exploration, with courtiership, with mercantile discourse, with words' relation to time, and perhaps with the Word's release after centuries of frost and the need, nevertheless, for endangered evangelical Christians to maintain silence.[4] In this version, melting *noises* are recognizable as cries, trumpet calls and canon shots, whereas the *words*, because in a barbarous tongue, remain incommunicative. The phenomenon is thus all the more epistemologically provocative, as are the biblical and classical analogues that Pantagruel cites. It is the crew's practical pilot, though, not the learned giant, who recognizes the words as time-

released aural fragments of a past battle, evidence (although he does not quite say so) of how far language and humanity have declined since Adamic naming in a peaceful Eden.[5]

How the English read the episode's philosophical or religious implications is hard to tell, but it did inspire several writers to amused allusion. If they seem to have found the notion of frozen words more entertaining than philosophically threatening, it should be recalled that both Plutarch and Castiglione likewise treat it as a jest, a "mot de gueule," if in Plutarch's case a pointed one. I would suggest that a palimpsestic mixture of Plutarch, Castiglione, and Rabelais lies behind a less than jesting but craftily suave passage in a letter Donne (if it was Donne) wrote in 1600 (probably) to Sir Henry Wotton. Along with affection, the writer sends "seald up" words that will thaw when read by designated recipients:

> S^r^[:] . . . if words seald vp in letters be like words spoken in those frosty places where they are not heard till y^e^ next thaw they have yet this advantage y^t^ where they are heard they are herd only by one or such as in his judgment they are fitt for. I am no Courtier for w^th^out having lived there desirously I cannot have sin'd enough to have deserv'd that reprobate name: I may sometymes come thither & bee no courtier as well as they may sometymes go to chapell & yet are no christians. I am there now where because I must do some evill I envy y^r^ being in y^e^ country not that it is a vice will make any great shew here for they liue at a far greter rate & expence of wickednes. [B]ut because I will not be utterly out of fashion & unsociable. I gleane such vices as the greater men (whose barnes are full) scatter yet I learne that y^e^ learnedst in vice suffer some misery for when they haue reapd flattery or any other fault long there comes some other new vice in request wherein they are unpracticed. . . .[6]

After more satirical reflections on court life, the letter concludes with a report on the recently disgraced Essex and his followers, "no more mist here then the Aungells w^ch^ were cast downe from heaven nor (for anything I see) likelyer to retourne."

This sounds like Donne: adept at witty analogy, self-conscious, adroitly disdaining in an offhand way the very court society, so desired by others and so transparent to himself, that he has admittedly sought. Castiglione would admire the self-protective yet casually sophisticated tone, and indeed by mentioning frozen words Donne may gesture self-mockingly at *The Courtier* even while playing the anti-court card so useful to intelligent courtiers. Since Plutarch's *Moralia* was easily read by the educated, the gesture may also recall not just Il Magnifico's joke about Muscovite bargaining but the notion of Socratic and obscurely sage words that melt at some appropriate time. If so, the focus shifts from *oral* pedagogy (the hearer, now older, can finally comprehend what a philosopher once said) to aiming *written* and "seald" words at the right reader in a world of conspiracy, government spies, and censorship—a world, I might add, painfully familiar to Rabelais, whom only luck, prudent revisions, and powerful patronage saved from real trouble and perhaps death.[7] Donne, particularly, would have been intrigued by the legal and scriptural notion of *seeing* words, of language material enough to be visible and even colored. The Word of God, after all, had once walked physically among men, visible but not yet fully known to the world, and one can well imagine a legal contract made of literally weighty language impossible to deny but with implications made manifest only by the process of time and a change of social or economic weather.

Whatever texts lie behind the letter's allusion to frozen words, at some point Donne almost certainly read Rabelais. For Rabelais, too, seems relevant here; even the vague "frosty places" seem a little closer to what Pantagruel finds somewhere up north than to the more specific Dnieper or city in Castiglione and Plutarch. More important is the interest Donne and Rabelais shared in voyages and new-found lands. Also significant may be the hint some have heard in Rabelais's episode that words—Gospel words, but also cries of loss and sorrow—can survive the winter of persecution and danger to melt and be heard when times allow. Together with his self-portrait of a (non)courtier, Donne passes along news of Essex that must be prudently worded in case the letter melts in the wrong fingers; but the relation of language to time and

even time-serving cannot have escaped his ironic mind. The various frozen words he is likely to have known about comprise a set of associations fitting his circumstance. The allusion also helps establish a performing voice, making Donne sound worldly but undeluded, well-read but unpedantic, engagingly humorous but with meanings that unwanted readers can see without understanding and right ones can hear.

Several years later Thomas Coryat published his *Coryates Crudities* (1611), an account of a walking tour on the Continent[8] with a prefatory carnival of amicably teasing verses by a crowd of often well-known writers. Coryat annotates these, taking their joshing in good part and, when he can, interpreting them as praise. According to Ben Jonson's "character" of him, Coryat was "a great and bold Carpenter of words, or (to expresse him in one word like his owne) a Logodaedale," the "Tongue-Major of the company." *Crudities* is travel literature, but Jonson and others are just as interested in Coryat as a macaronic cornucopia of language. Their own verses are engrossed by words and how to invent, read, or play with them: they include shaped poems, anagrams, pseudoclassical meters ("encomiological antispastics"), awful rhymes like "hop it" and "poppet," lines in Utopian, such neologisms as "itinerosissimus," and parody ("I sing the man, I sing the woful case, / The shirt, the shoes . . . ").

One poem on Coryat that does not mention Rabelais is by "Joannes Donne"; another, which does, is by "Joannes Dones." Who is "Dones"? Is he Donne with a typo? The poems are separated by many pages, but that is no proof either way. Whoever he was, he knows his Rabelais. What might Coryat have written about even vaster travels, he wonders, since in Europe "Almost for every step he tooke a word":

> What had he done had he ere hug'd th'Ocean
> With swimming Drake or famous Magelan? . . .
> It's not that French which made his Gyant see
> Those uncouth Ilands where words frozen bee,
> Till by the thaw next yeare they'r voic't againe;
> Whose Papagauts, Andoûilets, and that traine

> Should be such matter for a Pope to curse
> As he would make; make! makes ten times worse,
> And yet so pleasing as shall laughter move . . . .[9]

Coryat glosses "French" as "Rablais," and "Gyant" as "Pantagruel." The "Papagauts" are *The Fifth Book*'s greedy "popehawks," and the "Andoûilets" are the ferocious female if phallic sausages with "Mardigras" as their watchword and mustard as their medicine who battle Pantagruel's crew.[10] Several points need stressing: Dones imagines further travel by Coryat as cause for further laughing discourse, not as a source of real news; this discourse is associated with Rabelaisian voyages into linguistic fantasy and with satire easily read as anti-Catholic; and the anger of orthodox Catholicism at Rabelais was evidently well known. This not-quite-Donne with the added "s" has an eye on passages that raise questions about words and things and also about God's Word and papal curses. Donne and Dones would have had a lot to talk about, whether in some tavern or as interior dialogue.

Rabelais's words are nowhere more disconcertingly located than in his Panurge, the voluble and cowardly—if amusing—trickster who longs to enjoy the comforts of wedlock but fears what a wife might do to him. Whatever the longings of his aging flesh, though, Panurge was born a noun: a *panourgos* has *panourgia*, the capacity to be cunning and to do (*ourg-*) anything (*pan*).[11] Thomas Cooper's *Thesaurus* (1565) calls a "panurge" a "craftie, deceitfull, or wily person: an old beaten foxe," and Holyband's 1593 dictionary gives "a craftie one, also one that medleth to doe all things." Pagans had used the word for the fox, the *rhetor*, the deceitful gods. In the Septuagint, *panourgia* is astuteness, but for Paul it means injurious and diabolical craftiness (Eph 4.14), subtlety (2 Cor 11.3), cunning (1 Cor 3.19; the margin of the Geneva Bible adds, "When they them selves are entangled in the same snares, which thei laid for others"). Although Rabelais's *panourgos* calls "Panurge" his "nom de baptesme," sacramental water has not washed off his demonic birthmarks.[12]

A "panurge" can be, too, the busybody "curieux."[13] A prying courtier (Ben Jonson's Sir Politick Wouldbe, but smarter), Panurge is

also the judgmental narcissist of *The Third Book*[14] who consults a series of experts to see if he can sneak a look at his marital destiny. This is the "panurge" whom Alexander Craig rebukes in his 1623 *Poeticall Recreations* when he defies the "Critik, Scratch-pate, and Find-faulte" and asks us to "judge with Love." Panurge is the reader he does not want:

> Panurgus pryes in high and low Effaires;
> Hee talkes of Foraine, and our Civill State:
> But for his owne hee neyther countes nor cares;
> That hee refers to Fortune, and his Fate.
> His Neighbours faultes, straight in his Face hee'll finde,
> But in a Bag hee hangs his owne behinde.[15]

This Nick-of-all-trades has a sulfur smell as a calumniator, a spy. Donne had known and feared him a generation earlier.

Although Donne mentions Panurge only in passing, I suspect that the semi-demonic trickster and fearful would-be husband played a larger role in his memory than the brevity of his allusion would seem to indicate. For when Donne read Rabelais, presumably in the 1590s, he seems to have grasped that Panurge's marital indecision involved both a neglect of his spiritual "state" and a selfishly timorous inability to know and act upon his will (it is no accident that *Gargantua*, written after Rabelais had already invented Panurge, concludes with an abbey named *Thélème*, Greek for "will").

In Donne's Satire IV, you of course remember, the speaker has gone to court, a "Purgatorie, such as fear'd hell is / A recreation to,"[16] when he encounters a walking piece of *panourgia*: a loquacious braggart, seedily dressed despite his francophile taste, a seducer of widows, a gossip and moocher. Worse, he is probably an informer on the lookout for Catholics. Worst, as Tom Hester for one has noted, he seems the speaker's secret double, someone the satirist in part is or might be.[17]

This motley *panourgos* is a squalid cousin of Panurge, also a down-on-his-luck boaster, wanderer, busy-body, borrower, sexual predator,

and courtier somehow related—more as complement than opposite—to the noble giant he encounters on the outskirts of Paris when Pantagruel is taking the air with his entourage. The giant and his followers see a man clearly in need of befriending, but not one who is in a hurry to say so, for Panurge explains his situation in a set of various alien tongues, including Utopian (Pantagruel's native language). His performance has his hearers entranced, frustrated, and obscurely collaborative as they play the straight-men in an elaborate linguistic joke, listening to one foreign speech after another until the hungry trickster settles into what he calls his native French and asks for food and help in words Pantagruel's friends now admit they understand.[18] Donne would have grasped the comedy—a Greek noun claims to be native-born French, a naturalized and jabbering French *substantif* asks for sustenance. He might also have noticed that even as Pantagruel's friends *hear* Panurge's incomprehensible requests for assistance, they do not act upon what they must *see* as signs of distress, thus delaying the succor that charity requires.[19] Panurge may retain a faintly diabolical quality from his lexical background, but here he preaches, or rather stages, an implicit lesson on language and love.

Politically, the demonic overtones of Donne's own panurgic creature derive less from his wit and mobility than from his role as a government spy who seeks to "Make men speake treason," as the narrator puts it, and thereby have them ingested by an intolerant state's "Giant Statutes" that "ope" their jaws "To sucke me in" (like a crueler Pantagruel, perhaps, or the pilgrim-swallowing Gargantua). Rabelais's Panurge retains only a devilish tinge, but Donne's *panourgos*, while descended from the bore that Horace cannot shake off in Satire I.9, uncomfortably resembles the Father of Lies (also a wanderer up and down the earth).[20] Generically, he is what Rabelais's trickster becomes if he leaves genial Menippean prose for the shaggy swagger of Elizabethan verse satire. And, thematically, he serves Donne's insistence that abusing language corrupts society.[21]

The man Donne's satirist describes is too strange for even Adam to name, you remember, more monstrous than "Guianaes rarities." Al-

though he claims to know "what to all States belongs" and to speak "all tongues," his macaronic language is scrappy, deceptive. Attaching himself to the unwilling speaker and unctuously praising his judgment, he asks "Whom doe you prefer, / For the best linguist?" When the satirist replies dryly, "Calepines Dictionarie," he presses on: "Nay, but of men, most sweet Sir?" Beza, he is told, perhaps because that Genevan leader, so learned in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, had in 1588 published a congratulatory poem on the Armada in eight different languages. Or maybe, he adds, a couple of Jesuits and one or two professors. " 'There / He stopt mee,' and said, 'Nay, your Apostles were / Good pretty linguists, and so Panurge was; / Yet a poore gentleman, all these may passe / By travel' "

Donne, I assume, remembers Panurge's first meeting with Pantagruel and the many tongues in which he overflows with words and need. Here in Satire IV, the comedy lies partly in the theologically suspect assumption that Apostlic glossolalia (Acts 2) is obtainable by travel, although the apostles certainly got around, and in his apparent belief that Panurge is real enough to emulate. But nobody can surpass Panurge as a linguist, not so long as he speaks such good Utopian, Lanternish, and Antipodean, tongues that even Satan would be hard-pressed to learn by travel or travail. Donne perhaps recalled this episode precisely because he too explores how language relates to charity, whether that lacking in the *panourgos* who afflicts his narrator or that which the narrator owes even this talkative wretch. To be sure, this sorry companion is less ambiguous than Panurge, whose linguistic prowess, it has been said, "can be viewed either *in malo* as an allusion to Old Testament Babelism . . . or *in bono*, to the New Testament gift of tongues."[22] And the satirist's scorn, however suitable generically, contrasts with Pantagruel's rush of love for his disreputable other self. But then, Donne's narrator is no giant or prince and has cause to fear the big ones of this world and those tricky ones who serve the big by twisting the words of others.

In *The Third Book* Panurge is still a *panourgos*, but now, wanting a wife yet afraid to marry, he cuts a different figure. Fearing domestic

treason, he tries to foreshorten time by knowing now what only an unfolding life can reveal, to risk himself and his property only if assured beforehand that he will be safe. It is in vain that Pantagruel tells him he must determine what he wants and leave the rest to God:

"Are you not certain of your own will? The chief point lies there: everything else is chance and hangs on Heaven's fate-full decrees. . . . One must chance it with eyes bound and lowered head, kissing the earth [like soldiers before battle], and for the rest commend oneself to God, once one has wanted to put oneself to it. Any other assurance I do not know how to give you."[23]

Perhaps this failure of the will is another reason Donne found Panurge noteworthy, for the latter's perplexity concerning marriage is profoundly similar to the religious uncertainties of Satire III, and my perhaps incautious suggestion is that Panurge and Donne's satirist share a difficulty: knowing how to commit themselves to a female figure who may prove false. Panurge is, or plays, a fool. But when one recalls how often marriage has represented other sorts of commitment, his anxieties take on resonance.

If the pestilent courtier in Satire IV is a *panourgos* who has read Rabelais, Satire III has its own panurgic figure: "Carelesse Phrygius doth abhorre / All, because all cannot be good, as one / Knowing some women whores, dares marry none" (62-64). Panurge's problem exactly, and accompanying a similar cynical misogyny. Why "Phrygius"? For Tom Hester the name suggests the Barrowists, who revived the Phrygian Montanists' disbelief in marriage ceremonies.[24] "Phrygia" also recalls the cult of Cybele and her attendant eunuchs. Indeed, in his comments on Panurge's dilemma (*The Third Book* 48), Gargantua mentions with distaste a group of "moles"—which critics usually take to mean monks—that "abhor" marriage and live "comme les pontifes de Cybele en Phrygie" (or perhaps, he adds with anti-monastic cynicism, they in fact live licentiously). In some fine pages on Satire IV, James Baumlin says that comparing each sect's adherents to a wooer of some "wench" reduces "the differences between contemporary forms of religion to domestic comedy."[25] Indeed, but *this* domestic comedy has eternal consequences.

Donne hardly needed Rabelais to see that an inability to identify true religion can be figured as a failure to locate Christ's true bride. Religious *eros* and symbolic weddings are old stories. And in any case, allusions to sex and adultery run throughout his satires, not least in a striking *double entendre*: "To will," says Satire III, "implyes delay, therefore now doe."[26] Ben Jonson called "doing" a "filthy pleasure," but the spiritual life cannot be all foreplay. Donne's notice of Panurge gains texture, then, if we juxtapose Satire III's sexual imagery to Rabelais's demonstration of how timorous narcissism can congeal the spirit. Donne, too, satirizes a "courage of straw" (27) that leads merely to sexual bravado, a cowardice that must please the devil (33-34), a taste for that "worne strumpet" the World (37-39). With some daring, Donne condemns those who love a particular sect because some theologian or government tells them to. Have they no wills of their own? No *Thélème*?

Indeed, whether or not Donne was at this point still some sort of Catholic, and however he read Rabelais's religion—Lutheran, Evangelical, or simply blasphemous—he would have noticed in the later books a telling example of how those in power need not force conscience. When Panurge cannot decide if he should marry, his master does not compel him. Rather, he joins him on his voyage to resolve his dilemma; to paraphrase Donne, Pantagruel says in effect that "to sail inquiring right is not to stray." True, in the books we are sure Rabelais wrote, Panurge gets no answer he will accept—but neither does Donne say *what* Truth stands on the hill we are to climb. The only hint he gives us is the advice to ask our fathers what their fathers said and so on back, presumably, to the apostles and what they heard, a process that presupposes many past decisions to marry and beget sons. Had Panurge fully believed the pro-nuptial urgings of Pantagruel's father Gargantua, Rabelais's' novel would have taken a different turn. (As a walking noun, however, Panurge has no real father, and Gargantua himself descends from Nimrod and Goliath—untrustworthy religious guides.)

The point of tracing patrilinear words backward is to find the Word made flesh, but what of words that satirically strut their stuff in front of

nothing? Inside *Pantagruel et Gargantua* are texts extant only as titles or promises of books, holes in the fiction opening onto nothingness or—according to one's temperament—onto alternative realities.[27] Some sound attractive. Panurge's monograph on long codpieces would be the definitive study, and inhabitants of Pantagruel's inner world would read with interest the *Histoire des Gorgias* by Alcofribas, Rabelais's pseudonymous anagram, on his adventures in the giant's "gorge" (the title puns on "gorgeously dressed" and may also recall the quite historical sophist Gorgias, author of a treatise denying that anything is real, or if real is knowable, or if known is communicable; the treatise is, fittingly enough, now lost).

The seventh chapter of *Pantagruel* lists scores of such titles, some by real men, said to be housed at the abbey of St. Victor, in Paris. This collection, Europe's first fantasy library,[28] exacts a Humanist and evangelical revenge on enemies of the new learning, making often scatological or indecent fun of obscurantist theologians, logic-chopping scholastics, outdated doctors, myopic glossators. Some "authors," not least the Sorbonne's Noël Béda, had threatened the careers and lives of men like Rabelais (and one women, Marguerite de Navarre, whose *Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* Béda tried to have censored). To the paunchy Béda is given *De Optimitate triparum* ("On the best tripe"), and to "Magister Ortuinum"—Ortwin, outspoken opponent of the humanist Reuchlin, an *Ars honeste petandi in societate* (*How to Fart in Polite Society*). One book could be useful to logicians: *Quaestio subtilissima, utrum Chimera, in vacuo bombinans, possit comedere secundas intentiones, et fuit debatuta per decem hebdomadas in concilio Constantiensi* ("A Highly Subtle Question: whether Chimera, bombinating [buzzing, vibrating] in a vacuum is able to eat second intentions, as it was batted around for ten weeks at the Council of Constance.") Not in fact a bad question, but Humanist views of late Medieval logic could be unfair.[29] A few titles have authors, such as *De Patria diabolorum* by "Merlinus Coccaius" (Folengo). Most, though, and this may matter, are unascribed.

English writers on occasion show signs of knowing Rabelais's nonbooks, adopting or imitating them for purposes ranging from

scorning an individual to the ambiguous pleasure of inscribing nonentity or considering its pertinence to invention, belief, and referentiality. Nature may abhor a vacuum, yet language—like Chimera—can bombinate in one, if at the price of being batted around by philosophers and theologians. Just as "Chimera" and "vacuum" are valuably empty *words*, imaginary book-titles are empty *wordstrings*, chimerical vacuity jumped up a level to make entire Potemkin villages of discourse behind which stretches a waste of forever blank pages.[30] To the making of nonbook-titles there need be no end, a plenitude as disconcerting as the null sets to which infinity is paradoxically akin.

Not the first, but surely the most impressive English response to Rabelais's nonbooks was Donne's *Catalogus Librorum Aulicorum incomparabilium et non vendibilium* (*The Courtier's Library of Rare Books Not for Sale*), probably finished by 1611 but not printed until 1650.[31] Evelyn Simpson calls its thirty-four Latin titles "an elaborate jest in the manner of Rabelais." True, there were by now other French imaginary libraries with satirical titles such as "*The grand chronicle of cuckolds*, dedicated to the king of Navarre, with the observations of the sieur de Champvalon" (lover of Navarre's naughty wife, Marguerite).[32] Rabelais, though, seems Donne's likely model. Both catalogues aim at some powerful men, in Donne's case including Francis Bacon (enemy of the Earl of Essex, with whom Donne sympathized), Richard Topcliffe (scourge of Catholics who kept a rack at home for convenience), and Bishop William Barlow (preacher of a sermon against Essex that, or so Donne thought, slavishly said what Robert Cecil told him to say). By now Donne may have dropped his Catholicism, but not his detestation of informers, torturers, and toadies.

Donne was, moreover, drawn to nullity as such, to airy nothings that have names, if no local habitations, and live only in language. He is the writer for whom Love's "art did expresse / A quintessence even from nothingnesse," who is "re-begot / Of absence, darknesse, death; things which are not," who has noticed that by pasting maps on a blank sphere cartographers can make its "nothing, All."[33] No wonder he enjoyed Rabelais's own nullities, as witness a note, probably written in July of 1604, appended to the Burley manuscript's copy of a verse letter "To

Sir H[enry] W[otton] going to Venice," which says, "S^r though pchance it were nev^r tryed except in Rabelais his land of tapistry it may bee true y^t a pygmey upon a Giant may see further then y^e giant so after a long letter this postscript may see further into y^o then that if y^o will answer to 2 questions whether y^o have y^r last despatches at court or whether y^o make many dayes stay there or at London. such a one as I may yett kisse y^r hand."[34]

The pygmy peering from atop a giant descends from a comment by Bernard of Chartres, but Donne relocates this grotesque in one province of nowhere: the country of Satin or Tapestry imagined by Rabelais or persons unknown in the doubtfully authentic *Fifth Book*. Satinland literally embroiders the (non)facts of Nature, its vegetation and animals being artifacts. Who made them is unclear, for as Lewis Carroll knew, such playful nonsense relies on our not asking who does the dreaming, the playing, the needlework. Whatever the efficient cause of Satinland, though, fourteen phoenixes are found there, as are manticores, thirty-two unicorns, the golden fleece, the hide of Apuleius' golden ass, elephants, werewolves, Aristotle, Mid-Lent on horseback, Triton, and a buttock-shaking beast with two backs. The price of textile living can be high: unlike the golden bird of Byzantium into which Yeats imagines turning when he is "once out of nature," the birds in Satinland do not sing. Yet Donne's pleasure in the made-up is evident. "Rabelais his land of tapistry" is not wholly unlike the Library of St.-Victor, being a collocation of words with few referents in what we like to call reality.

Both Rabelais's and Donne's libraries, then, record bombinations in the void. Indeed, Donne has his own Chimera: *Chimaeram praedicari de Antichristo autore Sorbonistâ anonymo* (*That Chimera is a prophecy of Antichrist, by a nameless Sorbonnist*). He, too, mocks absurd subtleties, inventing for Nicholas Hill, who believed in atoms, a *De sexu et Hermaphroditate dignoscendâ in Atomis* (*On determining sex and hermaphroditism in atoms*, a topic that seems less foolish in our age of charmed quarks and left-handed molecules). Some titles suggest skepticism, like John Dee's *De navigabilitate aquarum supercoelestium, et utrum ibi an apud nos navis in firmamento in judicio sit appulsura* (*On the navigability of the*

waters above the heavens, and whether on Doomsday a ship in the firmament would dock there or down here with us). Others, like many at St.-Victor, are scatological: Cardanus, says Donne, has written *De nullibietate crepitûs* (*On a fart's nowhereness*), while John Harington has turned his expertise on an uncomfortable Biblical question: *Hercules, sive de modo quo evacuabatur à faecibus Arca Noae* (*Hercules* [cleaner of the Augean stables], *or how Noah's Ark was cleansed of its fecal matter*). And distaste for occult triviality inspires Pico's *Pythagoras Judaeo-Christianus, Numerum 99 et 66 verso folio esse eundem* (*The Judeo-Christian Pythagoras, or how the number 99 and 66 are the same if the page is reversed*).

Donne is more impatient with Renaissance occultism and Platonic airiness than with late scholasticism—his victims are more often Europe's Picos and Dees, not its Bédas and Ortwins. Other differences, too, demonstrate how ironic angles of vision on emptiness and the chimerical can start from different subjectivities and cultural positions. Rabelais was not a courtier when he wrote *Pantagruel*, his context being more professional (and monastic) than the court world that Donne, whatever his distaste and denials, sought. Later, when he had Cardinal Du Bellay and the Queen of Navarre as patrons, Rabelais continued to be more anti-academic, anti-papal, anti-monastic, than anti-court.

Those who navigate life near kings can, of course, laugh at courts, but on the whole Rabelais avoids this genre of satire. Donne, though, addresses élite fops and layabouts: "The mentally lazy," says his preface, "think they know enough if they can show credibly that other people's knowledge is imperfect," but "this approach may make you unpopular. At court you will have little leisure for literature, granted how late you get up and how long it takes to arrange your dress, face, gestures. Citing titles that others have not heard of, though, will give the impression that you have read much. I have therefore jotted down for your use the following catalogue that, with these books at your elbow, you may in almost every branch of knowledge suddenly emerge as an authority, if not with deeper learning than the rest, at least with a learning different from theirs." Indeed, for this "difference" ("*aliter doctus*") derives precisely from naming bits of nothing, gaining authority from

access to an infinite universe of possible titles. This "aliter" way of being learned need involve no limits—or any degree beyond an MN, a Master of Nothing. And if it is true that Donne distrusted print, then his making a little library taking up shelf space only in the zodiac of his own wit is yet more significant. What is the material history of *these* books with titles but no volume, and what coterie with zero members might read them?

Departing from his model, however, Donne has given real authors to all but one of his titles. Not only will citing these books give a courtier "authority," they are *by* authorities. This difference between the two catalogues may register a shift toward authorship's increased emotional, economic, and cultural importance in the Renaissance. *Pantagruel*'s seventh chapter, in this book authored at first only by an anagram, focuses most of its attention on the titles of trivial or foolish texts even while laughing at some real people. Donne's catalogue, although not printed in his lifetime, assumes a much tighter connection between silly texts and the silly men who write them. Rabelais mocks a few real authors such as Ortwin, but in prosecuting folly Donne is much more apt than Alcofribas to name names.

Who was Donne's Rabelais? He is not the wine-swilling bon vivant of one legend, nor the irreligious scoffer of yet another, and only minimally the scatological and obscene writer who still shocks the squeamish. Nor is he entirely, although he seems related to him, the evangelical promoter of Pantagruelism so justly familiar to many modern scholars. He *is* the Rabelais who thought deeply about words, about what they can do: make up something, make up nothing—lots and lots of nothing—deceive, betray, perhaps substitute for love and life, and even (some hope) trace themselves back to an oracle in a bottle that encourages us to take the plunge and that has, famously, a word of advice often welcome, if not always literally, even to the most arid of academics: "Drink!"

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Notes

1. For these and many other allusions, translations, borrowings, denunciations, and reconfigurations see my *Shock Value: Imagining Rabelais in the English Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); this essay, with the kind permission of Yale Press, combines and reworks passages on Donne from there.

2. *Moralia* 78. Jean Guiton, "Le mythe des paroles gelées," *Romanic Review* 31 (1940), 3-15, gives several analogues, including Caelius Calcagninus. Michael Screech, *Rabelais* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), pp. 377-439, outlines theories known to Rabelais that reconcile Plato and Aristotle on signs and signifieds. Gérard Defaux, "A propos de paroles gelées et degelées (*Quart Livre* 55-56): 'plus hault sens' ou 'lectures plurielles'?" in Raymond C. La Charité ed., *Rabelais's Incomperable Book: Essays On His Art* (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1986), 155-77, argues that Rabelais shows the hermeneutic primacy of the literal and material, not the impossibility of interpretation.

3. Guiton notes the scene's macabre, northern exoticism. See also A.P. Stabler, "Rabelais, Thevet, L'Ile des Démons, et les Paroles Gelées," *Etudes rabelaisiennes* 11 (Geneva: Droz, 1974), 57-62, and Kim Campbell, "Of Horse Fish and Frozen Words," *Renaissance & Reformation* 26 (1990), 183-92, who notes (as doubtless Donne did too) how discovery narratives raised problems concerning authority and eye-witnessing.

4. V.L. Saulnier, "Le silence de Rabelais et le mythe des paroles gelées," *François Rabelais: Ouvrage publié pour le quatrième centenaire de sa mort* (Geneva: Droz, 1953), pp. 233-47.

5. Jerome Schwartz, *Irony and Ideology in Rabelais: Structures of Subversion* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), pp. 189-94, notes the pilot's practicality.

6. Evelyn M. Simpson, *A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1948), # 6, p. 310. The letter is among those found, unsigned, in a manuscript collection of disparate materials. This one appears near a copy of Donne's "To Sir H.W. at his going Ambassador to Venice" with a postscript mentioning Rabelais (see below). Donne would have been intrigued by the legal and scriptural implications of *seeing* words; see Screech, *Rabelais*, pp. 410-39. Those working on the Donne Variorum edition of the letters tell me that the letter is almost certainly by Donne.

7. On the context of censorship, although not mentioning this letter, see Annabel Patterson, "Misinterpretable Donne: The Testimony of the Letters," *John Donne Journal* 1 (1982), 39-53.

8. I quote the anonymously edited *Coryat's Crudities* (1611; Glasgow: James MacLehose, 1905). "Crudities" means the raw produce of youth.

9. P. 71. At the 1997 meeting of the John Donne society, at which I first

presented this material, I was told Donne could sign his name with a terminal squiggle that might look to a printer like an "s."

10. Chapters 1-8, which also make up the first half of 1562's *L'Isle Sonante*, nucleus of 1564's *Fifth Book*; Dones's plural is misleading, for Pantagruel's friends meet just one Papegault, the normal complement at a given time.

11. There is no connection with Pan beyond a shared Greek word for "all" and, perhaps, a similarly skittish sexual swagger. On the name see also Jerome Schwartz, "Panurge's Impact on Pantagruel (*Pantagruel*, Chapter IX)," *Romanic Review* 67 (1976), 1-8, and Ludwig Schrader, *Panurge und Hermes: Zum Ursprung eines Charakters bei Rabelais* (Bonn: University of Bonn, 1958). On tricksters see especially Paul Radin, *The Trickster* (1956; New York: Schocken, 1972); Barbara Babcock, "'A Tolerated Margin of Mess': The Trickster and His Tales Reconsidered," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 11 (1975), 147-86; and Wayne A. Rebhorn, "'The Emperour of Mens Minds': The Renaissance Trickster as *Homo Rhetoricus*," *Creative Imagination: New Essays on Renaissance Literature in Honor of Thomas M. Greene*, ed. David Quint, Margaret W. Ferguson, G.W. Pigman III, and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Binghamton: MRTS 95, 1993).

12. *Pantagruel* 9. See Robert Griffin, "The Devil and Panurge," *Studi Francesi* 47-48 (1972), 329-36; Raymond La Charité, *Recreation, Reflection and Re-Creation: Perspectives on Rabelais's "Pantagruel"* (Lexington: French Forum, 1980), ch. 4, notes his roving, seediness, lies, sophistry, glossolalia, hunger, and lawsuits.

13. For Michael Downes, "Panurge, Ulysse et les 'gens curieux,'" *Etudes rabelaisiennes* 13 (1976), 139-45, "curiosity," opacity, and debt make Panurge the traditional bad courtier. In the same volume, Gérard Defaux cites Panurge's need to dominate ("De *Pantagruel* au *Tiers livre*: Panurge et le pouvoir," p. 171).

14. Edwin Duval, "Panurge, Perplexity, and the Ironic Design of Rabelais's *Tiers Livre*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 35 (1982), 381-400.

15. For a similar bag see *The Third Book* 15.

16. *Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters*, ed. W. Milgate (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967). Back home, the narrator sees the court while in "a trance / Like his, who dreamt he saw hell" (155-57). Most hear a reference to Dante, who has no "trance"; Donne may mean *Pasquine in a traunce* by Caelius Curio, a satirical report on postmortem worlds, trans. William Phiston (1566, 1584). Donne's *Ignatius* works the same Menippean vein. Compare Christ's warning in *Pasquine* "that in the night none can worke, that is to say in death" (sig. aa2) with Donne's Satire III: "Yet strive so, that before age, deaths twilight, / Thy Soule rest, for none can worke in that night" (83-84).

17. Thomas Hester, *Kind Pitty and Brave Scorn: John Donne's "Satyres"* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1982) calls him the speaker's "parodic doppelgänger" (80, 82). Many call him a "bore" or "boor" like the pest in Horace's Satire I.ix, but he is too ominous to be dull, and although gone to seed is less boorish than

pseudo-courtly.

18. Jerome Schwartz, *Irony and Ideology in Rabelais: Structures of Subversion* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), p. 34, notes the "complicity" of Panurge and Pantagruel.

19. For Terence Cave, "Panurge, Pathelin and Other Polyglots," *Lapidary Inscriptions: Renaissance Essays for Donald A. Stone, Jr.*, eds. Barbara C. Bowen and Jerry C. Nash (Lexington: French Forum, 1991), Panurge's Babel-like impudence undercuts Gargantua's univocal paternal advice. Edwin M. Duval, *The Design of Rabelais's Pantagruel* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1991) and Schwartz, *Irony*, note how talk postpones charitable action.

20. Howard Erskine-Hill, "Courtiers out of Horace," *John Donne: Essays in Celebration*, ed. A.J. Smith (London: Methuen, 1972), 273-307, stresses Donne's departure from Horace. A translation of Giovanni Botero's *Travellers breviat* (1611, sig. Q2) says of Horace's "irksome companion" that here "you shall see the French *natural* [i.e., basic nature], very lively and admirably well described."

21. Hence the allusion to Babel, says Nancy Mason Bradbury, "Speaker and Structure in Donne's *Satyre IV*," *SEL* 25 (1985), 87-107. Cf. James S. Baumlin, *John Donne and the Rhetorics of Renaissance Discourse* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1991).

22. Schwartz, *Irony*, p. 33; so too Duval, *Design*, p. 66.

23. *The Third Book* 10: "N'estez vous asceuré de vostre vouloir? Le poinct principal y gist: tout le reste et fortuit, et dependent des fatales dispositions du ciel.... Il se y convient mettre à l'adventure, les oeilz bandez, baissant la teste, baisant la terre et se recommand à Dieu au demourant, puys qu'une foys l'on se y veult mettre. Aultre asceurance ne vous en sçauroys te donner."

24. Hester, 119-27, for whom Phrygius is a "purist," not atheist (119-27). Like Panurge he does not *dare* commit himself.

25. Baumlin, 127.

26. Line 85, punning on "will" as erotic desire and "do" as sexual intercourse. Emory Elliott, "The Narrative and Allusive Unity of Donne's *Satyres*," *JEGP* 75 (1976), 105-16, notes allusions to adultery.

27. See Fred J. Nichols's beguiling "Generating the Unwritten Text: The Case of Rabelais," *L'Esprit créateur* 28 (1988), 7-17.

28. François Moreau, "La bibliothèque de l'Abbaye de Saint-Victor," *Littératures* 19 (1988), 37-42, notes the lack of Bibles.

29. Barbara C. Bowen, "Rabelais and the Library of Saint-Victor," in *Lapidary Inscriptions: Renaissance essays for Donald A. Stone, Jr.*, ed. Barbara C. Bowen and Jerry C. Nash (Lexington: French Forum, 1991), 159-70, examines this title; she also notes that whatever Rabelais's and van Hutten's disgust with his bias against Jewish books, Ortwin in fact had humanist credentials.

30. On "chimera" and "vacuum" as useful "empty names" in logic, see Desmond Paul Henry, *That Most Subtle Question (Questio Subtilissima): The Metaphysical Bearing of Medieval and Contemporary Linguistic Disciplines* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1984), pp. 1-3.

31. Ed. Evelyn Simpson, trans. Percy Simpson (London: Nonesuch, 1930). The books are not for sale for obvious reasons, but "non vendibilium" may also connect somehow to Donne's uneasy relation to print and a general public. Annabel Patterson, *Reading Between the Lines* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1993), pp. 185-86, 191-92, sees *Catalogus* as evidence of Donne's continuing distrust of courts and power.

32. Found in the *Library of Madame de Montpensier*; see J.H.M. Salmon, "French Satire in the Late Sixteenth Century," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 3 (1975), 57-88.

33. "A Nocturnall" (recalling the visit to the land of Quintessence in Rabelais's *Fifth Book*, where the queen's servants manipulate nothing) and "A Valediction of Weeping."

34. Evelyn M. Simpson, *A Study of the Prose Works of John*, pp. 319-20.