Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Early Modern French Studies

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/yemf20

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To cite this article: Zak Eastop (2022): Undead Dindenault: economics, theatre, and economic theatre in Rabelais's *Quart livre* and beyond, Early Modern French Studies, DOI: 10.1080/20563035.2022.2065062

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/20563035.2022.2065062

Published online: 05 May 2022.

EARLY MODERN FRENCH STUDIES, 2022, 1–17

Undead Dindenault: economics, theatre, and economic theatre in Rabelais's *Quart livre* and beyond

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This article is primarily concerned with the Dindenault episode (chapters V-VIII) of François Rabelais's *Quart livre,* which deals with economic and theatrical themes simultaneously. While previous studies have tackled these themes separately, I outline how they ought to be considered in tandem and, indeed, rely on one another for significance. I argue that in the Dindenault episode, Rabelais's use of common theatrical structures and motifs serves as a stage upon which to mount socio-economic critique, constituting a performance of *theatrical economics*, in the context of a broader example of *economic theatre*. I then turn to one of the nineteenth-century afterlives of Rabelais's texts – Théodore Labarre's and Henri Trianon's 1855 opera *Pantagruel* – claiming that the interdependence of the Dindenault scene's economic and theatrical themes is retroactively confirmed by its move into one of its 'downstream contexts': the shepherd's scandalous afterlife on the musical stage of Second Empire France.

KEYWORDS Rabelais, Dindenault, Afterlives, Panurge, Opera, Economics, Theatre

Introduction

On Christmas Eve 1855, *Pantagruel*, a two-act opera by the composer and harp virtuoso Théodore Labarre and librettist Henri Trianon was premiered at the *Théâtre Impérial de l'Opéra* (hereafter known as the *Opéra*). This was to be its only performance. Though no archival evidence has yet surfaced that conclusively accounts for the

* Though now affiliated with Durham University, I undertook much of the research for this article while based at the University of London's Institute of Modern Languages Research. My thanks go to everyone at the IMLR and especially to the institute's manager Cathy Collins, to whom this article is dedicated.

DOI 10.1080/20563035.2022.2065062

work's sudden cancellation, the most likely explanation is that the libretto was supressed by the Second Empire's censors for containing unexplained 'allusions politiques' revealed at performance. Mysteriously, in spite of the regime's intense preoccupation with quashing any critical voices in the press and arts, the political undertones in Trianon's libretto had managed to slip past the censor's scissors unnoticed until the piece received its first performance, attended by the emperor and his wife.

Why begin an article about Rabelais's sixteenth-century texts by discussing a relatively unknown and largely unsuccessful nineteenth-century attempt to adapt them for the musical stage? My aim in this article is to demonstrate that by examining Rabelais's nineteenth-century afterlives, one encounters – or rather *re*-encounters – readings of his *Chroniques* that have proved elusive for twentieth- and twenty-first century critics. Perhaps the clearest example of this can be seen in the treatment of chapters V-VIII of the *Quart livre* and the tendency among modern critics to separate the twin economic and theatrical themes at work in Rabelais's telling of Panurge's deadly dealings with a mouthy shepherd named Dindenault. In this article, I want to demonstrate that any reading of the episode separating these tandem themes is – though unquestionably useful – by default incomplete. As I will discuss, the critique of early sixteenth-century economic structures presented in Rabelais's text is expounded in an overtly theatrical context. At the same time, the theatrical devices deployed in these chapters – many borrowed from theatrical sub-genres, like French late-medieval farce, that engaged a great deal with the economic discourses of their time – serve to elucidate the episode's economic critique. These themes are mutually dependent and closely interwoven; to separate them is to unravel the thematic fabric of the text, leaving Rabelais's rich tapestry a mess of threads.

Despite the clear interrelatedness of the theatrical and economic in the Dindenault episode, their *mélange* seems to have slipped by modern critics broadly unnoticed; or, if noticed, it has been nodded toward and then quietly shuffled past. The scene's afterlives on the musical stage of nineteenth-century France, however, retain – and in Labarre's and Trianon's case emphasize – this fusion. Even on a superficial level this would make sense; not only are both key to the *Opéra's* lavish performance aesthetic and socio-cultural status, but nineteenth-century writers of music theatre were able, by virtue of the multifaceted, multimedial idiom in which they operated, to combine what seem to us disparate discourses in ways which would have been natural and obvious to an intertextual writer such as Rabelais.[1]

Further, like the afterlives of Goethe's *Mignon* explored at length by Terence Cave, I also contend that Rabelais's 'afterlives are deeply connected [… by] a hermeneutic rather than a merely narrative or thematic coherence […] the corpus is single, not double.'[2] Later interpretations of a work as magnitudinous as Rabelais's *Chroniques* – like the aftershocks that follow an earthquake – have a cultural force relative to that of their epicentral text. These later interpretations form part

[1] See Neil Kenny, 'Making Sense of Intertextuality', in *The Cambridge Companion to Rabelais*, ed. by John O'Brien (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 57–72 for an excellent study of this aspect of Rabelais's compositional style.

[2] Terence Cave, *Mignon's Afterlives: Crossing Cultures from Goethe to the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 7.

of a single wider, culturally seismic, event: they are a text's future and, like their tectonic analogy, are unforeseeable, impossible to accurately predict, and can only be fully accounted for in retrospect. These futures are what Cave calls a text's 'downstream context'.[3] This is a context into which a text passes as it travels through time, in which – because of its relative belatedness – the assumptions underpinning the interpretation of cultural objects differ to that of the text's original context.

Following my discussion of the interwoven economic and theatrical themes in chapters V-VIII of the *Quart livre,* I will explore what we can learn about sixteenth-century Dindenault as he passes into one of his nineteenth-century downstream contexts. Make no mistake: this is an article about Rabelais's *œuvre*. But my aim here is to read him upstream, using his Second Empire musical afterlife to retroactively confirm my reading. I will, therefore, complement my initial study of the interplay between the economic and theatrical in the Dindenault episode by turning forward from the sixteenth century towards to the shepherd's future, using the circumstances of his 1855 operatic reappearance as a lens through which to look back again. It is downstream that the dual significance of the economic and the theatrical become clearer.

Ovine economics: Dindenault the social climber and his 'moutons à la grande laine'

Chapters V-VIII of the *Quart livre* offer a nuanced critique of early modern economic structures and the networks of trade underpinning them. Though much of this material pertains to early sixteenth-century France and its increasingly globalized economy, as we will see, it is Lyon's local economic development which bears most relevance to Rabelais's representation of ovine economics.

That representation takes the form of a story laden with theatrical devices. While sailing the Atlantic aboard the *Thalamege,* Pantagruel and his entourage meet a group of travelling merchants who are sailing back home to Saintonge from Lanternland. Having set eyes on a bespectacled and codpieceless Panurge, one of the tradeship's crew – a shepherd named Dindenault – calls him 'une belle medaille de Coqu'.[4] Panurge is offended, and an argument ensues, eventually causing both the shepherd and Frère Jean (on Panurge's behalf) to draw their blades, with the former unable to do so because of a rusty scabbard. The helmsman intervenes, defuses the situation, and Panurge and Dindenault shake hands in reconciliation. Panurge then turns to Epistemon and Frère Jean, secretly telling them to stand back and enjoy his 'beau jeu' (QL.VI.550). He approaches Dindenault and repeatedly asks to buy a sheep but is refused every time. This is first because he does not look like a shepherd, then because the sheep are too valuable. Dindenault ridicules Panurge, calling him 'Robin Mouton' and making sheep noises. Panurge replies calmly, reminding himself to have 'patience' while repeatedly asking to buy a sheep. Eventually, after another intervention by the helmsman, Dindenault capitulates and sells Panurge an

[3] Terence Cave, 'Locating the Early Modern', *Paragraph*, 29.1 (2006), 12–26 (p. 21).

[4] François Rabelais, *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. by Mireille Huchon (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), p. 148. Hereafter given in text as (book.chapter.page).

animal for 'trois livres turnois' (QL.VII.553) – six times the normal asking price. Having selected and paid for the most resplendent of Dindenault's flock, Panurge tosses it into the sea. Hearing its desperate bleats, the other sheep begin hurling themselves overboard too. Panicking, Dindenault grabs hold of a ram, but alas the animal is too strong, dragging the shepherd into the water with him. Panurge then picks up an oar and, while using it to hold Dindenault underwater, recites rhetorical commonplaces. With Dindenault dead, Panurge turns to Frère Jean for approval. The monk questions Panurge's decision to pay the shepherd before murdering him, but Panurge explains: 'jamais homme ne me feist plaisir sans recompense […] jamais homme ne me feist desplaisir sans repentence' (QL.VIII.556). Frère Jean replies by damning Panurge, quoting the 'mihi vindictam' of Romans 12:19.

What does this story of a shepherd and his sheep drowned at sea have to tell us? Both Terence Cave, and more recently Katherine Ibbett, have insisted upon the close association of the ovine and the economic in the early modern period.[5] Ibbett links her notion of the 'sheepship' (the literary motif of the seafaring sheep) to the expansion and imposition of European economic power in the new world.[6] She views the sheep in a globalist, colonial-economic context, underlining how 'sheepish texts also build relations between a localized landscape and the larger world.'[7] Yet one does not have to stray from Lyon – one of Rabelais's many homes – to understand the significance of the sheep and the products derived from it for the city's inhabitants of the mid-1500s.

Sixteenth-century Lyon owed its prosperity primarily to the part it played in the trans-European textile industry. Before 1500, this trade was essentially unidirectional, almost exclusively importing and selling on fabric produced outside of France, with 81.5% of silk imports, according to Richard Gascon, coming from Italy – primarily from Lucca.[8] Close links to Italy were underpinned by the presence of merchant families like the Strozzi and Salviati who had moved into Lyon and formed what amounted to a mercantile colony in the city, drawn by its perfect location as a gateway to the Alps.[9] After 1500, French wool production and exportation increased dramatically, with Lyonnais wool exports eventually nearly matching in terms of volume (but, crucially, not value) the amount of Italian silk entering the city.[10] The burgeoning Lyonnais wool market would likely have been well known to Rabelais, and its growth was in no small part thanks to the country's sheep and shepherds, represented in his text by Dindenault and his flock.

Rabelais's shepherd forges a striking and direct association between his sheep and early modern economics by labelling them 'moutons à la grande laine' (QL.VI.550). This, as Mireille Huchon reminds us, was the slang term for a sixteenth-century French coin with an *Agnus Dei* stamped on it.[11] According to Dindenault, these

[5] Terence Cave, 'L'économie de Panurge: "moutons à la grande laine"', *Réforme, Humanisme, Renaissance*, 37 (1993), 7–24; Katherine Ibbett, 'Sheepships: Robin Mouton Goes to Sea (Rabelais, Choisy, Voltaire)', *French Studies*, 74.2 (2020), 189–202.

[6] Ibbett, p. 190.

[7] Ibbett, p. 189.

[8] Richard Gascon, *Grand commerce et vie urbaine aux VXIe siècle: Lyon et ses marchands* (Paris: École Pratique des Hautes Études, 1971), pp. 68, 65, and 114.

[9] Nadia Matringe, *La Banque en Renaissance: Les Salviati et la place de Lyon au milieu du XVIe siècle* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2016), p. 175.

[10] Gascon, p. 68.

sheep *are* money. Like a currency, they represent the material embodiment of an economic value, and in his eyes, that value is high. Mercantile handbooks and educational treatises warned against overstating the value of one's wares as Dindenault does here. Benedetto Cotrugli's famous treatise *Libro de l'arte de la mercatura*, for example, outlines a strict code of conduct for merchants, broken by the undue inflation of one's prices. For Cotrugli, getting rich is not a problem. The issue is doing so too fast and too dishonestly: 'che a lo mercante praeter ceteros homines convene essere modesto et pieno de honestà'.[12] Panurge alludes to the dangers of this mercantile misbehaviour in chapter VII, responding to Dindenault's quote of 'trois livres tournois' with a warning: 'Vous n'estez le premier de ma congnoissance, qui trop toust voulent riche devenir et parvenir, est à l'envers tombé en paouvreté : voire quelque foys s'est rompu le coul' (QL.VII.553-54).

Dindenault is no doubt being greedy by demanding so high a price. Even though the most expensive pelts in mid-sixteenth century France came from Noirot, in the Saintonge region from which the shepherd hails, their average price was still only thirty-nine *sous* and nine *deniers* between 1548 and 1569. This was six to ten times less than the equal weight in silk over the same period.[13] Dindenault's price of 'six livres turnois' thus begins to look like an attempt to sell his pelts as though they were luxurious Italian silk. Referring to his flock as 'Moutons de Levant' (QL.VI.550) further emphasizes this ruse as most Levantine textile imports into Lyon came via Italy.[14] Dindenault does not know the market value of luxury textiles and wrongly thinks his sheep capable of producing them.

Italian silk was a luxury textile (*soie de Lucques* was indeed 'deluxe'), and so only silk merchants and their richer customers would have been involved in trading it. Because of the era's financial structures which pandered to the rich at the expense of the poor, it would be nearly impossible for someone of Dindenault's low socio-economic status to infiltrate this luxury textile trade, or indeed enter and participate in elite, educated, luxury-trading culture more broadly.[15] He is, after all, only a shepherd from a rural part of north-western France and while he may *attempt* to trade luxuries (or what he claims to be luxuries) like the elites of his day, his accent and dialect reveal his true peasant status, emphasising his exclusion from the more refined mercantile culture in which he seems to be trying to take part.

When discussing Dindenault's language use in his now classic study of the *Quart livre*, Robert Marichal argued that Rabelais generally refrained from having his characters speak full-blown patois. Instead, he gave his non-standard speakers a 'couleur locale,' alluding to a dialect without adopting it wholesale.[16] This is true

[11] M. Huchon, 'Notes et variantes', in Rabelais, p. 1492 (n.7).

[12] 'Since the merchant is required to be, as are other men, modest and full of honesty.' Benedetto Cotrugli, *Libro de l'arte de la mercatura*, ed. by Vera Ribaudo, Italianistica, 4 (Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2016), p. 149. Written in ca. 1458 but not published until 1573, this work was eventually translated into French and published in Lyon in 1582.

[13] Gascon, p. 57.

[14] Gascon, p. 65.

[15] Lauro Martines, 'Review: The Renaissance and the Birth of Consumer Society', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 51.1 (1998), 193–203 (p. 198).

of Dindenault, with Marichal arguing that 'il y a dans son style, dans son phrase, quelque chose de si particulière qu'on défie un acteur ayant à lire ce dialogue de ne pas donner à Dindenault cet accent paysan de théâtre …'[17] Rabelais achieves this subtle linguistic characterisation in part by contrasting Dindenault's informal register with the extremely formal, eventually explicitly rhetorical one adopted by Panurge as he drowns the shepherd (QL.VIII.555). Though Dindenault's laughing and sheep noises are the most obvious signs of his extreme informality, these are not the only indicators of his lower linguistic and, by extension, implied socio-economic status. Marichal notes, for example, that Dindenault uses the vulgar pleonasm 'plus inferieurs' (QL.VII.553).[18] This is in contrast to Rabelais's numerous other uses of 'inferieur' elsewhere in his texts, always appearing without 'plus'. More compelling, though, is his use of 'viander' which Marichal argues is a failed attempt to render 'fienter' – 'to dung, shite, scumber' according to the Cotgrave *Dictionarie* – in a higher register.[19] It appears, therefore, that even linguistically Dindenault is peddling his shit for a too high a price. While his sheep may be excellent specimens, they are not luxurious or rarefied enough to merit the value their shepherd assigns them.

Yet Dindenault presses on, claiming that the high-quality wool his sheep produce is but one of the many things that make them so valuable. The shepherd breaks his sheep down into all of their potentially profitable uses: leather as good as that of Morocco; violin and harp strings more melodious than those of Munich or even Aquila; meat fit for kings; extremely fertile urine suitable for alchemy and for use in medicine; horns which when ground, sown and watered produce asparagus. Dindenault's polyvalent herd transcends the conventional bounds of sheepishness, and the wonders of which they are capable come, according to him, from their mythological genealogy. He claims they are of the same stock from which Jason took the Golden Fleece: 'la propre race de celluy qui porta Phrixus et Helle, par la mer dicte Hellesponte' (QL.VII.552).[20] Their genealogy and their panoply of superlative and supernatural uses render these sheep both genetically and practically 'durable'. Indeed, in Dindenault's eyes, and in his pricing, they become durable goods of enormous quality and luxury. Their high value is contained in their genealogy – their *provenance* (to borrow a term from rare art dealers). But this provenance is mythological, and thus undeliverable; in truth, Dindenault's sheep are just sheep.

A study of primarily economic concern would perhaps conclude here that Dindenault's mercantile transgressions, coupled with his insulting behaviour, were aimed at a dangerous Panurge of questionable morality, resulting in a display of extreme socio-economically motivated violence. Perhaps, as Philippe Desan has suggested, this scene serves to 'développer une fois de plus l'absurdité du processus du marchandage, plus particulièrement quand on confond moyen et fin du

[16] Robert Marichal, 'Commentaires sur le Quart Livre', *Études Rabelaisiennes*, I (1956), 159–81 (pp. 160–61).
[17] Marichal, p. 160.
[18] Marichal, p. 178.
[19] R. Cotgrave, 'Fienter', *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1970).
[20] Ibbett, p. 193.

commerce', constituting a 'parodie d'échange, ou plutôt une forme d'échange perverti'.[21] One could go on, as Cave has, to discuss the 'pessimisme foncier devant la valeur des monnaies' which underpinned late medieval and early modern systems of finance, and how this is embodied by the shepherd's dialogue in which 'la rhétorique et l'argent s'en trouvent conjointement assujettis à une inflation exorbitante'.[22]

Readings such as these are undoubtedly useful, but they fall short by isolating the economic discourses at play in the episode from the context of their articulation. The scene is surely economic, but it is not *only* economic, and while the deck of the *Thalamege* could represent the enclosed world of the economically profitable sheepfold, as Ibbett asserts, this setting can also be read as reflecting and recreating enclosed theatrical performance space.[23] We must assume that for the sheep to be cast off the ship, Panurge and Dindenault are stood on deck. A platform of this kind, like a performance space, is detached from its surroundings. In this case, it is raised from the sea like a stage is from an audience: open and exposed for all to see, and yet also closed off.[24]

Cave gestures towards this infusion of the theatrical with the economic by suggesting that the trade taking place between Panurge and Dindenault 'permet à Rabelais de *mettre en scène* un comportement et surtout une pratique économiques.'[25] And by asking 'who is Robin Mouton?' in her economically-oriented study of literary sheep on ships, Ibbett also briefly aligns these two discourses, pointing out that 'the Robin early modern readers might know best is a stage character'.[26] Yet, the scene contains more than the mere *soupçon* of theatricality that the passing comments in these economic readings would seem to suggest: the way it engages with economic discourses is extremely, self-consciously theatrical. It is in this space of theatrical performance, and according to its norms, that Dindenault is punished for his social and economic transgressions.

Economic theatre and theatrical economics in the Dindenault episode

The economic critique outlined above is, I claim, performed in a textual setting parodying that of theatrical performance. One could call this an example of *theatrical economics*: economic critique mediated by theatrical devices, performed on a stage

[21] Philippe Desan, 'Marchands et marchandises', ed. by Marcel Simonin, *Études Rabelaisiennes*, XXXIII (1998), 105–15 (p. 112).

[22] Terence Cave, *Pré-histoires II; langues étrangères et troubles économiques au XVIe siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 2001), pp. 162 & 160.

[23] Ibbett, p. 190.

[24] I acknowledge Koopmans's recent claim (Jelle Koopmans, 'Rabelais and Theatre', in *A Companion to François Rabelais*, ed. by Bernd Renner (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021), pp. 216–40 (p. 220) that the theatre of Rabelais's day was not always performed on a stage as we would know it, or with as much of a physical division between audience and performer. This may be true, but there still would have existed a boundary – albeit a porous one – between the two groups.

[25] Cave, 'L'économie de Panurge: "moutons à la grande laine"', p. 7. My italics.

[26] Ibbett, pp. 191–92.

at sea. Here, the theatrical and the economic are clearly working in tandem. In general, engagement with theatrical forms was integral to Rabelais's idiom. Jelle Koopmans begins his chapter *Rabelais and Theatre* by claiming that 'if Rabelais, instead of writing his Pantagruelic novels, had published *farces* and *sotties*, he would most certainly have been considered one of the greatest comedy playwrights in history.'[27] Whether or not this would really be the case (and whether or not it even matters), it is clear that Rabelais was obsessed with the theatrical culture of his day.[28] In the *Chroniques,* he often turns to theatrical forms, using them as a vehicle for his satirical socio-economic critique, and this is especially true in the Dindenault episode. The scene is a seabound 'jeu' (QL.VI.550) – or 'tragique farce' according to Nicolas Le Cadet – in which Panurge is principal actor, director, and producer, telling Frère Jean and Epistemon, 'retirez […] ici un peu à l'escart, et joyeusement passez temps ce que voirez' (QL.VI.550).[29] Panurge's instruction here designates Frère Jean and Epistemon as the audience to his forthcoming performance. As Christiane Deloince-Louette explains, 'le lexique employé est explicite: le "jeu" désigne en effet le jeu théâtral, voire la representation elle même. De même, l'expression *passer le temps*, comme la forme substantivée de *passetemps*, renvoie au plaisir du spectacle.'[30] Clearly, Panurge wants to be watched.

In chapter VI, the scene's theatricality is further intensified, with Rabelais's text morphing into a scripted dialogue between 'Pan' and 'Le March'. From here onwards Rabelais starts to work explicit references to late-medieval farce theatre – perhaps his most obvious thespian touchstone – into his text.[31] Dindenault's nickname for Panurge, 'Robin Mouton', is, as has already been mentioned, the name of the title character from a well-known fifteenth-century farce. Elements of the action nod towards another key farcical work, namely, *la Farce de Maistre Pierre Pathelin*.[32] For Bernadette Rey-Flaud, the parallels with *Pathelin* are integral, with the Dindenault episode relying 'en effet sur une allusion insistante à d'autres moutons, non moins célèbres, ceux de Thibault l'Aignelet'; a naughty shepherd is key to the play's plot as much as it is to Rabelais's episode.[33]

Pathelin was extremely popular during Rabelais's lifetime, published in no fewer than sixteen editions between 1485 and 1550.[34] Its title character is a lawyer who represents l'Aignelet in court after he is accused of stealing and eating the sheep of a local clothmaker. Pathelin directs Thibault to respond to all the judge's questions with 'bêê' thereby leading the judge to suspect him unfit for trial. L'Aignelet is

[27] Koopmans, p. 216.
[28] Koopmans, p. 217.
[29] Nicolas Le Cadet, *Rabelais et le théâtre* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2020), p. 261.
[30] Christiane Deloince-Louette, 'La vengeance de Panurge. Rabelais, Quart Livre, V-VIII', in *Poétiques de la vengeance: de la passion à l'action*, ed. by Céline Bohnert and Régine Borderie (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013), pp. 109–23 (p. 114).
[31] Barbara C. Bowen, *The Age of Bluff: Paradox and Ambiguity in Rabelais and Montaigne* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), p. 91; see Koopmans for an excellent study of Rabelais's broader engagement with farce theatre.
[32] Marichal, p. 168; Ibbett, p. 192.
[33] B. Rey-Flaud, 'Quand Rabelais interroge la farce: Les moutons de Panurge et l'épilogue du Pathelin', *Littératures*, 15 (1986), 7.
[34] E. Bruce Hayes, *Rabelais' Radical Farce: Late Medieval Comic Theatre and Its Function in Rabelais* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p. 12.

acquitted. Upon trying to collect his fee, Pathelin's ruse is turned against him as the shepherd responds to his requests for payment with the same sheep noises he used against the judge. Emphasising the close association of the court scene in *Pathelin* and the Dindenault episode, Rey-Flaud claims these bleats are the pair's shared linguistic locus: the *bêê* of Thibault is echoed in the taunting *bêê*s of Dindenault and the dying *bêê*s of his *challant*. Panurge using an oar to ensure Dindenault's drowning further emphasizes the scene's association with farce. Blunt and wooden, it is reminiscent of the *bâton*: the traditional weapon of the *farceur.* References like these to farce theatre in Rabelais's otherwise economically themed text are numerous and obvious, establishing a clear link between the two. But what might Rabelais have sought to achieve by fusing the theatrical and the economic (other than the writing of an entertaining and culturally relevant text)? What would their mixing have meant to a sixteenth-century reader?

When discussing the social and economic driving forces behind farce production, Sara Beam and Koopmans both maintain that the genre originated in wealthy and powerful circles. The former devotes several pages of her study to a discussion of royal and noble engagement with farce; the latter claims that 'the tradition of farce playing is far from just "popular"', instead arising from an academic and intellectual culture whose first traces are now to be found in court records.[35] To both, the genre is one that originated with, and whose performance was sanctioned by, a ruling class. Yet it is precisely this literate, elite class which Noah D. Guynn has claimed to be responsible for obscuring the genre's popular roots. In his recent study *Pure Filth*, Guynn argues that the treatment of farce theatre in critical discourse since the seventeenth century has privileged the voices of the humanist intelligentsia, denying 'to the supposedly benighted *hoi polloi* the capacity to imagine alternative social realities, or oppose existing ones.'[36] While audiences were drawn from every level of society, only those near the top of the socio-economic hierarchy would have the means to record, print, and promulgate these plays, effectively constituting a layer of censorship by the ruling and intellectual classes.[37] All of this has been further confused by the long-standing tendency in theatre studies toward overly taxonomic generic structures. E. Bruce Hayes' discussion of farce in Rabelais, for example, leans on the dual narrative loci of '*démesure*' and '*volte face*'; the former an enacting of excess or transgression of social norms, the latter a humiliating and degrading reversal of fortune which returns the transgressor to their rightful place on the socio-economic pecking order.[38] These are certainly deployed in *some* farces but not, as Hayes seems to claim, in *all* farces. Indeed, *Pathelin* – the farce most referenced by Rabelais – does not fully conform to this model, either containing more than one tenuous *volte-face* moment, or none at all.

[35] Sara Beam, *Laughing Matters; Farce and the Making of Absolutism in France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), pp. 44–48; Koopmans, pp. 223–24. Koopmans has promised a more in-depth study of the origins of farce his forthcoming monograph *Histoire de la farce*.

[36] N. D. Guynn, *Pure Filth: Ethics, Politics, and Religion in Early French Farce* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), p. 10.

[37] Guynn, p. 5.

[38] Hayes, p. 13.

It is not my intention to add to the confusion by wading too far into these critical discussions.[39] It is clear, however, that whether high or low born, taxonomic or not, farce was a genre which had as its primary target the late-medieval period's systems of socio-cultural stratification and the economic organisation that underpinned them. In other words, this is deeply *economic theatre*, its humour underpinned by the unequal socio-economic *milieu* in which it was written and performed. Looking again at *Pathelin*, the play's plot is at its most fundamental level a commercial dispute. Not only is the clothmaker seeking retribution for his lost income, but Thibault's bleats are themselves economically motivated; a ruse to avoid losing money to punishment or legal fees. The ease with which Rabelais can reference this play in the context of the Dindenault episode serves to underline the theatrical and economic fusion within it. The economic intrigue of *Pathelin* is in easy alignment with that of the Dindenault episode.

Chapters V-VIII of the *Quart livre* do, however, diverge from traditional farce in one key way: while the genre would generally seek to satirize those in power, be they local government functionaries or the king himself, the production staged by Panurge does the opposite, constituting instead a visceral representation and reinforcing of the oppressive economic structures of the period performed from the enclosed world of a theatrical stage at sea.[40] The polarities have been reversed: rather than ridiculing those in power before a crowd of commoners, a commoner is ridiculed and killed before a small group of elites. Far from being a late-medieval market-going everyman crowd, Panurge's audience are a king (Pantagruel); a monk (Frère Jean); and a learned humanist (Epistemon). Panurge joins this trio's high flying ranks, holding down the low-status shepherd and delivering a cultivated rhetorical oration, signalling his superior education and, by extension, superior social status. The extreme, often deadly, poverty in which the vast majority lived during the early sixteenth century becomes the sea under which Dindenault is held; Panurge and his makeshift *bâton* embody the early modern economic systems that kept the wealthy rich, and the poor in poverty.

When seen in relation to the farce paradigm more broadly, the theatrical economics at work in the economic theatre of the Dindenault episode appear extremely anti-poor, but what are we as the audience supposed to make of Panurge's trick? This is left somewhat unclear. Frère Jean concedes that, Panurge's payment to Dindenault notwithstanding, 'je n'ay rien trouvé maulvais' (QL.VIII.555). Yet, after Panurge explains that 'jamais homme ne me feist plaisir sans recompense […] jamais homme ne me feist desplaisir sans repentence' (QL.VIII.556), Jean's tone quickly changes to one of pious anger: 'Tu (dist frere Jan) te damne comme un vieil diable. Il est escript, *Mihi uindictam, et cætera*. Matiere de breviaire' (QL.VIII.556). Frère Jean's sudden change of tone here would imply that Panurge's vengeance is a transgression of basic Christian morality, but crucially only when it is couched in explicitly vengeful terms. Otherwise put, it was the intention behind the drowning that was problematic, not the drowning itself. One cannot help but wonder whether Frère Jean would have damned Panurge so vehemently, had the

[39] For a thorough, lucid, and up to date study of Rabelais's engagement with farce, see: Le Cadet, pp. 129–82.
[40] Beam, p. 48.

latter simply kept his mouth shut. Rabelais never offers a clear answer, setting sail instead for the island of Ennasin.

Undead Dindenault's Second Empire Censorship Scandal: Théodore Labarre's and Henri Trianon's Pantagruel

As the *Thalamege* continues on its journey, the bodies of Dindenault and his boisterous bleaters sink out of sight into the dark depths of the Atlantic ocean. They are gone, yes, but not entirely forgotten, morphing into, and living on as, the French idiom 'les moutons de Panurge', a phrase denoting the equivalent of English 'lemmings' whose usage peaked, according to Google Ngram, during the period between the formation of the Second Empire and the outbreak of the First World War. It is by examining Dindenault's 'forays into the undiscovered countries' of his nineteenth-century musical aftelives that the inseparability of economics and theatre in Rabelais's Dindenault episode itself is retroactively confirmed.[41] As we shall see, it may have been the retention of Dindenault's inherent socio-economic significance during the move from Renaissance page to Second Empire stage that spelled such disaster for Labarre's and Trianon's ill-fated adaptation, causing it to be censored.

It is, however, difficult to say with certainty what led to the sudden disappearance of Labarre's and Trianon's *Pantagruel* following its premiere on Christmas Eve of 1855. News of the work's cancellation does not appear in print before 30 December, with some critics attributing it in retrospect to either poor writing or unsuitability for the *Opéra*. A writer for *La France musicale,* for example, advised on 7 January 1856 that '*Pantagruel* ayant disparu de l'affiche après sa première représentation, ce qu'il y a de mieux à faire, c'est de ne rien dire.' This is not because it was 'un ouvrage mauvais ou même médiocre' but rather that its subject-matter seemed 'peu convenable pour une scène comme celle de l'Opéra'.[42] Similarly, writing in *Le Ménestrel* on 30 December 1855, critic Edmond Viel followed his generally positive review of *Pantagruel* by claiming that its authors had to cancel because 'le genre bouffe ne parait plus être de mise à l'Opéra. On n'y veut admettre que le drame lyrique sérieux dans toute sa pompe.'[43] To these critics, either the choice of bawdy and jocular Rabelais, or the attempt at introducing comic themes at the *Opéra,* was the reason for the piece's downfall. This dual failure is echoed by Henri Montazio, writing in *l'Appel* on 30 December 1855 that for him, the work was both an ill-conceived attempt to bring comedy into the *Opéra*, and also poor quality in and of itself. As he sums up: '*Pantagruel, mon cher ami, vous êtes assommant!*'[44]

[41] Apposite phrasing taken from Hamlet, via Richard Scholar, 'Montaigne's Forays into the Undiscovered Countries', in *The Uses of the Future in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Andrea Brady, Emily Butterworth, and Peter Burke (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 39–53.

[42] 'Théâtre impérial de l'opéra; Pantagruel et le diable à Quatre', *La France musicale* (Paris, 7 January 1956), p. 411.

[43] Edmond Viel, 'Théâtre imperial de l'opéra', *Le Menstrel: journal de musique*, 30 December 1855, pp. 1–2.

[44] Henri Montazio, 'Chronique Musicale', *L'Appel : journal littéraire, artistique et scientifique*, 30 December 1855, pp. 3–4, original italics.

The general (published) critical consensus in the weeks following the ill-fated premiere thus seems to have been that a lack of quality or a stylistic misjudgement ultimately led to *Pantagruel's* cancellation, but the strict press censorship of Napoléon III's regime means that it is impossible to know whether these critics genuinely believed this. Outside of France, however, Russian journals chronicling Parisian high society for the Francophile upper class of Saint Petersburg could be a little more candid. As a writer for the *Revue étrangère de la littérature et des arts* recounts:

> N'ayant pu assister à la première représentation [de *Pantagruel*], je me proposais d'aller à la seconde, *mais mieux vaut tenir que courir,* j'en ai encore une fois la preuve, car la seconde représentation qui était annoncée, n'a pas eu lieu ; les abonnés du théâtre ayant fait, quelques heures avant la représentation, une démarche auprès de la direction pour suspendre les représentations de cet ouvrage.[45]

Who were these *abonnés*? Writing in *le Figaro* on 30 December 1855, critic Benoît Jouvin reports that 'on assure, par exemple, que le Jokey-Club [sic] a fait prévenir l'administration de l'Opéra que si la pièce n'était pas retirée, il se rendrait à la représentation pour y siffler *Pantagruel*.[46] Jouvin is here referring to the *Jockey-Club de Paris*, a group of ultra-rich Parisian men – many of noble birth – who greatly influenced the running of the *Opéra* during the first decade of the Second Empire, and who had a famed aptitude for derailing performances they did not like.[47]

While the Jockey Club may very well have had a hand in *Pantagruel's* cancellation, their intervention being the sole cause is, however, unlikely. Members were always late to performances, preferring to eat dinner at their clubhouse during the first act. According to Charles Yriarte, they would then 'accéder à couvert [à la salle] grâce à [un] mystérieux passage qui communique de la rue Drouot à la rue le Pelletier', arriving in time to gawk at the female dancers performing the ballet which either accompanied or formed part of all performances at the *Opéra* during this period.[48] As composer Hector Berlioz put it: 'il n'y a pas d'opéras en cinq actes pour [les gens du monde], mais seulement des opéras en trois actes et demi.'[49] The Jockey would have likely missed much of Labarre's and Trianon's piece, and while Jouvin's article implicates the club, it also only frames their disturbance as a threat, not a fact. If they had taken offence at the work then any real hullaballoo would likely have begun in earnest at the second performance, had this actually taken place.

[45] 'Revue et nouvelles étrangères', in *Revue étrangère de la littérature des sciences et des arts* (Saint Petersburg: Libraire de la Cour Impériale, 1855), XCVI, 771. Original italics.

[46] Benoît Jouvin, 'Théâtres', *Le Figaro*, 30 December 1855, pp. 5–6 (p. 6).

[47] Joseph-Antoine Roy, *Histoire Du Jockey Club de Paris* (Paris: Libraire Marcel Riviere et Cie, 1958), pp. 3 & 62.

[48] Charles Yriarte, *Les cercles de Paris* (Paris: Dupray de la Mahérie, 1864), p. 95. The Jockey's clubhouse stood on Rue Drouot around the corner from Rue Pelletier where the *Opéra* was located until a fire in 1873 led it to be relocated to *Palais Garnier* on the Place de l'Opéra.

[49] Hector Berlioz, *Les grotesques de la musique*, ed. by Calmann Lévy (Paris: Ancienne maison Michel Lévy frères, 1888), p. 249.

The most likely reason for the piece's sudden cancellation is that it contained depictions (whether intentional on the part of Labarre and Trianon or not) of class antagonism: a theme strictly prohibited by the censors of Napoléon III's regime.[50] Those still writing about *Pantagruel* after the modest relaxation of censorship laws in 1864 support this hypothesis, blaming intervention by censors for the work's cancellation. Labarre's obituarist, for example, claims in an 1870 issue of *Le Figaro* that the work may have contained problematic 'allusions politiques'.[51] This is echoed eight years later, following the collapse of the Second Empire, by *Opéra* archivist Théodore Lajarte, who writes that 'cet ouvrage ne fut pas heureux […] on crut, dit-on, trouver dans le poëme des allusions politiques. Cette suspicion fit suspendre la pièce.'[52] It makes sense, given how tightly Napoléon III's regime controlled the press, that were this the reason for the work's suspension, it would not be mentioned in papers of the time. But could this piece really be politically problematic enough to be so aggressively censored? And if so, why was it ever cleared for performance at all?

Censorship laws in the 1850s were imprecise, requiring censors to review all new works on a case-by-case basis and consider them against loosely defined guidelines. The advice given by the *commission d'examen* was 'principalement à combattre les tendances continues des auteurs à chercher des situations et des effets scéniques : 1°) dans l'antagonisme des classes inférieures et des hautes classes où ces dernières sont invariablement sacrifiées […]'.[53] This preoccupation with preventing class antagonism from reaching the stage is confirmed by Victor Hallays-Dabot – one of Napoléon III's censors – who, writing about his activities during the Second Empire, states that 'l'antagonisme est un élément dramatique dont l'effet est aussi certain qu'il est dangereux. Que de fois et de combien de façons n'a-t-on pas tourné et retourné l'antithèse du pauvre honnête et du riche scélérat […]?'[54]

In Labarre's and Trianon's *Pantagruel,* we see Dindenault – now the primary focus of the entire plot's intrigue – subjected to ridicule, abuse, and exploitation not by just one *riche scélérat*, but by an entire wealthy class. It is through their juxtaposition with Dindenault that aristocrats Gargantua and Pantagruel in particular are revealed to be entitled and exploitative. The pair are thoroughly disagreeable, with the former depicted from curtain-up as lazy, gluttonous, and self-absorbed, and the latter extremely exploitative, repeatedly assaulting people and blaming it on others. Yet nobody is as mistreated by them as Dindenault. Indeed, in this operatic version, the shepherd's feud with Panurge stems not from farce-inflected insults, as is the case in Rabelais's texts, but instead results from the questionable actions of Gargantua and Pantagruel. If juxtaposing the innocent poor and the miscreant rich gets one censored in the Second Empire, then the treatment to which these

[50] Odile Krakovitch, 'La censure dramatique : de l'ordre impérial à l'indifférence', in *Les spectacles sous le Second Empire*, ed. by Jean-Claude Yon (Paris: Armand Colin, 2010), pp. 41–50 (p. 42).

[51] 'Echos de Paris', *Le Figaro* (Paris, 12 March 1870).

[52] Théodore Lajarte, *Bibliothèque musicale du théâtre de l'Opéra.* (Paris: Libraire des Bibliophiles, 1878), I, p. 219.

[53] Archives Nationales, F21 4635, dossier 3. Cited in: Krakovitch, p. 43.

[54] Victor Hallays-Dabot, *La censure dramatique et le théâtre, histoire des vingt dernières années (1850-1870)* (Paris: Libraire de la société des gens de lettres, 1871), p. 71.

privileged nobles subject Dindenault must surely have been the main driving force behind the work's cancellation.

The first example of Dindenault's poor treatment comes midway through Act I as a 'chœur d'écoliers' led by Pantagruel assault him unprovoked and *en masse*.[55] Having hired Jean Jeudy's tavern *Le Pom-du-Pin* on the pretence of mourning their late master, Braccardo, Pantagruel and his fellow students at the Sorbonne process onto stage in robes and hoods. Once the coast is clear, the students each take '*un bâton de dessous leur vêtements et l'élèvant en l'air*', exclaim that 'nous sommes prêts' (Trianon, p. 6). Following an interruption by the arrival of a very drunk Panurge, we learn they plan to use to use their sticks to attack Dindenault in a test of his courage. Pantagruel and his comrades confront the shepherd, and a large fight breaks out, during which the title character attempts to have his way with Dindenault's fiancée Nicette (Jeudy's daughter). This is then halted by Gargantua's appearance at the balcony overlooking the tavern. His post-lunch siesta had been interrupted by the commotion downstairs. Pantagruel instantly scapegoats Panurge who is, as a result of his supposed sexual transgressions then forcibly betrothed to Nicette, rendering her previous engagement to Dindenault null and void. This pits the shepherd against Panurge for the remainder of the narrative and presents the already socio-economically inferior Dindenault with a serious financial problem: he had already spent two-hundred-and-fifty *écus* on food and presents for the wedding, which he stands to lose now he and Nicette are no longer betrothed. As everyone on stage sets off to celebrate Panurge's engagement at Gargantua's *château* in Touraine, Dindenault protests, demanding 'Payez, payez' (Trianon, p. 9). He is, however, told by Panurge and Jeudy that 'on ne t'ecoute pas' (Trianon, p. 10) and is then chased off stage as the curtain falls for the end of Act I.

Outside Gargantua's *château* in Touraine at the start of Act II, a boatman is spotted coming down the Loire. He has found Dindenault floating in the river, nearly drowned. As the sopping wet shepherd regains consciousness, he curses Panurge, and laments the poor sheep that he killed (offstage). Rather than helping Dindenault to his feet, Gargantua runs away, exclaiming 'au diable l'étourneau! | Il m'a tout couvert d'eau !' and labells him a 'trouble-fête' (Trianon, p. 11). After unsuccessfully asking again for his losses to be repaid, Dindenault tells the group how at sea he met Panurge who, blind drunk, drowned his entire flock of sheep. Pantagruel, whether keen to get rid of Dindenault or just bored, suggests throwing the shepherd back into the water to drown too, but Gargantua opts to listen to the rest of the 'fable' – a label which implies fictionality and lightheartedness – adding that 'il sera toujours temps de le remettre à l'eau' (Trianon, p. 12) if he is too boring. To these nobles, Dindenault is entirely expendable.

Gargantua is clearly only concerned with Dindenault's wellbeing in as far as it affects his ability to be economically productive, reflecting the insincere concern for workers performed by those who governed the Second Empire. During the first years of his rule, Napoléon III rode a wave of economic expansion which

[55] Théodore Labarre and Henri Trianon, *Pantagruel: opéra en deux actes* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1856), p. 6. Hereafter given in text as (Trianon, p.).

had itself begun in the early 1840s (and was briefly interrupted during the revolutionary period of 1848); but this was in truth only a boom for the already reasonably wealthy.[56] Becoming economically bourgeois was increasingly difficult in the 1850s, with routes to wealth and status either themselves financially burdensome – like obtaining a secondary education – or socially insular, as was true for marriages between bourgeois families.[57] While the economic growth of the 1850s brought prosperity to the agricultural sector, it altered rural workers' living conditions very little.[58] This meant that, despite the imperial regime proclaiming its sympathy for the working class, farmers and their urban industrial counterparts continued to live in relative poverty while the metropolitan middle and upper classes profited from their labour and production.[59]

Mirroring this, Gargantua is outraged at the sheepfold being drowned, but not at Dindenault suffering the same fate: he and his associates swear to avenge the sheep, not the shepherd. This is, at least, until the dinner bell rings, at which point '*tous sortent, excepté Dindenault, qui est repoussé par tout le monde*' (Trianon, p. 13). The matter is instantly forgotten in favour of gluttony. As Dindenault sums up: 'La drôle de justice! On me promet vengeance, | Et l'on commence | Par me laisser mourir de faim !' (Trianon, p. 13). The predicament Dindenault outlines here reflects both the social divisions at play in the libretto's intra-narrative sixteenth-century setting, and also the work's Second Empire performance context: it is an example of Rabelais's text butting heads with its downstream context. Gargantua's concern, to put this another way, is for Dindenault's materially productive sheep, not for Dindenault the worker: for the means of production, not the labour force. Gargantua embodies the unbridled wealth and consumption of the Second Empire, where concern for safeguarding revenue streams masqueraded as feigned concern for workers, and where one's voice being heard was dependent on one's capacity to be economically productive: something Dindenault cannot be without his flock.

As the action comes to a head, Panurge suggests ending the feud by letting Nicette decide which of her suitors she wants to marry. He compares this decision to that of Paris who chooses which of Juno, Venus, and Minerva (in this case, Panurge, Pantagruel, and Dindenault; Trianon, p. 17) should receive the Apple of Discord; a choice that in Greek mythology ultimately leads to the Trojan war. This same potential for continued discord is strongly implied in the final moments of *Pantagruel*, with the title character refusing to accept Nicette's choice of Dindenault as her spouse, promising that 'je punirai tant d'insolence | Oui, j'en saurai tirer vengeance' (Trianon, p. 18). If the Second Empire's censors sought to avoid class antagonism on stage, then no wonder this production was forced to cancel. Pantagruel has effectively declared war on the poor, vowing, like Menelaus, to take the woman he desires back from the clutches of a marital usurper who represents a demographic

[56] Jeremy D. Popkin, *A History of Modern France* (New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 126–27.
[57] Popkin, p. 128.
[58] Roger Price, *People and Politics in France, 1848-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 180–84.
[59] Popkin, p. 128.

he considers inferior, and in doing so extend this instance of interclass discord long into the future.

Conclusion

Koopmans recently wrote that Rabelais's afterlives on the stage '[constitute] a witness of the gigantic potential of [his] text. These adaptations do not simply build upon Rabelais, they merely realize what is there'.[60] This claim seems to me to undersell the relation between Rabelais's texts and their adaptations.[61] What we learn by examining Dindenault's transformation from sixteenth-century murder victim to nineteenth-century lovestruck victor is not only what *is* there, but also what *could be* there in the future, when encountered in a different context a little further downstream.

The shepherd's nineteenth-century rise to narrative dominance is an example of the potentiality in Rabelais's *œuvre*, its capacity to be read in the conditional.[62] These Pantagruelic texts are, with their infinite potential for multiple, contrasting readings, in a sense unfinished. They are an example of what Umberto Eco would call an 'open work': one left to be completed by the interpreter.[63] This is perhaps why for the belated 'modern' reader there appears to be an anticipatory awareness in Rabelais's text that economic change is coming; that one day in the not-too-distant future those who own the means of production, rather than the feudal landlords, will be the ones who control the economy. Rabelais's shepherd could – and indeed as we 'moderns' now know *does* – have a bigger future than that of which the text itself is consciously aware.[64] It is not that Rabelais's texts presage the social and political developments of the nineteenth century, but that they leave the nineteenth-century space to place itself inside his narratives.

Self-insertion of this kind is, I think, a useful way of conceptualizing Labarre's and Trianon's engagement with Rabelais's works: they fill a Rabelaisian mould with nineteenth-century problems. Given their period's obsession with discourses of class, it is therefore little wonder that the pair gravitated toward Dindenault, a character for whom performing socio-economic identity in a theatrical context is definitional. His class identity is important precisely because of how it compares to those of the characters who surround him. The shepherd stands isolated in Rabelais's texts: he represents a lone 'low' voice in a work dominated by the voices of

[60] Koopmans, p. 240.

[61] The afterlives of Rabelais and his texts on the nineteenth-century musical stage are the subject of my current doctoral research.

[62] Colin Burrow, *Imitating Authors: Plato to Futurity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 9. Burrow outlines a 'subjunctive principle' at work in the *imitatio* practices adopted by some Renaissance humanists, according to which the goal was 'to write "as Cicero *would* write" in a new set of circumstances and vocabularies.' Though Burrows' study does not dwell long on the nineteenth century, there are numerous examples of subjunctive imitation from the period – perhaps most notably in architectural restoration practices – that I hope will be the focus of future study.

[63] Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. by Anna Cancogni (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 4.

[64] I thank Dr Johan Siebers for so perfectly articulating this point to me in his response to my talk at the IMLR in 2021.

educated and wealthy 'high' characters, and it is his transgression of this place in the socio-economic hierarchy that sets in motion the chain of events leading to his murder. As a lower-class character with a voice and a presence in the narrative beyond mere window-dressing, Dindenault is a Rabelaisian rarity and is thus of great socio-economic significance in the *Chroniques* as a whole; a fact rendered extremely apparent by the terms of his nineteenth-century resurrection. Whether those adapting liked it or not, as Dindenault encountered and moved into his new nineteenth-century downstream context, the economic predisposition instilled in him by Rabelais morphed into an inexorable magnetic pull toward socio-political subjects shrouded in taboo. It is thus unsurprising that the juxtaposition of the shepherd and the rich characters who surround him caused such a scandal. With the economic and the theatrical united and integrated on the nineteenth-century operatic stage, undead Dindenault, at long last, could rise from the murky depths of the literary past and show us downstream readers that he still had some life left in him.

Notes on contributor

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