

## 'I speak like John about the Apocalypse': Rabelais, Prophecy, and Fiction\*

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### I. Introduction

Can fictions 'prophesy'? What relationship might they have to apocalypse, in the sense of both the end of the world and also revelation? The connection between poetry and prophecy is omnipresent in the West, from ancient Greece and biblical Israel;<sup>i</sup> the novelist Andrew Crumey has recently explored whether novels are 'prophetic';<sup>ii</sup> web forums attest to an interest in whether films like Alex Proyas's *Knowing* (2009) can teach us about apocalypse.<sup>iii</sup> However, in the period of the Renaissance and Reformation, such questions must have taken on particular weight, for two reasons. First, apocalyptic discourses enjoyed an increased currency,<sup>iv</sup> as did prophetic readings of biblical texts such as Revelation and Daniel,<sup>v</sup> and medieval prophets such as Joachim of Fiore.<sup>vi</sup> History was generally thought to have reached its final stage, a belief which could be grounded in the four monarchies of Daniel or the triadic prophecy of Elias, the two schemes of periodization which dominated sixteenth-century historical thought.<sup>vii</sup> The upheavals of the Reformation were so significant that it seemed they must belong to the events of the final phase of history; the new prophets of the Reformation – whether considered false or true – must be those expected to arrive as the Apocalypse approached.<sup>viii</sup> Secondly, the notion of specifically poetic prophecy acquired renewed vigour, associated in particular with a conception of fiction as a prophetic veil for truth.<sup>ix</sup> It would be fruitful to engage with these contexts of religious history and literary history together, considering what it means that, at one and the same time, prophecy was becoming more important in the literary and the religious and political domains.

Frank Kermode opposed 'naively predictive' apocalyptic concepts of time to 'complex' modern ones, and argued that modern literature fictionalized the apocalyptic paradigm, setting it in balance with a modern view of time as an entity which stretched interminably into both past and future, in order to explore a 'sense of an ending'.<sup>x</sup> However, while it was almost universally believed in the sixteenth century that time was a finite structure, and that the present moment was situated towards the end of it, 'naively predictive' views were not dominant, and models of apocalyptic time were varied, complex and mysterious. So it might be unsurprising if in fact the literature of apocalyptic cultures – and perhaps *especially* of apocalyptic cultures – explored apocalyptic paradigms. Furthermore, pre-modern European cultures were very aware of the etymology of *apocalypse* (from the Greek noun meaning an *uncovering* or *disclosure*), so their apocalyptic fiction might deal with revelation as much as with the 'sense of an ending'. Indeed, while, as Kermode showed, literary forms function well to investigate the end and the structure of time, because they have their own endings and their own structures, texts which we call 'literary' also tend to be interested in their own representational practices and, in the Renaissance, even to conceive of them as prophecy.<sup>xi</sup> Thus literary texts might explore revelation and prophecy as much as endings.

So, how were fictions and poems employed to imagine the apocalyptic end or to approach revelation? How did apocalyptic expectation shape conceptions of poetic prophecy or of fiction? What relationships existed between literary and non-literary prophecy? This essay is part of a larger project intended to address these questions and represents a first step in exploring them in relation to the comic fictions of François Rabelais. Rabelais's writing is far from representative however it offers an insight into what could be done with poetic prophecy in an apocalyptic age. At the same time, this essay seeks to show that analysing Rabelais from the angle of apocalypse and prophecy provides a useful approach to the perennial questions in Rabelais studies of hermeneutics and epistemology. As we shall see, it illuminates in particular the question of the letter and the spirit, and points to a notion of embodied revelation.

Rabelais borrows from the Book of Revelation and evokes apocalypse.<sup>xii</sup> For example, in *Gargantua*, the text most obviously concerned with apocalyptic matters, the 'fanfreluches antidotées',<sup>xiii</sup> a verse prophecy placed towards the beginning of the text, plays with apocalyptic time,<sup>xiv</sup> towards the end of the text, Rabelais draws on biblical conceptions of Jerusalem to depict the fictional Thélème,<sup>xv</sup> then, a second verse prophecy, an 'enigma' found amongst the foundations of Thélème, evokes the suffering of the elect during the end times.<sup>xvi</sup> While the combination of Thélème and the verse prophecies points to a quasi-millenarian view, imagining an end times which combines joy with conflict,<sup>xvii</sup> the two verse prophecies which frame the text undercut this by highlighting how opaque apocalyptic prophecy can be. As André Tournon has shown, the 'fanfreluches' trouble the narrative temporality of apocalypse in a way which reflects the unthinkable temporality of the Book of Revelation itself.<sup>xviii</sup> In the case of the 'enigma', the uncertainty of apocalyptic interpretations is thematized in the text. This is the most obvious example of how, in Rabelais's fictions, evocations of apocalypse tend to highlight the hermeneutic complexities associated with it. Furthermore, Tournon has suggested that we should consider the problematization in *Gargantua* of reading apocalyptic prophecy as a reflection on the difficulties of reading Rabelaisian fiction.<sup>xix</sup> Dennis Costa has argued more generally that Rabelais conceives of signification and interpretation according to an apocalyptic paradigm which Costa defines – using modern theory and Wittgenstein as well as a reading of Revelation – as a 'fullness of knowledge of which lack or not-knowing is thoroughly, even pre-eminently a part'.<sup>xx</sup>

The suggestion that hermeneutic issues surrounding apocalypse are relevant to reading Rabelais constitutes the starting point for this essay, which focuses on the implications of apocalypse and the Book of Revelation for writing and reading fiction. Therefore I will investigate passages which both contain evocations of Revelation or apocalypse and also deal with writing or reading or interpreting. This entails moving between Rabelais's four books and, furthermore, focusing especially on passages taken from almost opposite ends of his fictional cycle, namely the prologue to the first book and the frozen words episode found in chapters 55-56 of the *Fourth Book*.<sup>xxi</sup> There are important differences between the books, not least an increasingly dark tonality reflecting an intensification of religious and social tension over the course of the 1530s; however Rabelais's evocations of apocalypse are dotted about through his fictions. In addition, whereas Rabelais's prologues are often examined in isolation, here I will

analyse a prologue in dialogue with the body of the fictions, since Revelation plays a role in both. The essay begins with a discussion of the prologue to the first edition of the first of Rabelais's fictions, *Pantagruel* (1532). This is particularly promising for my concerns because Rabelais develops the notion of poetic prophecy in an unusual direction by comparing himself to the author of the Book of Revelation, the Christian prophet of apocalypse, John.

The conceptualisation of prophetic poetry in sixteenth-century France has been analysed overwhelmingly in relation to verse, especially that of Pléiade poets such as Pierre de Ronsard or Pontus de Tyard who made reasonably programmatic statements about it,<sup>xxii</sup> as well as poems of confessional polemic, chiefly Agrippa d'Aubigné's *Tragiques* but also Ronsard's polemical exchanges with Geneva theologians.<sup>xxiii</sup> However, the Renaissance defined 'poetry' in a number of ways, of which verse and metre were only one possibility, and, in the absence of an overarching category of 'literature' like our own,<sup>xxiv</sup> notions of 'poetry' undoubtedly served to conceptualise the status and nature of prose texts which we would describe as 'literary'. Thus the famous fifteenth-century Italian Neoplatonist Marsilio Ficino formulated a notion of 'poetic prose', and some writers – including, in the 1540s and 1550s, French near-contemporaries of Rabelais, such as Hélienne de Crenne, François Habert, and Louis Le Caron – identified their own prose as poetic. In this context, 'poetic' appears first and foremost to indicate inspiration, as well as (to varying degrees) figures, fictions, and allegories.<sup>xxv</sup> Therefore, the notion of poetic prophecy should be examined in prose texts as well as verse ones, to assess the varying implications it could have in different sorts of fictions, not least comic ones such as Rabelais's tales about giants.

Indeed Rabelais was described by some contemporaries or near-contemporaries as a 'poet', although in at least some cases this seems to reflect the small amount of verse he wrote.<sup>xxvi</sup> Furthermore, he was interested in the possibilities of prophetic or inspired discourse: while he mocked simplistically predictive approaches to the future, in mock-prognostications as well as in his fiction,<sup>xxvii</sup> he explored the claims to knowledge of, among others, a dying poet.<sup>xxviii</sup> Most importantly, in his prologues Rabelais engages topoi of poetic prophecy, in particular drinking. For example, the prologue to *Gargantua* suggests that Rabelais's fictions contain a 'higher' meaning of which Rabelais – or rather his narrator, Alcofribas<sup>xxix</sup> – is not himself aware, any more than Homer was conscious of the meanings to be found in the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. The assertion that Homer's poems must be of divine origin was commonplace in the Renaissance, and Alcofribas implies that his own work may be similarly inspired. He claims that he was drinking while writing, as is appropriate 'for writing of these high topics and profound teachings, as Homer well knew'.<sup>xxx</sup>

Such claims to inspiration contain comic exaggeration, as well as co-existing with indications of conscious intention.<sup>xxxi</sup> This may, it seems to me, reflect an evangelical concern with the distance between divine truth and human creation.<sup>xxxii</sup> Rabelais's humour serves to make us cautious about the senses in which we interpret Alcofribas's writing as resembling prophecy. Perhaps his writing is like prophecy in some ways – in a lack of conscious intention underlying some of its meanings, or, as we shall see, in its

modes of sense-making – but the narrator does not, at least with any certainty and without ambivalence, lay claim to divine inspiration.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Nicolas Le Cadet argues convincingly that evangelical fiction, including Rabelais's, manifests a tension between a desire to pursue topics which might entail dogmatism (both 'high mysteries' and also polemic) on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a typically evangelical concern with the gulf between divine truth and human creations.<sup>xxxiv</sup> I would suggest that this tension shows why the notion of prophecy is relevant to Rabelais. Prophecy can be conceived precisely as both fulminating against social and ecclesiastical wrongs but also as producing meanings which can be multiple, and as speaking with a voice whose status may be uncertain. Rabelais certainly resembles a prophet insofar as he rails against moral failings, as Gérard Defaux has highlighted in a book appropriately subtitled 'du rieur au prophète'.<sup>xxxv</sup> Rabelais also implies, for example in the prologue to *Gargantua*, that he is inspired and thus may serve as the reader's conduit towards 'high mysteries'. However, at the same time, an evangelical concern with the distance between human and divine may explain why Rabelais couples prophetic claims with laughter. Moreover, as we shall see, the ways in which Rabelais conceives prophecy also cast light on his particular employment of evangelical thinking, including its emphasis on the letter and the spirit.

## II. Fiction and Prophecy: the prologue (and conclusion) to *Pantagruel*

As Timothy Hampton observes, the prologue to *Pantagruel* contrasts Rabelais's writing with the literalism of the Jews, thus announcing a concern with letter and spirit which will permeate Rabelais's text.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Rabelais (or, rather, Alcofribas) asserts that he is not talking like the authors of the Old Testament and that he does not lie: the implication seems to be that, because he is not speaking literally, his fictions are not lies; in the terms of the crucial Pauline distinction, his fictions should be read according to the spirit as well as the letter. While Rabelais's claims to truth-telling are on some occasions simply parody in the vein of Lucian,<sup>xxxvii</sup> the evocation of Old Testament literalism suggests that the letter-spirit distinction is at play here.

This distinction between letter and spirit, derived from Paul and from Augustine,<sup>xxxviii</sup> was fundamental to the Reformation. It was central to Luther's early exegetical work, in which it served to assert 'that Scripture is not God's Word until the Spirit makes it such by accomplishing an actual correspondence between the reader and the realities depicted by the text'.<sup>xxxix</sup> It was also deeply important to Erasmus and to early sixteenth-century evangelism. For Erasmus, the letter-spirit distinction meant that Scripture, in particular the Old Testament, should not always be taken literally: Christians should look beyond the literal interpretations favoured by Jews, so that, for example, where Jews are required to abstain from pork, Christians should reject 'swinish' passions.<sup>xl</sup> These concerns with the role of the reader and with literal and figurative interpretations have some echoes in Rabelais's conception of his fiction, as we shall see, however it is striking that Rabelais employs the letter-spirit distinction precisely in relation to his own fiction rather than to Scripture.

The argument that a contrast is being made between letter and spirit becomes stronger if we examine the original 1532 version of the prologue, since it, unlike the 1542 text analysed by Hampton, contrasts Jewish literalism explicitly with the New Testament and, more specifically, with the Book of Revelation, and thus with biblical prophecy:

‘Car ne croyez (si ne voulez errer à vostre escient) que j’en parle comme les juifz de la loy. Je ne suis nay en telle planette, et ne m’advint oncques de mentir, ou asseurer chose que ne feust veritable : agentes et consencientes, cest a dire qui na conscience na rien. Jen parle comme saint Jehan de Lapocalypse : *quod vidimus testamur*. C’est des horribles faictz et prouesses de Pantagruel, lequel j’ay servy à gaiges [...]’<sup>xli</sup>

The removal in 1542 of the biblical comparison for Rabelais’s fiction made any indication of the letter-spirit contrast less pronounced and Rabelais chose to rewrite the passage in a way which, as Andrea Frisch has observed,<sup>xliii</sup> reinforced the interpretation of it as a parodic Lucianesque claim to truth-telling (a move apparently motivated in part by the desire to mock the hypocrisy of protonotaries<sup>xliiii</sup>). The removal of the reference to Revelation, was, according to Defaux, motivated by prudence and the desire to avoid implying any irreverence towards the Bible.<sup>xliiv</sup> This explanation seems plausible: the 1530s witnessed increasing religious tensions and, since Rabelais also removed the prologue’s other comparison of fiction to the Bible,<sup>xliv</sup> it does seem that, rather than simply wanting to rewrite the passage which mentioned Revelation, he considered comparisons between fiction and the Bible per se to be undesirable.

When in pre-1542 editions Rabelais compared his writing to apocalyptic prophecy, he was not following sixteenth-century literary convention. Among poets, it would be an increasingly familiar move to suggest that poetic fictions constituted prophecy, understood as an indirect mode of expression. However, whereas Rabelais refers to biblical prophecy, poets usually cited pagan fictions believed to be prophetic, such as Homer’s. Yet comparisons between biblical and non-biblical fictions did have a respectable pedigree. When, in *Questions on the Gospels*, Augustine insists, like Rabelais, on distinguishing between fiction which is a lie and fiction which is truth expressed ‘figuratively’ (‘*aliqua figura veritatis*’), he observes that ‘otherwise everything that has been said in figurative form (‘*figurate*’) by wise men and saints or even by our Lord Himself would be regarded as a lie’: fictions which do not lie are compared to the non-literal modes of expression used by Jesus and the saints.<sup>xlvi</sup> Scotus Eriugena goes further in comparing the moral and material lessons taught by epic poets like Homer ‘by way of fictitious myths’ (‘*fabulas fictas*’) to the ‘fictitious imaginings’ (‘*fictis imaginationibus*’) of Scripture. Boccaccio similarly asks ‘what kind of thing is it, if not a poetical fiction, when in the Scriptures Christ is said now to be a lion and now a lamb and now a worm, and then a dragon and then a rock, and so in divers other manners [...]?’<sup>xlvii</sup> Rabelais takes up the comparison between biblical fictions and other ones but suggests that the former might provide an analogy not only for the fictions of pagan

poets like Homer but also for his own comic fictions, not only for Homeric epic but also for his own mock-epic.

Rabelais also hints that there is a parallel between his fiction and the Bible in the sense that engaging with his fiction correctly might function as a sign of something like salvation. The prologue to *Pantagruel* suggests that Alcofribas will be damned if he lies and his readers similarly if they do not ‘firmly believe’.<sup>xlviii</sup> Likewise the conclusion to *Pantagruel* (from the 1534 edition onwards) indicates that Rabelais’s desired readers are more ‘worthy’ of ‘forgiveness’ or ‘remission’ (‘dignes de pardon’) than those who read in order to slander him.<sup>xlix</sup> Furthermore, the list of those less deserving of pardon overlaps with the list of those excluded from Thélème, a refuge which in some ways recalls Jerusalem in Revelation: both lists include, as well as lawyers, a number of words meaning something like hypocrite or feigner, some of which (*cagotz*, *hypocrites*, *caffars*) are exactly the same in both lists.<sup>l</sup> Defining one’s enemies as false Christians and predicting that they will not be saved was a familiar move to be found in many polemical texts. In addition, hypocrites or feigners – false Christians – were to be expected in the final stages of history; indeed the list of synonyms in the Thélème inscriptions includes *gotz* and *magotz*, recalling Gog and Magog, apocalyptic enemies from the Book of Revelation. The question of how to read – and the role of the literal and the figurative – was also central to Reformation polemic and to the question of salvation: the central question of the Reformation was how to understand the ‘this is my body’ which instituted the Eucharist. However, it is striking that it is the appropriate reading of Rabelaisian fiction – rather than the Bible – which is the touchstone of being ‘worthy of forgiveness’.

Yet, even if Augustine compared biblical fictions to other ones, comic fictions about giants seem an odd analogue for them. The evangelical emphasis on the distance between human productions and divine truth meant that evangelical writing was inflected by various notions of ‘speaking otherwise’, such as negative theology.<sup>li</sup> Nonetheless, fictions about giants seem a strange locus of hidden truths. One might say that the letter seems, in this case, to be very distant from the elusive spirit. However, the same might be said about the Book of Revelation, the text to which Rabelais directly compares his own. Although some sixteenth-century commentators claimed to be able to solve its mysteries,<sup>lii</sup> Revelation is, and was, generally considered to be the most enigmatic book of the Bible.<sup>liii</sup> While Rabelais’s fictions recount the battles and journeys of a giant, Revelation describes angels blowing trumpets, horsemen, struggles with a dragon, and so on. Although some parts of the texts appear more transparent than others, it can be a challenge to locate definite meanings beyond the literal ones of John’s visions or of Pantagruel’s adventures.

Therefore we should nuance the standard reading of the prologue insofar as it equates the opposition between Law and Revelation with one between ‘imperfect, indirect, and figurative’ Old Testament revelation and ‘complete, direct’ New Testament revelation.<sup>liv</sup> It is true that the letter-spirit distinction was typically taken to mean that the Old Testament hints at what is said more clearly in the Gospel. However the Book of Revelation, to which Rabelais refers, surely cannot stand for ‘direct’ revelation against ‘figurative’ revelation. More generally in the New Testament, revelation is a dominant

theme but it tends to point forward to a future denouement when all will at last be made plain, while in the present we ‘see through a glass darkly’ (1 Cor. 13:12). Revelation can produce mystification as much as enlightenment, and visions do not offer answers unless their enigmatic imagery is interpreted, which is not the case in the Book of Revelation.<sup>lv</sup> So, since the literal offers no transparent access to the spirit, it remains stubbornly important, despite the fact that Alcofribas has indicated the need to read beyond it: in Revelation John records his visions without explicating them and, similarly, Alcofribas sets out to ‘bear witness to what [he has] seen’, in his case ‘the horrifying deeds and exploits of Pantagruel’.<sup>lvi</sup>

In addition, the prologue’s comparison of Alcofribas to John calls to mind the Gospel of John as well as Revelation. In the Renaissance, it was commonly believed that both texts were written by the same John and, while Alcofribas claims to speak like John in Revelation, his citation – *quod vidimus testamur* – comes from the Gospel of John. Critics have observed that the biblical passage preceding the verse cited concerns the distinction between flesh and spirit, closely related to Alcofribas’s contrast between literalism and prophetic visions.<sup>lvii</sup> Moreover we should note that the verse forms part of Jesus’s statement that his testimony should be received because he came down from heaven,<sup>lviii</sup> and that, as such, it touches on a fundamental aspect of the Gospel of John: as Christopher Rowland explains, the Johannine Gospel bears a ‘remarkable affinity’ to the final book of the New Testament since it is deeply concerned with revelation, but the mode of revelation differs, occurring not through visions but rather through Jesus, that is, through the Word become Flesh. The Gospel of John insists that revelation is to be found in the ‘earthly life’ and ‘human story’ of Jesus.<sup>lix</sup> Thus, insofar as Alcofribas evokes the Gospel of John, he points to a notion of revelation as fundamentally embodied, dependent on the flesh even as it points to the spirit. The contrast between Jews and John thus seems less to promote the spirit *over* the letter than to evoke the paradox central to Christianity, that is, the convergence of Word and flesh, and, by extension, of spirit and letter. The two books by John(s) have similar implications for the fiction with which they are compared: to put it somewhat schematically, the Book of Revelation points to a revelation bound up with the letter, and the Gospel of John to a revelation bound up with the body.

So, how should readers engage with this ‘revelation’? The conclusion to *Pantagruel* describes the desired reading practice – that which is more ‘worthy of forgiveness’ – as a ‘passe-temps’ (‘pastime’), to be compared with Rabelais’s writing ‘passant temps’ (‘passing the time’).<sup>lx</sup> While at first glance this suggests that reading and writing fiction are only about having fun, in the *Gargantua* prologue, for example, writing while having fun shades into inspiration, through the idea of drinking.<sup>lxi</sup> Furthermore, Rabelais asks readers to ‘drink’ with him so that writer and readers form a convivial community of ‘speakers’ and ‘drinkers’, something like that in Plato’s *Symposium*.<sup>lxii</sup> Thus, as various critics have noted, there are suggestions that reading, like writing, might involve inspiration. Indeed, in the prologue to the *Third Book*, readers are invited precisely to drink from a bottle Rabelais describes as ‘my one true Helicon, my Caballine stream, my sole breath of Enthusiasm’.<sup>lxiii</sup> Within the fictions, too, there are a number of instances which explore the possibility that inspiration plays an

important role in interpretation.<sup>lxiv</sup> The idea that interpretation of texts is inspired recalls the notion that exegesis of the Bible constitutes ‘prophecy’. As Erasmus explained, Paul uses *prophecy* in this sense.<sup>lxv</sup> Joachim of Fiore’s creative reading of the Book of Revelation was itself considered as prophecy.<sup>lxvi</sup> Similarly, Rabelais suggests that reading his fiction – or, if we take seriously the comparison with John, his ‘prophecy’ – might involve inspiration and be described using the topoi of poetic prophecy.

But what would such reading look like? Rabelais’s assertion in the *Pantagruel* prologue that his readers should ‘firmly believe’ his fiction or be damned in part provides Lucianesque comedy. However, since Rabelais has just differentiated fiction from literalistic assertions which constitute lies, the reader is also invited to ‘believe’ the fiction on a non-literal level, that is, to engage with it in a way which seeks truth beyond literal meanings. Similarly, the conclusion to *Pantagruel* implies that reading should move beyond the literal, or at least beyond a mode of interpretation dependent on definitions. A long list of verbs indicates what are harmful reading practices: ‘articulant, monarticulant, torticulant, culletant, couilletant, et diabolicunt, c’est à dire callumniant’.<sup>lxvii</sup> The list associates slanderous reading with contorsion (‘torticulant’), undignified and non-rational parts of the body (bum and bollocks, ‘culletant, couilletant’), and the devil (‘diabolicunt’). However, what interests me is that the first verb, which seems to inspire the development of the list, is *articuler*. This meant ‘to articulate, article, reduce into articles, divide, or distinguish by severall heads, titles, or summes; precisely, and particularly to describe, or point out’.<sup>lxviii</sup> It refers to a method of interpretation which is analytical, which depends on differentiating and defining. The second word in the list may in addition imply univocal reading, since it combines *articuler* with *mono*.<sup>lxix</sup> Thus the correct mode of reading, which is opposed to this one, presumably allows for non-literal levels of meaning, ones which do not depend on primary definitions. This fits well with Rabelais’s differentiation of his fiction from literalism in the prologue. However, as we have seen, the prologue also suggests that the literal does have a role to play: ‘speaking like John’ points to a revelation dependent on the letter and on the embodied. So, how might reading allow for this role of the literal?

### III. Approaching ‘Revelation’: the frozen words

To explore further the question of reading, and its relationship with revelation and the end of the world, I turn now to the encounter with the frozen words in Rabelais’s *Fourth Book*. It is, like many Rabelaisian episodes, a *mise-en-scène* of interpretation. Furthermore, one response to the interpretative situation is designated as a ‘*passetemps*’, an echo – across the distance of Rabelais’s four books – of the description in the conclusion to *Pantagruel* of the correct readerly response to Rabelais’s fiction. In addition, like the list of those excluded from Thélème, the frozen words include an echo of the Book of Revelation in the form of a reference to Gog and Magog. Finally, I will suggest that the episode illuminates the question of reading ‘revelations’ which are embodied and dependent on letter as well as spirit.



The friends are on a sea voyage to seek the oracle of the 'Divine Bottle' when Pantagruel hears voices 'talking in the air'.<sup>lxx</sup> In the first half of the episode, in Chapter 55, Pantagruel sifts through his bank of erudition for information which might assist the search for an explanation. He recasts Petron's idea explained in Plutarch's *On the Decline of Oracles*, suggesting that the Words and Ideas of all things, past and future, are contained in a 'Manor of Truth', some remaining there until the end of the world but others descending onto humanity within historical time. Also the words of Homer (the archetypal prophetic poet) were described by Aristotle as 'fluttering, flying, moving things and consequently animate'. And Plato's teachings were said to be like frozen words because they are understood not immediately but gradually, over the course of a lifetime. Perhaps, Pantagruel says, this could be the place where such words melt. Or, they might find here the severed but ever-lamenting head of Orpheus, inspired poet and supposed author of the Orphic hymns.<sup>lxxi</sup> However, at the outset of the second half of the episode, in Chapter 56, the ship's pilot explains that the sounds are from a battle which took place at the beginning of the previous winter: they froze and now are melting, which is why Pantagruel can hear them. Indeed the sounds will include gunfire and throats being cut.<sup>lxxii</sup>

There is, as critics have observed, a distinction to be made between Pantagruel's reflections concerning the voices and the pilot's explanation of them. While Pantagruel did suggest that words might be melting, it is not, for example, the case that truth of the kind to be revealed at the end of the world is also falling from the heavens before that end. Some critics emphasise this contrast strongly. However, referring to the different understandings of the prophetic enigma in *Gargantua*, Tournon has pointed out that many Rabelaisian episodes stage diverse interpretations of the phenomena (or texts) which the characters encounter, and that often the most satisfactory reading we can produce is one which preserves some co-existence or play between the different interpretations offered.<sup>lxxiii</sup> Thus an appropriate reading of the frozen words episode might be one which preserved some play between Pantagruel's musings and the pilot's identification of the battle sounds. Tournon himself incorporated into his interpretation of the episode Pantagruel's interest in truth.<sup>lxxiv</sup> Building on the work of Jean-Yves Pouilloux,<sup>lxxv</sup> Tournon emphasized that the pilot's explanation does not invalidate the seeking of truth but rather modifies how we can understand it. The pilot's response to Pantagruel does not suggest that truth cannot be found: he states simply that the words originate from a battle. This indicates that they do not represent truth descending from the heavens; however truth might still be sought in the world.

The means by which to proceed appears to be the creative exchange of words. In Chapter 56, after the pilot has explained the provenance of the words, Pantagruel casts fistfuls of them onto the deck, then the friends play with them, melting them so they can be heard, throwing them and catching them. They also play with words in the more usual sense of engaging in wordplay. In addition, arguably Pantagruel's evocation of voices 'parlans en l'air' ('talking in the air') indicates the desirability of at least attempting to use them to approach truth. As Jan Miernowski observed, 'parlans en l'air' cites 1 Cor.14:9,<sup>lxxvi</sup> a verse from a passage with which Rabelais also engages at other points in his fictions.<sup>lxxvii</sup> On the one hand, the citation constitutes an early

indication that any hopes for oracular clarity from the voices will be disappointed, since 1 Cor.14 discusses sounds (those of glossolalia) which, because of their unintelligibility, are of no use to the church.<sup>lxxviii</sup> However, Paul immediately proceeds to suggest that all utterances are significant: 1 Cor 14:10, 'nihil sine voce est', is given in most sixteenth-century vernacular translations as 'nothing is without meaning'.<sup>lxxix</sup> Furthermore, Paul states that one should pray for the ability to interpret unintelligible sounds for the benefit of the community.<sup>lxxx</sup> The wordplay of Chapter 56 does not constitute interpretation in any narrow sense: most of the sounds 'in the air' are incomprehensible, remaining 'languaige Barbare' or 'motz barbares',<sup>lxxxii</sup> and thus recalling Paul's suggestion that if utterances are not understood, then their speaker will appear to us a 'barbarus' ('foreigner').<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Nonetheless, while not interpretation in the narrow sense, the wordplay does at least constitute a response to the sounds, and is one which engages the group (even if, ultimately, it results in frustration and annoyance). Although the sounds do not allow for anything like a perfect interpretation, reactions to them which are possible are developed creatively by the group (who perhaps thereby resemble Rabelais's ideal readers, invited to respond with magnanimity however imperfect the offering<sup>lxxxiii</sup>).

What can we deduce about the mechanisms for playing with words and seeking truth? Le Cadet stresses the transfigurative power of wordplay, which transforms sounds of battle into discussion of love and lawyers.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> Tournon highlights the emphasis on *motz de gueule* which, he suggests, represent words which can, within a generous community, be interpreted in imaginative ways which run counter to their usual meanings.<sup>lxxxv</sup> Quint emphasizes the importance of temporal process, since the words and sounds have to be allowed to melt.<sup>lxxxvi</sup> I will argue that one crucial aspect of the various modes of playing with words in the episode is their movement, in a number of senses, between the figurative and the literal. On the one hand, 'playing' with words becomes literal, as the frozen words are physical objects. On the other hand, Pantagruel moves creatively between the literal and the figurative, taking figuratively Panurge's requests to be given or sold words. Furthermore, as we shall see, the question of the literal and the figurative is worth exploring in the first half of the episode as well, and the evocation of the Book of Revelation also points to the issue. In addition, as Michel Jeanneret demonstrated, the encounter with the frozen words forms part of a sequence of episodes concerned with literal and figurative language.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> This interest in the literal and the figurative raises, once again, the question of the Pauline distinction between letter and spirit.

For Defaux, analyzing the relationship between letter and spirit strengthened the contrast between the two halves of the episode. He argued that Pantagruel's reflections neglect the fact that 'the spirit presupposes the letter',<sup>lxxxviii</sup> and he perceived further oppositions between revelation and violence, and between Homeric words and those of the battle.<sup>lxxxix</sup> Such an approach represents a 'common understanding' of the episode.<sup>xc</sup> However, I will argue that the relationships between spirit and letter, revelation and violence, and Homeric words and bloody words should not be thought of as oppositions. At the same time, the episode does invite us to think about these pairs, and a fresh

approach to them will enable us to incorporate Pantagruel's musings into a reading of the episode which says something about truth-seeking and 'revelation'.

The only recognizable words (or, in the terms of Aristotelian philosophy, the only *voces* which signify *ad placitum*<sup>xc<sup>i</sup></sup>) among the frozen sounds of battle are *goth* and *magoth*. While these could serve simply as generalized terms for northern barbarians, and Tournon reads them as representing the scholastic tradition insofar as it is associated with the 'dead letter' of ossified knowledge,<sup>xc<sup>ii</sup></sup> they are also participants in the Book of Revelation.<sup>xc<sup>iii</sup></sup> In Revelation, Gog and Magog precisely engage in battle. In addition, it is perhaps significant that the episode of the frozen words takes place at the 'confin de la mer glaciale',<sup>xc<sup>iv</sup></sup> since Gog and Magog were usually expected to come from the north,<sup>xc<sup>v</sup></sup> and were often thought to be trapped until the end times beyond some sort of barrier or limit.<sup>xc<sup>vi</sup></sup> In short, the words *goth* and *magoth* would surely evoke for Rabelais's readers the Book of Revelation. This is significant, I would argue, because they thus evoke the question of revelation, already raised by Pantagruel's reflections earlier in the episode. Furthermore, by contrast with the Manor of Truth, the final biblical book points to revelation not as words descending from the heavens but rather as enigmatic visions of violence which, as we saw in the discussion of the *Pantagruel* prologue, indicate the necessity of both letter and spirit. Gog and Magog call to mind not a revelation which would be beyond the letter and beyond violence but rather one which operates through it.

The allusion to Revelation contained in the words 'goth' and 'magoth' is far from the only suggestion in the episode that, in the here and now of history, truth-seeking cannot lie beyond the letter, beyond the material or the physical. Even in the first half of the episode, when Pantagruel wonders if the voices might have some clear oracular or prophetic value, he nonetheless imagines them in evidently embodied form, literalising what might otherwise be metaphor or comparison so that the voices seem to have a real physical existence. The freezing of words which was an analogy for Plato's teaching becomes literal. The 'winged' nature of Homeric words is understood in a literal rather than a figurative sense, so that the words are literally 'in the air', described in a way which not only implies inspiration but also makes them material ('voltigeantes, volantes, moventes, et par consequent animees'; 'fluttering, flying, moving things and consequently animate').<sup>xc<sup>vii</sup></sup> Even the words descending from the Manor of Truth fall 'like catarrh'.<sup>xc<sup>viii</sup></sup> Furthermore, some of Pantagruel's reflections bring to mind modes of prophetic discourse which, like the Book of Revelation, are dependent not merely on the embodied but even on violence. Homeric epic may be prophetic but it constitutes for the most part bloody words of battle. And Pantagruel imagines an Orphic verse whose possible continued existence depends on the violent severing of Orpheus's head. In other words, from the outset, Pantagruel imagines a revelation which is not beyond language, the letter, and violence, but rather which operates through them; he brings into dialogue with ideas of revelation or truth-seeking an emphasis on physicality, bodies, the letter, and violence.

This foreshadows the aforementioned play or 'passetemps' with the words in the second half of the episode. If Pantagruel moves from the figurative to the literal in imagining Homeric words in the air, he will move from literal to figurative in interpreting

Panurge's requests for words. Since this play with the figurative and the literal crosses both halves of the episode, it supports Tournon's intuition that the second half also has a truth-seeking dimension. Moreover it suggests that creative movement between letter and spirit might be central to that pursuit of truth. The episode also offers insight into the Rabelaisian body. 'Revelation', such as it exists in the here and now of history, appears to be dependent on the body, not only in the sense that bodily and truth-seeking activities co-exist, as at the Platonic banquet, but also in that revelation might be embodied.<sup>xcix</sup> Bodily materiality is fascinating not only because it engenders a carnivalesque reversal of usual hierarchies but also insofar as it is intertwined with truth-seeking.<sup>c</sup>

Finally, the episode may also suggest that this activity of playful truth-seeking is suited to the threatened violence and the potential yet uncertain prophecy of the final stage of history. Like the close of *Gargantua*, the recent battle with its sounds of 'goth' and 'magoth' reminds us of a latent threat of conflict potentially connected to the end-times; Gog and Magog are expected to do battle under Satan after his unbinding following the thousand years of peace. The episode perhaps also poses the question of whether this is already a time in which end-time prophetic voices might be heard, since it asks not only whether prophecy or oracular truth is still possible, but also whether it is possible yet, namely by wondering both whether Orpheus's severed head could still produce prophetic verse, and also whether the Manor of Truth could already (before the end of the world) reveal Ideas. So, arguably the interpretative play of the Rabelaisian friends offers an example of how to live in the final stages of history, uncertain days of possible but opaque prophecy and of threatened violence: if the play with words is a means of 'passing the time', this responds to the pre-modern Christian dilemma of what to do with the time between Christ's first and second coming, a time which was often seen, as Marjorie Reeves puts it, as 'simply a space for waiting'.<sup>ci</sup>

Indeed the fraught question of how to use the time before the Second Coming emerges in passing at several junctures in Rabelais's fiction. In the 1542 edition of *Pantagruel*, the eponymous giant indicates that the correct preparation for the Last Judgment is to strive for salvation (in his case, by refusing an appointment as *maistre des requestes* and *president en la court*); otherwise there will not be enough people saved, with the result that 'Nicholas of Cusa will be disappointed in his conjectures and [...] we shall not reach the Last Judgment for another thirty-seven Jubilees'.<sup>cii</sup> In the *Third Book*, Frère Jean makes the rather different suggestion that, faced with the approaching end of the world and with reports that the Antichrist has already been born, Panurge should marry, so that the Last Judgment does not find him with his 'balls full'<sup>ciii</sup> (perhaps in part a comic echo of the commonplace idea which begins the famous letter from Gargantua, namely that, until the Last Judgment, when generation and corruption shall cease, human beings pass on their 'seed' through reproduction)<sup>civ</sup>. Another solution to this question of how to live in the final stages of history may be offered by the response of Pantagruel and his friends to echoes of 'goth' and 'magoth', namely playful interpretation.

#### IV. Conclusion

Rabelais's fictions offer an insight into how sixteenth-century literature might explore apocalypse (especially as revelation), as well as how apocalypse might inflect the conceptualisation of poetic prophecy. One resulting direction for future research might be to ask whether apocalypse can be said to contribute to a conception of poetic prophecy which foreshadows modern notions of literature in its emphasis on semantic multiplicity and the correspondingly creative role for the reader. At the same time, apocalypse and prophecy also cast light on hermeneutics and epistemology in Rabelais, especially the nature of the relationships between letter and spirit, and between body and revelation. Rabelais points to the need for both writer and reader of fiction – both of whom may aspire to inspiration – to move creatively between letter and spirit. And Rabelais's fictions – as much as reversing body-spirit hierarchies in a carnivalesque manner – point to the intertwining of the body with truth-seeking, not only insofar as they co-exist at the banquet but also insofar as 'revelation', such as it exists in the here and now of history, appears to be embodied.

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<sup>i</sup> J. Leavitt, ed., *Poetry and Prophecy: The Anthropology of Inspiration* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997). J. L. Kugel, ed., *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990). J. Wojcik and Raymond-Jean Frontain, eds, *Poetic Prophecy in Western Literature* (London/Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press / Associated University Presses, 1984). Kathryn Banks, Prophecy and Literature. *Insights* 4 (2011), journal of Durham Institute of Advanced Study, <http://www.dur.ac.uk/ias/insights/volume4/>.

<sup>ii</sup> Can Novelists Predict the Future? *Insights* 4 (2011), journal of Durham Institute of Advanced Study, <http://www.dur.ac.uk/ias/insights/volume4/>.

<sup>iii</sup> For example, 'I have been astounded at the number of apocalyptic movies that have come out recently or are scheduled to come out (2012). The world is definitely being prepared for something to happen' (<http://wisdomoftheworld.wordpress.com/2009/03/23/the-knowing-a-christian-film-analysis-and-the-alien-gospel/>). See also, for example, <http://bibchr.blogspot.co.uk/2009/03/knowning-movie-review.html>; <http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090417222104AARAcYC>; [http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What\\_is\\_the\\_symbolism\\_in\\_the\\_movie\\_Knowing](http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_is_the_symbolism_in_the_movie_Knowing).

<sup>iv</sup> For the French context, see Denis Crouzet, *Les Guerriers de Dieu: la violence au temps des troubles de religion (vers 1525-vers 1610)* (Champ Vallon: Seyssel, 1990). For a helpful overview of the state of scholarship more generally, see Robin Bruce Barnes, Varieties of Apocalyptic Experience in Reformation Europe. *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 33 (2002) 261-74.

<sup>v</sup> Irena Dorota Backus, *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse: Geneva, Zurich, and Wittenberg* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>vi</sup> Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); Marjorie Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future* (London: S.P.C.K, 1976).

<sup>vii</sup> Robin Bruce Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis: Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford Univ. P., 1988), pp. 100-40. Anthony Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger: A Study in the History of Classical Scholarship* (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1983), two vols, vol. 2, pp. 346-56.

<sup>viii</sup> For example, Barnes, op. cit.; Crouzet, op. cit.; Howard Hotson, *Paradise Postponed: Johann Heinrich and the Birth of Calvinist Millenarianism* (Dordrecht ; London: Kluwer Academic, 2000); Ottavia Niccoli, *Prophecy and People in Renaissance Italy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>ix</sup> Teresa Chevolet, *L'Idée de fable: théories de la fiction poétique à la Renaissance* (Geneva: Droz, 2007), pp. 49-134 and passim; Jean Lecointe, *L'Idéal Et La Différence: la perception de la personnalité littéraire à la Renaissance* (Geneva: Droz, 1993), pp. 217-374.

<sup>x</sup> *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction with a new epilogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), first published in 1966.

<sup>xi</sup> On the category of 'literature' and on the earlier use of 'poetry' to conceptualize texts which we could class as 'literature', see below p. 000 and n. xxiv.

<sup>xii</sup> Dennis Costa, *Irenic Apocalypse: Some Uses of Apocalyptic in Dante, Petrarch and Rabelais* (Anma Libri, 1981), pp. 107-38. David Quint, *Origin and Originality in Renaissance Literature: Versions of the Source* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 167-206. Thierry Victoria, *Un Livre De Feu Dans Un Siècle De Fer: les lectures de l'Apocalypse dans la littérature française de la Renaissance* (Leuven; Walpole, MA: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2009), pp. 240-45, 311-30.

<sup>xiii</sup> *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Mireille Huchon (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), pp. 11-14. All citations will be from this edition. 'Antidoted Bubbles', transl. M. A. Screech, *Rabelais: Gargantua and Pantagruel* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 211. All translations are from this edition except where otherwise stated.

<sup>xiv</sup> André Tournon, << Ce Temps De Passe-Passe...>> (Le Millenium Selon Rabelais). In *Formes Du Millenarisme En Europe a L'Aube des temps modernes*, ed. by Jean-Raymond Fanlo and André Tournon (Paris: Champion, 2001), pp. 455-68.

<sup>xv</sup> A recent discussion is that of Victoria, op. cit., pp. 325-30. A detailed list of possible echoes of various accounts of Jerusalem is provided in a 1998 Master's thesis by Michelle Morin-Asselin, 'Thélème, une nouvelle Jérusalem?', Mc Gill University, Département de langue et littérature françaises.

<sup>xvi</sup> Ed. Huchon, pp. 150-53; Transl. Screech, pp. 374-9.

<sup>xvii</sup> Tournon, art. cit., pp. 466-67. In addition, as Quint observes (op. cit., p. 176), although the *Quart Livre* has much less of a 'sense of an ending' than even the ambivalent one in *Gargantua*, arguably it similarly couples an awareness of pernicious enemies with a banquet which perhaps foreshadows the messianic one described in the Book of Revelation. On narrative time in Rabelais, and on a parallel between the ending of the *Quart Livre* and the 'fanfreluches' in *Gargantua*, see Emmanuelle Lacore-Martin, *Figures de l'Histoire et du temps dans l'œuvre de Rabelais* (Geneva: Droz, 2011), pp. 19-83, 286-7.

<sup>xviii</sup> Art. cit.

<sup>xix</sup> "En Sens Agile": *Les Acrobaties de l'esprit selon Rabelais* (Paris: Champion, 1995), pp. 16-21.

<sup>xx</sup> Costa, op. cit., p. 3. See also, for example, Raymond La Charité, The Framing of Rabelais's *Gargantua*. In *François Rabelais: Critical Assessments*, ed. by Jean-Claude Carron (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 3-18.

<sup>xxi</sup> The *Fifth Book* (which is of uncertain authorship) is beyond the scope of this essay but would be relevant to a study of poetic prophecy.

<sup>xxii</sup> Grahame Castor, *Pléiade Poetics: A Study in Sixteenth Century Thought and Terminology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), pp. 24-50; Lecointe, op. cit., 1993, pp. 349-65; Olivier Pot, *Inspiration Et Mélancolie: L'Épistémologie poétique dans les "Amours" de Ronsard* (Geneva: Droz, 1990); Olivier Pot, La Théorie du *Furor Divinus* dans *Les Amours De 1552-1553. Cahiers textuel*, 17 (1997) 25-53; Isidore Silver, *The Intellectual Evolution of Ronsard. Vol. 2, Ronsard's General Theory of Poetry* (St. Louis: Washington University Press, 1973).

<sup>xxiii</sup> On D'Aubigné, see for example Samuel Junod, *Agrippa D'Aubigné, Ou, Les Misères du prophète* (Geneva: Droz, 2008). On Ronsard, see Virginia Crosby, Prophetic Discourse in Ronsard and D'Aubigné. *The French Review*, 3 (1971) 91-100; Olivier Pot, Prophétie Et Mélancolie: La Querelle entre Ronsard et les Protestants (1562-1565). In *Prophètes Et Prophéties Au XVIe Siècle*, ed. by Robert Aulotte (Paris: Presses de l'École Normale Supérieure, 1998), pp. 198-229 ; Quint, op. cit., pp. 24-30.

<sup>xxiv</sup> 'Literature', with the sense of literary works and specifically 'writing which has claim to consideration on the ground of beauty of form or emotional effect' is, as the Oxford English Dictionary notes, of very

recent emergence in both English and French. 'Literature' and 'littérature' meant knowledge of texts and authors, or the mastery of reading and writing. The French expression 'belles lettres' was defined primarily by aesthetic qualities, and is undoubtedly a forerunner of our category of 'literature', but even that was born only in the first half of the seventeenth century, and imported into English in the eighteenth. Philippe Caron, *Des 'Belles Lettres' À La 'Littérature': une archéologie des signes du savoir profane en langue française (1680-1760)* (Louvain and Paris: Peeters, 1992), pp. 102-84.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Jean Lecointe, Naissance D'une Prose Inspirée. Néo-Platonisme Et "Prose Poétique" À La Renaissance. *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et renaissance* 51 (1989) 13-57.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> C. A. Mayer and C. M. Douglas, Rabelais Poète. *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 24 (1962) 42-46. Jean Plattard, Rabelais Réputé Poète Par Quelques Écrivains De Son Temps. *Revue des études rabelaisiennes* 10 (1912) 291-304.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Jelle Koopmans, Rabelais et la tradition des pronostications. In Paul J. Smith, ed. *Éditer et traduire Rabelais à travers les âges* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), pp. 35-65. Hugh Roberts, Mocking the Future in French Renaissance Mock-Prognostications. In Andrea Brady and Emily Butterworth, eds, *The Uses of the Future in Early Modern Europe* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010) pp. 198-214.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Ed. Huchon, pp. 415-24. Transl. Screech, pp. 488-500.

<sup>xxxix</sup> The vexed question of the relationship between Rabelais and his narrator is beyond the scope of this essay. However, in order to develop further an analysis of poetic prophecy in Rabelais, it will be necessary to consider it, in order to ask who precisely is inspired.

<sup>xxx</sup> Transl. Screech, pp. 205-8 (208). Ed. Huchon, pp. 5-8 (7). Edwin M. Duval, 'Interpretation and the 'doctrine absconce' of Rabelais's prologue to *Gargantua*', *Études rabelaisiennes* 18 (1985), pp. 1-17.

<sup>xxxxi</sup> James Helgeson, <<Ce que j'entends par ces symbols pythagoriques>>: Rabelais on Meaning and Intention. *Études rabelaisiennes* 42 (2003), 75-100.

<sup>xxxii</sup> In the context of sixteenth-century France, *evangelical* and *evangelism* are used, as Michael Screech put it, 'of pre-Tridentine >Catholic< Christians who advocated or practised a religion which was guided by a direct understanding of the Bible and its Good News which led them towards a theology anchored in the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles.' Their *evangelism* brought them close to many of the Reformers. Rabelais, who was deeply influenced by evangelical spirituality, had much in common with Melancthon and Luther. *Rabelais and the Challenge of the Gospel* (Baden-Baden & Bouxwiller: Éditions Valentin Koerner, 1992), p. 7.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Cf Quint (op. cit., pp. 167-206) and Tournon (art. cit., pp. 467-8). For Quint, although interpretation and inspiration by the Holy Spirit are limited within the space of history, Rabelais is confident of their forward progression and of his inspiration. Tournon somewhat elliptically describes Rabelais as a 'prophète pour rire', a 'prophet for laughter', whose words are 'all the truer' for the faith with which his humorous words are uttered: while Rabelais's prophecy is intended to make us laugh, it also involves truth.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> *L'Évangélisme fictionnel: Les 'Livres' rabelaisiens, le 'Cymbalum Mundi', 'L'Heptaméron' (1532-1552)* (Paris: Éditions Classiques Garnier, 2010).

<sup>xxxv</sup> *Rabelais Agonistes: Du Rieur Au Prophète. Études sur 'Pantagruel', 'Gargantua', 'Le Quart Livre'* (Geneva: Droz, 1997).

<sup>xxxvi</sup> *Literature and Nation in the Sixteenth Century* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 63-64. Cf Defaux's very different interpretation: Jews speaking of the Law are lying, as is Rabelais, but his readers should ignore this unless they wish to knowingly err (op. cit., pp. 87-97); quite apart from Rabelais's interest in the question of the letter and the spirit, the implication that Jews writing about the Law are 'lying' seems to me unlikely. On the prologue's comparison with John, cf also Peter Gilman and Abraham C. Keller, 'The "Grosses Mesles"', *Études rabelaisiennes* 29 (1993), pp. 105-26.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> On Rabelais's uses of Lucian, see Christiane Lauvergnat-Gagnière, *Lucien de Samosate et le lucianisme en France au XVIe siècle: atheism et polémique* (Geneva: Droz, 1988), pp. 235-61, and Huchon in her edition of Rabelais, pp. 1214-7.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> See for example Mark Ellingsen, *The Richness of Augustine: His Contextual and Pastoral Theology* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), pp. 15-38.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Mark Ellingsen, Luther as Narrative Exegete. *The Journal of Religion* 63 (1983), 394-413 (p. 398).

<sup>xl</sup> Shimon Markish, *Erasmus and the Jews* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986), pp. 7-26.

<sup>xlii</sup> pp. 215, 1238. 'For, unless you deliberately intend to go astray, don't think that I'm talking as Jews do about the Law: I was not born under such a planet as ever to lie or to assert anything which was not true: *agentes et consentientes* ['Doers and Abettors (are punished with the same punishment)', a legal maxim], meaning 'gents with nothing on our conscience'. I am speaking like Saint John of the Apocalypse: *quod vidimus testamur* [we bear witness to what we have seen]: that is, the horrifying deeds and exploits of Pantagruel, whose retainer I have been' (p. 13). Rabelais's reading of the legal maxim *agentes et consentientes* (which is the standard one, according to Defaux, op. cit., pp. 87-97) to mean that lack of knowledge entails lack of responsibility, when taken together with the comparison to John, may imply that Alcofribas is innocent of the meanings his text produces because, like John, he is inspired.

<sup>xliii</sup> 'Quod vidimus testamur: Testimony, Narrative Agency and the World in Pantagruel's Mouth', *French Forum* 24 (1999), pp. 261-283 (274).

<sup>xliiii</sup> The 1542 text is 'I am speaking like a Pelican lawyer – I mean a Vatican lawyer – talking of martyred lovers: I mean, like a protonotary talking of love-affairs' (p. 13, n. 3). Ed. Huchon, p. 215.

<sup>xliiv</sup> *Rabelais Agonistes*, p. 96.

<sup>xlv</sup> The 1532 prologue opens with an evocation of the *Grandes et inestimable Chronique de l'enorme geant Gargantua*, a work to which Rabelais compares his own, and which he says readers believed 'like the text of the Bible or the Holy Gospel' (transl. Screech, p. 11; ed. Huchon p. 1234 variant a); from 1542 readers are instead said to have believed it 'gallantly' (ed. Huchon, p. 213).

<sup>xlvi</sup> 'non enim omne quod fingimus mendacium est; sed quando id fingimus quod nihil significant, tunc est mendacium. Cum autem fictio nostra refertur ad aliquam significationem, non est mendacium sed aliqua figura veritatis. Alioquin omnia quae a sapientibus et sanctis viris, vel etiam ab ipso domino figurate dicta sunt mendacia deputabuntur, qui secundum usitatum intellectum non subsistit veritas talibus dictis. [...] Fictio igitur quae ad aliquam veritatem refertur figura est, quae non refertur mendacium est.' 'Not everything we make up is a lie; but when we make up something which does not signify anything it is a lie. But when our fiction refers to some meaning it is not a lie but a figure of truth. Otherwise everything that has been said in figurative form by wise men and saints and even by our Lord Himself would be regarded as a lie, just because, according to the usual understanding, these expressions are incompatible with the truth'. Book 2, chapter 51 (*Patrologia latina*, 35: 1362). The passage is cited by Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae*, 3, q.55, a.4. See also Augustine's *Contra Mendacium (Against Lying)*, chapter 10, paragraph 24, and chapter 13, paragraph 27 (in *Saint Augustine*, vol. 14: *Treatises on Various Subjects*, Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 1952, pp. 152-3, 160-2).

<sup>xlvii</sup> Scotus Eriugena and Boccaccio cited in Carlo Ginzburg, *Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance* (Verso, 2002), pp. 36-37.

<sup>xlviii</sup> Transl., Screech, pp. 13-14. Ed. Huchon, p. 215.

<sup>xlix</sup> Cotgrave translates *pardon* as 'pardon, forgiveness; remission'. *Pardons* in the plural referred to indulgences, as Cotgrave also notes ('The Popes Pardons'). Screech translates 'dignes de pardon' as 'more forgiveable' (p. 163).

<sup>i</sup> Ed. Huchon, pp. 141-2, 336-7; Transl. Screech, pp. 163, 364-6.

<sup>ii</sup> Jan Miernowski, *Signes Dissimilaires: La Quête des noms divins dans la poésie française de la Renaissance* (Geneva: Droz, 1997). Id., *Le Dieu Néant: théologies négatives à l'aube des temps modernes* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1998). Le Cadet, op. cit. Chevrolet, op. cit., pp. 115-34.

<sup>iii</sup> For example, *Exposition sur l'Apocalypse de Saint Jean, extraicte de plusieurs Docteurs tant anciens que modernes, avec preface de Theodore de Beze* (Jean Gerard, 1557), pp. 3-8.

<sup>iiii</sup> For example, as Alessandro Scafi points out in his essay in this volume (p. 000), St Jerome observed that in the Book of Revelation there are as many mysteries as words.

<sup>liv</sup> This reading was proposed by Edwin M. Duval in *The Design of Rabelais's 'Pantagruel'* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 6-10. It is cited in the notes to Huchon's *Pléiade* edition (p. 1238, n. 6).



<sup>lv</sup> Christopher Rowland, 'Apocalypse, Prophecy and the New Testament'. In Lester L. Grabbe and Robert D. Haak, eds. *Knowing the End From the Beginning: the Prophetic, the Apocalyptic and their Relationships* (London, New York: Continuum, 2003), pp. 149-66.

<sup>lvi</sup> Rabelais's future patron, the seigneur de Langey, referred to the same citation - *quod vidimus testamur* – to defend the idea that the historian should, as much as possible, be the direct witness of the events he recounts. Langey noted that 'Saint Jean pour estre creu, assure qu'il parle des choses veuës' (cited in Lacore-Martin, op. cit., pp. 128-9). The fact that the biblical passage lent itself to describing the historian's witnessing perhaps constitutes another indication that, while Alcofribas points beyond the literal, the literal content of 'what [he has] seen' is nonetheless of central importance.

<sup>lvii</sup> Duval, op. cit., pp. 6-8. Frisch, art. cit., p. 273.

<sup>lviii</sup> 'dico tibi quia quod scimus loquimur et *quod vidimus testamur* et testimonium nostrum non accipitis si terrena dixi vobis et non creditis quomodo si dixero vobis caelestia credetis et nemo ascendit in caelum nisi qui descendit de caelo Filius hominis qui est in caelo' (John 3.11-13). 'I say to thee that we speak what we know and we testify what we have seen: and you receive not our testimony. If I have spoken to you earthly things, and you believe not: how will you believe, if I shall speak to you heavenly things? And no man hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven.'

<sup>lix</sup> Rowland, art. cit., pp. 159-61.

<sup>lx</sup> P. 336. My translations.

<sup>lxi</sup> Florence Weinberg, *The Wine and the Will* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975). François Rigolot, <<Service divin, service du vin>>: l'Équivoque dionysiaque. In *Rabelais-Dionysos: Vin, Carnaval, Ivresse* (Montpellier: Éditions Jeanne Laffitte, 1997), pp. 15-28.

<sup>lxii</sup> Michel Jeanneret, *Des Mets et Des Mots: banquets et propos de table à la Renaissance* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1987), transl. by Jeremy Whiteley and Emma Hughes as *A Feast of Words: Banquets and Table Talk in the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991). François Rigolot, art. cit., <<Service divin>>. Id, From "Drink" to "Trinch": Rabelais's Literary Conviviality. In *The Western Pennsylvania Symposium on World Literatures: selected proceedings 1974-1991: a retrospective*, ed. Carla E. Lucente (Greenberg, PA.: Eadmer Press, 1992).

<sup>lxiii</sup> Screech translation, p. 408. Ed. Huchon, p. 349.

<sup>lxiv</sup> For example, the Bridoye episode in the *Third Book* (esp. pp. 486-7; transl. Screech, pp. 578-80). At the end of the *Fourth Book*, Pantagruel decides, apparently inspired by his Socratic 'daemon' (p. 866; 'Dæmon de Socrates', p. 697), not to land on the island of Ganabin; in addition, this island contains the 'Mount Antiparnassus' (p. 867; 'Mons Antiparnasse', p. 697) and thus appears to represent (among other things) the antithesis of poetic inspiration, so Pantagruel is inspired not to land on an island which opposes inspiration.

<sup>lxv</sup> 'Hoc loco Paulus prophetiam vocat non praedictionem futurorum, sed interpretationem divinæ scripturæ'. *Erasmus' Annotations on the New Testament: Acts – Romans – I and II Corinthians. Facsimile of the final Latin text with all earlier variants*. Ed. by Anne Reeve and M. A. Screech (Leiden, New York: E.J. Brill, 1990) p. 504.

<sup>lxvi</sup> On the importance of Joachim in the sixteenth century, see Reeves, *Joachim*, pp. 83-165.

<sup>lxvii</sup> p. 337. Screech translates as 'articulating, arse-ticulating, wry-arse-ticulating, bollockulating, diaboliculating, that is, calumniating' (pp. 163-4).

<sup>lxviii</sup> Cotgrave, 1611 French-English dictionary. Cf ed. Huchon p. 337; p. 1340, n. 9.

<sup>lxix</sup> However, Screech translates *monorticulant* as *mumbling* (p. 164, n. 121).

<sup>lxx</sup> Transl. Screech, p. 826. Ed. Huchon, p. 667.

<sup>lxxi</sup> Ed. Huchon, pp. 668-9. Transl. Screech, pp. 827-8.

<sup>lxxii</sup> Ed. Huchon, pp. 669-71. Transl. Screech, pp. 828-30.

<sup>lxxiii</sup> *En Sens agile*, pp. 16-21.

<sup>lxxiv</sup> De l'Interprétation des «mots de gueule»: note sur les chapitres LV-LVI du Quart Livre du Pantagruel. In *Hommage à François Meyer* (Broché, 1983), pp. 145-53; *En Sens agile*, pp. 9-13.

<sup>lxxv</sup> Note sur deux chapitres du «Quart Livre» LV-LVI. *Littérature* 5 (1972) 88-94.

- <sup>lxxvi</sup> Literature and Metaphysics: Rabelais and the Poetics of Misunderstanding. *Études rabelaisiennes* 35 (1998) 131-51.
- <sup>lxxvii</sup> On other uses of 1 Cor 12-15, see Quint, op. cit., pp. 180-6, and p. 250-1, n. 28.
- <sup>lxxviii</sup> Miernowski, Literature and Metaphysics. James Helgeson, 'Words in the Air': Thaumaste, Nazdecabre, and the Question of Perspicuous Signs. In *Esprit Généreux, Esprit Pantagruelique: Essays by His Students in Honor of François Rigolot*, ed. by R. Leushuis and Z. Zalloua (Geneva: Droz, 2008), pp. 177-96.
- <sup>lxxix</sup> Helgeson, 'Words in the Air', p. 189.
- <sup>lxxx</sup> 1 Cor 14:5, 10-13.
- <sup>lxxxi</sup> p. 670. 'Some barbarous tongue', 'barbarous words' (pp. 829-30).
- <sup>lxxxii</sup> 'si ergo nesciero virtutem vocis ero ei cui loquor barbarus et qui loquitur mihi barbarus' (1 Cor 14: 11). Cf Marie-Luce Demonet brings Rabelais's presentation of 'languaige Barbare' in the frozen words episode into dialogue with sixteenth-century accounts of vernacular languages, and suggests that it participates in a revalorisation of vernacular (or 'barbarous') languages. *Les voix du signe: nature et origine du langage à la Renaissance (1480-1580)* (Paris: H. Champion, 1992), pp. 376-84.
- <sup>lxxxiii</sup> Duval, art. cit., pp. 14-17.
- <sup>lxxxiv</sup> Op. cit., pp. 178-89.
- <sup>lxxxv</sup> De l'interprétation; *En sens agile*, pp. 9-13.
- <sup>lxxxvi</sup> Op. cit., pp. 186-8.
- <sup>lxxxvii</sup> Les Paroles Dégelées (Rabelais, « Quart Livre », 48-65). In *Le Défi des signes: Rabelais et la crise de l'interprétation à la Renaissance* (Orleans: Paradigme, 1994), pp. 113-129, first published in *Littérature* 17 (1975) 14-30.
- <sup>lxxxviii</sup> Op. cit., p. 535. Cf Jeanneret (Les Paroles Dégelées) also aligns Pantagruel with one half of the opposition between letter and spirit, but in a contrasting way.
- <sup>lxxxix</sup> 'Pantagruel [...] évoque Orphée, Homère et Platon [...] quand il s'agit de guerre, de bataille et de massacre. Il pense Inspiration et Révélation, et il n'est question que de violence, de souffrance et de bruit. Il dit l'émouvante légèreté des paroles d'Homère, pour se trouver aussitôt après confronté à des paroles lamentablement matérialisées et déchues' (op. cit., p. 529).
- <sup>xc</sup> Helgeson, Words in the Air, p. 193. For example, Edwin M. Duval, *The Design of Rabelais's Quart Livre De Pantagruel* (Geneva: Droz, 1998), pp. 37-39.
- <sup>xcj</sup> Defaux, op. cit., pp. 526-7.
- <sup>xcii</sup> De l'Interprétation, p. 146.
- <sup>xciii</sup> As observed by Weinberg (op. cit., pp. 41-2).
- <sup>xciv</sup> p. 669; 'at the approaches of the frozen sea' (p. 829).
- <sup>xcv</sup> Revelation 20:7. Ezekiel 38:14-16.
- <sup>xcvi</sup> See Alessandro Scafi's essay in this issue of *Literature and Theology*, p. 000.
- <sup>xcvii</sup> Ed. Huchon, p. 668; Transl. Screech, p. 827.
- <sup>xcviii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xcix</sup> Cf Jeanneret, *Des Mets et des mots*, especially on metaphors of reading as eating.
- <sup>c</sup> Cf Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, transl. by Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1968).
- <sup>ci</sup> Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore*, op. cit., p. 1.
- <sup>cii</sup> Transl. Screech, p. 75. Ed. Huchon, p. 263.
- <sup>ciii</sup> Transl. Screech, pp. 511-12. Ed. Huchon, pp. 434-5.
- <sup>civ</sup> Transl. Screech, p. 45. Ed. Huchon, pp. 241-2.