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RABELAIS AND LANGUAGE: STUDIES IN COMMUNICATION

by

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RABELAIS AND LANGUAGE: STUDIES IN COMMUNICATION

(an abstract)

by

WILLIAM GAYLORD SHAFFER

Rabelais is concerned with problems of communication among his characters in the Five Books. Several episodes, such as Pantagruel's encounter with the Limousin, Panurge's entry into the story, the consultations of the Third Book, and the episode of the frozen words, among others, offer studies in the use of language. Rabelais, traditionally accepted as "drunken with words," is evaluating language in order to appreciate its communicative powers.

The episodes about language and communication are concerned with four general problems: the right means of communication, ambiguity and interpretation, the theme of silence, and the dilemma of Panurge. Rabelais' treatment of these problems reveals a true appreciation of the powers of language, which is fundamental to the creation of his work and to some of his philosophy as related to his period.

Rabelais, writing in the first half of the

sixteenth century, was faced with the same problems of communication which he relegates to his characters. Because of the ever-present threat of persecution for heresy, he was concerned with the choice of the right language to convey his ideas. He used ambiguity, which suggests a hidden meaning and multi-level interpretation of his work, as a protective measure. He remained silent, preferring not to write, for twelve years after the condemnation of his first two books and during a period of religious persecution. His use of ambiguity creates for the reader a communication problem similar to that of Panurge.

These communication problems which are linked to the religious controversy between Catholics and Reformists and particularly to Evangelism also confronted Rabelais' contemporaries and appear in other literary works of the period. The question of the right means of communication for prayer and for the Bible was an important issue in the religious struggle. It was also a problem for writers such as Marguerite de Navarre, Marot, Des Périers, and Dolet, who did not want to be persecuted for their views. Ambiguity of language was used by the prosecuting forces; such terms as "heretic" and "Lutheran," with varying meanings, were used as excuses for punishing. Ambiguity as a literary convention for satire is used by Des Périers.

The theme of silence became the accepted attitude of the Evangelists about 1538, when all hopes of peaceful reform between factions had been destroyed. It appears as a literary theme in Des Périers. The dilemma of Panurge who is searching an absolute can be seen as representative of the search of every seeker of truth in the various newly-formed religious sects and in the Church itself. Des Périers presents a similar situation with the philosophers of the Second Dialogue of the Cymbalum Mundi.

Rabelais offers a veritable appreciation of the powers of language. The problems which he treats among his characters are not merely abstractions of his fictional creation; they were very real problems with which both he and his contemporaries were confronted. These communication problems were infinitely linked to the religious controversy between Catholics and Reformists and in particular to the movement known as Evangelism.

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INTRODUCTION

Even the inadvertent reader of Rabelais who reads the Five Books solely for their comic effect cannot ignore that he is dealing with a genius in the use of language. The tradition of Rabelais inebriated with words is as old as the work itself; "richesse de vocabulaire" and "style prodigieux" rank high on the list of attributes accorded him in anthologies and literary histories. But merely to note that he has an exceptional vocabulary which he knows how to manipulate, or to say that he invented many new words, does not suffice. Behind his verbal drunkenness lies an inherent interest in the power of words, a fascination with language as man's most important means of communication. In fact, he is playing and experimenting with language; not only is he using it to entertain, but much more fundamentally, he is testing and evaluating it, in an effort to discover and appreciate its qualities and faults as an instrument of communication.[1]

In this work, Rabelais' interest in language will

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[1]Consider also the remarks on Montaigne and language by Philip P. Hallie, The Scar of Montaigne (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1966), pp. 71-113; and especially the statement, "...it is an indisputable fact that a doctrine of the pitfalls and powers of language is

be examined in three different realms: studies in communication within the work, a categorization of examples drawn from the Five Books in which the author is clearly concerned with language and communication among the characters of his own creation; problems of communication between Rabelais and the reader, a consideration of the creative artist's use of language to convey his ideas; and communication problems among Rabelais' contemporaries, an examination of the work in the historical and religious atmosphere of the day. This study in three domains will lead to a definition of language and its function according to Rabelais, as related to his ideas and to the intellectual context of the period.

To consider the Five Books from the point of view of language and communication as being ultimately concerned with the ideas of the author is a new approach. Even though studies of his language have been made,[1] most of them[2] have been concerned with vocabulary and style, that is, they have limited themselves to the study of form. The major portion of literary criticism on Rabelais in the twentieth century has been concerned with his ideas, with

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close to the center of Humanism." (p. 71)

[1]See, among others, Edmond Huguet, Etude sur la Syntaxe de Rabelais (Paris: Librairie Hachette et C^ie^, 1894); Lazare Sainéan, La Langue de Rabelais (2 vols.; Paris: E. de Boccard, 1922); and Alfred Glauser, Rabelais Créateur (Paris: Nizet, 1966).

[2]With the possible exception of Glauser.

interpretations of the work on the philosophical, religious, and satirical levels.[1] Although his language and style are accorded their usual place of honor, they are only mentioned in passing as the critic rushes on to the subject at hand, the ideas of Rabelais, with little effort to establish a relationship between the two. The present work aims to link the two types of approach, by starting with language, then working toward the ideas of Rabelais, rather than by studying one or the other as an end unto itself.

Such a study should be fruitful as further justification of some of the present interpretations of Rabelais,[2] which assign him a prominent place in the movement known as Evangelism, a movement whose very existence is based on problems of communication, not only between man and God, but also between man and man, as representatives of the different religious factions in controversy in the first half of the sixteenth century.

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[1]The studies by Abel Lefranc, Jean Plattard, Verdun Saulnier, Michael Screech, and Marcel de Grève.

[2]The interpretations proposed by Saulnier and Screech.

CHAPTER I

STUDIES IN COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE WORK

The Five Books reveal Rabelais' interest in language and serve as a proving ground for his ideas about its communicative powers. Language, its study and proper use, occupy an elevated position in the work. The ability to speak five or six different languages is an accepted, natural quality of each of the inhabitants of the Abbaye de Thélème.[1] When Gargantua writes instructions to his son, Pantagruel, in Paris, his advice on language reflects the thinking of the author. In the passage, "Maintenant toutes disciplines sont restituées, les langues instaurées: grecque, sans laquelle c'est honte que une personne se die sçavant, hébraïcque, chaldaïcque, latine,"[2] he is speaking as a man imbued with the "spirit of the Renaissance," echoing the renewed interest in language, already expressed by other Humanists. Then Gargantua advises his son to learn

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[1]Rabelais, OEuvres complètes, Livre I: Gargantua, ed. by Jacques Boulenger (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1955), ch. LVII, p. 160. All subsequent references to the text will be to this edition; they will include the name of the book, the number of the chapter, and the page.

[2]Pantagruel, VIII, p. 204.

perfectly Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Chaldean and Arabic, the study of which forms an integral part of his education. Also, in an attack on those who consider themselves masters of legal counsel, Pantagruel reproaches those who can neither read nor understand Greek and Latin, languages essential to the study of law.[1] Other examples of this important position accorded language, which provide evidence for the traditional point of view of Rabelais drunken with words, could be cited, but this aspect of his interest is not the major concern of the present study.

The Five Books also offer episodes and situations between characters which can be considered as studies in the use of language as a means of communication, such as the encounter of Pantagruel and the Limousin student, Panurge's introduction into the story, the visit of Thaumaste who wishes to debate by signs and gestures, the episode of the frozen words, and even the voyage in search of the word of the dive Bouteille. These incidents provide further proof of Rabelais' interest in language, show the development of his thinking in this realm, and offer another source of unity to the work.[2] Rabelais creates situations in which he is testing, evaluating or simply playing with language. Sometimes it may be a test case

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[1] Pantagruel, X, p. 216.

[2] For the idea of unity, see Jean Guiton, "Le Mythe des paroles gelées," Romanic Review, XXI (February, 1940), 9-10.

which insists upon one of language's deficiencies, at other times, it may be nothing more than a game of linguistic trickery played on one of the characters. To facilitate the study of these examples, they can be grouped into four very general categories: those concerned with the problem of choosing the right means of communication among the diversity of languages available to man; those involved with the ambiguity of language, which is always susceptible to interpretation; those concerned with attempts to avoid the use of spoken language, which lead to the theme of silence; and those centered around the dilemma of Panurge, which constitute a group unto themselves.

The Right Means of Communication

Many different languages and types of languages are available to man. But although divers languages exist, they are not necessarily interchangeable, nor are they all valid for a given situation. The degree to which a person communicates depends upon the means of communication, the language, he chooses. Rabelais seems fascinated by this fact and in more than one instance uses his characters to demonstrate it.

The first illustration of this idea is the encounter of Pantagruel and the Limousin student.[1] When confronted by this young man who speaks a language of his own

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[1] Pantagruel, VI, pp. 190-93.

invention, formulated from a latinized French and comprehensible to himself alone, Pantagruel is successively confused, amazed, and angered. Not understanding what the man is saying because of his indirect and tortured locutions and his bastardized French, and not recognizing this language as any which he has ever learned, the giant asks, "Que diable de langaige est cecy? Par Dieu, tu es quelque hérétique."[1] The Limousin continues unsuccessfully to explain. Pantagruel, still confused, seeks help from his friends, one of whom states that the fellow is trying to appear as a Parisian and thinks that he is imitating Pindar by his highly artificialized and poorly latinized French. By the fact that he "dédaigne l'usance commun de parler" he thinks himself an orator.[2] Finally, Pantagruel deduces from his bizarre speech that he is a Limousin, a bit of information which does not please him and which only serves to further kindle his anger. Grabbing him by the neck, he orders him: "A ceste heure parles tu naturellement."[3] And as a concluding commentary to the episode, Rabelais adds:

> ...il nous convient parler selon le langaige usité et, comme disoit Octavian Auguste, qu'il fault éviter les motz espaves, en pareille diligence que les patrons de navires évitent les rochiers de la mer.[4]

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[1] Ibid., p. 191

[2] Ibid., p. 192

[3] Ibid., p. 193

[4] Ibid.

Thus Rabelais has set a standard for his characters, in fact, for man. Man should speak the language which is natural to him, without affectation, without effort to make it more or less than what it is. The results of attempts at affectation are those which befall the Limousin: he is misunderstood, wrongly accused, and finally, when his true nature is discovered, he becomes the physical means by which Pantagruel vents his anger. He hinders his chances of communicating and risks being misunderstood by his choice of a language not known nor understood by others.

This chapter about the Limousin student has received attention from Rabelais critics and has served to justify various points of view. The religious satire (which will be discussed later), the satire of affected oratory, and the satire of the latinists, have all received their share of attention.[1] However, emphasis on the satire does not prevent a consideration of the chapter from the point of view of communication. The fact that the Limousin almost fails to communicate by his ill-formed, self-perfected, private language is the essential point for this part of our study. By his choice of language--his refusal to speak as others do--he risks being gravely misunderstood and even punished.

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[1]See mainly Manuel de Diéguez, Rabelais par lui-même (Paris: éditions du seuil, n.d.), p. 61.

As if dissatisfied with the lesson drawn from this incident with the Limousin student, Rabelais returns to the same general idea, only three chapters later, when he introduces Panurge into the story.[1] This episode, too, serves to illustrate the consequences of failure to adhere to the standard just established. Pantagruel addresses the newcomer, Panurge, in his native French, but Panurge responds in German. Each effort of Panurge, each new language he tries--and he tries twelve different ones--fails as a means of communication between him and the giant. Each language he tries would be a valid communicative instrument in other circumstances, but it is not valid here, simply because the languages he chooses are not known to Pantagruel and his friends. Pantagruel says to him, "Dea, mon amy, je ne fais doubte aulcun que ne sachez bien parlez divers langaiges; mais dictes nous ce que vouldrez en quelque langue que puissions entendre."[2] His reaction here is somewhat different from his reaction before the Limousin. Panurge's display of knowledge of so many languages gains the admiration of the giant, whereas the Limousin's affected language only served to provoke his anger. But let it be noted that Panurge is displaying a knowledge of valid, acceptable languages, which are recognized as such by Pantagruel and his friends.

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[1] Pantagruel, IX, pp. 207-13.

[2] Ibid., p. 210.

When the giant finally asks him if he knows French (which he obviously understands, or he would have been unable to answer the questions asked previously), he responds happily, "Si faictz très bien, Seigneur, Dieu mercy. C'est ma langue naturelle et maternelle, car je suis né et ay esté nourry jeune au jardin de France: c'est Touraine."[1] His answer emphasizes what was established earlier with the Limousin: one should use one's natural (or native) language in situations which merit it. There is no need to seek affectation or another language, when one's native language is that of the other person, too.

Glauser in his interpretation of this chapter insists upon its value in terms of the artistic creation of Panurge.[2] It is fitting that this person, whose very character is based upon a preference for words rather than action, should enter the work through a chaos of language.[3] Such an interpretation does not prevent a consideration of the incident on the level of communication. Panurge utterly fails to communicate with Pantagruel until he is ready to speak a language common to both of them. His knowledge of other languages does not suffice to make them infallible communicative instruments. They become valid means of communication only when they are known and

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[1] Ibid., p. 212.

[2] Glauser, op. cit., pp. 126-58.

[3] Ibid., p. 135.

understood by those with whom he wishes to speak.

Two other instances, the harangue of Janotus Bragmardo and the chanting of the monks in the abbey during the Picrocholine invasion, which further reveal Rabelais' insistence upon the use of the right means of communication, merit attention. After Gargantua has stolen the bells from Notre-Dame, Janotus Bragmardo comes to request their return.[1] He delivers his famous harangue in an attempt to persuade Gargantua to return the bells. His speech, almost incomprehensible because of the Latin phrases and bizarre locutions, succeeds only in making Janotus ridiculous. Gargantua is so amused that he decides to return the bells, not for any logical reason, not because of any great persuasive powers of the oratory, but simply because he has been delightfully entertained. Then, it can be said that Janotus succeeds in spite of himself. He has communicated what he wanted to communicate not by the means chosen, the harangue with the persuasive powers of oratory, but in spite of it. The harangue as he intended it was the wrong means of communication; its intended powers failed. But, by the fact that he made himself extremely amusing by his speech, he did succeed in "softening" the will of Gargantua and attained his desired goal. The situation worked in reverse of its proposed intent.

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[1] Gargantua, XVIII-XX, pp. 56-62.

The other incident involves Frère Jean, who saves the abbey from the enemies' destruction during the Picrocholine war.[1] When he enters the invaded abbey, he finds the monks, who do not know which saint to call upon, singing a chant: "Ini, nim, pe, ne, ne, ne, ne, ne, ne, tum, ne, num, ..."[2] which is of absolutely no value in their situation. They are not communicating on any level, not with others, not even with themselves. They are not even acting. Frère Jean asks them why they do not sing: "Adieu paniers, vendanges sont faictes?"[3] In other words, if they are going to do nothing more than sing, they should at least describe their situation and lament their plight. They should use a language which communicates their problem, if only to themselves, rather than an inappropriate chant.

In this first group of examples Rabelais has shown his fascination with the diversity of languages available to man and has emphasized the necessity of finding the best language for the circumstances, if one wishes to facilitate communication. For the Limousin, Panurge and the monks, it was a question of finding the best language for the specific situation; for Janotus, it was a matter of accidentally succeeding in spite of having chosen the wrong means.

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[1] Gargantua, XXVII-XXVIII, pp. 83-87.

[2] Ibid., p. 84. [3] Ibid.

Ambiguity and Interpretation

In the second group of situations, Rabelais is concerned with the ambiguous nature of language, which is always susceptible to interpretation. Not content with saying that the right language must be chosen for a given situation, he carries his ideas one step further. Even when the same language is used, or known, by both parties, there is still no assurance of communication, no certainty of being understood. Language is not an infallible communicative instrument; it does not convey meanings in absolute terms. Different people make different interpretations, depending upon what they want to hear or understand. Language by its failure to exclude the subjective, on the part of the speaker as well as the listener, leaves margin for error.

The inscription on the foundation of the Abbaye de Thélème, known as "l'Enigme en prophétie," offers an example of ambiguity in language.[1] Although it is written in French, the language of Gargantua and his friends, this does not suffice to make it readily comprehensible to the group. It appears to be a sort of prophecy, with references to the religious persecutions of the day. Gargantua understands the enigma in these terms: even though there is religious dissension now, a better day will come for the persecuted. The monk, on the other hand, interprets

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[1] Gargantua, LVIII, pp. 161-64.

it simply as a description of a game of tennis. Neither interpretation can be considered "right" or "wrong"; neither can be considered conclusive. The two views can coexist, and are justifiable by the language. In this case the language purposely fails to communicate one single meaning because the writer of the enigma has chosen a confusing means of expressing his ideas.[1]

A similar situation appears in the Third Book, when Panurge receives the advice of the sibyl about his proposed marriage.[2] The words of the sibyl are not freely given; they are not even spoken. Instead, she writes them on leaves and throws them to the winds. Panurge has to chase after them and catch them. After retrieving them and reading the message, he has profitted little. The message, although written in French, is not readily comprehensible to the company. It allows for more than one interpretation, and those present do not all read it in the same manner. Pantagruel sees in it the same prophecy as given before: Panurge will marry, his wife will make him a cuckold, and she will bear the child of another man. Panurge, however, who obviously does not like this

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[1]For other interpretations of this episode see Michael A. Screech, "The Sense of Rabelais's Enigme en prophétie (Gargantua, LVLLL)," BHR, XVIII (1956), pp. 392-404, and Emile V. Telle, "Thélème et le paulinisme érasmien: le sens de l'énigme en prophétie, Gargantua, LVIII," Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance, Tome VII: François Rabelais, ouvrage publié pour le quatrième centenaire de sa mort (Genève: Droz, 1953), pp. 104-20.

[2]Le Tiers Livre, XVII-XVIII, pp. 387-94.

interpretation, offers his own ideas which are much more favorable to him and to the marriage. He sees his future wife as remaining faithful to him and bearing him a child, a second Panurge. The language chosen has failed to communicate an absolute answer in clear terms. Whether or not the sibyl voluntarily chose to state her answer in confusing terms is of secondary importance; the fact remains that her language conveys ambiguity.

In addition to showing that language can be ambiguous when it is susceptible to interpretation, Rabelais, in other instances, insists upon the necessity to interpret, rather than accept words literally. In the second book, Pantagruel receives a strange message from a lady of Paris.[1] The message is comprised of an apparently blank piece of paper and a gold ring with a false diamond. Satisfied that there is no message on the paper, Pantagruel and his friends finally look at the ring, which bears an inscription in Hebrew meaning "Pourquoy me as-tu laissée?"[2] The inscription has little significance by itself, but when Panurge realizes that the diamond is a false one, the entire message becomes clear: "Dy, amant faulx, pourquoy me as-tu laissée?" Then Pantagruel remembers that he had not taken proper leave of the lady before departing from Paris. Here, the language--the in-

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[1] Pantagruel, XXIV, pp. 269-73.

[2] Ibid., p. 271.

scription--has little value when considered by itself; it must be seen in connection with the diamond, and ultimately Pantagruel, for its full meaning to be realized.

The word given by the dive Bouteille provides another example which emphasizes the need to interpret.[1] The word, "Trinch," conveys one meaning when it is taken literally in the sense of "drink." And indeed, Panurge feels that he has profitted nothing from it. The word becomes richer and conveys more meaning for both Panurge and the reader when Bacbuc interprets it in the context of "la vérité dans le vin."

The final example to be considered in terms of language and interpretation is the episode of the frozen words.[2] At sea, Pantagruel hears strange sounds which seem to be words, although no one is speaking. Some of his friends, when they have cupped their hands over their ears, can hear them, too. The giant, calling upon his knowledge of the ancients, searches for an explanation of this extraordinary phenomenon. The captain finally explains that the sounds are words and noises frozen during a battle which took place in the same location a year ago. When some of the sounds have been defrosted into distinguishable words and syllables, they still cannot be

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[1] Le Cinquiesme Livre, XLIV-XLV, pp. 880-84.

[2] Le Quart Livre, LV-LVI, pp. 689-94.

understood, "car c'estoit langaige barbare."[1] When Pantagruel and his friends melt some on the deck, they can discern only types of words and sounds; they can distinguish terrible and sharp words, and some of the noises made by the weapons used for the war.

As for language and communication, this episode can be considered as a study in "pure language."[2] It is an attempt to see if words can exist as language, as a vehicle of communication, of and by themselves, without the aid of circumstantial information. When the words are still frozen, before their origin has been discovered, they mean nothing. They are nothing more than unintelligible sounds which provoke much thought and reflection, and many attempts at explanation. They exist only as sounds, audible to the ear which is prepared to hear them; they have no communicative value. It is not until their existence has been explained by the captain that they gain some significance. They will remain incomprehensible, because they are in a barbarian language, but Pantagruel and his friends, upon defrosting them, do manage to distinguish words and war noises. Then, according to Rabelais, language has meaning--is a valid instrument

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[1] Ibid., p. 692.

[2] For other interpretations of this episode, see especially Guiton, art. cit., and Verdun L. Saulnier, "Le Silence de Rabelais et le Mythe des paroles gelées," François Rabelais, ouvrage publié pour le quatrième centenaire de sa mort, pp. 233-48.

of communication--only when it can be attached to some one or something in specific circumstances.

Language existing alone, divorced from any situation, has no value. What we have termed "pure language" cannot communicate, simply because it has nothing to convey. Language is only a vehicle, a means of communication, not the communication itself. It is valid only when the circumstances which govern its creation are known. Pantagruel states the same idea in the chapter where he praises the advice of mutes:

> C'est abus dire que avons langaige naturel: les langaiges sont par institutions arbitraires et convenances des peuples; les voix, comme disent les dialecticiens, ne signifient naturellement, mais à plaisir.[1]

In the episode of the frozen words, nothing is communicated by the words themselves. What is known, is known about the words, not through them; the captain, an exterior source, has provided the information. What is understood is really interpretation on the part of Pantagruel and his companions. Once they have learned that the words were frozen during a battle, once they have learned about the circumstances in which the sounds were produced, they are able to interpret them as different types of words and as battle noises. What is understood about the words depends upon interpretation and upon what information the hearers can bring to the language

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[1] Le Tiers Livre, XIX, p. 395.

given. Here, Rabelais sanctions interpretation based on exterior information.

In this section, Rabelais has expressed some of his views on ambiguity and interpretation. Language, in the enigma at Thélème and in the message of the sibyl, is used ambiguously. It allows for more than one interpretation. But it can lead to ambiguity also if taken too literally as in the case of the letter from the lady of Paris and in the word of the dive Bouteille. The episode of the frozen words shows that language cannot exist as a means of communication divorced from the situation in which it was produced and permits Pantagruel and his friends to interpret what they hear on the basis of what they know about the words, rather than from them.

The Theme of Silence

Since language which depends upon spoken or written words can be ambiguous and misleading and thus imperfect as a means of communication, it follows logically that Rabelais should have his characters try to communicate by other means or even avoid the use of language entirely by choosing to remain silent in some instances. The third category is concerned with these attempts to avoid the use of any spoken or written language. The episodes of the debate with Thaumaste, the scholar from England, and Panurge's consultation of the deaf-mute offer examples of efforts to find means of

communication other than those dependent upon the use of words.

Thaumaste, who has heard of the great wisdom and extraordinary intelligence of Pantagruel, has come to Paris to seek him out for a debate to see if what he has heard is true.[1] His chosen manner of debate, which goes against the very nature of this type of exercise, is not by words, but by signs and gestures. His explanation is worthy of note: "Mais je veux disputer par signes seulement, sans parler car les matières sont tant ardues que les parolles humaines ne seroyent suffisantes à les expliquer à mon plaisir."[2] Thaumaste, like the poet or any other creative artist who depends upon language as a medium of communication, is aware of the inadequacy of words. There are subjects, ideas, and sentiments which cannot be successfully treated or expressed by a language of words.[3] By these views of Thaumaste, Rabelais is elaborating on his initial idea that language of spoken and written words--language in its most common usage --is not an infallible instrument. It cannot fulfill all functions of communication.

Pantagruel accepts the offer of Thaumaste, they

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[1] Pantagruel, XVIII-XX, pp. 248-59.

[2] Ibid., p. 249.

[3] Thaumaste, however, unlike the writer who accepts language as imperfect but nevertheless utilizes it as such, rejects language and words entirely for signs.

set a time and place, and retire for the night. Panurge believes that he could win against the Englishman and persuades his friend to let him argue in his stead. The next morning Panurge makes himself accepted by the scholar and the debate begins. Neither one is permitted to speak a word. The entire debate proceeds without the use of spoken words, (except for a couple of sentences, uttered by Thaumaste, which do not directly concern the subject). The two participants manage to make themselves understood, and to carry on a veritable debate, without reverting to spoken language. They rely solely upon gestures and physical expressions which function as language, that is, which serve as vehicles to convey their thoughts. At one point, the narrator adds that the spectators understand what Panurge is "saying,"[1] thus indicating that the chosen means of expression is not so unusual but that it can be understood by those who are not directly involved in the debate.

Then a language of gestures and signs understood not only by the two debaters but also partially comprehensible to the spectators, a language which will suffice when words are not desirable or not possible, must be admitted. This first attempt on the part of Rabelais to make his characters communicate without the use of

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[1] "Le monde, qui n'entendoit rien à ces signes, entendit bien que en ce il demandoit sans dire mot à Thaumaste: Que voulez-vous dire là?" loc. cit., p. 256.

spoken words, has succeeded. However, the results must be qualified: the two debaters have communicated without the use of words; in their place they have substituted another type of language, one of gestures, recognizable and comprehensible to both of them, and partially to the audience. Rabelais has shown that communication without words is possible, but whether a language which uses signs rather than words is necessarily a superior means of conveying ideas--as Thaumaste would have us believe--is another question.

Rabelais returns to this theme of communication without the use of spoken language in the Third Book, when Pantagruel encourages Panurge to consult a mute.[1] In his praise of mutes the giant mentions the pitfalls of language. He says that the ancient Greeks were well aware of the shortcomings of language; they believed that the most reliable oracles were those dependent upon signs.[2] He also speaks of Tyridates, king of Armenia, who when visiting Nero and offered whatever favor he wanted, requested an actor

> lequel il avoit veu au théâtre, et, ne entendant ce qu'il disoit, entendoit ce qu'il exprimoit par signes et gesticulations, ... Car, en matière de signifier par gestes, estoit tant excellent qu'il sembloit parler des doigtz.[3]

And when Panurge consents to visit a mute, Pantagruel

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[1] Le Tiers Livre, XIX-XX, pp. 394-401.

[2] Ibid., p. 395.

[3] Ibid.

insists that they find one who is mute by birth, "affin que ses gestes et signes vous soient naïfvement prophéticques, non faincts, fardéz, ne affectéz."[1] Rabelais is here returning to the standard established with the Limousin that one should speak the language which comes to him naturally, without trying to make it appear better than it is, without affectation.[2]

At last the mute, Nazdecabre, is invited to the court of Pantagruel. Panurge, by the use of signs and gestures, explains his problem to him, and he answers in the same manner, first by the use of numbers. The giant acts as interpreter, drawing upon his knowledge of Pythagoras. The mute gives the same advice as the sibyl, except that he expresses himself a little more clearly. By signs and motions, which enrage Panurge, he indicates that he will be married, cuckolded, beaten, and robbed of his goods. Of course, Panurge does not want to accept what Nazdecabre has said, but Pantagruel gives the same interpretation as he did in the case of the sibyl.

After this episode, the message, or the "answer" to Panurge's questions remains essentially the same, except that it has been made clearer for him. The mute, not having used spoken language, but gestures, signs, and even pantomime, has communicated his ideas in such a way that they cannot be misunderstood. Panurge, although

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Supra, pp. 6-8.

he does not like what has been indicated, can offer no alternate interpretation. The means of answering used by the mute has been too clear, too direct, too simple even, to allow a second interpretation.

In addition to these efforts to communicate without spoken language, there are incidents when the use of language--any form of language-- is entirely avoided. There are times when words are of no advantage and admittedly useless, times when it would be unwise to even try to communicate. One instance appears in the Fourth Book when the company of travelers comes in sight of the island of Chaneph, but due to lack of wind, cannot arrive there.[1] This unexpected delay puts them ill at ease and makes them irritable. While Pantagruel sleeps, the others find little tasks to occupy their time and break the boredom. When the giant awakes, each member of the company has found a "problem" for him to solve. They ask that he answer their questions in order to divert their minds and break the monotony. He advises them:

> Amis, à tous les doubtes et quaestions par vous proposées compète une seule solution, et à tous telz symptomates et accidens une seule médicine. La response vous sera promptement expoussée, non par longs ambages et discours de parolles: l'estomach affamé n'a poinct d'aureilles, il n'oyt goutte.[2]

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[1] Le Quart Livre, LXIII, pp. 713-16.

[2] Ibid., p. 716.

Pantagruel realizes that it is not the time for words; it is not the time to try to answer their questions. Their real need is not of words and answers but of food. They are hungry and bored. Their first need is for nourishment. Words would be useless at this time; any effort to communicate on an intellectual level would be in vain. The use of language is not desirable here, because it is not the appropriate moment. The situation, their hunger and boredom, calls for another remedy.

This episode where Pantagruel answers with nourishment rather than with words serves as a bridge between the efforts to communicate without language and the theme of silence. To counsel silence in a specific situation is merely to go one step beyond the avoidance of spoken language and to advise the use of no language at all. In other terms, it is wiser not to communicate at all, either because one does not have the proper language to fit the situation, or because the circumstances are such, as in the case of the hungry men, as to prevent any meaningful use of language.

There are instances in the work when Rabelais advises silence as a perfectly valid response to a situation. There are times when he accords silence its place beside the various attempts at communication. In the episode of the frozen words,[1] Panurge asks

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[1] Supra, pp. 16-19.

Pantagruel to give him some of these strangely preserved words, but the giant refuses, saying "donner parolles estoit acte des amoureux."[1] Then Panurge asks him to sell him some, to which he answers, "Je vous vendroys plustost silence et plus chèrement, ainsi que quelques-foys la vendit Démosthènes, moyennant son argentangine."[2] The religious and historical implications of this short incident have already received attention from the critics.[3] For this part of the present study, we need only note that Pantagruel has taken advantage of Panurge's request to utter a few words in praise of silence.

The theme of silence reappears in the Fifth Book. When the group of travelers arrives at Entelechy they cannot go directly to talk with the Queen, but are first requested to observe her.[4] The captain tells them: "Heure n'est de parler à elle; soyez seullement spectateurs attentifs de ce qu'elle faict."[5] At last, when the Queen speaks, she mentions the role of silence in worship practices of the ancients:

> En l'eschole de Pythagoras taciturnité de congnoissance estoit symbole, et silence des Egiptiens recongnoissoit-on louange déifique, et sacrifioient les Ponthifes en Hieropolis, au grand Dieu en silence, sans bruyt faire,

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[1] Le Tiers Livre, LVI, p. 693. [2] Ibid.

[3] See especially Saulnier, "Le Silence de Rabelais et le Mythe des paroles gelées," pp. 233-38.

[4] Le Cinquiesme Livre, XX, pp. 803-06. [5] Ibid.

ne mot sonner.[1]

Again, the author is indicating that silence has its place next to language in the field of communication.

In this group of examples, Rabelais has led his characters to try to communicate without the use of spoken language, and has made them aware of the value of silence. In the episode of Thaumaste and in Panurge's consultation of the mute, he showed that words are not absolutely necessary to communication, that one can convey his ideas through the use of signs and gestures. In the other examples, he insists upon the proper moment for the use of language, and shows, too, that silence is preferable in some situations.

The Dilemma of Panurge

The linguistic games of the Third Book have been grouped as another category, because they are all concerned with one basic problem: Panurge's desire to know whether or not he should marry. It has long been accepted among Rabelais' critics that Panurge receives no direct answer to his question simply because it cannot be answered in the clear, precise terms which he is seeking. He is looking for an absolute, but there is no absolute to be found.[2] Neither he nor any of those

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[1] Ibid., p. 804.

[2] Per Nykrog, "Thélème, Panurge et la dive Bouteille," RHLF, LXV (juillet-septembre, 1965), 392.

people counselled can foretell the future. Therefore, it goes without saying that none of them can give the type of answer which he wishes to hear. Those who counsel him are forced to hedge, to avoid taking a stand. They must be careful to choose words which cannot be interpreted absolutely to convey only one meaning. They must give much attention, either consciously or unconsciously, to the language they use, to the means of communication they choose in order to convey a vague answer to Panurge's question.

For example, the episode where Panurge consults the sibyl has already been examined.[1] The sibyl, because she has no key to the future and no real means of foretelling the results of Panurge's marriage, can only suggest the results. But, as was noted, she conveys her "answer" in a complicated way. The message, when found after the chase, is of little help to Panurge, because it allows of more than one interpretation. Her ability as a sibyl depends on her ability to give vague answers. If she is to continue giving advice, she must continue to avoid precise answers which could be used to force her into taking a stand. As long as she keeps her clients bewildered by the use of ambiguous language, as long as she never gives a "wrong" answer, she can continue her work. Her success is forever dependent upon

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[1] Supra, pp. 14-15.

her ability to keep her clients from realizing that she does not know the answers either.

Even in the beginning of the search when Panurge seeks the opinion of Pantagruel on whether or not he should marry, he fares no better. The giant, after having advised his friend to decide and take his chances, carefully avoids taking any further stand.[1] He rephrases each question to make it a statement, and he starts each answer with the last word of the question. When Panurge says, "Voe soli! L'homme seul n'a jamais tel soulas qu'on veoyd entre gens mariéz," Pantagruel says, "Mariez-vous donc, de par Dieu."[2] When Panurge asks about cuckoldry and says, "C'est un poinct qui trop me poingt," the giant responds, "Poinct doncques ne vous mariez."[3] The interrogation continues in the same manner with the repetition of words and Pantagruel's rephrasing of his friend's questions. At the end Panurge, enraged, tells him, "Vostre conseil soubs correction semble à la chanson de Ricochet. Ce ne sont que sarcasmes, mocqueries et redictes contradictoires."[4]

This chapter's interest is derived from Pantagruel's astuteness in the use of language. He is capable of manipulating the words provided by the ques-

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[1] Le Tiers Livre, IX-X, p. 357-61.

[2] Ibid., p. 358.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 361.

tions into answers without getting caught into taking a stand. He alternates positive and negative answers to such an extent that the entire interrogation becomes nothing more than a game, which can be considered as linguistic rather than intellectual because it is dependent upon the giant's power to manipulate words rather than upon his knowledge. His astuteness in this game depends upon his power not to communicate nor betray any absolute answer.

Later, when Panurge decides to seek the advice of the poet, Raminagrobis, his problem is again one of communication.[1] The sly old poet knows how to manipulate his words to avoid taking a stand, just as did Pantagruel. He knows how to say "yes" and "no" at the same time. To Panurge's question, he replies:

> Prenez-la, ne la prenez pas.
> Si vous la prenez, c'est bien faict;
> Si ne la prenez en effect,
> Ce sera oeuvré par compas.[2]

Panurge has found no absolute answer to his question and again becomes enraged. He finds an occasion (the poet's condemnation of the monks)[3] to pour forth his anger on this man who has so neatly avoided giving him the type of answer he wants to hear. He says of the poet, "Ventre beuf, comment il se donne guarde de mesprendre

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[1] Le Tiers Livre, XXI-XXII, pp. 401-08.

[2] Ibid., p. 404.

[3] Ibid., pp. 405-07.

en ses parolles! Il ne respond que par disjonctives."[1] Panurge realizes that he is being confused and deceived by the use of words and that the poet is consciously playing with language.

When Panurge talks with Trouillogan, he has no more success than with those who have already advised him.[2] The philosopher manages to avoid the question as did the others. When Pantagruel asks him if Panurge should marry, he answers, "Tous les deux," and when Panurge asks for himself, he responds, "Ne l'un ne l'aultre."[3] The following attempts of Panurge to make his questions more precise and to force the philosopher to take a stand only result in frustration and anger for himself. Trouillogan either gives a qualified answer, a generalization which lightly touches upon the question, or he takes the question in a sense other than the one in which it was meant to be taken.[4] Panurge has encountered another person who knows how to arrange words to avoid giving an absolute answer to his question.

The search among friends, voyeurs, and scholars has been of little help to Panurge. There has been very little communication between him and those from

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[1] Ibid., p. 406.

[2] Le Tiers Livre, XXXV-XXXVI, pp. 454-61.

[3] Ibid., p. 454.

[4] Ibid., pp. 456-61.

whom he sought advice. He has asked his questions, but the answers given never seemed to fit. This lack of communication is due to two factors: the ability of the advisors to avoid the question, as has been shown, and the attitude of Panurge, which blinds him to what is being said. These two factors work together to hinder the positive use of language as a vehicle of communication. Saulnier and Screech try to explain this failure by ultimately opposing views. Saulnier attributes it to the astuteness of the people consulted, and at the same time, insists upon the earnestness of Panurge in his search.[1] Screech, on the other hand, insists upon the fault of Panurge, who is blinded by his vanity and pride.[2] Both critics overemphasize the importance of one factor in order to justify their interpretation of the search, and hence, of the Third Book. It is my opinion that both sides are to blame; the counsellors, by their ability to manipulate language and play tricks on Panurge, and Panurge himself, by his attitude and certain traits of character, which prevent him from listening profitably. The two factors work together to render the search unfruitful, and for

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[1]Verdun L. Saulnier, Le Dessein de Rabelais (Paris: Société d'édition d'enseignement supérieur, 1957), p. 110.

[2]Michael A. Screech, "Introduction" to Le Tiers Livre (Genève: Droz, 1964), p. xvii.

this study, to prevent very much positive use of language as an instrument of communication. The two forces play upon each other to make the interrogations something less than conversations; they are no more than incidents where those involved talk at each other with little actually being communicated between them. The advisors' use of language has already been examined, let us now consider the traits of Panurge which close his mind to communication.

Although he sincerely wants to marry, his vanity and pride prevent him from taking positive action.[1] As Mario Roques points out, Panurge, as one who has aided many a wife in the deception of her husband, now finds himself about to be placed in the same situation.[2] He is afraid that once married, someone will all too readily help his wife deceive him, and he will be categorized among the cuckolds. In fact, he is not so much concerned with his role as a husband but with the role of his wife and what she will do for and to him. His concern over the problem of cuckoldry develops into an overruling fear, ultimately an obsession which dominates him throughout the entire search of the Third Book. This fear of what might be the results of

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Mario Roques, "Aspects de Panurge," François Rabelais, ouvrage publié pour le quatrième centenaire de sa mort, p. 124.

his marriage, fear for his own pride, acts as a blinding force during the interrogations and prevents him from hearing and considering what is said to him.

Saulnier has stated that the desire to learn and the fear of not learning have seldom been so well expressed through a character as they are in Panurge.[1] It is not his fear of not learning, but rather his fear of learning, which dominates. He is afraid of hearing the answer which he does not wish to hear. He is afraid of being assured of cuckoldry, and as has been seen, each time he receives a promise of cuckoldry, he becomes enraged and tries to re-interpret the "evidence" to form the answer he most earnestly wants to hear, the promise of a happy marriage.

In other terms, Panurge has undertaken research on his proposed marriage with already fixed attitudes; he has already decided the answer he wishes to hear and the one he does not wish to hear. He is searching with a closed mind, a mind set upon an absolute answer to his question. During the latter part of the interrogations, when he is no longer confronted by voyeurs, but has been led by Pantagruel to seek advice of accepted scholars, he is still blinded by his obsession. When the issue at hand is not directly cuckoldry, but the nature of woman and the nature of marriage, Panurge

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[1]Saulnier, Le Dessein de Rabelais, p. 106.

still does not hear with understanding. When Hippothadée describes a Christian view of marriage, indicating the responsibility of the husband and noting the type of woman to be chosen, Panurge misses the point entirely. Nurturing always his fear of cuckoldry, he cannot see beyond his nose and answers, "Vous voulez doncques que j'espouse la femme forte descripte par Salomon? Elle est morte, sans poinct de faulte. Je ne la veid oncques, que je saiche."[1] The words of the theologian have been wasted, because Panurge's preoccupation has closed his mind to any real communication.

In addition to his obsession with cuckoldry, Panurge also displays an exaggerated interest in words which ultimately acts as an obstacle in his path. Love of words and languages form an essential part of his character; it will be remembered that he is introduced into the work through a display of his knowledge of many languages.[2] Glauser justifiably sees this introduction as a means of insisting upon the very nature of Panurge who loves language, and even more, prefers words to action.[3] This trait becomes evident again in the Third Book when the entire process of

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[1] Le Tiers Livre, XXX, p. 439.

[2] Supra, pp. 9-11.

[3] Supra, n. 3, p. 10.

interrogations serves as an excuse for not taking positive action concerning marriage. Finally, Panurge goes beyond this love of words to substitute words, the means of communication, for the answer he wants, the communication itself. He confuses the means with the end. This confusion of the answer with the means of conveying the answer is first evident in his reaction to the counsel of the mute. When the mute foresees cuckoldry, Panurge's reaction is one of rage. Pantagruel then says to him: "Si les signes vous faschent, o quant vous fascheront les choses signifiées."[1] Even in this episode, where it is not a question of words, but of sign language, Panurge has confused the means and the end. Finally, his reactions in the episode of the frozen words again reveal his preoccupation with words as an end, any words, even the frozen ones which are not valid vehicles of communication because they are detached from any situation which would cause them to convey meaning to the travelers.[2] It will be remembered that Panurge asks Pantagruel to give him some of the frozen words; when the giant refuses, he wants him to sell him some.[3] In his mind he has confused the means of communication with the communication itself to the extent that he

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[1] Le Tiers Livre, XXI, p. 401.

[2] Supra, pp. 13-14.

[3] Supra, p. 20.

wants words for the sake of words, even words which are absolutely meaningless and will communicate nothing to him.

At the end of the Third Book, the voyage seems to be the only way to help Panurge out of his dilemma. This voyage, undertaken in search of a word, a communication, is necessary for two reasons: to get the advice of the oracle and, just as important, to help prepare Panurge to receive it. The voyage should offer valid experiences which would help him to change his attitude and overcome his obsessions. And his attitude and closed-mindedness must be changed if he is going to profit from the word of the oracle. In order that there be a real communication between the oracle and Panurge, not just the giving of a word, he must be ready to listen with an open mind.

Then for this study, the dilemma of Panurge is used to indicate a communication problem in which language fails because both parties are at fault: on one side, there is a conscious effort to trick and confuse by the use of vague language, and on the other, a certain closed-mindedness which prevents the hearer from listening with comprehension and profit.

These four categories into which Rabelais' studies in language fall, are by their very nature artificial, but they nevertheless serve to prove his

preoccupation with the qualities and deficiencies of language. They all provide evidence of one basic underlying belief on the part of the author: language cannot be accepted as an infallible instrument of communication which always conveys ideas in clear terms. Whether it be by his insistence on the choice of the right language for a given situation, his demonstrations of ambiguous use of language, his efforts to bypass the spoken word and try other means of communication, or the linguistic games of the Third Book which contribute to the dilemma of Panurge, all the examples contribute to this one central conviction. Language even though it be man's best and most common means of communication, is certainly not without fault. It has weaknesses as Rabelais has shown among his characters.

It seems to me that this inherent appreciation of the powers of language is fundamental to Rabelais' work and to some of his philosophy. As will be shown in the ensuing chapters, these four general types of communication problems which Rabelais treats among his characters are also applicable to the author and his work and to the intellectual and religious atmosphere of the first half of the sixteenth century.

CHAPTER II

PROBLEMS OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN RABELAIS AND HIS READER

The four types of communication problems--the choice of the right language for the situation, the problem of ambiguity and interpretation, the theme of silence, and the dilemma of Panurge--with which Rabelais makes experiments among his characters are applicable to the man himself. As a writer living in the first half of the sixteenth century and as a creator of a work of universal interest, he was confronted with precisely the same problems of language and communication as he relegates to his characters. The printed language of his work serves as the means of communication between him and his reader and serves the same function as does spoken language between his fictional characters. In this chapter, these four basic types of problems will be applied to the writer.

The Right Means of Communication

Rabelais, once he decided to write books for the public, was faced with all the fundamental problems of language and communication which face any creative artist

who chooses literature as a medium. All the problems of what he wanted to communicate and how best to communicate it--the problems of finding the right language, form, and genre--were experienced by him. In this sense, his problems of choice of language were not unlike those of any other creative artist. But for Rabelais, as for many of his contemporaries, there were exterior forces, religious and political, which, by the restrictions they imposed, rendered the problem of communication infinitely more difficult. The Five Books, because of the religious and political satire, were in constant danger of attack and condemnation by the School of Theology of the Sorbonne. He was writing during a time when the appellations of "Lutheran," "heretic," or "atheist" were sufficient not only to condemn one's writings, but also to send the writer to prison or even to the stake. Not at all unlike his fictional character, the Limousin student, Rabelais, if he did not choose the proper means of communication for the circumstances, risked being misunderstood by his readers, being called a heretic, and even being punished. Bearing in mind that Rabelais, the writer, was confronted with a double problem of communication, that of any writer plus the restrictions imposed by the forces of his time, let us go on to consider what he wished to communicate through his work and what he chose as the right language, or languages, for it.

Of all those admirers, scholars, and critics of Rabelais who have attempted to describe his work and goals in writing, whether it be in terms of praise of his linguistic and comic achievements or in terms of condemnation of his thought and vulgarity, Saulnier offers perhaps the best definition. "L'oeuvre de Rabelais est roman, joie et pensée."[1] This is at the same time the truest, by the fact that it indicates the three different domains of his work, and the most prudent, by its choice of terms, attempt at definition. Although it cannot be said that Rabelais offers a novel in the modern sense of the word, the term "roman" with its connotations of plot, action, suspense, and adventure can certainly be applied to the Five Books. Rabelais communicates "joie" on various levels: from the use of vulgarity by the writer selling his book at the fair to the theme of "rire est le propre de l'homme" and to the moral philosophy of Pantagruelism. And finally, there is "pensée" in the sense of the writer's personal opinions expressed through his satire of human evils and in the sense of the philosophy of life, Pantagruelism.

Once established what Rabelais communicates through his work, then remains a consideration of his choice of language with which to express it. Again, the two types of problems, those of any creative writer seek-

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[1]Saulnier, Le Dessein de Rabelais, p. 139.

ing the right language to convey his thought and those resulting from the political and religious restrictions of the day, are applicable here. Rabelais' choice of language then involves the use of language as a vehicle to convey an idea, create an effect, or evoke an atmosphere, and the use of language as a means of self-protection to veil his too daring opinions and save him from the attacks of his critics.

The language, or better the languages, of Rabelais, from the popular French to words borrowed from technical vocabularies and invented words, and from the Italian and Spanish to the classical Latin and Greek, has already been extensively analyzed by Sainéan.[1] It is not the goal of the present study to rework or to offer a new version of such a study. Instead, Rabelais' language will be considered from a functional point of view, from the point of view of its validity as a means of communication. As further studies are made on his style and use of language, another of the myths about the creator of the Five Books must be revised. The tradition of Rabelais, drunken with words, who fills his pages with interminable lists of adjectives or nouns, for the sheer joy of pouring forth words, is not entirely true. Certainly, he has a tremendous word power, a tremendous ability to find and use words with amazing profusion. However, he is not always

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[1]Sainéan, op. cit.

spouting forth words for the sake of words, like Panurge who must display his knowledge of many languages. Further examination often reveals a functional value behind the results of the author's drunkenness with words, as can be seen in the lists of words, the legal language of Bridoye, and even in some of the vulgar language. Tetel, in a recent article, insists upon the comic value of the verbal accumulations which form an integral part of the text.[1] They are not just words thrown forth, but reveal evidences of a preconceived style. Also, the blasons of the Third Book offer Rabelais' version, exaggerated of course, of a poetic tradition of the day.[2] Screech has shown that the legal language of Bridoye is made up of formulas probably known and recognizable by Rabelais' public.[3] Rabelais is not citing Latin for the sake of Latin, nor even nonsensical Latin, but recognizable quotations which serve to render Bridoye, and the law, ridiculous. And finally the vulgar language, which has embarrassed Rabelais enthusiasts and discouraged other readers because they cannot

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[1]Marcel Tetel, "La Valeur comique des accumulations verbales chez Rabelais," Romanic Review, LIII (1962), 96-104.

[2]Le Tiers Livre, XXVI, pp. 422-24; XXVIII, pp. 430-32; XXXVIII, pp. 464-67.

[3]Michael A. Screech, "The Legal Comedy of Rabelais in the Trial of Bridoye in the Tiers Livre," Etudes Rabelaisiennes, Tome V (Genève: Droz, 1964), pp. 175-95.

justify it in their own minds, also has a functional value. Whether it be a reflection of the lack of refinement of the times, an indication of the importance of the body as the home of the soul,[1] or simply an effort to obtain "le gros rire" on the popular level, it sometimes serves an evocative purpose to create in the reader a feeling of repulsion or disgust for the character in question. It is used to call forth an emotional as well as an intellectual reaction on the part of the reader.[2]

Rabelais' second use of language, as a means of veiling his thought to protect himself from the attacks of the Sorbonne, is based upon ambiguity in language and comprises a section unto itself.

Ambiguity and Interpretation

Rabelais uses language not only as a means of communication to convey his ideas, but also as a means of non-communication to hide his thoughts and opinions from the censor. He was well aware that language is always susceptible to interpretation, and hence carries with it a certain amount of ambiguity. Just like the sibyl of Panzoust, or others among Panurge's consultants, he realizes that ambiguity can be used advantageously either to

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[1]Saulnier, Le Dessein de Rabelais, p. 48.

[2]As examples, consider especially some of the proper names such as "Baisecul" and "Humevesne," and the description of Panurge's experience with fear in the Quart Livre, LXVI-LXVII, pp. 723-29, which in addition to the

confuse the hearer or reader, or to veil his own thoughts. For Rabelais, the satirist, whose none-too-orthodox views on religion and politics were under constant threat of condemnation, this ambiguity of language becomes an extremely useful protective device. If no one is sure of what he is saying, if he uses a language vague enough and enigmatic enough to always leave a slight doubt in the mind of the reader as to what he really thinks, then he cannot be condemned or persecuted for his views. In fact, ambiguity forms the very basis of good satire. As Rabelais well understood, satire must be couched in terms light enough to be comic and amusing on one level, while at the same time, direct enough to hit the point, in order that the aware reader be able to understand what is being satirized. It must be light enough to exist unto itself as humor, but it must also give some "leads" to the advertent reader who can understand and appreciate what the value of the author's attacks is.

Progressively, from the publication of his first book, Pantagruel, and its immediate condemnation by the Sorbonne, Rabelais makes use, more and more, of ambiguity as a framework for his work. This can be seen through a brief consideration of the Prologues to the Five Books. The Prologue to Pantagruel reveals Rabelais writing to

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comic appeal of the vulgarity also creates in the reader a feeling of disgust and repulsion for him in this incident.

gain a certain amount of popular appeal and to sell his book at the fair by the treatment of legendary characters.[1] Even though he is interested in "un gros rire et deux sous," he already gives an indication of something more than laughter and uses ambiguity to his advantage. After enumerating the qualities of the Grands et inestimables Chronicques de l'énorme géant Gargantua--refuge in time of failure, poultice for certain maladies, consolation for women in labor of childbirth, and certain occult properties--he lightly applies the same virtues to his own creation by saying, "je,..., vous offre de présent un aultre livre de mesme billon, sinon qu'il est un peu plus équitable et digne de foy que n'estoit l'aultre."[2] Despite the call for popular appeal, there is already a prudent use of ambiguity. He does not start by describing his own work but by describing the qualities of another already known book, then he slyly says that his work is of "le mesme billon." His statement leaves much room for interpretation, because he pretends only that his work is similar; he does not frankly declare that the qualities mentioned are the specific qualities of his work, too. He hints very slightly at something more than comic value when he says that his work is "plus digne de foy." Does he mean that it is simply more true and therefore more

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[1] Pantagruel, pp. 167-70.

[2] Ibid., p. 169.

worthy of our belief than the Grands Chronicques, or does it perhaps contain ideas about religious faith?

The Prologue to Gargantua marks a notable change in tone and artistic refinement from the time of Pantagruel and reveals a more extensive use of ambiguity as a protective measure.[1] The dedicatory poem to the readers is simply an invitation to laugh and be merry and announces the Rabelaisian refrain of "rire est le propre de l'homme." The Prologue, however, is an invitation to dire and utter confusion for the reader. Addressing himself to the topers, the narrator makes four historical or literary allusions which indicate a duplicity of meaning. He speaks of Socrates, ugly and misshapen physically, who spoke words of great wisdom; of Alcibiades' comparison of Socrates to the "silènes," small, grotesquely or comically decorated boxes, which contained valuable drugs or jewels; and of the dog which sucks the bone, breaks it, and finds the marrow. He adds by implication the wisdom-folly theme by calling his readers "foulz de séjour" and telling them it would become them to be "sages" to appreciate the substance of his books, thus evoking the Pauline and Erasmian ideas that a fool may say a word in season, and that to be wise in the eyes of God, one must be considered a fool in the eyes of men. The four allusions imply that the work should be read on two levels: one should read

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[1] Gargantua, pp. 2-6.

for the comic value and for the serious intent behind it. In fact, the narrator invites the reader to carefully weigh the text and to look for the hidden meaning.[1] Then, as easily as he created it, he destroys the entire idea by saying that there is no hidden meaning and by making fun of the one who is foolish enough to interpret where there is nothing.

Rabelais is voluntarily employing ambiguity to confuse the reader. He is acting just like the sibyl of Panzoust who writes the verse concerning Panurge's fate on the leaves, or like Raminagrobis who tells Panurge about taking a wife, "Prenez la, ne la prenez pas." The reader does not know what to believe because Rabelais has used ambiguity to communicate an atmosphere of confusion.[2] He knows that language is subject to interpretation and that the reader will automatically interpret what is there. His invitation to interpret followed by the suggestion that such efforts may be in vain should work inversely and cause the reader to search twice as hard for a hidden meaning. But no matter what the reader finds, Rabelais has completely protected himself by the ambiguity of his "maybe there is, maybe there is not" approach.

The Prologue to the Third Book differs from that

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[1] Ibid., p. 4.

[2] Floyd Gray, "Ambiguity and Point of view in the Prologue to Gargantua," Romanic Review, LVI (1965), 12-21.

of Gargantua by an even more extensive use of ambiguity which gives it an enigmatic quality.[1] Rabelais starts by giving a detailed comparison of himself writing his book while others are engaged in politics to Diogenes rolling his barrel to give the impression of being occupied while others were busily engaged in preparation for war. By this comparison to Diogenes and his reference to Sisyphus, he over-insists on the uselessness of his task, and therefore causes the reader, already acquainted with Pantagruel and Gargantua, to doubt that the author would be wasting his time writing if the task had no meaning. He explains that he only writes while drinking and only drinks while writing, thus in a very indirect way makes one think of the "maybe there is, maybe there is not a hidden meaning, I the writer am not entirely responsible" attitude of the Prologue to Gargantua. Finally, he invites the reader to come drink the wine of his barrel: "Tout beuveur de bien, tout goutteux de bien, altéréz, venens à ce mien tonneau, s'ilz ne voulent, ne beuvent."[2] He invites some, not all, as he repeats later, "gens de bien, beuveurs de la prime cuvée et goutteux de franc aller."[3] He then promises: "Bon espoir gist au fond," thus recalling the idea of a

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[1] Le Tiers Livre, pp. 319-29. [2] Ibid., p. 327.

[3] The selectivity on the part of Rabelais as to the type of people who should partake of this wine recalls the inscription on the Abbaye de Thélème. See Nykrog, art. cit., especially pp. 391-92.

hidden meaning of the Prologue to Gargantua.

Although the Prologue to the Fourth Book with its gaulois anecdote about Couillatris and his lost hatchet offers a lesson in moderation and modest wishes obviously calls for a reading on two levels,[1] the best examples of ambiguity are to be found in the epistle dedicatory.[2] Rabelais again calls to mind the idea of a hidden meaning when he talks of Julia, daughter of Octavian Augustus, who dressed in one manner to please her husband and in quite a different manner to please her father, and when he likens his book unto a medication and says that the form must fit the needs of the reader. He mentions the accusations of heresy which befell his first three books and insists that they, as well as the present one, contain only "folastries joyeuses." Again, as in the Prologue to Gargantua, he implies a hidden meaning and at the same time insists that his work has only comic value.

The Prologue to the Fifth Book, although fragmentary, offers examples of ambiguity.[3] The author, addressing himself to the "indefatigable topers," returns to the wisdom-folly theme of the Prologue to Gargantua by his

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[1]Le Quart Livre, pp. 523-37. [2]Ibid., pp. 517-22.

[3]Although a complete Prologue exists, Boulenger attributes only the first part to Rabelais and offers it in his edition, Le Cinquiesme Livre, pp. 749-50. Jean Plattard, in his edition [Rabelais, Le Cinquiesme Livre (Paris: éditions Fernand Roches, 1929), pp. 1-8], gives the entire Prologue without commentary as to authorship.

question, "pourquoy est-ce qu'on dit en commun proverbe: le monde n'est plus fat?"[1] Even though Rabelais approaches the question of the world's newly-gained wisdom objectively, he continues his series of interrogations until he puts in doubt the entire concept of human wisdom. The fragment terminates with a verse of which the words are "scotines et obscures"; again the author suggests an engimatic quality and the possibility of different interpretations.[2]

Rabelais was well aware of the positive value of ambiguity of language and, like some of his characters, was capable of using it as a protective device against his censors. No matter what one found in his works, he could always hide behind the pretext of offering nothing more than nourishment for "le gros rire." Even if something more profound were discovered, he was not responsible. For his contemporary readers, and much more so for his readers in following centuries, his use of ambiguity has given his work an engimatic quality which utterly complicates the task of the reader who has the courage to seek the "sustantificque mouelle." Before considering

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[1]Boulenger edition, p. 749.

[2]The continuation of the Prologue (Plattard edition), although it reveals a conscious effort to return to themes and people dear to Rabelais by the mention of the barrel of Diogenes and of Marguerite de Navarre, marks a change in tone from the Fragment. Man's wisdom is no longer put in doubt; instead, the author counsels the reader to abandon the old folly and cling to the new wisdom.

this complicated task of the reader, it is first necessary to examine the theme of silence.

The Theme of Silence

It is certain that Rabelais was preoccupied with searching for the appropriate moment to offer his books to the public because of his use of ambiguity as a protective device against attacks and condemnation and because of what is historically verifiable about the circumstances of publication.[1] The problems of finding the right moment to try to communicate and of knowing when to remain silent played very active roles in his literary career, as can be seen by a brief consideration of the history of the publication of the Five Books.[2]

In 1532, Rabelais published his first edition of Pantagruel in Lyon to be sold at the fair. It was signed with the anagram, Alcofribas Nasier. It was condemned in 1533 by the School of Theology of the Sorbonne and put on the Index for "obscenity," perhaps an excuse for condemning a work which offered evidences of Lutheranism.[3]

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[1]See especially, Michael B. Kline, "Rabelais and the Age of Printing," Etudes Rabelaisiennes, Tome IV (Genève: Droz, 1963), pp. 11-35; and Marcel de Grève, "L'Interprétation de Rabelais au XVI^{e} siècle," Etudes Rabelaisiennes, Tome III (Genève: Droz, 1961), pp. 12-184.

[2]For these two paragraphs, I follow in general the ideas of Kline, op. cit.

[3]Jean Plattard, "L'Ecriture sainte et la littérature scripturaire dans l'oeuvre de Rabelais," Revue des Etudes Rabelaisiennes, VIII (1910), p. 290.

Rabelais finished the Gargantua and published it, unsigned, in 1534, almost contemporary to the Affaire des Placards, an event which immediately brought forth extensive persecution for heretics. The author went into hiding, probably in Chinon.

Even though Rabelais had promised a sequel to Pantagruel, to appear soon after the Gargantua, he remained silent for twelve years. There has been much speculation about his reasons for not writing;[1] the most logical explanation is that of prudence, a voluntary silence when his works were still under heavy criticism and more and more people were being persecuted for heresy.[2] In 1543, the School of Theology of the Sorbonne condemned both Pantagruel and Gargantua not as obscene works but as heretical writings. They were categorized with the works of such men as Erasmus, Marot, Calvin, and Zwingli. By 1545, Rabelais obtained a royal privilège for the republication of the two books; by 1546, the Third Book appeared, also with a privilège and signed by the author. In 1548, a partial edition of the Fourth Book, which stopped with chapter eleven, was printed; in 1552, the entire book, with a privilège, was published. Rabelais

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[1]See especially, Abel Lefranc, "Introduction" to Le Tiers Livre, Tome V of OEuvres de François Rabelais (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1931), pp. i-x, xxx, lv; and Saulnier, Le Dessein de Rabelais, pp. 20-21, 39-50, and 125-28.

[2]Saulnier, op. cit., pp. 20-21.

died in 1553 and the Fifth Book was printed posthumously.

The history of Rabelais' active literary career is one dominated by an ever-present threat of persecution. The questions of knowing when to talk and when to remain silent are not secondary notions relegated to Pantagruel in the last three books of the fictional creation, but very real problems experienced by the author himself.

The Dilemma of Panurge

The direct result of Rabelais' use of ambiguity of language to veil his ideas and protect himself from criticism and persecution is a communication problem for the reader. Just like Panurge's advisors, Rabelais does not offer a language which clearly conveys his thoughts but one that allows of more than a single interpretation. The readers of the Five Books from the sixteenth century to the present have found themselves in a position similar to that of Panurge. The inadvertent reader does not know whether to look for the "sustantificque mouelle" on every page, or to ignore it entirely and read just for amusement. He is caught between interpret and not interpret; he does not know whether to accept the work at face value or to seek a more profound meaning.

As in the case of Panurge, what one finds in the work, finally what Rabelais communicates to his reader, is partially dependent upon the attitude of the reader and what he brings to the text. According to Saulnier's for-

mula, there are "roman, joie et pensée," but the author has purposely confused and intermingled the three to the extent that the reader is not always readily conscious of where one stops and where another begins. There is symbol in the work, but not everything must be interpreted as symbol.[1] If we accept it all as symbol and look for a hidden meaning on every page, we fall into the same self-prepared trap as does Panurge, who greedy for words, any words, attaches too much importance to the means of communication.

Rabelais' use of ambiguity to protect himself from persecution has led to continuing divergence of interpretation of his books since his own time. The comic, the "joie," has remained as a universal mean in his work; each generation of readers, except those who have taken offense at the vulgarity, has been able to enjoy and appreciate him on this first level of communication. But the second level of communication, that of his thought, has always had various and contradictory interpretations. This has been particularly true concerning his religious position, of which the interpretations fall into two major schools: those critics who, in the tradition of Lefranc, consider him atheistic, or accord him varying degrees of disbelief; and those critics who, in the tradition of Saulnier and Screech, consider him Evangelistic,

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[1] Ibid., p. 139.

a point of view which also presents different definitions, but which does not go so far as to see him as a non-believer. The episodes which lend themselves most easily to more than one interpretation are the Enigma in Prophecy,[1] Panurge's praise of debtors,[2] the discussion of the herb, Pantagruelion,[3] and the episode of the frozen words.[4]

The fact that the four types of communication problems with which Rabelais deals in his work among his characters are also applicable to him, to his work, and to his public, indicates that these are problems with which he himself was deeply concerned and not just abstractions for his fictional creation. The fact that these problems were ones which perpetually confronted him further justifies my statement that in his work he is consciously playing with language and creating test cases to discover and appreciate the qualities and faults of language as man's most important means of communication.

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[1] Supra, pp. 13-14.

[2] See especially Screech, "Introduction" to the Tiers Livre, pp. xiv-xvi; and Saulnier, Le Dessein de Rabelais, pp. 51-53.

[3] See especially Saulnier, "L'Enigme du Pantagruélion ou: du Tiers Livre au Quart Livre," Etudes Rabelaisiennes, Tome I (Genève: Droz, 1956), pp. 48-72.

[4] Supra, pp. 17-19.

CHAPTER III

RABELAIS AND HIS PERIOD: PROBLEMS OF COMMUNICATION

Rabelais' interest in language and communication offers, by no means, an isolated case for the period in which he was writing. His contemporaries in France, in the first half of the sixteenth century, were concerned with language both structurally, as a study in itself, and functionally, as an instrument of communication. Their interest in language was at first rooted in the early Humanists' rediscovery of the ancients; later, it became involved with the Reformation, both as a stimulus for and as a product of this movement.

The early Humanists advocated the study of the ancient languages, especially Greek and Hebrew, in addition to the traditional Latin, as a means of more direct access to the writers of antiquity. In the last decade of the fifteenth century, Greek, taught by a native, was added to the curriculum at the Sorbonne. In 1529, François I, influenced by the leading Humanists, among whom his sister, Marguerite de Navarre, founded the Collège de France, first under the name of the "Collège

de Trois Langues," for Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.

Along with this interest in the languages of the ancients came a veritable patriotism for French, the vulgar language. It was during this period that French came to be accepted as the official language of the country. The Humanists, having studied the ancients and their literary works, wished to elevate their native tongue to make it the equal of Greek and Latin. In addition to social and political influences which exercised a force on the language both toward standardization as the monarchy became more stable, and toward enrichment as more technical and commercial terms were added, there were the constant attempts of the Humanists to organize and categorize their language. This is the period which saw the first dictionaries of French words, and the first grammars for the French language.[1] By the order of Villers-Cotterets in 1539, French replaced Latin in legal proceedings. It was found worthy for philosophical treatises: Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion was published first in Latin in 1536, and again in French in 1541. Toward the middle of the century the three arts of poetry, including the Deffence et Illustration de la langue francoyse, which

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[1]The first dictionary was that of Robert Estienne, Dictionnaire Francoislatin, 1533; and the first grammars were those of Jacques Dubois, In linguam gallicam isagoge, 1532; John Palsgrave, L'Esclaircissement de la langue françoyse, 1532; and Louis Meigret, Tretté de la grammère françoeze, 1550.

defend French as a valid language for poetry, appeared.[1]

This first interest in language which was manifested during the time of Rabelais was concerned, for the most part, with the structural side of language, and saw language as a study unto itself with a view toward improving and enriching it, rather than evaluating its functional powers. Rabelais reflects this first type of concern with language. One need only remember the letter of Gargantua to his son, Pantagruel, where the giant speaks of the restoration of languages and insists upon their importance in the program of study of his son.[2] This aspect of Rabelais' interest in language has been overemphasized and has led to the tradition of the writer drunken with words. As has been shown in the present study Rabelais was also concerned with language functionally, as an instrument of communication. This second interest in language is also a reflection of his time and is deeply involved with Humanism and the Reformation.

The Humanists' study of the ancient languages and their desire to return to the early texts of the ancients rather than the Latin translations helped prepare the way for the Reformation. Such men as Erasmus, Lefèvre

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[1] In addition to the Deffence by Du Bellay in 1549, there were the Art Poétique by Thomas Sébillet in 1548, and the Art Poétique départi en deux livres by Jacques Peletiers in 1555.

[2] Supra, pp. 4-5.

d'Etaples, and Briçonnet, Bishop of Meaux, in the early part of the century were advocating a return to the early texts of the Holy Scriptures and a putting aside of the exegesis accumulated during the Middle Ages. They wanted to recapture the spirit of primitive Christianity by a study of the Four Gospels and the teachings of Saint Paul. They emphasized the personal and spiritual side of religious experience as opposed to the practice of rites and the strict adherence to dogma. In France, Lefèvre d'Etaples and Briçonnet were seeking to bring about a peaceful reform within the Church itself. When Luther initiated actions in 1517 which eventually led to a break with the Church, he gravely hindered the efforts of the peaceful reformers. Until this time only two currents of thought regarding the Church were distinguishable: the attitude of those who were satisfied with Catholicism as it was, and the attitude of those who advocated, in varying degrees, some sort of reform. As Luther's struggle continued and he ultimately came to open rebellion, three factions became evident: the orthodox, the Church and the schools of theology which would remain strongholds of Catholicism; the Reformists, the followers of Luther who would eventually establish new sects independent of Rome; and the Evangelists, in principle, the followers of the ideas of Erasmus, who were always seeking changes within

the Church but never a break with her.[1]

This third group, which found some of its most ardent leaders among the men of letters in France, from Lefèvre d'Etaples and Briçonnet to Marguerite de Navarre and her literary circle, including such people as Rabelais, Bonaventure Des Périers, Clément Marot, Etienne Dolet, and for a time, Jean Calvin, remains difficult to designate and define.[2] It was allied to the Reformation in purpose and attached to Rome through fidelity. As a group situated in the middle between two others, its lines of division and difference from them remain at times impossible to discern. Because of their search for a reform and their approval and even alliance at times with followers of Luther, the Evangelists were constantly in danger of being called "Lutherans" or "heretics" and, in fact, some of them would be burned for it. Later, as "party ties" became more closely drawn, both Luther and Calvin broke with the Evangelists and in turn condemned them for their too strict adherence to Rome.

All three factions, Catholics, Reformists, and Evangelists, were concerned with problems of language and communication in different realms, from the problems of

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[1]The term "évangélisme" was first applied to this group by Pierre Imbart de la Tour in the third volume, L'Evangelisme (1521-38) of his three volume work, Les Origines de la Réforme (Paris: Hachette et Cie, 1905-14).

[2]Roland Bainton, The Age of the Reformation (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1956), pp. 61-62.

communication between God and man and the question of the right language for the Bible to the search for the best means of communicating propaganda for each faction. However, it was the Evangelists especially who were confronted more and more with problems of communication. If they were to continue as a third group and maintain their independence without becoming absorbed into orthodoxy or into the Reformation, they had to learn to diffuse their beliefs among men and at the same time protect themselves from persecution for heresy. Evangelism as a movement started with the early Humanists' interest in the ancient languages as a key to the Scriptures; it continued and terminated with its members being forced to consider their modern language as a communicative instrument between them and their contemporaries. It is interesting to note that the interest in language during this period started among the Humanists as an objective and erudite study, apart from everyday life; it continued as much more than a study; it became a very real problem of everyday living.

Rabelais as an historical personage is attached to Evangelism as a member of the literary circle of Marguerite de Navarre. As a writer and thinker, his work provides evidence of Evangelistic attitudes.[1] His in-

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[1]See especially Michael A. Screech, "L'Evangélisme de Rabelais," Etudes Rabelaisiennes, Tome II (Genève: Droz, 1959), pp. 7-98; and Saulnier, Le Dessein de Rabelais, pp. 7-9, 20-21, and 55-73.

terest in language and communication, which has been the object of the present study, is directly allied with the Evangelists' problems of communication. He reflects the thinking of his period in his functional interest in language.

The four types of studies in language and communication which Rabelais makes in his work, and which have been applied to him as a writer, are also applicable to the historical period, both in the general context of the religious controversy and in the specific context of literary themes appearing in other writers. These four types of problems which confronted Rabelais confronted his contemporaries also.

The Right Means of Communication

The problem of finding the right means of communication or the right language for the situation was an important issue of the period on two levels: on the level of communication between man and God, and on the level of communication between man and man. One of the major points of difference between Catholics and Reformists concerned the question of how man should communicate with God in prayer. The early reformers questioned the validity of the hierarchy of intermediaries comprised of the Virgin Mary and the Saints as prescribed in Catholic doctrine. As good men of the Renaissance believing in the power and importance of the individual, they thought that

man could pray to God by means of one single intermediary, His Son, Jesus Christ. This point of view, shared by both Lutherans and Evangelists, is also shared by Rabelais. It will be remembered that when his heroes pray seriously, they pray to God without calling upon the Virgin Mary.[1] In fact her name is scarcely mentioned in the work, except when Panurge mentions her name in a moment of cowardice.[2]

In keeping with the Reformists' and Evangelists' insistence upon man's right to pray to God by means of one intermediary was their belief that man has the right to read and interpret the Holy Scriptures without being solely dependent upon the explanations and interpretations offered by the Church fathers. The question of the right means of communication, in the sense of the right language for the Bible, the divine word of God, was also a current issue in the religious controversy. The Evangelists, as well as the Lutherans, and later the Calvinists, insisted upon a Bible in French, available to a much broader public than were the Latin texts. Lefèvre d'Etaples presented a French translation of the Bible in 1523. Olivetan presented a second translation, considered as Calvinistic, in 1535.

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[1]Consider especially the prayer of Pantagruel before the battle with Loup Garou, Pantagruel, XXIX, pp. 290-21.

[2]See also, Enrico Bertalot, "Rabelais et la Bible

On the level of communication between man and man, the problem of choosing the right language in which to safely express one's views in order to avoid condemnation and persecution for heresy existed for many of Rabelais' contemporaries, especially Marguerite de Navarre, Clément Marot, Bonaventure Des Périers, and Etienne Dolet, just as it did for himself. The condemnation of Rabelais' books by the School of Theology of the Sorbonne has already been mentioned.[1] Marguerite de Navarre's Miroir de l'Ame pêcheresse was condemned in 1533. Clément Marot was persecuted and forced into exile more than once for his Lutheran tendencies. Bonaventure des Périers' Cymbalum Mundi was condemned shortly after its publication in 1537 as "pernicious"; it was also said to contain "de grands abuz et heresies."[2] Etienne Dolet, after persecution and imprisonment, was burned at the stake on charges of heresy. The choice of the right language with which to communicate with one's contemporaries, as seen in the comic episodes of the Limousin scholar and the entry of Panurge into the story, represent very valid problems of the period.

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d'après les premiers quatre livres," Etudes Rabelaisiennes, Tome V (Genève: Droz, 1964), pp. 19-21.

[1] Supra, pp. 52-53.

[2] Peter H. Nurse, "Introduction" to the Cymbalum Mundi (Paris: Librairie d'Argences, 1958), p. ix.

Ambiguity and Interpretation

Ambiguity of language and terms was used conveniently by the punishing forces and among writers and thinkers themselves. The Pantagruel was condemned as "un livre obscène," but it is not known exactly what was meant by "obscenity," whether it was taken in the sense of vulgarity or if it was used to mask another reason for condemning the work.[1] The terms of "blasphémateur," "hérétique," "luthérien," and even "athée" were used as insults and terms of condemnation; however they did not always have the same meaning when used by different people, nor did they mean the same for the sixteenth century as they do for the twentieth. To call someone "luthérien" did not necessarily mean that he was a follower of Luther; it may only have meant that he was sympathetic to some of Luther's teachings, or simply that his thinking was slightly unorthodox.

Febvre, in his study of the value of these terms for the sixteenth century, explains that among other meanings, the word "athée" carried the impact of the ultimate insult.[2] If "blasphémateur" indicated only a suspicious divergence from accepted views, "athée" served as the superlative. It is a term which carried all the

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[1] Supra, p. 52.

[2] Lucien Febvre, Le Problème de l'incroyance au XVI[e] siècle (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1942), pp. 138-53.

impact of our twentieth century insult of "communist." When applied to another, the term could mean that the person did not believe in Christ, denied the immortality of the soul, was sympathetic to the Reformation, or shared views which did not agree with those of the one using the term.[1]

These terms were used by the School of Theology of the Sorbonne and applied to specific cases where works were being condemned. They were used by other people in power as insults and as means of creating suspicion about those whom they did not like. Also, they were used by scholars, writers, and reformers among themselves, as a means of insult, or as a way of indicating that the person to whom the term was applied had strayed too far from the faith in his thinking on a particular subject. The use of the term "athée" was not reserved to the School of Theology nor even to Calvin, writing from Geneva about those who, according to him, had lost the faith. It was used by Rabelais, himself suspected of heresy, to condemn Scaliger; it was used by Dolet, he who was burned for heresy, to condemn Erasmus.[2] It was used by the officials and by the condemned.

The use of ambiguity as a vehicle of satire and as a protective device to protect both author and work from condemnation is not limited to Rabelais. In fact,

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[1] Ibid., pp. 139-40. [2] Ibid., pp. 141-44.

his contemporary, Bonaventure Des Périers, used it in much the same manner. His Cymbalum Mundi, already mentioned, and the Nouvelles Récréations et joyeux Devis, not published until 1558, but probably dating from the early 1540's, are worthy of note. In these works, Des Périers, like Rabelais, voluntarily creates a communication problem between himself and the reader by his use of language.

The Cymbalum Mundi, comprised of four short dialogues of religious and social satire, admits to be nothing more than "fort antiques, joyeux et facetieux." In the preface,[1] the author, under the title of Thomas Du Clevier to his friend, Pierre Tryocant, possible anagrams for Thomas Incredule to Pierre Croyant,[2] insists that he is offering him a translation in French of this little pamphlet which he discovered in Latin. He does not say that it is similar to other works as does Rabelais when introducing the Pantagruel; he claims that it is a translation. He indicates that the work should remain in manuscript and not be printed, perhaps an indication that it is too dangerous a work to appear in print.

The work, which is couched in ambiguity, has as its main character, Mercury, whether the Mercury of an-

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[1]Nurse edition, pp. 3-4. All subsequent references to the Cymbalum Mundi will be to this edition.

[2]Nurse, "Introduction," p. xxxix.

tiquity or the author's creation cannot be discerned. He has come to earth to have Jupiter's Book of Immortality rebound. Mercury could represent Christ, and the book could be the Bible.[1] In the Second Dialogue,[2] Mercury visits a field where three philosophers, whose names have been interpreted as anagrams for Luther, Bucer, and Erasmus,[3] are frantically searching for pieces of the philosopher's stone, which they believe to have been broken and scattered in the field by Mercury. Disguised, and therefore unrecognizable to the philosophers, Mercury talks with them and casts doubt on the validity of their search and even the stone they are seeking. He tells them:

> Il pourroit bien estre que, pour des pieces d'icelle pierre philosophale, ilz auroient choisi par my le sable du sable mesmes, et si n'y auroit pas gueres à faire: car il est bien difficile de les cognoistre d'entre le sable, pource qu'il n'y a comme point de difference.[4]

He does not say that there is no difference between the sand and the pieces of stone; he renders the statement unclear by adding the word "comme." Later, he pities them for having faith in Mercury the master deceiver and asks them:

> Ne doubtez-vous point qu'il ne vous ait baillé

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[1] Ibid., p. xxxiii.

[2] Cymbalum Mundi, pp. 12-22.

[3] Ibid., p. 46.

[4] Ibid., p. 13.

> quelque aultre pierre des champs ou, peult-estre, de l'areine mesmes, et puis qu'il vous ayt faict à croire que c'est la pierre philosophale, pour se mocquer de vous et prendre son passetemps des labeurs, coleres et debatz qu'il vous voit avoir en cuydant trouver la chose laquelle n'est point?[1]

The ambiguity comes from Mercury's use of the verb "to doubt" in the negative interrogative form. He does not tell them that what they are seeking does not exist; he only asks them if they do not doubt its existence. Like the advisors of Panurge who are experts in the manipulation of language, Mercury uses ambiguity to keep from giving a clear answer.

The first short story "en forme de préambule" of the Nouvelles Récréations et joyeux Devis recalls the Prologues to Pantagruel and Gargantua.[2] The author praises the qualities of laughter, as does Rabelais, and then insists that there is only comic matter in his work:

> Je vous prometz que je n'y songe ny mal ny malice; il n'y ha point de sens allegorique, mystique, fantastique. Vous n'aurez point de peine de demander comment s'entend cecy, comment s'entend cela; il n'y fault ny vocabulaire ne commentaire: telz les voyez, telz les prenez.[3]

Such emphasis on the comic value causes the reader to doubt if he should read solely for the comic effect, or

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[1] Ibid., p. 18.

[2] Des Périers, Les Nouvelles Récréations et joyeux Devis, Tome II of OEuvres françoises de Bonaventure Des Périers, ed. by Louis Lacour (Paris: Chez P. Jannet, Libraire, 1856), pp. 7-14.

[3] Ibid., p. 9.

if he should not perhaps search for a "substantificque mouelle." And it has been shown in a recent study by Sozzi that the collection of short stories do reveal Evangelistic advice and themes.[1]

The Theme of Silence

The question of finding the appropriate moment to try to communicate which eventually gave way to the theme of silence became more and more one of the essential problems of Evangelism as its attempts at peaceful reform and reconciliation between Catholics and Reformists became progressively more futile. Evangelism's first organized effort, the Groupe de Meaux, headed by Briçonnet, was dissolved and the members separated in 1525. The movement came into power again in the early 1530's, not as an organized force, but as the general attitude shared by the majority of Frenchmen who hoped for reform within the Church and reconciliation between the two factions. Although it was not organized into a group with collective strength, it did count among its members some of the greatest minds and most powerful people of the day. Marguerite de Navarre is worthy of note because of her position, both as sister to the king, and as patron of letters. In the years preceding the Affaire des Placards, the cause of the Evangelists, due in great part to the

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[1]Lionello Sozzi, Les Contes de Bonaventure Des Périers (Torino: G. Giappichelli, 1965).

work of Marguerite, seemed closest to realization. Her confessor, Roussel, preached the Gospel at the Louvre, and at one point François I was almost gained to their side.

The Affaire des Placards, event of October 17, 1534, when a group of either Catholics or Reformists tacked posters bearing inscriptions against the Holy Mass as irreligious on doors in Paris, other cities, and even at the king's residence at Amboise, transformed an issue hitherto religious into a political one. François I was forced to take a stand in the religious controversy. New laws were passed against heresy, and many people were persecuted or burned. Men of letters who could be considered "suspect," such as Marot, Rabelais, and Calvin, took refuge outside the kingdom. The gap between Catholics and Reformists was broadened, and the hopes of the Evangelists dashed asunder.

By 1536, when a relative tranquillity had been regained, the hopes of the Evangelists were renewed for a short time. Marguerite was writing to Bucer, to Melanchton, and to Pope Paul III, in preparation for a council to try to settle differences.[1] A council met, finally, not with reconciliation in mind, but with plans for the restoration of the Church. It was too late for reconciliation; Europe was already divided into two

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[1]Pierre Jourda, Marguerite d'Angoulême, 2 vols. (Paris: Champion, 1930), p. 209.

camps. The French reform, independent of German and Swiss influence, was growing rapidly: it had its own Bible, that of Olivetan; it had its doctrine, the Institutes of the Christian Religion of Calvin; it only needed organization under a single leader, and Calvin would soon accomplish this final feat.[1] Catholicism, on the other hand, under the direction of Paul III, had but one goal: restore the Church by strengthening its forces and renewing its authority. François I, influenced by Pope Paul, made a renewed effort to cleanse the kingdom of heresy.

All hopes of reconciliation destroyed, Evangelism as an easily traceable force passed gradually from the scene about 1538. Imbart de la Tour sees it disappear completely; as the sides were more clearly drawn, the Evangelists let themselves become absorbed into orthodoxy or allied themselves with the Reformists.[2] Saulnier, however, does not admit the total disappearance of the movement; he prefers to see, rather, a change in principle, whereby those who had previously sought reconciliation and peaceful reform decided to be prudent, keep silent for the time being, and await a more favorable moment to speak about their aims. He calls this transformed Evangelism, "hésuchisme," an Evangelism which did

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[1]Imbart de la Tour, op. cit., p. 494.

[2]Ibid., p. 609.

not preach.[1] It was useless to talk, to try to communicate, when others had their closed minds and were not willing to listen. Besides, it was dangerous to talk; the stake had been lit for many on the basis of heresy. And evidence of heresy was no longer necessary; suspicion alone was sufficient for prosecution.[2]

In addition to this transition to hésuchisme, which emphasized prudence rather than attempts at communication, there was an ever-present mystical current in French Evangelism. Starting with Lefèvre and Briçonnet who differed in this respect from the too-intellectual Erasmus, the mystical current found sympathy and a follower in Marguerite de Navarre.[3] It seems as though she became more interested in mysticism late in life, during the 1540's, and at this time became friendly with the two "libertins spirituels," Pocque and Quintin, who preached a form of mysticism.[4] This mystical current offered still another point by which the Evangelists were concerned with problems of communication, here, between man and God. This would seem to

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[1]Verdun L. Saulnier, "Le Sens du Cymbalum Mundi," BHR, XIII (1951), 163-66.

[2]By the edict of January, 1535, the non-revelation of heresy was assimilated into heresy itself.

[3]Jourda, op. cit., p. 96.

[4]Ibid., p. 306. Concerning Pocque and Quintin, see also Henri Busson, Le Rationalisme dans la littérature française de la Renaissance, nouvelle édition (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1957), pp. 301-17.

betray the need of no language whatsoever, in order for the soul to communicate with God. This mystical penchant was completely in keeping with Evangelists' emphasis on the spiritual and personal manifestations of religion as opposed to the practice of external rites and the strict following of dogma.

Evangelism, transformed into hésuchisme, was concerned with communication in several ways. First, the followers were impressed with the uselessness of trying to communicate when the factions involved did not want to listen, as Pantagruel realizes that his companions are not ready to have their questions answered in the episode at sea.[1] Secondly, they had become silent as a matter of prudence to protect themselves. And finally, the ever-present tendency toward mysticism was also a means of recognizing the value of silence, as opposed to the use of words.

The theme of silence, sometimes in form of the exploitation theme, appears in the Cymbalum Mundi of Des Périers. It is one of the themes of the last two dialogues. In the Third Dialogue,[2] it appears with the horse, Phlegon, which has been given the faculty of speech by Mercury. He is first of all exploited by his master who invites others to come and witness the marvel

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[1] Supra, pp. 24-25.

[2] Cymbalum Mundi, pp. 23-33.

of the talking horse. Then, misusing his gift, Phlegon tells of his master's mistreatment of him, and points out his master's hypocrisy. The horse is led away and threatened with a beating if he continues to talk too much. He will be punished for having spoken out against the shortcomings of his master. It would have been better for him to have remained silent.

The theme recurs in the Fourth Dialogue with the attitudes of the two dogs, Hylactor and Pamphagus, who, having eaten of the tongue of their master, Acteon, gained the ability to speak.[1] Hylactor, after much searching, is pleased to have found Pamphagus, a dog with whom he can talk. He tells of his adventures as a talking dog while his friend listens. Pamphagus, however, rues the day that he ate of the tongue of his master, because speaking has brought him only discontent. The dialogue ends with Pamphagus telling Hylactor to speak if he wishes, but as for himself, he prefers to remain silent.[2]

The Dilemma of Panurge

The dilemma of Panurge, who is so assiduously

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[1] Ibid., pp. 34-43.

[2] For interpretations of the entire Cymbalum Mundi based upon the theme of silence, see Wolfgang Spitzer, "The Meaning of Bonaventure Des Périers' Cymbalum Mundi," PMLA, LXVI (1951), 795-819; and Verdun L. Saulnier, "Le Sens du Cymbalum Mundi," pp. 43-69 and 137-71.

looking for answers to his questions and for whom there is little communication because he is the victim of his counsellors' trickery and the victim of his own fear and indecision, can be considered as representative of the situation of every earnest man concerned with the religious controversy between orthodoxy and the Reformation in the first half of the sixteenth century. The problem of every man affected by the religious struggle is one of communication, not just in the sense of relating to his fellow men or simply saving himself from persecution for heresy, but in the sense of his search, his quest to find the "right" answers and the "right" religion. Confronted on one side by the Church, whose very foundations have been shaken, and on the other side by the Reformists whose doctrines still carry the stigma of "heresy," he wants most an answer. He wants proof and evidence; he wants to know which way is the true way to salvation. Just like Panurge he wants an absolute answer communicated to him in clear terms.

He is, like Panurge, a victim of the teachings and actions of the two main factions, which are not always reliable. Each side insists that it offers the only true way to salvation. The Church's shortcomings and weaknesses have been pointed out by the Reformists. In an attempt to protect herself and to quell heresy, the Church has accused and punished unjustly. The Reform-

ists insist upon a renewed spirit of Christianity, but in some instances they seem even more tyrannical than the Church of Rome. The man seeking for the right way is confused by the succession of events as the Church tries to regain its strength by coercion, and as the Reformists break away and take measures to organize new sects.

Also like Panurge, the man seeking truth is the victim of his own fear and blindness. He desperately wants to know which religion is the right one, and the urgency of this desire to know affects his attitude in the search. He does exactly what Panurge does, avid for answers, he confuses the means with the end, and becomes greedy for words, the means by which he thinks the answer will be communicated. And the words which he accepts may be meaningless, or false, or misleading, because he has accepted them as the object, as an end in themselves. It is this type of problem with communication which is at the very basis of Rabelais' studies in language. By comparison to the communication problems involved with preaching reconciliation or saving oneself from persecution, this is the most valid one, for the period. Rabelais wants people to realize that words and language are above all a means of communication and not the communication itself. They are valid and reliable only so far as their sources and speakers are. This

brings into question again the episode of the frozen words; words which exist in a vacuum, detached from any valid situation for the listeners, have no meaning.

And ultimately Panurge's problem of communication becomes a problem of knowing. The answer he searches does not exist; he cannot be assured of the outcome of his marriage. He is looking for an absolute where there is no absolute to be had. The man seeking the "right" religion is in precisely the same situation. The correct answer, the one which will tell him which religion is the one to follow, does not exist. It does not exist in the absolute form, and it can never be communicated by words. It must be found in the individual himself, not in language. To search for it in words, in what others say, is only to put off the real issue and avoid acting.

This manner of thinking is inherently linked with the principles of Evangelism. It is perfectly natural that a group concerned primarily with the personal and spiritual side of religion as opposed to external manifestations, a group which bends toward mysticism, would not be looking for absolute answers to be communicated to them by others. They would emphasize the importance of the individual's search to find for himself the "right" religion.

The same type of dilemma, stemming from a com-

munication problem, is also found in Des Périers' work. Panurge's search for words, and his confusion of the means of communication with the communication he so much desires, is comparable to the philosophers' search for the tiny bits of stone in the Second Dialogue of the Cymbalum Mundi. The philosophers, also, have confused the means with the end; each one is convinced that he has found several pieces of the real philosopher's stone, the alchemist's means for transforming metals. They are so concerned with their search for more pieces, the means, and their conviction that the pieces which they have are the real ones, that they have lost sight of the end to which the stone should lead them. If the stone is allowed to represent a means of arriving at truth, then it can be said that these men have abandoned their search for truth and have become preoccupied with the means, the stone itself. In the context of the religious controversy, each "philosopher," Luther, Bucer, or Erasmus, is so convinced that he has found the right means to salvation, that he is no longer concerned with salvation itself.

Just as in the case of Panurge, the absolute answer does not exist in the form which the philosophers wish it to have. Truth, or ultimately salvation, is not to be found in the pieces of stone themselves. They offer, at best, a means of arriving at truth. In this

sense, the words of Mercury, when he asks the philosophers if they never doubt that they be searching for "la chose laquelle n'est point," become clearer.[1] He does not mean that truth does not exist; he means only that it does not exist in the absolute, recognizable form which they think it has. The pieces of stone, or religion according to Luther, Bucer, or Erasmus, are at best a means of arriving at truth, not truth itself.

Rabelais represents both tendencies in the interest in language during the Renaissance: the structural interest concerned with the instrument itself, and the functional interest concerned with its communicative powers. The present study has shown that the communication problems which he treats among his characters are not there just as examples of the Humanist's love of language. They are representative of very current problems of communication which confronted Rabelais and his contemporaries, and are deeply involved with the religious controversy and the movement of Evangelism.

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[1] Supra, pp. 69-70.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this study it was stated that Rabelais is interested in language not just for the sake of language, but that he is evaluating it as man's most important means of communication. It has been shown that the episodes which are concerned with communication can be considered as experiments with language and that they can be categorized into four communication problems: the right language for the circumstances, ambiguity and interpretation, the appropriate moment to communicate which is allied to the theme of silence, and the dilemma of Panurge. As communication problems they are not merely abstractions of the author's fictional creation; they are very real problems with which he himself and his contemporaries in the first half of the sixteenth century were confronted. As studies which consider language functionally, they are inherently linked in general to the religious controversy between Catholics and Reformists and specifically to the movement of Evangelism.

Rabelais' fascination with language and communication is representative of his period. First, he is

interested in language structurally as an object of study. From the traditional point of view, he is the typical man of the Renaissance drunken with words, like the early Humanists who studied the ancient languages and gained access to the writers of antiquity or like his contemporaries who developed a patriotism for their native French. But to explain Rabelais' interest in language as "typical Renaissance fascination with words" is to sell him short, because he is also concerned with language functionally, a point which has very often been neglected. This functional interest is also representative of the thinking of his century, because it stems not only from the Humanists' erudite approach to the study of language but also from the problems of communication created, partially at least, by the Reformation.

Rabelais, however, cannot be dismissed as simply representative of his century. He presents a singular case in more than one way. When others were writing dictionaries, grammars, or treatises about the French language on how to improve and enrich it, he was offering an example of what could be done with it as an instrument of artistic expression. He is probably the only writer of his time who presents episodes of communication problems which can be seen as test cases for

language.[1] The various incidents, where the essential problem is one of communication, which were examined in the first chapter of the present study, can be considered as experiments in language. They have much more than comic value; it would seem that the author meant them to be much more than just comic. He wanted his readers to see beyond the comedy of the Limousin student or Panurge and the frozen words to realize that language is not infallible and that it can be used deceptively and ambiguously. Among Rabelais' contemporaries, not even Des Périers, who resembles him most by his use of ambiguity as a vehicle of satire and by his concern with communication, can be said to offer studies in language which could be called test cases.

To say that Rabelais' studies in language can be considered as conscious experiments on his part is plausible, but to go so far as to call him a modern linguist would be utterly foolish. He is playing with language in order to discover and point out its qualities and weak points as a communicative instrument, to show its use and misuse, no more. In fact, it is very difficult to arrive at a definition of language according to him. From the studies which he makes in the Five Books, any attempt at definition will be more neg-

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[1]The expression "test case" is used in its very broadest sense to indicate that Rabelais is attempting to evaluate language.

ative, tell what language is not, rather than positive, tell what language is. Language is man's most important means of communication, but it can be artificial, ambiguous, deceptive, or useless, depending upon the speakers and hearers and upon the circumstances. It is above all a means of communication and can never be taken as an end in itself, as Panurge wishes to do. Rabelais' advice on language can be reduced to the negative, "Beware of words." Man cannot base his existence on words or trust solely in language; he must add action to words as Panurge ultimately discovers.

However, a definition of language according to Rabelais based entirely on what he himself says or shows about language in his work would be false by what it omits. Any attempt at definition must go beyond what he says about language and consider what he accomplishes with it, that is, the end result, the literary creation itself. At first, it might seem paradoxical that Rabelais who was so aware of the powers and pitfalls of language should be the man drunken with words who displays such a tremendous talent for their use. But therein lies his success: it is perfectly fitting that the man whose fascination with language ultimately led him to a veritable appreciation of its powers as an instrument of communication,

should use it to create a masterpiece of literature. Only a genius in the use of words--functionally as well as structurally--could create a work in which "roman, joie et pensée" are mixed and intermingled to allow multi-level interpretation and to challenge the perceptivity of the reader.

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