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Putting the ‘Haute’ Back into the ‘Haute Dame de Paris’: The Politics and Performance of Rabelais’s Radical Farce¹

In 1911 Gustave Cohen published an important article in *Revue des Études Rabelaisiennes* entitled “Rabelais et le théâtre.”² Cohen’s article centered on late medieval theater and Rabelais; specifically he focused on the theater of farce and its role in Rabelais’s work. Almost a century later, another medievalist from the University of Amsterdam, Jelle Koopmans, commented that Cohen’s article “est resté pendant longtemps, malgré sa date de publication (1911) [. . .], le dernier mot sur la question,”³ while underscoring the need for much more work on this important influence on Rabelais’s work. Rabelais’s tales of Gargantua and Pantagruel contain a surprisingly large number of references to farces, and many episodes within the *Chroniques* are structured with a farce-like framework. Rabelais was extremely familiar with the theater of farce, and this intimacy affected his work in important ways. Indeed, the theater of farce is a crucial subtext in understanding Rabelais’s literary project.

Rabelais’s use of dramatic farce offers a fascinating dynamic of cultural transferal. His books were written towards the end of a watershed era of this theatrical genre in France, from approximately 1450 to 1550. There remain over 150 extant French farces dating from this period, the best known being the *Farce de Maître Pathelin*. Rabelais alludes to *Pathelin* some two dozen times in his work, and, as Koopmans has noted, “Rabelais cite soit directement soit indirectement, textuellement et librement, des centaines de passages [des farces], voire plus, parfois directement, parfois indirectement.”⁴ It is not a coincidence that, in one of only two instances of authorial self-reference within the work, the text refers to a farce in which Rabelais took part while a

medical student at Montpellier (*Tiers livre* ch. 34).⁵ Records confirm the autobiographical reality behind this, as Rabelais, like so many students in France, participated in a theatrical group that enacted productions of farce, such as the specific play referred to in the chapter, *Celui qui espousa une femme mute*.⁶ These references point to an underlying farcical, theatrical spirit that informs Rabelais's work. Moreover, farce becomes a central structuring mechanism for many of the narrative encounters in *Gargantua* and the Pantagrueline chronicles.⁷

An overview of the way farce functions, both in its original dramatic format and, more importantly, in Rabelais's books, illustrates the radicalization of this genre. Beyond the obvious example of generic transferal, as theater is transcribed into prose, the transformation of farce takes place on two primary levels in Rabelais. First, the subject matter is altered in significant ways. The setting of farce is primarily a domestic one, with disputes between spouses and additional characters such as imbecilic servants and lascivious monks. This private, anonymous setting is replaced by the much more public, ideologically-charged settings of Rabelais's farce-like scenes. Second, the ethos of farce is inherently conservative; the humiliating reversals that characterize the genre are not posited to call social norms into question, but rather to reinstate them.⁸ Rabelais turns these comedic reversals on their head, and whereas in farce the victim is always a transgressor of the status quo, Rabelais takes aim at societal institutions in the areas of education, law, and theology, effecting humiliating *volte-faces* on characters that reflect these power structures.⁹

There is not a better example of an archetypal *trompeur* than Pantagruel's companion Panurge. From the moment he arrives in chapter nine of *Pantagruel*, he is immediately associated with Pathelin, the supreme trickster of the genre. His elaborate glossalalia constitutes an updated, humanist-inspired version of Pathelin's famous delirium scene with the merchant. Panurge then goes on to best the Englishman Thaumaste in a farcical performance before turning his attention to the *haute dame de Paris*. Among Rabelais's farce-like episodes, the attempted seduction and subsequent punishment of the Parisian lady by Panurge is in many ways one of the most troubling to modern readers of Rabelais's work, due to its seamless misogyny and blatant elements of sexual harassment. Coming to terms with the episode led to a pair of imaginative readings by Carla Freccero, who compared the Parisian

Lady to Anita Hill, and François Rigolot, who found in her a type of *figura Christi*.¹⁰

In Jean-Claude Carron's introduction to the proceedings of the conference that brought together these two surprising, divergent interpretations, he explains that, for Freccero, "The traditional eagerness to laugh and to find textual value at the expense of women is an uncomfortably familiar and misogynist reaction," and furthermore that, "Rabelais's antifeminism, like that of some modern male critics [she referred specifically to Wayne Booth's reading of this episode], is fueled by the same repressive, reactionary principles that led to the Hill/Thomas hearings."¹¹ Carron explains that Rigolot "uncovers a biblical intertext . . . and builds a scandalous, even blasphematory parallel between the three temptations of Christ and one of the misogynist episodes, made up of three successive scenes of sexual harassment in which Panurge would be Satan and the lady a Christlike figure in *Pantagruel*." Carron further notes that Rigolot is "interested in the apparent contradiction between the stated evangelical message of *caritas* in the text and the humiliation of the woman."¹² Freccero's feminist reading risks being anachronistic, and seems at least as interested in contemporary sexism as in the original text's apparent misogyny. Rigolot's introduction of this new scriptural intertext of the three temptations of Christ adds to the richness of interpretive possibilities of the Lady of Paris episode, coupled with an emphasis on this episode as an example of Renaissance "crisis of exemplarity."¹³ For example, even if the episode's intent is to punish the hypocrisy and anti-*caritas* of the Parisian lady, the method of punishment, not to mention the detached, approving attitude of Pantagruel, the messianic humanist prince, can hardly be considered charitable, thus problematizing the issue of exemplarity; the episode does not fit comfortably into a rubric of good versus evil. However, Rigolot's efforts to rehabilitate the Parisian lady are themselves problematic, as he himself recognizes; it seems clear that in the case of the Lady, the three temptations of Christ intertext makes more sense when taken ironically, as she is not presented in the text as some *figura Christi*.¹⁴

Viewing this episode as another example of Rabelais's appropriating theatrical farce into his narrative offers fresh insights into the episode, and as this article's title suggests, helps to restore the 'haute' back into the 'haute dame de Paris.'¹⁵ Freccero may be correct in ob-

serving that “Panurge’s emblematic chastising of the ‘haulte dame de Paris’ follows the pattern of comic punishment in the *Fabliaux*,”¹⁶ yet the scene more closely mirrors the format and structure of farce, the *fabliau*’s dramatic counterpart. In this encounter, Panurge is plotting and carrying out a farce that fits comfortably within the parameters and conventions of the traditional genre, including specific theatrical markers indicating to the reader that, although the text is a narrative, it is one of a dramatic representation. In a traditional farce, all activity is directed towards the final outcome, which involves a trick or deception that produces a comic reversal. The punishment is never gratuitous, but rather follows a specific ethical formula in which the character guiltiest of *démésure*, or excessiveness, is the one whose fortunes are reversed. The base and humiliating punishment of the Lady of Paris is representative of ubiquitous punishments that characterize the genre of farce. Moreover, as will be demonstrated, the debasing of the Parisian lady represents an underlying ideological critique in which Rabelais intentionally juxtaposes contrasting theatrical forms to show the triumph of evangelical humanism over haughty forms of hypocritical devotion. Panurge’s staging of the farce, after all, takes place during a religious procession, a highly theatrical performance which emphasizes social hierarchies. The Parisian Lady is portrayed as the principal “actor” in this type of ostentatious performance that is laid low by the “primitive” theatre of farce.¹⁷

The episode begins with Panurge’s infatuation with the *haute dame de Paris*. It is striking that Panurge’s original motivation for propositioning the Parisian lady is hubris. After defeating the famed English scholar Thaumaste he has become famous, and as the text says, “il devint glorieux” (*Pantagruel* 21:291), “glorieux” in this instance meaning proud or vainglorious.¹⁸ This vanity leads him to approach the Lady, who immediately repulses his crass proposal. (He says, “Ma dame, ce seroit fort utile à toute la republicque, delectable à vous, honneste à vostre lignée et à moy necessaire, que feussiez couverte de ma race” (*Pantagruel* 21:292)).¹⁹ However she outperforms him in terms of arrogance, and disdainfully asks, “A qui pensez vous parler?” (*Pantagruel* 21:292), immediately introducing the notion of class distinction. It is problematic to accept Freccero’s assertion that “it is not on the basis of class that the Lady refuses.”²⁰ Focusing on the gender differences in this episode should not lead readers to ignore the social

marker contained in the word 'haute,' which refers both to the Lady's social status (she is clearly a noble) and her disposition (she is portrayed as haughty). It is important to note that, according to the rules of farce, had the lady acted less arrogantly, Panurge, not the noblewoman, would have been punished. He is guilty from the beginning of vanity and presumption, crimes punishable and, indeed, regularly punished in farce. As is the case with Panurge, farcical characters are almost always morally ambiguous or even amoral. While a *farceur* may punish someone in one episode, the maxim governing farce, "à trompeur, trompé et demi" looms large as the trickster is invariably in jeopardy of falling victim to another trick. Farce is a locus of moral ambiguity in the sense that characters are interchangeable; rather than a hero triumphing over a villain, in farce neither the punisher nor the punished is in a position of moral superiority.²¹

In the rules that govern farce, the character most tainted with excessiveness is consistently the one punished. A distinguishing characteristic of this farcical episode is the fact that it is a woman who is being exposed. Women are nearly universally cast as the winners in traditional farce, owing to the misogynistic stereotyping of women as being crafty and deceptive. Also, in farces that focus on sexual desire, it is almost always the woman who is portrayed as being concupiscent. The Lady of Paris represents a drastic reversal from a female role in farce: she is guilty of excessiveness; she is neither cunning nor wily, nor sexually aggressive. While this episode may employ another form of gender-based stereotyping, it is important to note that it also represents a radical departure from the standard female characterizations found in the genre from which it draws its structure.

Because of the Parisian lady's class-based arrogance, she proves a more appropriate target for farce. In addition, as Panurge continues to coax her into reciprocating his feelings, she demonstrates a level of hypocrisy that makes her an even more inviting target. When the purportedly besotted Panurge asks who loves the other more, she responds, "Quant est de moy je ne vous hays point: car comme dieu le commande: je ayme tout le monde" (*Pantagruel* 21:294). Such a response further elucidates another element central to this episode—forms of religious devotion. The lady's disingenuous attempt at charity is undermined by her obvious disdain for her interlocutor. She may sound devout, but her actions reveal the hypocrisy of her position.

While she regularly attends mass and readily quotes scripture, it is evident from her description that she is far more concerned with the external trappings of her outward appearance and social position, rather than her interior disposition.

Panurge also teases out of her another condemnable attribute: avarice. He entices her with promises of various jeweled rosaries (a ploy visually emblematic of the true nature of her devotion), which “luy faisoit venir l’eau à la bouche” (*Pantagruel* 21:294–95). Once again demonstrating the hollow nature of her language she follows up this obvious sign of desire with the comment, “Non, je vous remercie: je ne veulx rien de vous” (*Pantagruel* 21:295). Despite this second seemingly Christ-like response to the devilish Panurge, the lady’s comment is highly ironic. More specifically, she is portrayed as an individual who does want something, even many things, but not “de Panurge.” She is not someone who wants to do without; rather, she restrains her desires only because of the lower social position of the one offering the goods. Combining all of these offenses—presumption, hypocrisy and cupidity—we can establish within the judicial economy of farce that the *haute dame de Paris* is a fitting target for Panurge’s farcical revenge.

Explaining how a major subtext provides a clearer, less anachronistic understanding of this episode does not, however, render it any more palatable for the modern reader. Rather than a whimsical farce-like episode, what one sees in these chapters is a classic case of sexual intimidation followed by a vulgar counter-attack when the aggressor’s advances are rejected. Such a view is in many ways ultimately correct; farce is, after all, an exceptionally misogynistic genre. Yet if Panurge is viewed not as a virile threat, but rather as a farcical figure, then his codpiece becomes a hollow prop, sexist but ultimately non-threatening. Freccero has made some incisive observations that support this view of Panurge. She refers to the passage in Rabelais’s work concerning the “hypocritiques braguettes. . . qui ne sont plenes que de vent” (*Gargantua* 8:25–26) and links it directly to Panurge’s impotence: “Panurge deploys a strategy of inexhaustible substitution for the thing itself, which seems to imply, though delicately, a lack. He approaches women with a series of substitute members.” Freccero then remarks, “[Panurge’s] jokes and acts are sexual, but designed to annoy rather than please.”²²

This characterization of Panurge relates directly to his role as a *far-*

ceur. Despite all of his sexual braggadocio, Panurge is surprisingly inept and even impotent.²³ This becomes very clear at the start of the *Tiers livre* when he replaces his hollow *braguette* with monkish apparel. Panurge's anxieties that dominate the *Tiers livre*, namely that if he marries he will be beaten, cuckolded, and robbed by his wife echo those of a specific type of farce character. A stock figure in farce is the braggart husband whose boasts are undermined by his impotence. Inevitably such characters, usually older than their young wives, suffer the very things that Panurge so dreads.²⁴

The noblewoman also bears little resemblance to female characters in farce, which are invariably of lower social station and generally demonstrate insatiable sexual appetite and a superior cunning to their male counterparts. The Lady of Paris asserts little measure of femininity according to the norms of the genre. Whereas farce is explicitly sexual, as will be shown later, the pious lady's punishment focuses not so much on her sexuality but rather on the fabric or textile symbol of her ostentation that echoes the soiled fancy clothes of the *écolier limousin* (*Pantagruel* ch. 6).

Before carrying out his farcical revenge, Panurge shares a poem he has composed for the lady. Part of the *rondeau* Panurge recites to her states:

Vous pouviez par vous sans maquerelle,
Me dire, "amy partez d'icy entour,
Pour ceste foy." (*Pantagruel* 22:296)

The essential critique that Panurge offers in his *rondeau* is that the lady refused to formulate her rejection in egalitarian terms. Rather than engaging, even punishing Panurge for his devilish pranks, she chooses instead to draw upon her superior rank and remain aloof. A fundamental ethos of farce is that of play; the lady's disdain leads her to attempt to remove herself from this play. It is her unwillingness to condescend to the lowly Panurge that sets in motion the chain of events of this farce-like episode.

Panurge's reference to "maquerelle" in the *rondeau* is enlightening as well. "Maquerelle" means "pimp," a reference to the lady's repeated attempts to call for help. It is these very cries for assistance, however, that signal the theatrical nature of this episode. Her method

of enlisting aid is rather curious, since the first time she does so, the text relates, “*elle fist semblant de se mettre à la fenestre pour appeller les voisins à la force*” and the second time “*elle commença à s’escrier, toutesfoys non trop haul*” (*Pantagruel* 21:293, 295, italics mine). These textual qualifiers underscore the intertext that frames this exchange; “*elle fist semblant*” and “*toutesfoys non trop haul*” are modifiers that make little sense except as stage directions, reminding the reader that this is a farce being performed, rather than a scene of real threat or danger. In farce, the weapon of choice is the *bâton* and not the sword, and Panurge’s phallic implement is, in the end, an empty prop. Furthermore, the fact that Panurge immediately switches from an aggressive seducer to a coward who runs away each time he is threatened by the lady illustrates the way that his character in this episode is based on a stock figure from farce, that of the cowardly lover.

Panurge’s other complaint to the lady pertains to her condescending, and ultimately, ironic discourse. While she preaches the Golden Rule, she refuses to meet Panurge on an equal footing, that of “*amy*.” Had she chosen to do so, according to the ethical rules of farce, she would have become the punisher, humiliating the *glorieux* Panurge. This class-inspired arrogance, coupled with her hypocritical pious discourse, makes her a more inviting target for a farcical reversal.

The farce that follows is meticulously orchestrated for maximum effect and is placed in a specific performance space, that of a ceremonial procession. In fact, at this critical point of the episode, where a farce is being directed by Panurge, the supreme *farceur*, two forms of theatre are brought into competition. Religious processions were in fact highly theatrical, with participants donning “*costumes*” of their most impressive finery and parading in front of an “*audience*” of spectators. In terms of performance, the humiliation of the Parisian lady *during* the procession is key; the Lady and Panurge are competing actors in very different forms of spectacle. Whereas farce originally served as a form of interlude during religious pieces of theatre such as the *moralité*, here farce invades and co-opts the space of religious performance. Competing theatrical forms in this episode serve the author’s ideological purposes, as the lowly genre of farce, appropriated as a tool for Rabelais’s humanist, evangelical ideology, reverses and humiliates the sort of ostentatious display of a highly ritualized performance which evangelicals would consider hollow devotion.

Originally Rabelais placed the event on the feast of Corpus Christi.²⁵ As François Rigolot has pointed out,

Rabelais may have felt that the allusion to the feast of Corpus Christi did not fit with the liturgical calendar he had in mind. At any rate, he later amended this line, presumably to give a clearer sense of his intentions: "Or notez que le lendemain estoit la grande feste du *sacre*" 'Now note that the next day was the great feast of the *coronation*' (1:332; my italics). In sixteenth-century usage, the substantive noun *sacre* could refer either to the Holy Sacrament or to the crowning of a king. This fully attested ambivalence suggests that Rabelais's correction allows for an allusion to the mock coronation ceremonies of both Jesus and the *dame de Paris*.²⁶

The farce that follows is indeed a type of mock coronation, but there are important differences between the mock coronation of Christ and the punishment of the lady which point to an ironic parody of the biblical intertext. While Christ has a robe and crown of thorns forced upon him, the lady chooses her own scarlet robe, her "costume," one that indeed mirrors in ironic fashion the mock robe of Christ. The Parisian lady wears "une tresbelle robbe de satin cramoyssi, et d'une cotte de veloux blanc, bien precieux" (*Pantagruel* 22:295). The key words here are "bien precieux," which directly contradicts the nature of Christ's robe and underscores the lady's pretentiousness, not to mention the pretension of the ornate, hierarchical form of the religious procession. Rather than drawing a parallel between the lady's clothing and Christ's, the reader is led to see the lady's fancy couture as an echo of the *écolier limousin*, described in similar terms as "tout jolliet" (*Pantagruel* 6:232).²⁷ The Lady's finery represents her "costume" for her role in the performance she is participating in; not only is she attacked in the episode, but perhaps more importantly, the spectacle in which she is playing a lead role is disrupted and overwhelmed by the theatre of farce.

As with the *écolier*, it is the very object symbolizing her ostentation that is attacked in the farce, as her elegant apparel becomes the locus of her humiliation when the dogs begin to soil her clothing with their urine, as well as feces in the first edition of *Pantagruel* (1532). The text is graphically explicit about how much the lady's costume is ruined by this canine free-for-all. The material symbol of her piously disguised class-consciousness is debased and becomes the focal point of her punishment. As the text makes explicit, "les chiens frays venuz la suyvoyent à la trasse, pissans par le chemin où ses robes avoyent

touché” (*Pantagruel* 22: 297, italics mine). While earlier the dogs urinated on her head (an ambiguous reference, as her head would have almost certainly been covered, perhaps another ironic link to Christ’s mock coronation), her sleeves, her crupper, and her shoes, this last reference to the woman’s apparel completes the synecdoche between the Lady’s clothing and her pretension.

The sheer exaggeration of the number of dogs, 600,014 to be exact, also paradoxically deflates the danger of the episode. A pack of dogs is threatening; several hundred thousand dogs converging on one person is comically absurd. Freccero has made the important observation that in the first edition of *Pantagruel*, the number of dogs is 600, a figure that repeats the number of dogs that chased Panurge during his escape from Turkey (see *Pantagruel* ch. 14). Freccero does this as part of a larger argument pointing out the androgynous, even feminine nature of Panurge.²⁸ She also later points to the less womanly side of the *dame de Paris*, observing, “She is a castrating bitch, a virago, a virile woman; she is not mute, she vexes the critic out of his laughter, and her presence has a scandalous effect.”²⁹ It is worth noting that, in an actual theatrical production of this farce-like episode, gender roles would indeed be ambiguous if not totally reversed, as the impotent character of Panurge would be seeking revenge on a male actor playing the Parisian lady.

Another key to recognizing the subtext of farce in this episode concerns the presence of an audience. An audience does in fact view this dramatic production, as spectators would have already gathered to watch the procession. However, as far as the text is concerned, the most important member of the audience is Pantagruel, whom Panurge seeks out so that he, too, may witness what is variously described as “le mystere” or the “spectacle” (*Pantagruel* 22:297). The use of these terms, which refer specifically to theatre, clearly highlight the theatrical, performative nature of this scene, serving further to reinforce the notion that Rabelais is constructing a farce for his readers. It is also clear from Pantagruel’s complicity that he does not view Panurge’s revenge as cruel. The humanist hero of the story, Pantagruel, is not offended, but instead describes what he sees as “fort beau et nouveau” (*Pantagruel* 22:297). As is manifest later in the *Quart livre*, it is not always the case that Pantagruel reacts positively to Panurge’s farcical ruses.³⁰

To conclude, this scene represents an example of a farce in Rabelais's work that faithfully adheres to the conventions and rules governing popular farce. Not only are the mechanisms the same, but the ethical underpinnings also resemble those of farce. A person guilty of *démésure* is punished in a way that is base and vulgar. It is the framing of this farcical episode in such a context that provides the basis for the social and religious satire Rabelais is offering. Such a critique leads us away from popular farce, which is much more conservative in its aims. Rabelais extends such mundane chiding to the level of scathing satire against the pharisaical attitudes personified in the *haute dame de Paris*. As Edwin Duval has written, the Parisian lady is one of many characters in Rabelais's work who "are systematically demoted and replaced by their popular counterparts—that is, by the mores and manners of a common, popular culture."³¹ Duval concludes,

. . . popular culture is not only the common culture of the saved but actually a means of salvation in the *Pantagruel*. By humiliating the exalted in this world it allows for the possibility of exaltation in the next. Far from being extraneous to serious meanings or incompatible with the Christian humanist design of the work, it is inextricably bound up with the radically evangelical ideology of the work and plays a crucial, integral role in it.³²

The Parisian lady presents herself publicly as an extremely pious figure, yet Panurge uncovers her innate hypocrisy. She has assumed a position of superiority that makes her incapable of following the commandment she quotes to Panurge, namely to hate or despise no one. Her self-absorption and obsessive focus on outward appearances prevent her from sincerely practicing the essence of Christianity, *caritas*. In this farcical scene, there is a social and religious critique not found in popular farces. With Panurge's reversal of the haughty lady's position, farce illustrates in Rabelaisian fashion the essence of Christ's teaching in Matthew 23:12: "And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased." Rabelais presents us with a farce in which all of the comedic devices of traditional farce are present, and yet, the framing of the farce is much more far-reaching in its objectives. Ultimately, Rabelais offers his readers both a new version of farce and a new form of humanist satire by wedding the two together.

Notes

1. I would like to thank the University of Kansas for awarding me a General Research Fund summer grant which helped in the completion of this article.

2. “Rabelais et le théâtre,” *Revue des Études Rabelaisiennes* 9 (1911): 1–72.

3. “Rabelais et l’esprit de la farce,” *Les grands jours de Rabelais en Poitou: Actes du colloque international de Poitiers* (Geneva: Droz, 2006) 299.

4. *Art. cit.*, 302.

5. The other self-reference is found in the *Quart livre*, chapter 27, which explains that Rabelais was one of those present at the death of his protector, Guillaume Du Bellay, who passed away January 9, 1543.

6. V. L. Saulnier, “Médecins de Montpellier,” *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 19 (1957): 425–79. There is no surviving version of the farce mentioned in the chapter.

7. Among the many episodes in Rabelais that resemble theatrical farce are Pantagruel’s adjudication of the dispute between Baisecul and Humevesne (*Pantagruel* ch. 10–13), the debate between Panurge and the English scholar Thaumaste (*Pantagruel* ch. 18–20), the dealings between Panurge and the merchant Dindenault (*Quart livre* ch. 5–8), and the punishment of the *chicanous* by Lord Basché (*Quart livre* ch. 13–15). In each of these, there are distinctive theatrical elements, such as stage directions and *mise-en-scène*, theatrical dialogue, and gesturing. In dramatic farce, all action revolves around the punishment of one character in a humiliating and coarse fashion, a punishment occasioned by the character’s excessive appetites or attempts to break with social conventions.

8. As Michel Rousse has observed, while farce does provide the occasional “rire utopique et libérateur . . . l’ordre établi reste tout-puissant.” “Mystères et farces à la fin du Moyen Âge,” *La scène et les tréteaux: Le théâtre de la farce au Moyen Âge* (Orléans: Paradigme, 2004) 255. Many scholars of popular culture have debated the potentially subversive nature of “popular culture” (Mikhail Bakhtin, Peter Burke, Natalie Zemon Davis, etc.); as far as farce is concerned, Michel Rousse has offered a compelling summation: “[la farce] ne colporte pas une conscience politique des problèmes sociaux en cause. La farce ne se veut qu’exceptionnellement critique à l’égard des institutions, et l’expression d’une opposition claire au système social en vigueur est pratiquement absente.” *Op. cit.*, 260.

9. The preceding introduction on the importance of farce in Rabelais’s books can be found in my article which explores another specific instance of the appropriation of farce, “Rabelais’ Radical Farce: A Comparative Analysis of the *Ecolier Limousin* Episode and the *Farce de Maître Mimin Etudiant*,” forthcoming in *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme* (Fall 2005).

10. Carla Freccero, “Damning Haughty Dames: Panurge and the *Haulte Dame de Paris* (*Pantagruel*, 14),” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 15 (1985): 57–67. François Rigolot, “Rabelais, Misogyny, and Christian Charity: Biblical Intertextuality and the Renaissance Crisis of Exemplarity,” *PMLA* 109 (1994): 225–37.

11. *François Rabelais: Critical Assessments* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1995) xvi–xvii.

12. *Op. cit.*, xvii.

13. *Art. cit.*, 226, 234.

14. While it is easy to see Panurge as a devil-like character in this encounter, it does not necessarily follow that the Parisian lady is portrayed as a Christ-like figure. As Rigolot himself

acknowledges, his reconstruction of the Lady's behavior as an example of *imitatio Christi* is "unexpected and problematic" (*Art. cit.*, 230). He also highlights the "ambivalent flavor of the episode" (*Art. cit.* 232), by such acknowledgements as, "The Parisian lady seems to be cast as an allegory of the suffering Christ, yet her character also carries certain marks of ambivalence" and "The Parisian lady, although patterned after Christ, departs radically from her holy model" (*Art. cit.* 234).

15. 'Haute,' which can be defined as 'high' or 'haughty' is a key to understanding the intended meaning of the episode. Just as in traditional farce, the character punished in this farce-like episode is punished for her *démesure*, or excessive, haughty behavior. Her punishment has little to do with her refusal of Panurge's ridiculous advances. As Barbara C. Bowen has made clear, "[Panurge] deliberately uses an approach which he knows cannot succeed, because his real objective is a pretext for the revenge that will follow the lady's refusal." "Rabelais's Panurge as *homo rhetoricus*," *In laudem Caroli: Renaissance and Reformation Studies for Charles G. Nauert*, ed. James V. Mehl, *Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies* 49 (1998): 133.

16. *Art. cit.*, 61.

17. This is not the only instance of Rabelais ridiculing religious processions in his work. For example, there is the religious procession preceding Pantagruel's birth that is organized in hopes of bringing rain to the drought-ridden country; the "miraculous" moisture which results is deceptive: "ilz y furent trompés, car la procession finie alors que chascun vouloit recueillir de ceste rosée et en boire à plein godet, trouverent que ce n'estoit que saulmure pire et plus sale que n'estoit l'eau de la mer" (*Pantagruel* 2:224). Then there is the case of the inept, futile procession organized by the monks of Seuillé who are being attacked by Picrochole's army (*Gargantua* 27). Finally, the most satirical attack against processions is the example of the Papimanes; when the ultra-Catholic Papimanes come to greet Pantagruel and his companions, they arrive "comme en procession" (*QL* 48:650). While they do not organize a procession during Pantagruel's visit, they parade around the papal Decretals as if they are relics. As with the *haute dame de Paris*, the Papimanes' wealth is emphasized, contrasted with the dismal poverty of their enemies the Papefigues. All quotes from Rabelais's work are taken from Mireille Huchon's edition (Paris: Gallimard, 1994). Following the work, both chapter and page number are given.

18. For a detailed analysis of Panurge's 'glorieux' state, see Gérard Defaux, *Le Curieux, le glorieux et la sagesse du monde dans la première moitié du XVIe siècle* (Lexington: French Forum, 1982).

19. As Bowen has demonstrated, Panurge's "pick up" line represents a parody of "the four topics essential to any set rhetorical theme: *utile, iucundum, honestum, and necessarium*" (*Art. cit.*, 129).

20. *Art. cit.*, 65.

21. Drawing attention to the important intertext of farce with its amoral characters helps to explain what Rigolot correctly identifies as the "ambivalent flavor of the episode" (*Art. cit.* 232).

22. *Art. cit.*, 63.

23. This is a common function of the braggart male in the theatre of farce. Often a male pursuing a married female acts with great bravado until potential danger arises, at which point he becomes utterly pusillanimous.

24. Panurge's advanced age is mentioned specifically by Frère Jean in the *Tiers livre*: "Desjà voy je ton poil grisonner en teste. Ta barbe, par les distinctions du gris, du blanc, du tanné et du noir, me semble une Mappemonde" (28:438). A relevant example of a farce that illustrates these

fears is *Un mari jaloux*, where a husband, fearing his wife is making him a cuckold, disguises himself as a priest (his wife's lover), but who is then recognized and beaten by his servant and his wife. See André Tissier, *Recueil de farces (1450–1550)*, vol. 9 (Geneva: Droz, 1995) 75–126.

25. Although, as Rigolot indicates, Rabelais changed the feast day, the liturgy of Corpus Christi offers another interesting parallel between the religious procession and the humiliating farce. As my colleague Paul Scott has pointed out, there is a rather odd line in the liturgy of Corpus Christi which refers to dogs: “Vere panis filiorum, / Non mittendus canibus.” (“Yea, the Bread to children given / That to dogs must not be thrown.”) (verse 12, lines 3–4) In this episode, while the host is spared, the Lady, who is a metonymy of empty rituals condemned by Erasmian humanists such as Rabelais, is thrown to the dogs.

26. *Art. cit.*, 231.

27. In discussing possible biblical parallels in this episode with my colleague Paul Scott, he suggested the story of Jezebel. The most obvious connection between the two women is that they are both, in the end, thrown to the dogs, albeit in a much more violent fashion in the biblical story of Jezebel. The scriptural passage referring to Jezebel's demise is instructive:

And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her face, and tired [i.e. adorned] her head, and looked out at a window. And as Jehu entered in at the gate, she said, Have you come in peace, Zimri, who slew his master? And he lifted up his face to the window, and said, Who is on my side? who? And there looked out to him two or three eunuchs. And he said, Throw her down. So they threw her down; and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses: and he trode her under foot. (2 Kings 9:30–33)

Despite the contrast in tone between the morbidity of Jezebel's death and the farcical experience of the Parisian lady, there are other connections between the two stories. Jezebel's preparation for the arrival of Jehu mirrors that of the pious lady's preparation for the procession. The text makes clear the reason why the *haute dame* dresses as she does in her “beaulx acoustremens” (*Pantagruel* 22:297). The meaning of Jezebel painting her face is, however, somewhat unclear; while it could mean that she is portrayed as a prostitute, at this point in the story Jezebel is an old woman and her sarcastic remark to Jehu further belies the notion that she was somehow preparing to seduce him. Despite such sayings as “a painted Jezebel” and “Jezebel the harlot,” there is little mention of Jezebel's purported concupiscence in the biblical text.

28. *Art. cit.*, 64–66.

29. *Art. cit.*, 80.

30. Rabelais conspicuously removes Pantagruel as an observer during Panurge's tragic farce in which he kills the merchant Dindenault and Frère Jean condemns Panurge with his “Matiere de breviaire,” quoting from Romans 12:19, “Mihi uindictam” (“Vengeance is mine”) (*Quart livre* 8:556). In the *Quart livre*, in both the Dindenault episode and the Lord Basché episode, with its use of the term “farce tragique,” Rabelais seems to be reconsidering his acceptance of the violent nature of farce.

31. *The Design of Rabelais's Pantagruel* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1991) 139.

32. *Op. cit.*, 140–41.