

RABELAIS, PANTAGRUELION & UTOPIA

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ABSTRACT

STEWART ARTHUR PELTO: Rabelais, Pantagruéliion & Utopia.
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This thesis addresses the problems of intoxication and utopia in *Gargantua* and *Le Tiers Livre*, maintaining that progress towards a utopian future is made through the positive consequences of collective intoxication. Through a close examination of relevant episodes leading up to the foundation of the abbey of Thélème, this thesis argues that Rabelais's utopia is significantly dependent on the pacifying effects of the *symposion*. Next, a survey of sources contemporary to Rabelais demonstrates his knowledge of both cannabis intoxication and the plant's widespread use and exchange throughout the Mediterranean. Finally, an analysis of enigmatic imagery in the Pantagruéliion episode illustrates Rabelais's attempt to improve diplomatic relations with his neighbors in the Middle East and India through an increase in maritime exploration, mercantile exchange, and collective intoxication.

I dedicate this thesis to ibn Abu ibn Ajoo al-Moo-hamm-ed al Moo-ham-&-eggs al-ibn Bakr Zakariya al-Hassassan. He is the Poonocrates to my Garganjua.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| I. Introduction: le Pantagruélion..... | 1 |
| II. Chapter I: Utopian Intoxication in <i>Gargantua</i> | 7 |
| Said Feast..... | 8 |
| The Prologue..... | 13 |
| Frere Jan & the Vineyard..... | 16 |
| Gargantua’s Education..... | 20 |
| Transitional Remarks..... | 25 |
| III. Chapter II: Cannabis in the Sixteenth Century..... | 26 |
| Smoke Cannabis..... | 27 |
| Eat Cannabis..... | 29 |
| Rub Cannabis on the Skin..... | 32 |
| Buy, Sell, & Import Cannabis..... | 36 |
| Rabelais’s Comprehensive Approach to Cannabis..... | 39 |
| IV. Chapter III: The General Attitude Towards Pantagruélion..... | 41 |
| Their Thematic Context..... | 43 |
| From Thélème to Thalamège: Typical..... | 44 |
| Appeals Mercantile, Diplomatic, Spiritual, & Intoxicating..... | 47 |
| Cannabis in the Middle East & India..... | 52 |
| Smoking Surreptitiously through Steganography..... | 53 |
| Chapter XLIX..... | 54 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Chapter L..... | 55 |
| Chapter LI..... | 56 |
| Terrestrial & Celestial Extrapolation of Cannabis Intoxication..... | 60 |
| Chapter LII..... | 63 |
| To Conclude..... | 68 |
| V. Works Cited..... | 71 |

Introduction: le Pantagruélion.

At the end of *Le Tiers Livre*, a Panurge indecisive about marriage finally proposes a voyage to the Divine Bottle. He hopes that this Divine Bottle, which is a clear reference to the theme of intoxication, will provide the answer to his question: “Me doibs je marier, ou non?” (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 445). It lies at the end of a long and arduous journey requiring the aid of the enormous maritime ships being built during the Renaissance for the purposes of planetary exploration. Chapter XLIX features both Pantagruel’s fleet of ships and the provisions being placed onboard, amongst which is a healthy amount of Pantagruélion. The fleet’s maiden ship is called the Thalamège, an orthographical extension of the utopian abbey of Thélème, and it stocks this enigmatic herb both raw and cooked into confections¹:

Là arrivez, Pantagruel dressa equippage de navires, à nombre de celles que Ajax de Salamine avoit jadis menées en convoy des Gregoys à Troie. Nauchiers, pilotz, hespaliers, truschemens, artisans, gens de guerre, vivres, artillerie, munitions, robbes, deniers, et aultres hardes, print et chargea, comme estoit besoing pour long et hazardeux voyage. Entre aultres choses je veids qu’il feist charger grande foison de son herbe Pantagruelion, tant verde et crude, que conficte et præparée. (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 500-1)

This development in the novel raises questions about the nature of Pantagruélion and whether its identity corresponds concretely to a known plant.

Thankfully, Abel Lefranc identifies Pantagruélion in his edition of *Le Tiers Livre* (1931). His footnote for the first use of the word reads, “C’est le chanvre (*Cannabis sativa* L.) que R. va décrire sous le nom de *Pantagruélion*” (Rabelais, *Œuvres*, 338, his italics). To

¹ Mireille Huchon connects the abbey and its nautical counterpart: “La mention des douze navires d’Ajax du *Tiers Livre* est ici supprimée, mais, en 1548, Rabelais a retenu du héros le nom de son père Télamon, puisqu’il appelle alors la nef principale *Telamone*... témoignant d’un rapprochement voulu avec *Theleme*” (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 1494).

support his claim, Lefranc proves in his Introduction that Rabelais's father grew cannabis in the Tourangeau region.² In his footnotes to chapters XLIX and L, he also carefully demonstrates how the botanical description of Pantagruéliion corresponds in great detail to cannabis (Rabelais, *Œuvres*, 338-57). Although more recent scholars such as V. L. Saulnier and François Rigolot define Pantagruéliion as some nebulous blend of cannabis, flax, laurel, and even the mineral asbestos, I find Abel Lefranc's admirable observations quite convincing.³

In fact, Lefranc does a remarkable job accumulating information about this episode. Nevertheless, the problem for Lefranc is that he needs to synthesize the amazing material he has collected and subsequently draw some conclusions, as Mikhail Bakhtin points out in *Rabelais and His World* (130). Lefranc makes no mention of the fact that cannabis, while providing the shipbuilding industry with a sturdy fiber for the production of sails and ropes, also provides the human body with a dose of Δ^9 -tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). While it may be plausible to suggest that Lefranc is simply unaware of the intoxicating properties of cannabis, the fact remains that this new information allows for a more complete analysis of the theme of intoxication in Rabelais.

Presently, this theme is understood largely in the context of the *symposion*. In his book, Bakhtin develops this context further by demonstrating how the free and frank atmosphere created among men due to collective intoxication by wine leads to collective

² Lefranc states, "Nous avons eu déjà l'occasion de faire remarquer que le père de Rabelais avait possédé des 'chenevreaux' et que le pays tourangeau a été souvent cité comme l'une des régions les plus favorables à cette plante textile" (C). He emphasizes the textile aspects of cannabis. The occasion Lefranc speaks of is a brief article he published in tome III of the 1905 *Revue des Études Rabelaisiennes* entitled "'Pantagruéliion' et 'chenevreaux'" (402-4).

³ I am thinking specifically of V. L. Saulnier's 1956 article appearing in tome I of *Études Rabelaisiennes*, "L'Énigme du Pantagruéliion ou: du *Tiers* au *Quart Livre*" (48-72). For Rigolot, I am referring to his 1989 article appearing in volume 42 of *Renaissance Quarterly*, "Rabelais's Laurel for Glory: A Further Study of the 'Pantagruéliion'" (60-77).

efforts towards a utopian future. While this wine-based approach to Rabelais is correct, it is also incomplete. As such, my contribution to Rabelais scholarship is to re-examine the introduction of cannabis at the end of *Le Tiers Livre*. My purpose is to augment Bakhtin's concept of utopia through intoxication as established by the carnivalesque *symposion* by extending his idea to include cannabis in both its functions as a maritime textile and as the featured intoxicant in the *synthumion*.⁴ In order to enlarge the themes of intoxication and utopia to include this episode on cannabis, it is necessary to demonstrate not only Rabelais's knowledge of cannabis intoxication, but also how the progress made in sixteenth-century maritime technology profoundly influenced his concept of utopia and transformed it from the abbey of Thélème in his second book into the ships of the "arcenac de Thalasse" in the third.

At this point, it will be useful to define exactly what I mean by the terms "utopia," "carnavalesque *symposion*," and "*synthumion*." I understand "utopia" to be a fictional illustration of an ideal mode of existence that is in purposeful contrast to its society of origin. Utopia exists elsewhere, either in space or in time, and it can only be reached through a long journey. As the search for paradise on Earth became increasingly more fruitless, Renaissance thinkers began to project their visions of utopia out onto the open seas, which were unexplored and could thereby preserve their mystery and adventure. With this definition, I follow Jean Servier's work in *Histoire de l'Utopie*, where he demonstrates how the humanist works of Thomas More and Rabelais drew heavily from utopian concepts put

⁴ This is a term coined specifically for the purposes of this paper, and it is designed to be a nonstandard Greek rendition of "smoking together." In his *Histories*, Herodotus describes the Scythian custom of becoming collectively intoxicated by the inhalation of cannabis smoke (259). Given the treatment of cannabis in a text from antiquity, its group use deserves to have a classical epithet such as the one that wine enjoys under the term *symposion*. A possible candidate for this would be *atmidophiloï*, which means "brothers in inhaling." This is both difficult to remember and tricky to pronounce, and it bears no resemblance to its cousins the *symposion* and the *syndeipnon* (collective ingestion of food). As such, the sonoral resonance of the *synthumion* makes it a better candidate to designate collective cannabis intoxication.

forth by Plato and St. Augustine until they became radically transformed by advances in maritime technology and the discovery of the New World.⁵

Furthermore, I divide this understanding of utopia as a dynamic historical phenomenon into two classes that both begin in the present moment: the “traditional” utopia rules on the strength of a nobler past; the “critical” utopia envisions futures that alienate the status quo. On this point, I follow Michael Gardiner’s article, “Bakhtin’s Carnival: Utopia as Critique” (1993), which contextualizes its argument through the theories of Zygmunt Bauman, Tom Moylan, Fredric Jameson, and Paul Ricœur (22-30). According to Gardiner, a “traditional” utopia bemoans the degenerative state of the present to further consolidate the legitimacy of the authority it receives from an idealized past; it is a tool manipulated by the ruling elite to perpetuate their dominance (24). Standing in contrast to this device for oppression is the “critical” utopia, which depicts the present from an imagined future, thereby transforming the former into a distant and unrecognizable past (29). In this way, it allows humans to address the triviality of the dominant authority by portraying it under an odd and unnatural light (29).

I make this distinction to accurately analyze the abbey of Thélème and extend its message correctly into the Thalamège. In his sizeable work “Les Langages de Rabelais” (1972), François Rigolot works to demonstrate how the apparently joyous content of these seven concluding chapters are betrayed by a monotonous and negative style of writing (77-98). Bakhtin puts forth a similar argument in his book by pointing out the episode’s lack of food, wine, and banquet imagery (*Rabelais*, 138-9, 280). While they both understand the

⁵ In a chapter entitled “L’utopie et la conquête du Nouveau Monde,” Servier explains, “En effet, un autre élément mérite d’être signalé dans la genèse de la pensée utopique et dans l’*Utopia* de Thomas More: l’impact de l’aventure maritime de l’Occident et la découverte du Nouveau Monde” (135).

abbey to be a “traditional” utopia that enshrines and preserves the aristocratic court, I argue that the abbey is a “critical” utopia founded on the principles of the carnivalesque *symposion*.

I understand the carnivalesque *symposion* largely by how it differs from the Platonic one. While both these bouts of wine intoxication create an atmosphere of congeniality and cooperation among their participants, the Platonic *symposion* is normally restricted to only a handful of guests. While this is always a positive phenomenon, it cannot reach the levels of hyperbolic optimism typical of Rabelais. To this end, the carnivalesque *symposion* can swallow entire villages and cities on those feast days when man was granted the freedom to indulge excessively in food, drink, and sex:

The feast was a temporary suspension of the entire official system with all its prohibitions and hierarchic barriers. For a short time life came out of its usual, legalized and consecrated furrows and entered the sphere of utopian freedom. The very brevity of this freedom increased its fantastic nature and utopian radicalism, born in the festive atmosphere of images. (Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 89)

For Bakhtin, the “traditional” utopia of the dominant authority cedes momentarily to the “critical” utopia of the masses. Extending from this point, I argue that Rabelais takes the temporary “critical” utopian atmosphere of the carnivalesque *symposion* and makes it permanent in the carnivalesque freedoms enjoyed at Thélème.

Rabelais then globalizes these freedoms by transforming the utopian *symposion* into the *synthumion*, which uses cannabis instead of wine. Although his wish is to take the *synthumion* all over Earth and eventually out into space, Rabelais directs this collective intoxication specifically to the Middle East and to India. In his concluding poem, Rabelais makes mercantile, diplomatic, spiritual, and intoxicating appeals to them that are indicative of his humanist penchants. Interestingly enough, the societal and educational influences that can be attributed to Rabelais inform his multifaceted approach to cannabis.

In the four enigmatic chapters that provide a context for this benevolent poem, Rabelais weaves an illicit thread of intoxication through the fabric of his praise for its industrial applications. Even as he plainly raises his appreciation for canvas sails to a utopian level, Rabelais discreetly instructs his fellow citizens in the science of cannabis: its botanical identification, how to ignite the flowers, a likely side effect, and above all the wine-like nature of the intoxication. He surreptitiously spreads his message of cannabis intoxication through the art of steganography, extending the intoxicating utopia of Thélème to all those who will take a cannabis intoxication trip on the Thalamège.⁶

⁶ I borrow the term “steganography” from Mireille Huchon, who uses it to designate the process of burying a hidden meaning under the surface level of the text (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 1042).

Chapter I: Utopian Intoxication in *Gargantua*.

The episodes of Thélème and Pantagruélion are both developed at the ends of their respective novels. As such, the latter may be seen as an echo of the former's ideality. Nonetheless, there is in Rabelais scholarship a fundamental misunderstanding of the theme of utopia – it has not been properly linked to the theme of intoxication. Rigolot deems the abbey a “traditional” utopia populated by the upper crust of society:

En fait, l'épisode tout entier semble bâti sur une double postulation contradictoire. Nous y relevons en effet:
– d'une part, une peinture idéalisée, une sorte de projection allégorique du bonheur pour aristocrates;
– d'autre part, un style monocorde et fané qui rend toute promesse de bonheur illusoire. (*Langages*, 78)

Here, he interprets the clash of aristocratic bliss against a monotonous tone as evidence of Rabelais's inclination to chastise the ruling class.

Even at an architectural level, the abbey of Thélème demonstrates its function as a sterile refuge of the elite aristocracy. Its geometrical regularity is both painfully boring and plainly rendered (Rigolot, *Langages*, 83). Nevertheless, Jean Servier affirms that there is harmony and hope to be found in mathematical consistency: “L'abbaye sans murailles s'inscrit dans un hexagone dont les angles sont marqués de six tours aux noms symboliques; elle semble plaquer sur le sol le signe de l'hexagramme, du monde régénéré et de la réintégration de l'homme dans un ordre nouveau” (117). Rather than pointing at the style of the episode, he points to the history of utopia, and especially to Hippodamos of Milet's conviction that structural congruity mimics celestial harmony (28-9). Consequently, Thélème does not indicate Rabelais's distaste for the aristocratic establishment; rather, it

speaks to his aspiration to welcome and educate all young men and women of the Renaissance.

Bakhtin also acknowledges that this utopian episode is rendered in a style alien to Rabelais; for him, the abbey of Thélème is an aristocratic and “traditional” utopia whose purpose is to parody court life and its stifling boredom (*Rabelais*, 138-9). However, instead of focusing on its architectural uniformity, Bakhtin is more concerned with the curious absence of that tremendous carnivalesque spirit that normally permeates the author’s writing: “Our attention is drawn to the fact that banquet imagery is almost entirely absent from the Abbey of Thélème episode” (280). While I applaud the fact that Bakhtin addresses the theme of intoxication, I must say this statement needs major correction. The *syndeipnon* and the *symposion* play a fundamental role in the creation and sustainability of Rabelais’s utopia; in fact, plans to build this abbey are developed completely within the context of a feast that concludes the Picrocholine war.

Said Feast.

This war begins in chapter XXV when bakers from Lerné refuse to sell their bread to some shepherds who are protecting Grandgousier’s grapes (*Rabelais, Œuvres complètes*, 73-5). Just as banquet imagery of bread and wine is at the origin of this carnivalesque war, so too is it present at its end. After Picrochole himself has been overwhelmed in chapter XLIX, his army surrenders (*Rabelais, Œuvres complètes*, 131). Instead of punishing his enemies, Gargantua gives freely of his own wealth to feed those present: “Puis les feist refrascher chascun par sa bande et commanda es thesauriers que ce repas leur feust defrayé et payé, et que l’on ne feist outrage quelconques en la ville, veu qu’elle estoit sienne, et après leur repas ilz comparussent en la place davant le chasteau, et là seroient payez pour six mois”

(Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 132). At this carnivalesque feast, the combatants no longer fight and kill each other, but instead pass the salt, chink glasses together, and down the fruity alcohol held therein. The particularly positive effects of collective intoxication begin to assuage the nasty hostility between the opposing forces.

Gargantua takes the opportunity afforded him by this peaceful banquet to smooth relations even further. He explains to all the men that it was against his will to participate in this war: “Je regrette de tout mon cuer que n’est icy Picrochole. Car je luy eusse donné à entendre que sans mon vouloir, sans espoir de accroistre ny mon bien, ny mon nom, estoit faicte ceste guerre” (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 135). Here, the giant echoes the humanist precepts of Thomas More as seen in his work *Utopia*:

I also remind the French King that even if he does start all these wars and create chaos in all these different countries, he’s still quite liable to find in the end that he has ruined himself and destroyed his people for nothing. I therefore advise him to concentrate on the kingdom that his ancestors handed down to him, and make it as beautiful and as prosperous as he can, to love his own subjects and deserve their love, to live among them and govern them kindly, and to give up all ideas of territorial expansion, because he has got more than enough to deal with already. (38)

More makes it very clear that aggressive wars are unacceptable. As such, Gargantua focuses not on the accumulation of capital and territory at his opponents’ expense, but on the steady amelioration of their relationship through the agency of the *symposion*.

Indeed, the Erasmian conceptualization of the *symposion* is an appropriate solution to the belligerence that concerns Thomas More. In his work *The Praise of Folly*, Folly depicts the act of drinking together as a purely positive phenomenon designed for the health and well-being of man:

Of course, those customary amusements at parties – such as choosing a master of the revels, playing dice, drinking each other’s health, *passing the bottle around the table*, having everybody (one after the other) sing a song, dancing around and cutting up – all these pastimes were hardly invented by the seven sages of Greece but rather were thought up by us for the well-being of the human race. (30, translator’s italics)

The images of the *symposion* that Folly uses here are completely incompatible with war: games, drinking, singing, and dancing. Its harmonious and communal nature is an ideal tool to use when resolving conflicts peacefully. Therefore, when Gargantua is confronted by Picrochole's greedy and aggressive war, he reluctantly responds as defensively as possible and then proposes the camaraderie and joviality of the *symposion* as a solution.

Grandgousier does the same when he learns of the war's conclusion. Upon the return of the victors in chapter LI, he throws a carnivalesque feast to celebrate: "À la veue et venue d'iceulx le bon homme feut tant joyeux, que possible ne seroit le descripre. Adonc leurs feist un festin le plus magnifique, le plus abundant et plus delitieux, que feust veu depuis le temps du roy Assuere" (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 136). Again, it is important to note here how the *symposion* is portrayed. Standing in complete opposition to war, it is the happy continuation of a successful humanist response to greed and aggression. While war is waged by those who wish to take, peace is waged by those who wish to give.

Grandgousier wages peace. Exactly as Gargantua distributes food, wine, and riches to the recently vanquished during a village-wide carnivalesque *symposion*, so too does Grandgousier give freely of his wealth in celebration. The cups, glasses, and drinking vessels he awards the major members of Gargantua's retinue place an emphasis on the theme of intoxication:

À l'issue de table il distribua à chascun d'iceulx tout le parement de son buffet qui estoit au poys de dishuyt cent mille quatorze bezans d'or: en grands vases d'antique, grands poutz, grans bassins, grands tasses, couppez, potetz, candelabres, calathes, nacelles, violiers, drageouirs, et aultre telle vaisselle toute d'or massif, outre la pierrerie, esmail et ouvraige, qui par estime de tous excedoit en pris la matiere d'iceulx. (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 136-7)

Grandgousier then gives land and castles to Ponocrates, Gymnaste, and Eudemon, as well as a number of other men present (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 137). When chapter LII opens, the only character still awaiting his gifts is Frere Jan (137). Drinking at the feast table,

Gargantua offers him his choice of abbey, but Frere Jan refuses and asks instead to found his very own (137). As such, Thélème is born within the context of these war-ending *symposia*.

In his work *Rabelais: a Study in Comic Courage* (1970), Thomas M. Greene states that the abbey “stands clearly as an answer to the violence and the stupidity of Picrocholine aggression” (48). To Greene’s argument I will simply add the fact that this abbey does so through the peaceful consequences of collective intoxication. Gargantua gives a *symposion* to reintegrate the vanquished; Grandgousier gives a *symposion* to applaud the victors; the abbey of Thélème holds a perpetual *symposion* for the benefit of all the men and women of the Renaissance.

The abbey’s perpetual *symposion* is addressed in chapter LVII, entitled “Comment estoient reiglez les Thelemites à leur maniere de vivre” (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 148). In it, the narrator explains that the Thelemites are completely autonomous as individuals. When it comes to their beds and tables, nobody is in charge save themselves:

Toute leur vie estoit employée non par loix, statuz ou reigles, mais selon leur vouloir et franc arbitre. Se levoient du lict quand bon leur sembloit: beuvoient, mangeoient, travailloient, dormoient quand le desir leur venoit. Nul ne les esveilleoit, nul ne les parforceoit ny à boyre, ny à manger, ny à faire chose aultre quelconques. Ainsi l’avoit estably Gargantua. En leur reigle n’estoit que ceste clause. *Fay ce que voudras*.

Parce que gens liberes, bien nez, bien instructz, conversans en compaignies honnestes ont par nature un instinct, et aguillon, qui tousjours les poulse à faitcz vertueux, et retire de vice, lequel ilz nommoient honneur. Iceulx quand par vile subjection et contraincte sont deprimez et asserviz, detournent la noble affection par laquelle à vertuz franchement tendoient, à deposer et enfraindre ce joug de servitude. Car nous entreprenons tousjours choses defendues et convoitons ce que nous est denié.

Par ceste liberté entrerent en louable emulation de faire tous ce que à un seul voyoient plaire.

Si quelq’un ou quelcune disoit ‘beuvons,’ tous buvoient. (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 148-9)

The fact that the Thelemites have such freedom to decide the course of their own lives is due to a combination of ingredients: they are free, they are raised well, they are educated well, and they dialogue with honest company. This responsible autonomy gives them a strong moral compass that steers them to virtue instead of vice. As a result, the Thelemites live in such harmony that they begin to develop a communal will.

They emulate one another, and they all do in unison what they see pleases one of their members. The very first example of this is the act of drinking. If a monk or a nun says, “Let’s drink,” then all drink. It is an abbey-wide *symposion* that reproduces the village-wide carnivalesque *symposion*. This collective intoxication is a major contributor to the conversations “en compaignies honnestes” mentioned by the narrator, as *symposia* allow for fearless and free truth to be exchanged between its members. This much is evidenced by the prologue to *Gargantua*. *Symposia* are also an integral part of the Thelemites’ education and religion, as developed in the episodes of Gargantua’s time as a student and Frere Jan’s defense of his abbey’s vineyard. I should like to strengthen my analysis of Thélème as a “critical” utopia by addressing these preceding episodes in detail.

However, before I continue, I would like to re-address Bakhtin’s assessment of banquet imagery in this episode. It is true that the seven concluding chapters dealing specifically with the abbey of Thélème cover a wide range of subjects: architecture, clothing, prophecies, and inscriptions, to name a few. As such, the role of banquet imagery is somewhat reduced in order to afford them space. Nevertheless, not only is banquet imagery clearly present in the architecture of Thélème and in the structure of the Thelemites’ lives, but it is also the principal ingredient in their genesis. Bakhtin could easily revise his perspective on Rabelais’s utopia if he could pay more attention to the episodes that precede it. They demonstrate both the utopian function of the *symposion* and the spirit of the carnivalesque that dominates in the chapters leading up to the establishment of the abbey. Thélème is not a “traditional” utopia set apart from the rest of *Gargantua*; it is a “critical” utopia that crowns the action in the novel.

The Prologue.

To establish its particular genre of rapport between himself and his readers, the narrator situates the novel within the context of the Platonic *symposion*. He opens with a dedication specifically to those men who drink and then follows it quickly with a discussion of this classical work: “Beuveurs tresillustres, et vous Verolez tresprecieux (car à vous non à aultres sont dediez mes escriptz) Alcibiades ou dialogue de Platon intitulé, *Le bancquet*, louant son precepteur Socrates, sans controverse prince des philosophes: entre aultres parolles le dict estre semblable es Silenes” (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 5). Through this opening allusion, Rabelais valorizes collective intoxication and the truths it permits; as such, the beginning of this novel is intimately linked to the theme of intoxication and is ultimately linked to the “critical” utopian atmosphere of congeniality, cooperation, and truth that the *symposion* creates.

In her work *The Wine and the Will: Rabelais’s Bacchic Christianity*, Florence Weinberg characterizes the very illustrious drinkers addressed by Rabelais to be intelligent men seeking true wisdom behind the guise of folly:

But the illustrious boozier is much more than an ailing sinner: he is a seeker, thirsty for knowledge. *Beuveur* is equated with *philosophe* by Pantagruel who, astonished at Panurge’s apparent wisdom, exclaims: “Since the last rains you have become a great guzzler – I should say philosopher” (TL.viii; my trans.). The equation guzzler = philosopher (sic) is linked to Plato’s *Symposium*, where all the philosophers present were hearty boozers. ... The merrymakers at the symposium form just such a society of wisdom seekers, imbibing knowledge in frivolous disguise. Plato furnishes an archetypal example of *serio ludere* in suggesting the equivalence between merriment and wisdom. (28)

For Weinberg, the *symposion* functions as a period of trivial collective intoxication that is worthy of espousing serious truth. By this same line of logic, the Thelemites may be seen to become more and more “bien instruitz” every time they raise a glass in harmonious unison. Through drinking together, they “imbibe knowledge in frivolous disguise.”

The narrator desires the same for his readers, which he makes clear by ending his Prologue with an invitation to drink: “Or esbaudissez vous mes amours, et guayement lisez le reste tout à l’aise du corps, et au profit des reins. Mais escoutez vietz d’azes, que le maulubec vous trousque: vous soubviene de boyre à my pour la pareille: et je vous plegeray tout ares metys” (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 8). Rigolot recognizes this appeal for a combined effort in an article entitled “‘Service Divin, Service du Vin’: L’Équivoque Dionysiaque” (1997): “Bien plus, ce bambocheur de conteur entend embrigader son lecteur fictif pour le faire participer, le verre à la main, au banquet de la lecture pantagruélique” (19). I follow his depiction of the inclusive function of the *symposion* in this prologue: both intoxication and action are necessary to truly participate alongside the narrator. Indeed, Rabelais’s attempts to include the reader indicate his utopian approach to literature itself; through his novels, Rabelais creates a community that can effect change through unified action.

The narrator is insistent upon the active participation of the reader not because he simply wants him to get really drunk, but because intoxication is intricately interlaced with knowledge and truth. Like Weinberg, Bakhtin connects the intoxication provided by the *symposion* with the knowledge men glean therefrom:

He was convinced that free and frank truth can be said only in the atmosphere of the banquet, only in table talk. Outside all considerations of prudence, such an atmosphere and such a tone corresponded to the very essence of truth as Rabelais understood it: a truth inwardly free, gay, and materialistic. ... In the eyes of Rabelais seriousness was either the tone of that receding truth and doomed authority, or the tone of feeble men intimidated and filled with terror. The grotesque *symposion*, the carnivalesque, popular-festive or antique ‘table talks’ provided him with the laughing tone, the vocabulary, the entire system of images which expressed his own conception of truth. (*Rabelais*, 285)

“Table talks” are so important to the narrator that he confesses he has composed the entire novel while at the table. He places emphasis on the relationship between knowledge, eating, and drinking by considering mealtime as an ideal opportunity to discuss intellectual subjects:

“Car à la composition de ce livre seigneurial, je ne perdiz ne employay oncques plus ny aultre temps, que celluy qui estoit estably à prendre ma refection corporelle: sçavoir est, beuvant et mangeant. Aussi est ce la juste heure, d’escrire ces haultes matieres et sciences profondes” (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 7).

Rabelais’s “own conception of truth” begets productive changes in man and ultimately in his society. The peculiar thought processes provoked in him while intoxicated at the table galvanize him into action. Rigolot characterizes this phenomenon as an external dialogue that leads subsequently to an internal dialogue: “Pour Rabelais comme pour Platon c’est le dialogue qui importe dans l’expérience du banquet; car cet échange entre convives est le prélude au dialogue intérieur qui doit ensuite prendre place pour arriver à la pleine connaissance de soi” (*Service*, 23).

Bakhtin frames this function of the *symposion* in a manner that more readily relates the direct role of intoxication. For him, man in a state of intoxication taps into the positive and regenerating grotesque concept of “festive madness,” which is responsible for the transformative dialogue indicated by Rigolot:

For instance, the theme of madness is inherent to all grotesque forms, because madness makes men look at the world with different eyes, not dimmed by ‘normal,’ that is by commonplace ideas and judgements. In folk grotesque, madness is a gay parody of official reason, of the narrow seriousness of official ‘truth.’ It is a ‘festive’ madness. (*Rabelais*, 39)

It is the intoxicated man who remains “sane” as he more easily contemplates the “insanity” of the status quo. This is related to the “critical” utopia in that both allow man to become productively alienated from the present long enough to recognize its odd and unnatural aspects.

For Bakhtin, it is the “normal” perspective on society that is dull or literally “dimmed.” On the other hand, the inner madness that stems from a man’s intoxicated

perspective is bright, sharp, and enlightened. He develops this idea in his essay entitled “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics.”

The *symposion* debases the perspective of the dominant authority and fertilizes it with the festive madness of the carnivalesque:

In such a way the eating and drinking series, through their grotesque development, perform the task of destroying archaic and false matrices between objects and phenomena, and create new matrices, fleshed-out ones, that materialize the world. At its positive pole this series ends in nothing less than ideological enlightenment, the culture of eating and drinking, which is an essential feature of the new human image, a man who is harmonious and whole. (187)

Rabelais begins to build his concept of the *symposion* from the very beginning of the novel.

The Prologue develops certain aspects of collective intoxication by wine that are seen later in the abbey of Thélème: a greater sense of community that demands participation and a noble quest for intelligence that involves debasing the dominant authority of the present.

Frere Jan & the Vineyard.

The same Picrocholine war that Gargantua concludes with a carnivalesque *symposion* brings the aggression and greed of its troops to Frere Jan’s doorstep. As the hostile forces become more and more fearless in their harvesting of the monks’ grapes, the monks become more and more fearful. Instead of following the precepts of Thomas More and engaging in a just defense of their intoxication, they hold a religious service and ask for divine help: “Les pauvres diables de moines ne sçavoient auquel de leurs saints se vouer, à toutes adventures feirent sonner *ad capitulum capitulantes*: là feut decreté qu’ilz feroient une belle procession, renforcée de beaulx preschans et letanies *contra hostium insidias*: et beaulx responds *pro pace*” (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 77-8). These monks cling superstitiously to their cult of saints, sprinkling their chaotic desperation with phrases in Latin that are hollow and without true action.

They represent the “traditional” clergy that reinforces the dominant authority of the Pope. They are not true monks with true knowledge, like Frere Jan. Young, strong, and healthy, he is an example for the Thelemites to follow:

En l’abbaye estoit pour lors un moine claustrier nommé frere Jean des entommeures, jeune guallant: frisque: de hayt: bien à dextre, hardy: aventureux, deliberé: hault, maigre, bien fendu de gueule, bien advantagé en nez, beau despescheur d’heures, beau desbrideur de messes, beau descrotteur de vigiles, pour tout dire sommairement, vray moyne si oncques en feut depuys que le monde moynant moyna de moynerie. Au reste: clerck jusques es dents en matiere de breviaire. (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 78)

Frere Jan’s physical appearance provides a sharp contrast with his fellow monks. Where they are depicted as weak, “poor devils,” Jan is described as being tall, thin, and adventurous – he is both physically attractive and physically active. This bodily worth prefigures the monks and nuns of Thélème, who are attractive and healthy compared to the traditionally undesirable members of most abbeys:

Item par ce qu’en icelluy temps on ne mettoit en religion des femmes, si non celles que estoient borgnes, boyteuses, bossues, laydes, defaictes, folles, insensées, maleficiées, et tarées: ny les hommes non catarrez, mal nez, niays et empesche de maison. ... Feut ordonné que là ne seroient repceues si non les belles, bien formées, et bien naturées: et les beaulx, bien formez, et bien naturez. (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 138)

Not only does Frere Jan physically prefigure the Thelemites, but he embodies a true knowledge of his religion as well. Armed to the teeth with “matiere de breviaire,” he is confident in his relationship with Christian scripture and need not be deathly serious to convince others.

Indeed, he is so well educated in his religion that he can even poke fun at it without destroying its authority. Walking outside to see the Picrocholine army picking all of their grapes designated to become wine, Frere Jan returns inside the abbey and becomes angry at the other monks’ inactivity when confronted with the aggression of an unjust war:

Icelluy entendent le bruyt que faisoyent les ennemys par le cloz de leur vine, sortit hors pour veoir ce qu’ilz faisoient. Et advisant qu’ilz vendangeoient leur cloz au quel estoyt leur boyte de tout l’an fondée, retourne au cueur de l’eglise où estoient les aultres moynes tous estonnez comme fondeurs de cloches, lesquelz voyant chanter, *ini, nim, pe, ne, ne, ne, ne, ne, ne, ne, tum, ne, num, num, im, i, mi, i, mi, co, o, ne, no, o, o, ne, no, ne, no, no, no, rum, ne, num, num*. ‘C’est, dist il, bien chien chanté. Vertus Dieu: que ne chantez vous. Adieu paniers, vendanges sont faictes? Je me donne au Diable, s’ilz ne

sont en nostre cloz, et tant bien couppent et seps et raisins, qu'il n'y aura par le corps Dieu de quatre années que halleboter dedans. Ventre saint Jacques que boyrons nous ce pendent, nous aultres pauvres diables? Seigneur Dieu *da mihi potum*.

Lors dist le prieur claustral. 'Que fera cest hyvrogne icy? Qu'on me le mene en prison, troublez ainsi le service divin?

– Mais: (dist le moyne) le service du vin faisons tant qu'il ne soit troublé, car vous mesmes monsieur le prieur, ayez boyre du meilleur, sy fait tout homme de bien. Jamais homme noble ne hayst le bon vin, c'est un apophthegme monachal. (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 78)

Here, the “traditional” monks are portrayed as sterile; their plan to deal with the vineyard crisis consists of shakily repeating an incantation in Latin. Frere Jan, on the other hand, gives them a forceful rebuke that is colored by the carnivalesque language of the marketplace, full of billingsgate, oaths, and curses. Bakhtin explains that this fearless profanation of the sacred is typical of the low clergy of the Renaissance (*Rabelais*, 87). Frere Jan's use of oaths such as “Ventre saint Jacques” and his travesties of sacred texts such as “*da mihi potum*” indicate that he belongs not to a class of “traditional” elites like his fearful brothers in the abbey, but to a much wider and much more inclusive group of people. He uses a “critical” utopian form of speech that represents a carnivalesque debasement of the dominant authority.

As such, he is able to valorize the profane aspects of the communion with confidence even as the “traditional” monks valorize the sacred aspects of the communion with insecurity. Frere Jan need no longer respect the seriousness of the fearful monks; he may freely delight in the joviality of intoxication. This is a purely inclusive act; Frere Jan casts aside the stratifications legitimated by tradition and mixes everything together: “The grotesque *symposion* does not have to respect hierarchical distinctions; it freely blends the profane and the sacred, the lower and the higher, the spiritual and the material” (Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 285-6). He prefigures the carnivalesque *symposion* that swallows an entire village after the Picrocholine war; rather than separating vanquished from victor, or following the tradition of harsh punishment, all present participate in the *symposion*. All are freely mixed

together, both vertically from foot soldier to general and horizontally from one side of the conflict to another.

Rigolot characterizes this blend of the profane with the sacred as evidence of Rabelais's will to distinguish Frere Jan from his peers:

Pour le 'beau desbrideur de messes' (G 78) le 'service du vin' se veut, certes, dénégation du 'service divin' mais pour le 'beau despescheur d'heures' (ibid.) le vin connote une énergie joyeuse qui s'oppose à la mollesse timorée des autres moines de l'abbaye. Sauver la vigne reste une tâche collective qui s'impose, dit-il, à tout 'homme de bien' (ibid). (*Service*, 18)

I should like to place particular stress on the fact that Frere Jan views the defense of the abbey as a collective effort to which all the monks must contribute. If one monk is willing to defend the abbey's means to intoxication, so should all the monks. In fact, this is true for the ideal abbey of Thélème. Their complete liberty combined with their solid education gives them a natural penchant to do in union what pleases one of them, and when it pleases one of them to drink, they all drink. Although intoxication is enough reason for the Thelemites to take action, it is not enough for the "traditional" monks of Seuillé. Frere Jan motivates his fearful brothers by reminding them of the collective intoxication they stand to lose if they remain inactive; indeed, he interrupts them as they drink wine to make this call to action.

Rigolot's analysis of this episode, along with Weinberg's opinion on the subject, becomes more complete when incorporated into Bakhtin's interpretation.⁷ As Rigolot states, wine imparts a joyous energy that Weinberg calls the service of truth. However, it is with the enormous "critical" utopian wealth of the carnivalesque that Frere Jan belittles the "traditional" utopian mores of the inactive monks. Bakhtin states that his true and genuine working knowledge of the sacred is what gives him this ability:

⁷ Weinberg states, "The pun on *service divin* and *service du vin* juxtaposes the formalized, useless ritual, which *men* consider divine service, epitomized in the monks' unintelligible chant (supposed to be 'impetum inimicorum ne timueritis') with the service de la vérité, 'service of truth [wine service],' which no *homme de bien*, no noble man can desert" (111).

In Rabelais, Friar John is the incarnation of the mighty realm of travesty of the low clergy. He is a connoisseur of 'all that concerns the breviary' (en matière de brevière); this means that he can reinterpret any sacred text in the sense of eating, drinking, and eroticism, and transpose it from the Lenten to the carnival 'obscene' level. (*Rabelais*, 86)

The switch from "service divin" to "service du vin" is a transformation of the sterile and petty seriousness of the dominant authority into the fertile and important merriment of the lower stratum. All of the "traditional" power enjoyed by the monks is handed over to the realm of the carnivalesque. This allows for a greater number of people to be included in the collective intoxication served at the religious communion. Frere Jan paves the way for the Thelemites, who as members of the sacred create cooperation and harmony amongst themselves through the profane. The abbey of Thélème uses the *symposion*-like aspects of the communion to promote peace, end wars, and engender cooperation and understanding.

Gargantua's Education.

Gargantua uses the carnivalesque *symposion* to fuel his own understanding. What he learns as a young giant bears an enormous influence on both his approach to the Picrocholine war and the lifestyle recommendations he makes for the monks and nuns of Thélème. Interestingly enough, this education permits Gargantua the right to a carnivalesque *symposion* on a monthly basis. Furthermore, these bouts of drunken excess are both a continued form of study and a jovial break from the discipline of his education. Consequently, the giant can draw strength from this momentary intoxication to return with renewed vigor to his regime. The function of the *symposion* in this episode is to take the Platonic *symposion* featured in the Prologue and expand it to the carnivalesque, village-wide level.

Ponocrates, Gargantua's preceptor, directs him away from the terribly inefficient Sophist approach to learning and towards the humanist one, which was gaining wide

currency at the time of the novel's genesis and publication.⁸ Under his new and progressive regime, Gargantua is instructed in an enormous variety of disciplines that are designed to exercise both his body and his mind: divine scripture, astronomy, reading, sports, nutrition, hygiene, arithmetic, probability and statistics, geometry, music, horseriding, military disciplines, swimming, sailing, mountain climbing, and herbology, to name a few (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 64-70).

Servier explains that this education brings Gargantua in line with Plato's vision of utopia in *The Republic*:

La République assure, par l'éducation, le conditionnement de ses futurs citoyens. Tout d'abord, la gymnastique qui rend fort et harmonieux le corps éphémère; puis la musique qui, sans être une science, contribue cependant à établir une harmonie entre le corps et l'âme. Si les artisans ont besoin d'acquérir une certaine connaissance des techniques, les hommes libres, et plus encore les dirigeants de la cité, ont besoin d'être versés dans des sciences ayant une portée universelle: l'arithmétique, la géométrie, l'astronomie, la connaissance de l'harmonie, et enfin, par-dessus tout, la logique. (36)

In his study of utopia, Servier does not make a distinction between "critical" and "traditional." Nevertheless, the Republic's aspiration to educate its children and assure that they make continual progress can be seen as a "critical" utopian emphasis on the future. Plato's conception of human immortality is a good example: "Il faut, dit Platon, voir l'âme immortelle de l'homme, ardente amour de la vérité, recherchant ce qui, comme elle, est divin, immortel, éternel" (Servier, 39). He does not look to the past for answers, as the Sophists do. This particular brand of education has a decided penchant for harmony and universality, and it is a brand reproduced by Ponocrates for Gargantua. The giant's humanistic education is an ideal picture of a "critical" utopian approach to learning that breaks completely with the obsolete methodology of the dominant scholastic authority.

⁸ The popularity of the humanist education is developed in Mireille Huchon's notes to chapter XV: "C'est sous le patronage des humanistes et de leur méthode nouvelle en vigueur dans le Paris des années 1530 qu'est placé le changement d'éducation de Gargantua" (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 1104).

The Thelemites reproduce this penchant for active learning and forward-thinking education. Contrary to Rigolot's assertion that "la vie à Thélème sentira l'oisiveté" (*Langages*, 90), the Thelemites are every bit as active as Gargantua while he carries out his humanist regime. They, too, can attribute their extraordinary abilities to a sound education:

Tant noblement estoient apprins, qu'il n'estoit entre eulx celluy, ne celle qui ne sceust lire, escripre, chanter, jouer d'instrumens harmonieux, parler de cinq et six langaiges, et en iceulx composer tant en carme que en oraison solue.

Jamais ne feurent veuz chevaliers tant preux, tant gualans, tant dextres à pied, et à cheval, plus vers, mieulx remuans, mieulx manians tous bastons que là estoient. (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 149)

The Thelemites learn the same as Gargantua when it comes to the concepts of harmony and universality. On this point, I follow Weinberg: "The training of Gargantua represents a synthesis of the best ideas of the Renaissance educators; Rabelais's abbey displays the results of the perfect education" (150).

Rigolot and Bakhtin misjudge the abbey of Thélème when they declare it to be a "traditional" utopia full of lazy aristocrats. The Thelemites have the same true knowledge of subjects that expand their mind and allow them to embrace harmony and universality. In both episodes, the march towards "critical" utopia begins with a cultivation of the body through physical education and a cultivation of the mind through the sciences. Plato and the humanists who draw from his legacy are aware of the body and its importance. They are also aware of the importance of bodily intoxication.

Indeed, bodily intoxication makes the mind receptive to learning in humanist fashion. For example, in chapter XXIII, Gargantua learns a great deal of material during his afternoon *syndeipnon* and *symposion*, or lunch:

Au commencement du repas estoit leue quelque histoire plaisante des anciennes prouesses: jusques à ce qu'il eust prins son vin. Lors (si bon sembloit) on continuoit la lecture: ou commenceoient à diviser joyeusement ensemble, parlans pour les premiers moys de la vertus, propriété, efficace, et nature, de tout ce que leur estoit servy à table: Du pain, du vin, de l'eau, du sel, des viandes, poissons, fruitz, herbes, racines, et de l'aprest d'icelles. Ce que faisant aprint en peu de temps tous les passaiges à ce competens en Pline, Athené, Dioscorides, Jullius pollux, Galen, Porphyre, Opian, Polybe, Heliodore, Aristoteles, Aelian, et aultres. Iceulx propos tenus faisoient souvent pour plus estre assurez, apporta

les livres susdictz à table. Et si bien et entierement retint en sa memoire les choses dictes, que pour lors n'estoit medecin, qui en sceust à la moytié tant comme il faisoit. (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 66)

To begin his afternoon meal, the giant first drinks wine. This intoxication prepares his stomach for food and his mind for intellectual nourishment. The act of eating and drinking together segues into learning all about the food they eat and discussing a wide range of classical authors who have something to say on the subject. The Thelemites are “bien instructz” (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 149), just like Gargantua. They, too, converse in “honest company” and gain knowledge through the intoxication of the banquet.

Bakhtin does recognize the theme of intoxication here, but only in passing and without further elaboration: “Images of eating and drinking also play a substantial part in Gargantua’s education” (Rabelais, 280). It is unfortunate that he does not pursue this statement further and really demonstrate this in his argument, especially since chapter XXVIII provides such a useful example of what he terms “Banquet Imagery.” After having meticulously detailed Gargantua’s new humanist regime, the narrator explains that the giant is adapting to his new lifestyle and feeling like a king (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 72). As a reward for his efforts, he is allowed to descend once a month into the carnivalesque realm of intoxication:

Toutesfoys: Ponocrates pour le sejourner de ceste vehemente intention des esperitz, advisoit une foyz le moys quelque jour bien clair et serain, auquel bougeoient au matin de la ville, et alloient ou à Gentily, ou à Boloigne, ou à Montrouge, ou au port Charanton, ou à Vanves, ou à saint Clou. Et là passoient toute la journée à faire la plus grande chere dont ilz se pouvoient adviser: raillans: gaudissans: beuvans d’aultant: jouans: chantans: dansans: se voytrans: en quelque beau pré: deniceans des passereaulx, prenans des cailles: peschans aux grenoilles: et escrevisses.

Mais encore que icelle journée feust passée sans livres et lectures: point elle n'estoit passée sans proffit. Car en beau pré ilz recoiloient par cueur quelques plaisans vers: de l’agriculture de Virgile: de Hesiod: du *Rusticque* de Politian: descripvoyent quelques plaisans epigrammes en latin: puis les mettoient par rondeaux et ballades en langue Françoisse. (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 72-3)

The fact that this freedom is allowed only for a day goes back to Bakhtin’s argument that the very brevity of these carnivalesque sessions heightens their utopian element (Rabelais, 89).

Gargantua cherishes his collective intoxication not only for its positive function in his life, but also because its scarcity makes it precious.

These monthly bouts of extreme and joyful intoxication are not outside of the realm of Gargantua's humanist education. He still finds the occasion to discuss classical authors like Virgil, Hesiod, and Politian, and even stretches his brain with wordplay and poetry. Intoxication in its temporary, carnivalesque form can be considered a reason for the giant's continued success in his "vehement" regime, because the momentary right to indulge gives him the strength to return to his more disciplined lifestyle. Bakhtin provides an interesting example of this concept by way of a letter written at the Paris School of Theology in 1444 (*Rabelais*, 75). I cite this letter as it is presented within Bakhtin's argument with no additional modifications:

Such a gay diversion is necessary 'so that foolishness, which is our second nature and seems to be inherent in man might freely spend itself at least once a year. Wine barrels burst if from time to time we do not open them and let in some air. All of us men are barrels poorly put together, which would burst from the wine of wisdom, if this wine remains in a state of constant fermentation of piety and fear of God. We must give it air in order not to let it spoil. This is why we permit folly on certain days so that we may later return with greater zeal to the service of God.' (*Rabelais*, 75)

The apologist argues that the temporary foolishness permitted at the feast is a necessary component of man's continued discipline, and above all, sanity. To better return to his education, Gargantua needs to tap into the "festive madness" of the carnivalesque *symposion*. This sets him apart from sobriety and from the normalizing tendencies of the dominant authority, if only for the length of a day.

What is extraordinary about the abbey of Thélème is that it takes these permissions granted temporarily to their gigantic founder and renders them permanent. The Thelemites are always allowed to indulge in carnivalesque excess because they are governed by nothing other than their own "franc arbitre" (*Rabelais, Œuvres complètes*, 148). Their freedoms are defined by the carnivalesque tendency towards food, drink, and sex: they get up from bed

when they want, they eat when they want, and they drink when they want. They all live in a harmony that is due in large part to the collective intoxication of the *symposion*.

Transitional Remarks.

The conclusion of the Picrocholine war demonstrates the capacity of collective intoxication to end cultural conflicts and nurture a healthy relationship between people formerly at war. On a European scale, the Thelemites practice a utopian level of harmony that uses the fruity intoxication of wine to include large swathes of the population in their noble efforts. This concluding utopian episode in *Gargantua* prepares a similar one in *Le Tiers Livre*. In his third novel, Rabelais enlarges his concept of utopia, expanding outwards from the abbey of Thélème to all four corners of the Earth on the strength of the cannabis-rich “arcenac de Thalasse.” The Thelemites’ message of utopia through intoxication remains consistent; the only noticeable shift is the choice of intoxicant employed. Whereas fermented grapes prove to be perfectly acceptable in Europe, their appeal begins to wane with increased distance from the Christian communion that Frere Jan transforms. As such, Rabelais picks intoxicating flowers instead: cannabis replaces wine. Not only does cannabis supply mankind with a dose of intoxication that leads like wine to peace and truth, but it also offers to carry the Thelemites out of their abbey and on to the open seas in search of the very men and women with whom they wish to smoke.

Chapter II: Cannabis in the Sixteenth Century.

Before addressing the utopian function of the Pantagruélion episode, I must first provide a preponderance of historical and textual evidence to suggest that Rabelais was well aware of cannabis intoxication. I have already mentioned that Rabelais's father, Antoine, cultivated cannabis in the Tourangeau region. In “‘Pantagruelion’ et ‘Chenevreaux’” (1905), Lefranc cites a legal document from 1505 that details Antoine's proprietorship of cannabis fields in Cinais (402), consequently providing incontrovertible evidence that the plant was present in Rabelais's youth. As a boy, he and his family worked in unison to grow cannabis, watch over its development, harvest the mature plants, ret their stalks for fibers, and sell these at a profit (403). Rabelais can be seen to witness the cloth produced therefrom turned not only into a sturdy source of clothing for his fellow Frenchmen, but also into the ropes and sails that power the enormous maritime ships casting out onto the open sea to explore the earth.

Nonetheless, it is not enough to be able to point to the author's first-hand experience with cannabis, its cultivation, and its uses as a textile. For my argument to be convincing, Rabelais must be familiar with the intoxication that results from the inhalation of the plant matter combusted. Extrapolating from man's typical encounters with cannabis over the course of his history, I do not doubt that Rabelais's personal experience as a young and curious boy led him quite naturally to this knowledge. However, for this there can be no possible evidence. As such, I turn to various texts relevant to his interests and to his professions that furnish Rabelais with examples of the intoxicating properties of cannabis.

Some critics point to Pliny the Elder as the driving force behind these chapters; Lefranc says as much in his edition (339), and Mireille Huchon follows suit in hers (1448). In section XCVII of the twentieth volume of his *Natural History*, the classical author does provide Rabelais with a list of medicinal uses for cannabis (123). Rabelais reproduces these in chapter LI, explaining how cannabis ejects all manner of vermin from the ears, tranquillizes distempered horses, relaxes the human body, and heals burns from both scalding water and fire (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 507). From this I can only agree that Pliny's influence is evident, but I also maintain that there are other, more important sources that make cannabis intoxication more explicit.

Smoke Cannabis.

In his *Histories*, Herodotus tells of the Scythian custom of collective intoxication through the inhalation of cannabis.⁹ About a third of the way through his fourth book, he describes the elaborate rituals necessary to give a king his proper burial (258-9). This provides Herodotus with an appropriate segue for discussing what happened to common Scythians when they died (259). They were carted about and shown to their friends and family, at which point much *syndeipnon* and *symposion* ensued (259). In a carnivalesque disregard for seriousness, the dead corpse ate and drank alongside the mourners!

Once the deceased had been buried, the Scythians who still clung to their consciousness cleansed themselves with cannabis:

After burying their dead, Scythians purify themselves. First they anoint and rinse their hair, then, for their bodies, they lean three poles against one another, cover the poles with felted woollen blankets, making sure that they fit together as tightly as possible, and then put red-hot stones from the fire on to a dish which has been placed in the middle of the pole-and-blanket structure.

Now, there is a plant growing in their country called cannabis, which closely resembles flax, except that cannabis is thicker-stemmed and taller. In Scythia, in fact, it is far taller. It grows wild, but is also cultivated, and the Thracians use it, as well as flax, for making clothes. These clothes are so similar to

⁹ In his work *The Life of François Rabelais* (1968), Jean Plattard explains that during his monkhood of the early 1520s, Rabelais practiced his languages by translating Herodotus from Greek into Latin (29).

ones made out of flax that it would take a real expert to tell the difference between the two materials. Anyone unfamiliar with cannabis would suppose that the clothes were linen. Anyway, the Scythians take cannabis seeds, crawl in under the felt blankets, and throw the seeds on to the glowing stones. The seeds then emit dense smoke and fumes, much more than any vapour-bath in Greece. The Scythians shriek with delight at the fumes. (259)

Herodotus very plainly describes the effects of cannabis on humans that inhale its smoke. The euphoria provoked therefrom causes them to “shriek with delight.” I can imagine that the dense blankets of felted wool are designed to trap the cannabis smoke within their lean-to so that it might be inhaled over and over again until they are absolutely silly with intoxication.

As Mark David Merlin points out in his work, *Man and Marijuana: Some Aspects of Their Ancient Relationship* (1972), Herodotus’ account has been justified by the excavation of Scythian tombs in Siberia (59). In addition to a number of Scythian curiosities, “a tent-like frame structure, metal censers, and hemp seed were recovered” (59). Despite this corroborating evidence, I must respond in advance to those detractors who would dispute the validity of this example on the grounds that the seeds of the cannabis plant contain no intoxicating value. While I agree that they have been scientifically proven to provide no intoxication, I also maintain that the term “seeds” is used loosely to designate the dried flowers to which they are inextricably attached. Merlin explains, “It should be noted that the seeds are much less euphorically potent than other parts of the plant. But seeds are more resistant to combustion and therefore would remain after the dried flowers were burned” (60). The Scythians most likely threw the entire tuft of flowers down upon their hot plate and inhaled the consequences.

As such, Herodotus provides a valuable example of the spiritual function of the *synthumion*. Exactly as the foolosophers of the *symposion*, who disguise a noble purpose behind a trivial façade, this lighthearted smoking session is a way for the Scythians to honor

their dead solemnly through collective intoxication as a harmonious group. As a young monk translating Herodotus in his cell during the 1520s, Rabelais would have had a working representation of the *synthumion* and its function some twenty to twenty-five years before the publication of *Le Tiers Livre*. Nevertheless, the historian Herodotus is not the only way for Rabelais to approach the subject.

Eat Cannabis.

Apart from smoking cannabis to effect immediate intoxication, Rabelais could have opted to ingest cannabis that had been baked into confectionary sweets. The effects take much longer to develop, but result subsequently in a much stronger and sustained intoxication. There is evidence for knowledge of this phenomenon in the works of Leo Africanus. Before examining his work, I should like to provide some context for its publication. In her biography entitled “Trickster Travels: a Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds” (2006), Natalie Zemon Davis gives Africanus’ full Arabic name as “al-Hasan ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Wazzan” (15). Ejected in or slightly before 1492 by the Christian Reconquista of Granada, his family relocated to Fez (18-9). As such, al-Hasan al-Wazzan became ideally placed to begin traveling around the northwestern regions of Africa.

Indeed, he travelled extensively all around the countries of the Mediterranean Sea until his capture in approximately 1518 by a Christian pirate who subsequently bequeathed him as a gift to Pope Leo X (55-6). Although in the 1520s he dictated his general description of Africa while still somewhat captive in Italy, it would take some time before his story was picked up and published: “Yet al-Hasan al-Wazzan left behind in Italy several manuscripts, one of which, published in 1550, became a bestseller” (Davis, 4). Davis places his text

between the two dates given by Huchon for the publications of *Le Tiers Livre*: 1546 and 1552 (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 1341). Given both Rabelais's zeal for the global and al-Wazzan's popular and contemporary first-hand account of Africa, there can be no doubt that the former is aware of the latter.

Furthermore, the latter gives a plain description of hashish use in Tunisia. For my purposes, I cite an English translation done by John Pory in 1600 and re-issued by the Hakluyt Society in 1896. In his fifth book, al-Wazzan devotes a healthy portion of space to “the mightie citie of Tunis” (716). Near the end of his description, al-Wazzan finds himself amongst the city's prostitutes, who eat hashish confections to remain sexually aroused and in a carefree disposition for their clients: “They haue here a compound called Lhasis, whereof whosouer eateth but one ounce falleth a laughing, disporting, and dallying, as if he were halfe drunken; and is by the said confection maruellously prouoked unto lust” (722).

The word “Lhasis” must be understood in the manner clarified by the notes of Dr. Robert Brown, editor of the 1896 publication: “‘Lhasis’ (*ihasis* in the original Italian) is ‘hashish’, or Indian hemp” (755). Davis confirms this in one of her own notes: “Right after describing the male and female prostitutes of Tunis, Yuhanna al-Asad talks of the use there of the drug hashish (‘el hasis’) and its aphrodisiac qualities” (351). Here, al-Wazzan is unmistakably describing the intense effects of cannabis ingested.¹⁰ So powerful are its abilities to intoxicate that even an ounce of this hashish confection is enough to provoke bouts of drunken hilarity, erotic playfulness, and an inability to concentrate. His popular

¹⁰ To be clear, resin is harvested from the dried flowers of the female cannabis plant and compressed into blocks of hashish (Booth 7). In his work *The Herb: Hashish Versus Medieval Muslim Society* (1971), Franz Rosenthal details the general effects of eating hashish as seen by both supporters and detractors. These correspond largely to Africanus' depiction of silliness, playfulness, and sexual arousal. There is a “loss of contact with reality, the ordinary world of the senses” (95); the *Arabian Nights* describes a man who ate hashish, which “provoked in him exciting dreams of glory and sex” (94); and of course, the inevitable negative stigma attached to cannabis is bestowed upon the hashish-eating Muslims: “The mental changes observable in the addict made him a fool in the eyes of the common people, someone not to be trusted to react rationally in any way” (93).

description of Africa provides Rabelais with information concerning both the intoxicating effects of eating cannabis and its use in contemporary Muslim societies.

For more information on the ingestion of cannabis, Rabelais can turn to the classical author Claudius Galen. It is certain that Rabelais studied Galen while acquiring his doctorate in 1537 in Montpellier, some nine years before the first publication of *Le Tiers Livre*. According to Louis Dulieu's exhaustive work *La Médecine à Montpellier* (1975), approximately thirty-eight different treatises by Galen were taught at the University of Montpellier during the sixteenth century (144). Furthermore, Rabelais was in possession of a Greek manuscript of Galen's work that he used to distinguish himself at said university (Plattard, 95). By commenting directly on it, rather than from a Latin translation, he was able to attract large crowds to the auditorium (95).

Galen's treaty that deals specifically with intoxication by cannabis is entitled *De alimentorum facultatibus*. In my argument, I cite an English translation called "On the Properties of Foodstuffs" (2003). Galen is none too impressed by this seed, but does mention that it has a drug-like effect when roasted and consumed:

It is not the case that since the Indian hemp plant itself resembles the chaste tree, its seed is somehow similar in property to that seed. Rather, it is completely different from it, being difficult to concoct and unwholesome, and produces headaches and unhealthy humours. Nevertheless some people roast and eat it with other sweetmeats. (Clearly, I am calling things that are eaten after dinner for pleasure while drinking, sweetmeats.) The seeds are quite warming, and consequently when they are taken in quantity over a short period they affect the head, sending up to it a vapour that is both warm and like a drug. (68)

Although he does not describe the hilarity or eroticism of al-Wazzan's hashish, the effects of eating cannabis and drinking wine after dinner are clearly present. While the intoxication lasts, the Greeks experience a temporary state of harmony and a greater sense of companionship that facilitates relationship-building amongst them. As such, Rabelais can

use this ancient example to justify his approach to the utopian dimension of cannabis and wine intoxication.

Indeed, Rabelais does incorporate this example with little alteration into the Pantagruélion episode. In his rendition, the connection between cannabis and wine is more pronounced:

Et quoy que jadis entre les Grecs d'icelle l'on feist certaines especes de fricassées, tartres, et beuignetz, les quelz ilz mangeoient après soupper par friandise et pour trouver le vin meilleur: si est ce qu'elle est de difficile concoction, offense l'estomach, engendre mauvais sang, et par son excessive chaleur ferist le cerveau, et remplit la teste de fascheuses et douloureuses vapeurs. (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 502)

Rabelais clearly explains that the purpose of these cannabis confections is to enhance the taste of wine. In addition, he reproduces Galen's assertion that cannabis provokes both "unhealthy humours" and a warm, drug-like "vapour" in the head. Rabelais emphasizes the "excessive warmth" of the plant, which can be seen as an association of cannabis with the element of fire and its corresponding choleric humor. In order to segue more naturally into a discussion of the elements, the humors, and their relevance to my argument, I should like to present an herbal from the sixteenth century that makes the association between cannabis, fire, and cholera more explicit.

Rub Cannabis on the Skin.

This contemporary herbal is entitled *Le Grant herbier en francoys*, published in Paris in 1522 and again in 1532, the year of Rabelais's first book, *Pantagruel*. This collection of herbs, rocks, and their uses belonged to the immensely popular field of botany, which enjoyed a privileged status at the University of Montpellier thanks to the work of Rabelais's friends like Rondelet (Dulieu, 226). Rabelais thinks the science important enough to include in Gargantua's humanist curriculum:

Le temps ainsi employé, luy froté, nettoyé, et rafraichy d'habillemens, tout doucement retournoit et passans par quelques prez, ou aultres lieux herбуz, visitoient les arbres et plantes, les conferens avec

les livres des anciens qui en ont escript comme Theophraste, Dioscorides, Marinus, Pline, Nicander, Macer, et Galen, et en emportoient leurs plenes mains au logis, desquelles avoit la charge un jeune page nommé Rhizotome, ensemble des marrochons, des pioches, cerfouettes, beches, tranches, et aultres instrumens requis à bien arborizer. (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 69-70)

This zeal for botany leads naturally to an interest in and fascination for the therapeutic powers of plants and their applications.

Indeed, it is the analgesic or pain-dulling properties of cannabis that are featured in this herbal.¹¹ Any doctor who approaches it is shown how to eliminate pain through a particularly creative method of rubbing a genre of cannabis balm over the skin:

De canapis

Canapis / c'est chanvre: c'est une herbe dont il en est de deux manières / C'est a savoir la privée ou commune / et la sauvage de laquelle nous voudrons maintenant dire les vertus / chanvre sauvage est chaude et sèche au second degré. On l'appelle autrement agrion canabin.

Pour les mamelles.

Pour douleur et enfleure des mamelles soit l'herbe de chanvre meslé avec gresse: puis en soit fait emplastre qui sois mis sus le lieu. et sans doute il appaisera la douleur et l'enfleure. Aussi ce mêmes meurist apostumes et les despart p especial ceulx qui sont causez dhumeure froide / celle est meslee avec semence dortie et mise sus on verra bon effait / et espartira les apostumes froys.

Contre rhume ou goutte causee de froidure en quelque lieu du corps que la goutte soit. Prends le jus de la racine et autant de gresse ou de suc et un peu de vinaigre soit oingnement dont le lieu soit oyngt il oste la douleur.

In its brief and erroneous introduction to cannabis, the herbal characterizes the plant as being “hot and dry to the second degree.”¹² To approach a contemporary vision of the elements

¹¹ Dr. Robert Walton attests to this aspect of cannabis in his contribution to *The Marihuana Papers* (1966). His chapter is entitled “Therapeutic Application of Marihuana,” which contains a section called *Analgesic Uses*. In it, Walton cautiously admits that “In combatting pain of various causes, cannabis preparations might be expected to be reasonably effective” (397).

¹² While the “savage” variety of cannabis featured here is indeed cannabis, the so-called “domestic” variety is not. The herbal is actually referring to *Eupatorium cannabinum*, or hemp-agrimony, whose stalk and leaves are often mistaken for those of cannabis. In his own description, Rabelais is careful to distinguish the two: “La figure d’icelle peu est differente des feuilles de Fresne et Aigremoine: et tant semblable à Eupatoire, que plusieurs herbiers l’ayant dicte domesticque, ont dict Eupatoire estre Pantagruelion saulvaginé” (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 501). The herbal’s alternate epithet for cannabis derives from the erroneous Dioscoridean classification of the plant into two distinct species, with the female plant known as “Kannabis Emeros,” and the male “Kannabis Agria” (Merlin, 71). Although Renaissance botanists were becoming aware of the plant’s dioecious nature, they still confused the two sexes and attributed the stronger psychoactive effects to the male plant. Consequently, the herbal’s specific choice of “agrion canabin” for medicinal purposes actually indicates the female variety, whose unfertilized flowers abound in psychoactive resin. In chapter XLIX, Rabelais

and humors, I cite Thomas Walkington's presentation of the Hippocratic philosophy of medicine, which he puts forth in *The Optick Glasse of Humors* (1607). He indicates that a description of anything as being "hot and dry" is consistent with the element of fire, which in turn leads to the temperament of choler: "if the element of fire be chieftaine, the body is said to be cholericke... For choler is hot and dry" (76).

Furthermore, Walkington paints the picture of a choleric man consumed in hilarity and easily distracted. It sounds very much like al-Wazzan's description of the hashish-eating Tunisian prostitutes, but contains Galen's disapproval of the vapor-filled Greeks:

Hee is according to his predominate element of fire which is most full of levity, most inconstant and variable in his determinations, easily disliking that which hee before approved: and of all natures in that this complexiō is counted to surpass, is the cholericke man for changeableness is reputed among the wise to be most vndiscreet and vnwise. And indeed mutableness and inconstancy are the intimates and badges whereby fooles are knowne. (109)

This choleric humor closely echoes the behavior of the wise "foolosophers" who seek wisdom under the guise of folly. It seems as though Walkington is aware only of the negative superficial appearance of a man intoxicated, and cannot penetrate into the intensely positive psychological transformations that happen inside of him as a result.

After this description, Walkington takes it upon himself to associate the choleric humor with both wine and tobacco. First, he states that thick and sweet wine "also is a great generator of choler" (104) – undoubtedly due to its powerful and undiluted capacity to intoxicate. Next, he explains that tobacco, "being also hot and drie in the second," "begets many vgly and deformed phantasies in the braine" (105). Walkington's work ties the herbal's hot and dry classification of cannabis into Galen's warnings that too much of the plant sends intoxicating, drug-like vapors to the head. He also deems tobacco to be "for the consumption of the lungs" (105).

indicates that the "female" plants are useless, but the "male" plants abound in seeds (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 502), which from the Scythian example can be seen as the intoxicating flowers of the female variety.

However, the remedies prescribed in the herbal demonstrate the intoxicating effects of cannabis as being absorbed not through the lungs, but through the skin itself. For breast pain, the doctor is first instructed to mix cannabis with “gresse,” or fat. This is consistent with current knowledge on the subject; since the principal intoxicants in cannabis are not soluble in water, they must be extracted into fat.¹³ Once this has been achieved, the intoxicating fat can be substituted for normal fat in almost any recipe, as with the Greeks and their sweetmeats or the Tunisians and their hashish confections. However, this herbal demonstrates that this mixture of cannabis and fat can also be worked into a therapeutical balm, or “emplastre.”

This cannabis balm can be applied to warm up the body exactly as Galen describes in his account of the Greeks and their *symposion*. Any ailments provoked by an excess of either cold or moisture are treated through the levity, the distraction, and the sexual motivation of cannabis intoxication. Cannabis can be rubbed on painfully swollen breasts with the confident assurance of the herbal that “sans doute il appaisera la douleur et l’enfleure.” The same treatment can be used to relieve the intense pain of gout, because the cannabis balm relieves pain no matter where it is spread on the skin: “dont le lieu soit oygnt il oste la douleur.” Perhaps it is this particularly intoxicating remedy that Rabelais has in mind when he addresses the “Goutteux tresprecieux” in his prologue to *Le Tiers Livre* (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 345). The analgesic benefits of cannabis detailed in this herbal are a direct result of a successful extraction of THC and other intoxicants into a fatty medium. Given this, it can be seen that the intoxication is not separated from the medicine – the intoxication is the medicine.

¹³ In his work *Cannabis: A History*, Martin Booth writes, “As cannabinoids are insoluble in water, they are usually dissolved into fat” (9).

Buy, Sell, & Import Cannabis.

In addition to doctors with formal training, the medicinally intoxicating applications of cannabis were practiced by the pepperers and apothecaries of medieval Montpellier. Amongst a host of other intoxicating plants, their reliance upon cannabis for folk remedies can be illustrated through an examination of the town's economy. In the second tome of his *Histoire d'une Seigneurie du Midi de la France* (1969), Jean Baumel traces the emergence of mercantile commerce in Montpellier from 1213 to 1349. Among an enormous list of imported items is cannabis: "Parmi les produits importés dans la seigneurie et cités dans des textes, je continuerai à signaler le blé qui fit défaut presque tous les ans, les orges, les amandes, le chanvre, la soie brute, l'alun..." (315). Since Baumel precedes cannabis in his list with foodstuffs and then follows it with textiles and resources for dyeing them, the plant may be seen as fulfilling multiple needs for the people of Montpellier. They can ingest the seeds of cannabis for a healthy dose of nutrition, or turn the fibers into textiles.

Nevertheless, there is also strong evidence to suggest that the burgeoning city of Montpellier imported cannabis for its value as a medicinal intoxicant. In her book *Society, Law, and Trade in Medieval Montpellier* (1995), Kathryn L. Reyerson explains that the medieval town had a growing reputation for its folk remedies:

The attraction of would-be pepperers and apothecaries can also be explained by the longtime reputation of Montpellier in these fields. From the twelfth century and probably earlier, the town had been the site of medical instruction. Medieval medicine was closely related to the practices of apothecaries and pepperers; inspiration for the concoction of special elixirs and alcohols flowed freely here. Moreover, Montpellier was an important port of entry for Levantine goods and the access to spices and herbs of Eastern origin was greatly facilitated. (I, 273)

Arriving there in the 1530s to study medicine, Rabelais gained exposure to a lengthy tradition of importing poisonous plants from around the Mediterranean and extracting their intoxication into various compounds, potions, and elixirs. Reyerson does an excellent job of demonstrating the relationship that Montpellier cultivated with the Middle East through the

purchase of its medicinal spices and herbs; among the “Levantine goods” that she speaks of is invariably the cannabis that Baumel shows was imported into the town.

Opium was also brought into the city specifically for its analgesic intoxication, and so the medicinal value of cannabis to do the same can be seen as an echo of this. In her work *Montpellier la Medievale* (1990), Jacqueline Liault explains that the “Levantine goods” Reyerson speaks of allowed Montpellier to build a tradition of using intoxicating plants for medicine:

– les épices ne servaient pas seulement à rehausser le goût des mets. On les utilisait aussi en pharmacie pour composer des ‘drogues’. Le mot englobe tous les produits qui servaient de base à la fabrication des médicaments et, jusqu’au 16^e siècle, on ne faisait pas de véritable différence entre ‘épiciers’ et apothicaires. Autre drogue d’importation: l’opium, qui avait une importance primordiale car on l’utilisait comme calmant de la douleur. On sait que de nombreux produits toxiques sont des médicaments quand on les utilise à faible dose (digitale, belladone, cigüe). Ajoutons que Montpellier était très bien placée pour fabriquer des drogues avec les plantes médicinales de ses garrigues: thym, romarin, menthe, ‘thé’ des garrigues, bourdaine, bourrache... (59)

Liault does an admirable job of incorporating the tradition of Montpellier medicine both into its interaction with the Middle East and with the floral abundance of its own geographical location. The curious mixtures of intoxication and medicine found in foxglove, hemlock, belladonna, and opium sat on the shelves of pepperers and apothecaries alongside drugs made from flora found in the scrublands surrounding the city. As a point of fact, the folk remedies found in their wonder unguents were not mixtures of intoxication and medicine – the intoxication was the medicine. In her list of poisonous yet medicinal plants, Liault needs only add cannabis.

In fact, it is such important and lucrative merchandise that in another of her books entitled *Business, Banking and Finance in Medieval Montpellier* (1985), Reyerson states that the Montpelliérains purchased stores of cannabis completely on credit (41). The reasoning behind this was purely speculative: “If market trends allowed cheap purchase and expensive resale, capital could be generated from profits” (40). After they had made the transaction, an

enterprising Montpelliérain could place value upon the quality of cannabis as either a textile or a medicine. The pepperers and apothecaries of Montpellier relied on the latter, which became such a profitable industry that they even traveled abroad with their fare.

Arlette Jouanna attests to this in a chapter entitled “De la Ville Marchande à la Capitale Administrative (XVI^e Siècle),” which appears fifth in a collection of scholarly contributions edited by Gérard Cholvy and published in 1984 as *Histoire de Montpellier*. There was an advantageous market for the intoxicating medicines of Montpellier in Lyon, another town often associated with Rabelais:

Les marchands de Montpellier apportaient aussi aux foires de Lyon diverses spécialités, comme les drogues et herbes médicinales, les matières colorantes, les confiseries, les parfums, les objets d’or et d’argent. Les épiciers-apothecaires de la ville avaient conquis une renommée certaine dans la confection de diverses drogues aux secrets de fabrication jalousement gardés. (129)

Jouanna indicates that the pepperers and apothecaries of Montpellier were respected for their knowledge of plants, and this much is reflected in Rabelais’s work. On days when the sky was overcast and showering down rain, Ponocrates would take Gargantua to these shops instead of out into the field to practice botany: “Et au lieu de arboriser, visitoient les boutiques des drogueurs, herbiers et apothecaires, et soigneusement consideroient les fruitz, racines, feuilles, gommés, semences, axunges peregrines, ensemble aussi comment on les adulteroit” (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 72). Here, the giant learns the “jealously guarded” secrets of these merchants that afford them such respect. Yet the mercantile influence of Montpellier extends well beyond Lyon and indeed the borders of modern-day France.

In fact, merchants followed soldiers to their battles, turning a profit off of the inevitable post-carnage demand for healing. As she covers the economic and intellectual

expansion of Montpellier in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Liault mentions a particularly striking example of this interestingly peaceful approach to wartime profit:

Autre exemple qui peut se rattacher à la réexportation: au moment du siège de Valence (en Espagne) par Jacques d'Aragon pour reprendre la ville aux Maures, en 1236, un chroniqueur rapporte que des apothicaires montpelliérains se sont établis près des camps militaires et vendent leurs médicaments aux troupes. (59)

Alongside the combative soldiers and their swords, shields, helmets, and war engines were the cooperative merchants and their medicines of cannabis, opium, belladonna, and hemlock. Whereas the knights can be seen as an example of the schism between Islamic and Christian cultures, the merchants of Montpellier demonstrate that there were some who were interested in bridging these ecclesiastical and societal divisions:

En outre, comme nous venons de le voir, dès que les Croisés eurent pris pied au Levant, les marchands suivirent, si bien qu'il y eut pendant ces deux siècles une curieuse dualité dans les buts poursuivis. D'un côté, la guerre et son cortège de combats féroces, de massacres, d'exactions mutuelles. De l'autre, les rapports commerciaux et même diplomatiques entre Chrétiens et Musulmans. (Liault, 55)

From Liault's work, it may be seen that mercantile exchange between Christianity and Islam leads to a genre of improvised diplomacy between them. In the place of carnage is commerce; merchandise replaces massacres; economy becomes a viable substitute for exactions.

Rabelais's Comprehensive Approach to Cannabis.

Rabelais can be seen to take first the intricate blend of cannabis as textile, medicine, and intoxicant and apply it second to the plant's advantages in economy, diplomacy, and spirituality. He can then project it third onto his knowledge of the plant's use amongst the Muslims and Arabs of Africa and the Middle East as documented by al-Hasan al-Wazzan. Keeping in mind the example provided him by the economically-motivated diplomacy of the merchants of Montpellier, Rabelais may be seen to support the intoxicatingly-motivated diplomacy of the *synthumion* as an acceptable method for reducing conflict between the two

warring civilizations represented in essence by Islam and Christianity. Just as the positive effects of the *symposion* work to assuage hostility between opposing European forces, so too can the *synthumion* begin to soothe belligerent interactions between European and Arabic troops. The abbey of Thélème's influence is enlarged from a local to a global scale, working to include not just the worthy young men and women of the Renaissance, but indeed the entirety of mankind.

Chapter III: The General Attitude Towards Pantagruélion.

In Rabelais scholarship, there have been numerous reactions to the Pantagruélion episode, and while each critic advances his or her own slight interpretive variation, they all tend nevertheless towards two general conclusions. The first is that these chapters are dull. Greene “confesses” that the detailed description of cannabis is here “tiresomely catalogued” (78). In their article “Rabelais, la Botanique et la Matière Médicale – le Pantagruélion” (1997), Claude Viel and Jack Vivier state that one scholar literally yawns with boredom: “Jacques Boulanger s’ennuie à la lecture de ces quatre chapitres très denses et il bâille d’ennui” (361). Rigolot is puzzled as to why Rabelais would even spend time on “ce propos terne et laborieux,” given that Pliny has already accomplished more elegantly the same: “Mais à quoi bon refaire en français ce qui a été mieux fait en latin?” (*Langages*, 144-5). To his credit, Bakhtin is able to see through the supposedly uninteresting botanical erudition of Rabelais to attribute at least some form of a positive utopian element to the entire episode: “Rabelais, on the other hand, has a popular tone similar to that of the ‘Tale of the Herbs,’ the cry of the collector of medicinal plants and of the vendor of wonder unguents” (*Rabelais*, 186).

Nevertheless, Bakhtin does not distinguish himself any further from his scholastic colleagues. They all inevitably arrive at their second conclusion, which is that Pantagruélion is a symbol. Greene takes Pantagruélion to represent “Pantagruelism” (78), which is itself a nebulously defined concept. He interprets this episode to embody Rabelais’s great desire to travel across the Earth and to experience new peoples and cultures, in addition to a healthy

dose of courage that is unafraid of religious persecution (79-80). Saulnier also understands these chapters to stand in defiance of religious persecution, and terms Rabelais's particular brand of bravery "l'hésuchisme rabelaisien" (62). Rigolot does not agree with Saulnier's evangelical disposition (*Langages*, 151), but points instead to a possible glorification of the technological achievements of mankind: "Peut-être voulait-il aussi, en montrant les nombreuses applications industrielles de la plante, faire l'apothéose de l'activité humaine" (152). Bakhtin is not as cautious as Rigolot; he is confident that Pantagruélion symbolizes man's attempts to thrust himself into the future by sheer force, coming into increasingly harmonious contact with one another by way of the ship sail (*Rabelais*, 366-7). For the Russian critic, Pantagruélion is "a symbol of man's entire technical culture" (366).

Notwithstanding my total disagreement as to the intellectual stimulation that can be had while reading these chapters, I tend to agree with most of the symbolic interpretations I have here featured. Greene is absolutely correct to evoke a certain sense of wonder before the great expanse of the earth and indicate thereby a penchant for exploration, and both he and Saulnier are not mistaken in their religious characterization of the plant. Rigolot and Bakhtin are also justified in their conclusions about the highly positive light in which the maritime capabilities of man are cast. However, Rabelais scholarship does not go far enough in its interpretation of these chapters. To get on board an enormous maritime ship of the Renaissance and brave the caprice of our planet's oceans in search of new and wondrous peoples is undeniably the first step in Rabelais's utopian plan for mankind. However, it is not enough to simply come into contact with other peoples and their cultures; in order to make concrete progress, man must come into a more harmonious contact with his fellow man that is marked by its benevolence and by its will to understand the other. In order to hasten

this process of peace, Rabelais offers to artificially ignite a cooperative atmosphere through a reliance on the intoxicating dimension of cannabis. Such is the power of the *synthumion*; it is a peaceful gift of cannabis to those men who are reached by the strength again of cannabis.

Their Thematic Context.

Before addressing the final poem in which Rabelais proposes this combination of exploration and intoxication, I should like to provide the context of the Pantagruélion episode as a whole. To be brief, it is preceded by just as much banquet imagery as the birth of Thélème. For example, to help Panurge find the answer to his question of marriage, Pantagruel arranges a *symposion* attended by men of religion, medicine, law, and philosophy (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 443). Still perplexed at the conclusion of this drinking session, Panurge is catalyzed finally into action as an empty wine bottle is thrust back into his hands by a *fou* (490).

In addition, Rabelais associates the herb with Thélème itself, and with a strong desire to travel. This is evident through the choice of words he uses to introduce the characters travelling to the Divine Bottle:

Peu de jours après Pantagruel avoir prins congié du bon Gargantua, luy bien priant pour le voyage de son filz, arriva au port de Thalasse prés Sammalo, acompaigné de Panurge, Epistemon, frere Jan des entommeures abbé de Theleme, et aultres de la noble maison, notamment de Xenomanes le grand voyagier et traverseur des voyes perilleuses, lequel estoit venu au mandement de Panurge. (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 500)

As he calls upon Frere Jan, the narrator makes a direct reference to the abbey of Thélème, which can be seen as a reminder of said utopian finale. The perilous voyager who comes directly after is Xenomanes, a new character whose name indicates a profound passion for the foreign (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 1446). He is aboard the Thalamège because he knows the exact location of the intoxicating Divine Bottle (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 494). Perhaps it is he that Greene has in mind while analyzing Rabelais's ambitious travel

plans. At any rate, he can be seen to represent Rabelais's expansion of Thélème beyond its abbey walls and into all the new and foreign corners of the world.

From Thélème to Thalamège: Typical.

When Rabelais transforms his vision of human happiness from a wine-based abbey into a cannabis-based fleet of ships, he is simply indicating the trends in utopia pursuant to the discovery of the New World. According to Servier, this transformation represents a radical shift in utopian thought:

Utopie, comme la nommera le premier Thomas More, Pays de Nulle Part, elle sera le refuge d'hommes de bonne volonté. Sans doute, par bon nombre de ses aspects, elle rappellera la Terre promise et la Jérusalem purifiée. En fait, elle en différera profondément, ne distinguant ni élus ni réprouvés et remplaçant le long chemin du désert et le sang des martyrs par les eaux de l'Océan, du rêve. (113)

Although past forms of utopia exercise a certain influence on the humanist approach, Servier explains that the ramifications of technologically-advanced maritime travel must also figure into the analysis of Thomas More's *Utopia*. The same can be said for Rabelais's Pantagruélion episode and for the lengthy adventure that follows.

While both Rabelais and More incorporate the discovery of the New World and the subsequent passion for maritime exploration into their visions of utopia, they are set apart by Rabelais's additional use of the theme of intoxication. Rabelais blends exploration with intoxication by literally weaving alcohol ensigns into the cannabis sails. This comes at the opening of his fourth book, where Pantagruel's "stash" of Pantagruélion is employed to demonstrate the story's uninterrupted continuity:

Le nombre des navires feut tel que vous ay exposé on tiers livre, en conserve de Triremes, Ramberges, Gallions, et Liburniques nombre pareil: bien équipées, bien calfatées, bien munies, avecques abondance de Pantagruelion. L'assemblée de tous officiers, truchemens, pilotz, capitaines, nauchiers, fadrins, hespailliers, et matelotz feut en la Thalamège. Ainsi estoit nommée la grande et maistresse nauf de Pantagruel: ayant en poupe pour enseigne une grande et ample bouteille à moytié d'argent bien liz et polly: l'autre moytié estoit d'or esmaillé de couleur incarnat. En quoy facile estoit juger, que blanc et claret estoient les couleurs des nobles voyageurs: et qu'ilz alloient pour avoir le mot de la Bouteille. (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 537-8)

Not only does he make a direct reference to his third novel, but Rabelais also takes this opportunity to do some “retroactive editing.” While he makes it clear in his third book that the fleet’s sails are spun from cannabis, he now makes it clear in his fourth that said sails are adorned with banquet imagery. As such, Rabelais is “revising” his previous work to encompass a much broader concept of intoxication.

Bakhtin addresses this in his essay, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel”: “All the ships that set sail are decorated with symbols of drunkenness in the form of heraldic devices: a bottle, a goblet, a pitcher (amphora), a wooden jug, a glass, a cup, a vase, a wine basket, a wine barrel (Rabelais describes each ship’s device in detail)” (180). While I follow Bakhtin’s association of these ships with the theme of intoxication, I must say that to approach a more complete analysis, he need only address the fact that said heraldic devices are placed onto sails of cannabis.

Rabelais also edits the conclusion of his second novel by building both abbey and ship out of cannabis. This much is evidenced at the end of a lengthy discussion of flame-resistant flora crowned by a certain plant called *Larrix*, which the narrator explains holds so much value that Pantagruel thought about using it as a building material:

Et par leur recit congneut Cæsar l’admirable nature de ce boys, lequel de soy ne fait feu, flambe, ne charbon: et seroit digne en ceste qualité d’estre on degré mis de vray Pantagruelion, et d’autant plus que Pantagruel d’icelluy voulut estre faitz tous les huys, portes, fenestres, goustieres, larmiers, et l’ambrun de Theleme: pareillement d’icelluy feist couvrir les pouppes, proes, fougons, tillacs, coursies, et rambades de ses carracons, navires, gualeres, gualions, brigantins, fustes, et aultres vaisseaulx de son arsenac de Thalasse: ne feust que Larix en grande fournaise de feu provenant d’aultres especes de boys, est en fin corrompu et dissipé, comme sont les pierres en fourneau de chaulx. Pantagruelion Asbeste plus tost y est renouvelé et nettoyé, que corrompu ou alteré. (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 512)

From this description, it is apparent that if he had so chosen, Pantagruel could have built a great deal of Thélème with *Larrix*, and likewise a healthy portion of his arsenal of ships. In fact, the phrase is set up in such a way that it can easily fool scholars into believing the abbey

and its ships are indeed made out of this wood. For example, Greene makes this very mistake in his interpretation of the passage: “It is less easy to interpret the passage at the very end on the larix, but a guess can at least be hazarded. The larix is a supposedly incombustible tree mentioned by the Roman author Vitruvius, and it is used by Pantagruel to protect the abbey of Thélème as well as the ships in his arsenal” (80).

Nevertheless, the limiting factor of *Larrix* is that it does break down when subjected to enough heat. As a result, Pantagruel must reject it as a viable building material because it does not truly stack up against cannabis. The narrator makes this rejection clear by stating that the plant *would be* worthy of comparison to cannabis (“seroit digne”), *if not for* the fact that it can eventually become corrupted (“ne feust que”) (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 512). From this explicit denial of *Larrix* can be seen an implicit approval of Pantagruélion; it is cleansed and renewed by fire, rather than corrupted or altered. Therefore, cannabis may be seen as responsible for the abbey’s doors, gates, windows, gutters, and more. Rabelais uses the Pantagruélion episode to retroactively expand his vision of Thélème; the Thelemites can now be seen to harmoniously raise their glasses of wine within a utopian structure built of cannabis.

Similarly, Pantagruel’s ships have their sterns, bows, kitchens, upper decks, and passageways covered in cannabis. This is in addition to the abundant supply of cannabis both raw and baked into confectionary sweets that the giant has placed aboard four chapters earlier (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 501). Given this knowledge, the “arcenac de Thalasse” must be viewed as a literal extension of Thélème. To revisit a previous example, Grandgousier’s *symposion* after the Picrocholine war provides incontrovertible proof that intoxication can and does come in the form of a ship (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 137).

Huchon defines his gift of “nacelles” as being “vases en forme de bateau” (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 137). At the war-ending *symposion* that gives birth to the abbey of Thélème, Grandgousier prefigures the ships and their intoxicating function by awarding his men vessels of gold that hold wine in their boat-like cavities. These ships of cannabis are designed to expand the wine-inspired message of the abbey to a global scale.

Appeals Mercantile, Diplomatic, Spiritual, & Intoxicating.

The poem that concludes the Pantagruélion episode is a striking indication of the ships’ duty to expand Rabelais’s utopia. Through the medium of cannabis, he proposes a new level of cooperation between Europe, the Middle East, and India:

*Indes, cessez, Arabes, Sabiens,
Tant collauder vos Myrrhe, Encent, Ebene,
Venez icy reconnoistre nos biens,
Et emportez de nostre herbe la grene.
Puis si chez vous peut croistre, en bonne estrene,
Graces rendez es cieulx un million:
Et affermez de France heureux le regne,
On quel provient Pantagruelion.* (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 512-3)

This poem contains a diverse set of appeals for peace that all have some function of cannabis as their basis. First, Rabelais approaches the subject from an economic standpoint. He uses myrrh, incense, and ebony to sketch a mercantile representation of the Middle East and India, evoking the steady influx of exotic goods that poured daily into the ports surrounding Montpellier. These wares pale in comparison to the mighty Pantagruélion, which is much more lucrative merchandise. The resinous myrrh, the perfumed incense, and the prized dark wood of ebony are matched by cannabis: it has an intoxicating resin, a strong perfume (“L’odeur d’icelles est fort, et peu plaisant au nez delicatz” (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes* 501)), and can also be used as a luxurious building material like ebony, as evidenced by the abbey and its fleet. The cooperation that Rabelais proposes through the merchandising of

cannabis can be seen to reflect the peaceful interaction of the pepperers, apothecaries, and merchants on the sidelines of medieval battlefields.

Next, Rabelais approaches his appeal for greater cooperation from a diplomatic standpoint. He invites the Indians and the Arabs to come to France in search of the seed of cannabis. This indicates his eagerness to include the peoples of the Middle East and of India in the society his people are working to build in France. It is as if he is opening the doors of Thélème not only to the young men and women of the Renaissance, but also to the diplomats and representatives of far-away nations. For Rabelais, peaceful political interaction with foreigners is a positive phenomenon that leads to progress and to a greater understanding among men; he is like Xenomanes in his passion for all things foreign. He asks them to make a diplomatic mission to France, envisioning a future where there is cooperation instead of discord. This “critical” utopian approach places the present into a bizarre and unrecognizable light, undermining its justification for belligerence.

Rabelais then approaches his appeal for greater cooperation from a spiritual standpoint. In a tone that indicates his progressive and tolerant approach to religion, Rabelais asks the Indians and Arabs to give a million thanks to the heavens if the herb grows successfully in their countries. His refusal to commit to any specific religious imagery can be seen as a reflection of the precepts put forth by Thomas More. During the feasts that begin and end each lunar month, the Utopians all gather in massive churches to worship in their own particular way: “For that reason, there’s nothing to be seen or heard in their churches which can’t equally well be applied to all religions. ... Nor is God addressed by any special names there. He is simply called Mythras, a general term used by everybody to

designate the Supreme Being” (106-7). Both Rabelais and More exhibit a strong desire to move beyond religious differences and emphasize in their place a common spirituality.

If man can use religious diversity to engender respectful curiosity that leads to knowledge rather than disrespectful strife that leads invariably to ignorance, then the dominant and warmongering authorities will be forced to find other, more tangible reasons for their aggression and greed. Rabelais seems to agree with Erasmus and his condemnation of war that is justified through a flimsy appeal to religion:

Thus, although the Christian church was founded with blood, confirmed with blood, expanded with blood, nowadays they settle everything with the sword, just as if Christ had perished completely and would no longer protect his own in his own way. ... Nor is there any lack of learned flatterers who call this patent madness by the names zeal, piety, fortitude, having devised a way to allow someone to unsheathe cold steel and thrust it into his brother's guts without any offense against that highest duty of charity which, according to Christ's precept, he owes to his fellow Christian. (113-4)

Here, Erasmus plainly rejects the popular association of war and religion, showing great distaste for the clever ways in which men use the latter to support the former. As he states, the true purpose of religion is to teach human beings to be charitable to one another, an ideal that Rabelais admirably reproduces in his offering of cannabis to the Arabs and Indians.

He further embodies his religious appeal through his name for cannabis itself: Rabelais combines “Pantagruel” with “lion.” In medieval Christian allegory, the lion has strong ties to Jesus Christ and to the stories surrounding him. This much is attributed to Willene B. Clark's publication, *A Medieval Book of Beasts: the Second-Family Bestiary* (2006), which was “the most popular Latin version in its day, [and] survives in at least forty-nine manuscripts” (7). For example, the lion only becomes angry when personally injured: “The nature of lions is such that they cannot become angry toward men, unless <the lions> are hurt” (121). This may be seen as representative of Rabelais's humanistic benevolence towards two nations that have caused him no personal slight. Even if they had committed him some injury, he can still offer cannabis as a sign of his abundant mercy: “For the mercy

of the lion is apparent in continuous examples, for they spare the prostrate, <and> allow captives they encounter to return home” (121). The giants in Rabelais’s stories do exactly this, as evidenced by the humane treatment of the vanquished forces of Picrochole.

The lion also has a distinct tendency towards the enigmatic: “And if it should happen that he is sought by hunters, the odor of the hunters reaches to him and with his tail he covers the trail of foot-prints he left behind. Then the hunters are unable to track him” (120). This is akin to Jesus Christ, who “covered over the foot-prints of his love in Heaven” (121). In the same line of logic, Rabelais covers his tracks by creating a diverting enigma around his treatment of cannabis. As a consequence, his readers become naturally inclined to seek out the meanings behind the Pantagruélion episode and strip it of some of its mystery. In addition to this is the resurrectional quality of the lion, which is born dead and brought to life three days later by the breath of its father (121). This is reproduced in the final chapter, where cannabis is depicted with phoenix-like abilities to be born again from the flame.

Many of the positive and spiritual qualities of the lion are reflected in both the giant and his herb of preference. The latter is even depicted within the context of a Biblical anecdote:

Aultrement est dicte Pantagruelion par ses vertus et singularitez. Car comme Pantagruel a esté l’Idée et exemplaire de toute joyeuse perfection (je croy que persone de vous aultres Beuveurs n’en doute) aussi en Pantagruelion je recognoys tant de vertus, tant d’énergie, tant de perfection, tant d’effectz admirables, que si elle eust esté en ses qualitez cogneue lors que les arbres (par la relation du Prophete) feirent election d’un Roy de boys pour les regir et dominer, elle sans doute eust emporté la pluralité des voix et suffrages. (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 506-7)

Lefranc explains that the scripture transformed here comes originally from Judges (*Œuvres*, 363). Although in the Bible the trees are led to ruin by the election of a bush, Rabelais reframes the story in a positive way by crowning cannabis their king. It is as if the unjust Anarchus is being replaced by the humanist Pantagruel as king of the Dipsodes, or “Thirsty Ones.” His parenthetical aside to drinkers ushers in the theme of intoxication and provides

the excerpt with some context as to what exactly Rabelais has in mind when he speaks of the “vertus” and “qualitez” of cannabis.

With the trees, there is a fundamental problem of education; if only they had been aware of the numerous applications of cannabis, they would surely have elected it to power. This can be seen as an echo of Rabelais’s wish for the people of France to become aware of the considerable advantages to be had with cannabis. Its insertion into the Bible joins with the plant’s associations to the positive attributes of the medieval lion to form a spiritual dimension that makes it as worthy of a religious intoxicant as wine. As such, cannabis stands to be the ideal intoxicant for a global communion that is respectful and incorporative of multiple religions. Frere Jan transforms the sacred *service divin* into the profane *service du vin*, prioritizing the intoxicating aspects of this religious gathering over its pious ones; the Pantagruélion episode takes the coexistence of religion and intoxication and expands it to a global scale.

To say it differently, Rabelais approaches his appeal for greater cooperation from an intoxicating standpoint. His wish is for these diplomatic merchants to enhance the potency of cannabis back in the Middle East and India. These two regions of the world have decidedly hotter climates than that of France, so cannabis grown there is much more psychoactive:

Cannabis sativa secretes an insoluble resinous material from its glandular hairs to protect the inflorescence against excessive water loss in the hotter and drier environments.

The resin is significant because it contains psychoactive substances that man has long used for intoxicating purposes. The amount of exuded resin is directly dependent upon climatic conditions. Generally, the hotter and drier the environment, the more concentrated and powerful the hallucinogenic potency of the individual plant. (Merlin, 20)

As Merlin indicates, cannabis grown in the Middle East and in India is more powerful than cannabis grown in France, simply on the strength of their disparate meteorological environments. Unlike Gargantua and the feast days he spends separating wine from water

outside of Paris, there is no “entonnoir de Lierre” to concentrate the strength of cannabis as an intoxicant.¹⁴

During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the only way to increase the presence of resin and its intoxicating effects is to grow it in a hotter and drier environment. For Rabelais, the Middle East and India provide Europe with an opportunity to strengthen both cannabis intoxication and their economic, diplomatic, and spiritual ties. The only question that remains is how these peoples would likely receive Rabelais’s offering.

Cannabis in the Middle East & India.

There is a religious approach to cannabis that goes a long way to giving the plant widespread legitimacy in India. First, the Hindu persuasion relates that their god Shiva brought cannabis down from the Himalayas as a gift (Merlin, 91). This is closely reflected by Rabelais’s association of cannabis with the spiritually-rich lion. Second, the use of cannabis as an intoxicating medicine in Montpellier has an even larger tradition in India, and is often seen as a special ability of the holy men who use it for spiritual purposes (Merlin, 105). Some were even inclined to bestow gifts of cannabis upon these “yogis” as an act of charity (105). Similarly, Rabelais’s gift of cannabis could absolutely be considered by them as an act of good will. If his poem had been heard by Hindus, it might have led to harmonious relations between India and Europe, if not at least to some level of increased cooperation and understanding.

The approach to cannabis in the Middle East is more complicated, as indicated by the title of Franz Rosenthal’s book on the subject, *The Herb: Hashish Versus Medieval Muslim Society* (1971). Muslims opposed to the use of cannabis invariably linked it to wine, which is

¹⁴ I address this aspect of Gargantua’s education as it relates to the Pantagruélion episode further on in my argument.

forbidden by their prophet (Rosenthal, 106-7). For the affluent member of the ruling class, confirmed users of cannabis were either seen to belong naturally to a meaner state of being and a lower class of society, or else to have been pushed thereto by the steady deterioration of their constitutions (Rosenthal, 140). Nevertheless, scholars who stretched all the way from the lower rungs of society to the upper echelons of command proved they could indulge in cannabis intoxication with no detriment to the execution of their services (144). In addition, Sufis not only demonstrated the lack of contradiction between cannabis and Islam, but also viewed it as an enhancement of their religious faith and at times its pinnacle (148-9).

There are also the rural peasants, urban merchants and craftsmen, and the everyday Muslim to consider. For these sections of society, Rosenthal points to the friendship-building aspect of cannabis featured in the poetry of al-Mashhadi (138). The poet neither condemns the plant as religious sin nor lifts it to the heights of Sufi adoration (138). He indicates that for the masses, it is simply a plant that helps them connect to one another through a temporary escape from reality (138). It serves the same function as the carnivalesque feasts of Europe. As such, I maintain that a large swathe of medieval Muslim society would have accepted Rabelais's offer for greater cooperation through cannabis.

Smoking Surreptitiously through Steganography.

In the four chapters that precede this final poem, Rabelais prepares his French audience for cooperation through cannabis by educating them on the plant. Since raising awareness about cannabis during the Renaissance implies a certain risk, he delivers his message in a clandestine fashion that requires the active participation of the reader. He has a penchant for speaking to the reader on a level that lies below the surface of the text. Huchon calls this technique of encryption "steganographic art" (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 1042),

and even points to the Pantagruéliion episode as an example (1454). Although I follow her steganographic approach, I draw a different conclusion. Rather than a message about alchemy and the Philosopher's Stone (1454), I see enough imagery to suggest wine-like intoxication by setting fire to cannabis. At every step, Rabelais disguises his illegitimate discussion of intoxication behind the legitimate façade of the plant's fibers.

Chapter XLIX.

The opening chapter of Rabelais's enigma is dedicated to the botanical description of Pantagruéliion (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 500-2), with the identification of cannabis as its steganographic message. It is not necessary to spend much time proving this, as Abel Lefranc has already covered this chapter extensively in his edition of *Le Tiers Livre* (1931). Nonetheless, I will add to his work by addressing a few aspects of the chapter that are important to my argument.

In his description of the stalk of cannabis, Rabelais mentions that it is “plein de fibres, es quelles consiste toute la dignité de l'herbe” (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 501). His confident assertion that *all* the dignity of the plant lies in its fibers acts as a clue for the reader that some dignity does lie elsewhere, such as in its intoxicating flowers. This can only be developed as far as its relationship to his other remarks, and so I will put it aside for the moment. As he moves from the stalk of Pantagruéliion to its leaves, he states, “Et sont par rancs en eguale distance esparses au tour du tige en rotondité par nombre en chascun ordre ou de cinq, ou de sept. Tant l'a Cherie nature, qu'elle l'a douée en ses feuilles de ces deux nombres impars tant divins et mysterieux” (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 501). Huchon points to the Pythagorean perspective on numbers and their meanings to explain Rabelais's comment (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 1449), and I would augment her work simply by

pointing out that his treatment of the divine and mysterious composed leaf of cannabis is mildly mystic – which is certainly echoed and amplified in the Sufi tradition.

Overall, the general purpose of this chapter is to provide his readers with a thorough description of the plant's stalk, seeds, and the stench of its leaves, in addition to its average height, period of growth, and soil preference. He gives them a basic botanical education so that they might recognize cannabis both wild and domestic in the countryside of France. For Rabelais, identifying the plant out in nature is the first step towards familiarity with its intoxication.

Chapter L.

The first section of this chapter is dedicated to the extraction of the fibers from the stalk, commonly known as the retting process. Tucked below the surface of the text is all the information his readers need to correctly ignite and inhale the intoxicating flowers:

On pare le Pantagruelion sous l'æquinoct automnal en diverses manieres, selon la phantasie des peuples, et diversité du pays. L'enseignement premier de Pantagruel feut, le tige d'icelle devestir de feuilles et semence: le macerer en Eaue stagnante non courante par cinq jours, si le temps est sec, et l'eaue chaulde, par neuf ou douze, si le temps est nubileux, et l'eaue froyde: puy au Soleil le seicher: puy à l'umbre le excorticquer, et separer les fibres (es quelles, comme avons dict, consiste tout son pris et valeur) de la partie ligneuse, laquelle est inutile, fors qu'à faire flambe lumineuse, allumer le feu, et pour l'esbat des petitz enfans enfler les vessies de porc. D'elle usent aucunesfoys les frians à cachetes, comme de Syphons, pour sugser et avecques l'haleine attirer le vin nouveau par le bondon. (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 502-3)

Pantagruel's first instruction is to rid the stalk of its leaves and seeds, which are both connected to the intoxicating flower buds. The narrator includes a parenthetical aside similar to the one in chapter XLIX, which belabors the plant's fibrous advantages precisely in an attempt to undermine them. He then states that the woody remains of the de-fibered stalks are only good for making a luminous flame with which to light a fire.

Next, Rabelais brings the message together by ushering in the theme of intoxication. Greedy gourmands inhale wine through the straw-shaped stalks of cannabis as they hide

themselves from view. They appear to exhibit a clandestine desire for intoxication that does not seem to be entirely sanctioned by their society. If the readers connect the flowering tops of cannabis with the imagery of fire and wine, they form a picture of wine-like intoxication through the combustion and inhalation of cannabis.

This steganographic message is then quickly tempered by overt allusions to the use of cannabis as a textile (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 503). From there, Rabelais pulls the attention of the reader away from cannabis completely, whether textile or intoxicant, by entering into a long discussion of the various meanings behind the names of plants (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 503-5). I follow Rigolot on this point, who finds this passage to have a primarily distracting purpose (*Langages*, 148). Nevertheless, within this digression is a host of plants that provide some form of intoxication, and as such he continues to emphasize the theme. He mentions “Absynthe” (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 504), a drink whose principal intoxicant is found in *Artemisia absinthium*, or Wormwood; “Hyoscyame, hanebanes” (504), two names for the same delirium-inducing poisonous plant; and “Aristolochia” (504), commonly known as Birthwort, whose toxic acid was believed to aid women in childbirth. This abundance of imagery is indicative of this chapter’s purpose, which is to shift Rabelais’s discussion of cannabis from botany to intoxication.

Chapter LI.

Rabelais then switches from intoxication to its consequences. Under the surface of his textile treatment of the noose is a message about the severely dry throats his readers can expect to experience from using cannabis:

Par ces manieres (exceptez la fabuleuse, car de fable jà Dieu ne plaise que usions en ceste tant veritable histoire) est dicte l’herbe Pantagruelion. Car Pantagruel feut d’icelle inventeur. Je ne diz quant à la plante, mais quant à un certain usaige, lequel plus est abhorré et hay des larrons... Car maintz d’iceux avons veu par tel usaige finer leur vie hault et court... de ce seulement indignez, que sans estre aultrement mallades, par le Pantagruelion on leurs oppiloit les conduictz, par les quelz sortent les bons

motz, et entrent les bons morseaulx, plus villainement que ne feroit la male Angine et mortelle Squinanche. (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 505-6)

Rabelais places a large emphasis on the throat here. The criminals are strung up by their necks and experience a pain that is worse than “la male Angine et mortelle Squinanche,” which are “noms sous lesquels les anciens auteurs désignaient les affections suffocantes aiguës du pharynx et du larynx” (Lefranc, *Œuvres*, 362). These constant allusions evoke the plant’s namesake, who has an unmistakable connection to the theme of intoxication (Lefranc, *Œuvres*, 363). As a *diablotin*, Pantagruel goes about salting the open throats of the very drunk, so that upon arousing they might have the impetus to continue drinking.

Furthermore, Pantagruel certainly did not invent the hempen noose, as the harvesting of cannabis for its fibers was a practice begun well in advance of the giant’s birth. As Rabelais states, Pantagruel has invented a certain usage for Pantagruélien that dries out men’s throats to such a degree that it is as if they are being strung up by the neck. Without being otherwise unhealthy or sick, these thieves experience a tightening of their throat, the passage by which good words escape and good bits of food enter. As such, Rabelais structures the seemingly negative execution of criminals within the positive framework of prandial conversations. These “larrons” begin to take on a more ambiguous connotation, and seem to be the company of the “friars à cachetes” from the previous chapter. As Bakhtin illustrates in his work, grotesque laughter is intended to lift up and to cast down, to poke fun and to praise. To look only at the negative aspects of this passage would leave the readers with “a reduced form of laughter, a cold humor deprived of positive regenerating power” (Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 42).

To emphasize the fact that nobody is actually suffering the pains of the noose, Rabelais incorporates imagery of wine intoxication into his discussion:

Aultres avons ouy sus l'instant que Atropos leurs couppoit le fillet de vie, soy grievement complainans et lamentans de ce que Pantagruel les tenoit à la guorge. Mais (las) ce n'estoit mie Pantagruel. Il ne feut oncques rouart, c'estoit Pantagruelion, faisant office de hart, et leurs servent de cornette. Et parloient improprement et en Solécisme. Si non qu'on les excusast par figure Synecdochique, prenens l'invention pour l'inventeur. Comme on prent Cerés pour pain, Bacchus pour vin. Je vous jure icy par les bons motz qui sont dedans ceste bouteille là qui rafraichist dedans ce bac, que le noble Pantagruel ne print oncques à la guorge si non ceulx qui sont negligens de obvier à la soif imminente. (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 506)

Rabelais protests that those who complain of a dry throat need not look to Pantagruel, but instead to Pantagruélion; it is cannabis that is responsible. Luckily, the effects of its intoxication are remedied by those of another; the narrator swears on the bottle by his side that Pantagruel only grabs the throats of those who do not slake their “imminent thirst” with wine. Therefore, although the first sense of this image has very much to do with execution, its steganographic message lends a positive tone to the passage. In truth, Rabelais is simply having a laugh about the throat-drying effects of smoking cannabis.

He then recalls the birth of Pantagruel, in which the entire population ground to a halt as a result of no wine: “Car Pantagruel naissant on monde estoit autant grand que l'herbe dont je vous parle. Et en feut prinse la mesure aisement: veu qu'il nasquit on temps de alteration, lors qu'on cuille ladicte herbe” (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 506). As with the retroactively editorial remark in chapter LII about the building material of Thélème, Rabelais is going back into his previous stories and inserting cannabis. At the time of the giant's birth, not only were the people of the region completely strapped for wine, but they were also harvesting cannabis!

As such, he is working to give cannabis the same status in his novels as he gives to wine. In some ways, Rabelais gives cannabis a privileged status above wine. Rabelais speaks of the amazing qualities of Pantagruélion, and uses the previous anecdote from the Bible to hyperbolize the positive spiritual aspects of the plant (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 506-7). He then switches from Christianity to classical mythology: “Diray je plus? Si

Oxylus filz de Orius l'eust de sa sœur Hamadryas engendrée, plus en la seule valeur d'icelle se feust delecté, qu'en tous ses huyct enfans tant celebrez par nos Mythologes, qui ont leurs noms mis en memoire eternelle. La fille aînée eut nom Vigne” (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 507). If cannabis were to spring from the incestuous relationship of Oxylus and Hamadryas, they would value it above their eight other children. First among these children is the vine and the wine it produces – for the moment.

Rabelais’s “Diray je plus?” sounds almost as though he is daring himself to value cannabis above his beloved wine, of which he has sung the praises of for so long. Dare he choose cannabis over wine as his favorite intoxicant? From the ambitious projects that he has for the plant, this much is implied. His picture of life without cannabis conceals intoxication behind textile: “Sans elle seroient les cuisines infames, les tables detestables, quoy que couvertes feussent de toutes viandes exquis: les lictz sans delices, quoy que y feust en abondance Or, Argent, Electre, Ivoyre, et Porphyre” (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 507). In his edition of *Le Tiers Livre* (1966), Pierre Michel addresses the passage’s surface level: “Il s’agit maintenant des nappes et des draps de lin” (574).

Under this textile interpretation is the Bakhtinian sense of the carnivalesque. Cannabis is an intoxicant that enhances the pleasures derived from indulging in the food, drink, and sex of carnivalesque excess. Without it, Rabelais would not have the will to take his corporal refectation, as it were, even if the table be laden heavily with all manner of meats. Without cannabis, Rabelais could gain no pleasure from bedding a woman, even if the bed itself was ornately built. This dimension of cannabis is demonstrated by the Greeks’ use of the herb “pour trouver le vin meilleur” (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 502), as well as its role in their *symposion* as an aphrodisiac (Lefranc, *Œuvres*, 341). This emphasis on beds and

tables is taken up again when Rabelais addresses the role of cannabis in maritime exploration.

Terrestrial & Celestial Extrapolation of Cannabis Intoxication.

Near the end of chapter LI, Rabelais provides an example of the utopian thought processes transformed by the discovery of the New World. Through the use of cannabis as a textile, men become fearless before the enormity of their planet:

Icelle moyenant, par la retention des flots aërez sont les grosses Orchades, les amples Thalameges, les fors Guallions, les Naufz Chiliandres et Myriandres de leurs stations enlevées, et poussées à l'arbitre de leurs gouverneurs. Icelle moyenant, sont les nations, que Nature sembloit tenir absconses, impermeables, et incongneues: à nous venues, nous à elles. Chose que ne feroient les oyseaulx, quelque legiereté de pennaige qu'ilz ayent, et quelque liberté de nager en l'aër, que leurs soit baillée par Nature. Taprobrana a veu Lappia: Oava a veu les mons Riphées: Phebol voyra Theleme: les Islandoys et Engronelands boyront Euphrates. Par elle Boreas a veu le manoir de Auster: Eurus a visité Zephire. De mode que les Intelligences celestes, les Dieux tant marins que terrestres en ont esté tous effrayez, voyans par l'usaige de cestuy benedict Pantagruelion, les peuples Arcticques en plein aspect des Antarctiques, franchir la mer Athlanticque, passer les deux Tropicques, volter sous la Zone torride, mesurer tout le Zodiacque, s'esbatre sous l'Æquinocial, avoir l'un et l'autre Pole en veue à fleur de leur Orizon. (Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 508-9)

Interestingly enough, the fictional abbey of Thélème makes an appearance among a long list of actual destinations. This is a further indication of Rabelais's determination to link the abbey with cannabis. In addition, his partnership of Thélème with "Phebol," which Huchon defines as an island in the gulf of Arabia (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 508), emphasizes his benevolent attitude towards the Middle East.

He even shows how the spiritually-rich "benedict Pantagruelion" helps man to exercise his "arbitre" over the ships. As such, cannabis helps them to live their lives according to their "vouloir et franc arbitre" (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 148). This is arguably the most important concept for the Thelemites, and it recalls their motto: "Fay ce que voudras" (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 149). Through the use of the ropes and sails of cannabis, disparate locations are suddenly brought closer together, culminating in a total victory over Earthly space. The gods of earth and sea become frightened to see man displace

himself so nimbly across their oceans, sailing across the Atlantic, exploring the equator as well as the tropics of Capricorn and Cancer, taking measurements of their planet, and reaching the poles with ease.

However, Rabelais does not actually use cannabis to strike fear into the hearts of the gods. Rather, this entire passage is framed by the happy atmosphere of carnivalesque laughter, which strips them of their fearful aspects and elevates man himself to a position of strength (Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 12). Indeed, the positive tone of the carnivalesque becomes more apparent as Rabelais expands man's reach into space:

Les Dieux Olympicques ont en pareil effroy dict. "Pantagruel nous a mis en pensement nouveau et tedieux, plus que oncques ne feirent les Aloïdes, par l'usaige et vertus de son herbe. Il sera de brief marié, de sa femme aura enfans. À ceste destinée ne povons nous contrevenir: car elle est passée par les mains et fuseaulx des sœurs fatales, filles de Necessité. Par ses enfans (peut estre) sera inventée herbe de semblable energie: moyenant laquelle pourront les humains visiter les sources des gresles, les bondes des pluyes, et l'officine des fouldres: pourront envahir les regions de la Lune, entrer le territoire des signes celestes, et là prendre logis, les uns à l'Aigle d'or, les aultres au Mouton, les aultres à la Couronne, les aultres à la Herpe, les aultres au Lion d'argent: s'asseoir à table avecques nous, et nos Déesses prendre à femmes, qui sont les seulx moyens d'estre deifiez." En fin ont mis le remede de y obvier en deliberation, et au conseil. (509)

The gods of Olympus explain that Pantagruel's use of cannabis and its virtues make them uneasy, because it is the first step towards reaching them one day. They say it is possible that the sons of Pantagruel will invent an herb of a similar energy that will allow them to surpass the maritime adventures of their ancestors. By its use, they will unmask the secrets of their planet's meteorological phenomena, travel about the celestial constellations at their leisure, and finally sit down to eat at the Olympian table. They will even take the goddesses to bed, becoming gods themselves by this two-fold action of prandial intoxication and sexual pleasure.

For Rabelais, the culmination of space travel is to go on a drunk of Olympian proportions and top it off with naked goddesses in bed. This reflects his earlier treatment of

the beds and tables that would be unattractive without cannabis, and sounds very much like the Erasmian conception of an Olympian *symposion*:

Indeed, even Vulcan himself often plays *the clown* at the banquets of the gods, enlivening their drinking bouts by limping around, or making smart remarks, or telling funny stories. Then Silenus, that white-haired wooer, dances *a frisky jig*, Polyphemus stomps around to the *thrum-thrum of a guitar*, and the nymphs jump about *dancing with bare feet*. The satyrs, human above and goat below, flounce around doing bumps and grinds. Pan makes everybody laugh by singing some silly song, which they would rather hear than a performance by the Muses themselves, especially when they are beginning to get soused on nectar. I suppose there is no need to mention what the gods do after the banquet, when they are quite drunk – such tomfoolery that sometimes it's all that I can do to keep from laughing out loud. (27, translator's italics)

The gods use alcoholic intoxication as a social lubricant that leads first to a rejection of inhibitions, then to a healthy amount of hilarity, and finally to drunken bouts of sex. There is no contradiction between their divinity and their appreciation for corporal pleasure – in fact, in his version of events, Rabelais views this corporal pleasure as the path to godship itself.

Another difference between Erasmus and Rabelais is that the former never posits that man will be able to physically reach this orgiastic Olympian *symposion*. This is where I would reproach Bakhtin's argument for the divinization of man through the invention of the sail (*Rabelais*, 367). I follow his point that exploration of the earth contributes in a large degree to the progress of man, but the Olympian gods clearly state that the only way to become a god is to first get drunk with them at the banquet table and then have sex with the goddesses. There is another area of Bakhtin's argument that needs some correction. In agreement with P. L. Jacob and Jules Claretie (Rigolot, *Langages*, 150), he states that Rabelais "foresees" both aviation and astronautics (*Rabelais*, 367). Bakhtin bestows both praise and prophetic qualities on Rabelais for his thoughts on space travel.

However, Rabelais is not the only one to imagine humans in space. In fact, he is still operating within the influence of the New World on the concept of utopia (Servier, 140). The failure to find utopia on Earth leads authors to project said paradise out into space:

Mais déjà l'échec des navigateurs qui n'ont pas retrouvé le Paradis terrestre, amène en 1638 l'évêque Godwin à envisager les voyages interplanétaires, dans les *Aventures de Domingo Gonzalès*, un nom qui évoque les conquistadores. Un autre petit ouvrage, attribué à l'évêque Wilkins, *The discovery of a world in the Moon*, publié également en 1638, traduit les rêves nés du Nouveau Monde et leur accorde un sursis. (Servier, 140-1)

By always pushing the concept of utopia just beyond the reach of man, authors can rejuvenate the hope and positivity that surrounds it. In this respect, Rabelais is no different, and he is certainly not a prophet. What distinguishes Rabelais from his fellow writers is his portrayal of man reaching utopia through intoxication.

Chapter LII.

In his final chapter, Rabelais takes this imagery of intoxication and makes it abundantly plain. For example, he likens the unraveling of his enigma to the separation of wine from water:

Ce que je vous ay dict, est grand et admirable. Mais si vouliez vous hazarder de croire quelque aultre divinité de ce sacre Pantagruelion, je la vous dirois. Croyez la ou non. Ce m'est tout un. Me suffist vous avoir dict verité. Verité vous diray. Mais pour y entrer, car elle est d'accés assez scabreux et difficile, je vous demande. Si j'avoys en ceste bouteille mis deux cotyles de vin, et une d'eau ensemble bien fort meslez, comment les demesleriez vous? Comment les separeriez vous? De maniere que vous me rendriez l'eau à part sans le vin, le vin sans l'eau, en mesure pareille que les y auroys mis. Aultrement. Si vos chartiers et nautonniers amenans pour la provision de vos maisons certain nombre de tonneaulx, pippes, et bussars de vin de Grave, d'Orleans, de Beaulne, de Myrevaux, les avoient buffetez et beuz à demy, le reste emplissans d'eau, comme font les Limosins à belz esclotz, charroyans les vins d'Argenton, et Sangaultier: comment en housteriez vous l'eau entierement? Comment les purifieriez vous? J'entends bien, vous me parlez d'un entonnoir de Lierre. Cela est escript. Il est vray et averé par mille experiences. Vous le sçaviez desjà. Mais ceulx qui ne l'ont sceu et ne le veirent oncques, ne le croyoient possible. Passons oultre. (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 509-10)

After another reference to the divine and sacred nature of cannabis, Rabelais asks his readership what they could possibly do to separate wine from water if they had been extremely well-mixed beforehand. His choice of liquids is a clue as to the plant's dual nature, with flower buds that intoxicate and a stalk that does not.

Curiously enough, he provides the reader with a second clue through an allusion to the "entonnoir de Lierre." Rabelais is referring his readership to Gargantua's education, where Ponocrates rewards him a day's feast for his efforts. As he is drinking, laughing,

roughhousing, and generally making “la plus grande chere dont ilz se pouvoient adviser” (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 72), Gargantua plays a bit of an alchemical trick to strengthen the wine he is pouring down his gullet:

En banquetant du vin aisé separoient l'eau: comme l'enseigne Cato *de re rust.* et Pline: avecques un guobelet de Lierre: lavoient le vin en plain bassin d'eau: puis le tiroient avec un embut: faisoient aller l'eau d'un verre en aultre: bastisoient plusieurs petitz engins automates: c'est à dire: soy mouvens eulx mesmes. (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 73)

Through his education and a careful alchemical process of extraction, Gargantua concentrates his wine even while completely drunk. Rabelais's allusion to this episode indicates that his audience should focus on getting rid of the sobering bits of the riddle and concentrate on its intoxicating aspects. As such, they can begin to see other meanings under the surface level of the text.

The imagery of intoxication becomes even stranger as the chapter progresses. Next, Rabelais talks about wrapping human corpses in shrouds of cannabis, lighting all of this on fire, harvesting the resultant ashes, and placing these human remains in good white wine to be drunk:

Si nous estions du temps de Sylla, Marius, Cæsar et aultres Romains empereurs ou du temps de nos antiques Druydes, qui faisoient brusler les corps mors de leurs parens et seigneurs, et voulussiez les cendres de vos femmes, ou peres boyre en infusion de quelque bon vin blanc, comme feist Artemisia les cendres de Mausolus son mary, ou aultrement les reserver entieres en quelque urne, et reliquaire: comment saulveriez vous icelles cendres à part, et separées des cendres du bust et feu funeral? Répondez. Par ma figue vous seriez bien empeschez. Je vous en despesche. Et vous diz, que prenent de ce celeste Pantagruelion autant qu'en faudroit pour couvrir le corps du defunct, et ledict corps ayant bien à poinct enclous dedans, lié et cousu de mesmes matiere, jetez le on feu tant grand, tant ardent que vouldrez: le feu à travers le Pantagruelion bruslera et redigera en cendres le corps et les oz. (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 510)

On the surface, Rabelais is speaking of the antique tradition of literally drinking the ashes of dead bodies in wine, and the need to keep their ashes separate from those produced by the funeral pyre. Nevertheless, this surface meaning can leave any reader puzzled as to why Rabelais would speak of a quasi-cannibalistic approach to intoxication.

First, to better define the tone of this passage, I point quite bluntly to the fact that there is no fire-proof strain of cannabis. If any specimen be forced to co-exist with fire, it will combust and produce intoxicating plumes of smoke. Yet in this final chapter, Rabelais is adamant that there is a fire-proof strain of cannabis, and it is to this outlandish declaration that he refers at the beginning of the chapter when he demonstrates his nonchalant attitude towards the incredulity of his audience: “Croyez la ou non. Ce m’est tout un” (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 509).

He calls this extraordinary example of cannabis “Pantagruelion Carpasien Asbestin” (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 510). Nevertheless, he does not believe that cannabis actually shares any similarities to asbestos, least of all its resistance to flame. He demonstrates in *Gargantua* that he is perfectly aware of what asbestos actually is, naming it a rock during the *Propos des bienyvres*: “La pierre dite ασβεστος n’est plus inextinguible que la soif de ma paternité” (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 19). This contradicts Pliny, who takes asbestos to be an incombustible variety of flax in book XIX of his *Natural History* (30). Unlike the classical author, Rabelais is making this mistake on purpose. A look at Pliny’s account of incombustible flax will provide a precedent for the hyperbolic tone that Rabelais imitates in his enigma:

On a découvert aussi un lin incombustible. On le nomme lin vif et nous en avons vu des serviettes jetées dans les foyers lors de banquets en sortir nettoyées, rendues plus éclatantes par le feu que l’eau n’aurait pu le faire. On en fabrique des linceuls royaux, qui séparent des autres les cendres du corps. Il vient dans les déserts brûlés par le soleil de l’Inde, où ne tombe aucune pluie, au milieu d’horribles serpents. Il s’y habitue à résister au feu; il est rare à trouver et difficile à tisser parce qu’il est court. Du reste sa couleur est rousse et respandit au feu. Quand on le trouve, son prix vaut celui des plus belles perles. Les Grecs l’appellent *asbestinon* d’après ses propriétés. Anaxilaus affirme que, si on coupe un arbre enveloppé d’un tissu de ce lin, les coups sont assourdis et ne s’entendent pas. Ce lin occupe donc le premier rang dans tout l’univers. (30-1)

Pliny attributes some fairly unbelievable qualities to his fire-proof linen: napkins cleansed not in water but in flame, miracle shrouds that separate corpses from their pyres, its origin in

the land of serpents and droughts, its sound-cancelling effects on trees being cut down, and finally the fact that it occupies the number one spot in the entire universe. Well aware of Pliny's mistake, Rabelais parodies this over-the-top account of incombustible flax rather than make the same mistake with cannabis.

Rabelais's purpose in this final chapter is to incite his readership into an incredulous state that can only be satisfied by personally lighting cannabis on fire and seeing what happens. Amongst his hyperbolic claims about cannabis are many clues for the benefit of his readership. First, the white wine evoked in this passage indicates the theme of intoxication. Next, his direction to cover the corpse in enough cannabis and then wrap it up in the same material is a play on its dual nature; Rabelais would not need to specify this if he were only addressing the textile aspect of cannabis. His readers would simply wrap the corpse in a funerary shroud and be on their way to burning the entire thing on a pyre. As such, Rabelais may be seen to indicate that the dead body should be covered in raw cannabis flowers and leaves and then wrapped up snug in a shroud.

Although on the surface Rabelais is describing a funeral, under the surface he is providing detailed instructions for how to roll and smoke cannabis. In this passage, he uses a series of images to build a connection between cannabis, wine, and fire: "faisoient brusler... boyre en infusion de quelque bon vin blanc... cendres du bust... feu funeral... jectez le on feu tant grand, tant ardent que vouldrez..." (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 510). It is a passage that seems strange at the outset, but that reveals a hidden message when interpreted on a steganographic level. Through abundant imagery of wine and fire alongside cannabis, Rabelais hints at the nature of the wine-like intoxication that can be had by lighting it on fire.

In an effort to drive his point home, Rabelais then speaks of throwing eggs wrapped up in cannabis into fires; he talks of salamanders walking in flames; he points to Galen's assertion that salamanders are not truly fire-proof in his book on the temperaments (which can be seen as a reflection of both his desire to indicate that cannabis is not truly fire-proof either and to point his readership to some context for the fiery nature of the plant); he addresses a whole host of supposedly fire-proof minerals and plants; he ends finally with his discussion of *Larrix* and of Julius Cæsar setting an entire town ablaze (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 510-12). At this point, Rabelais points out that both Thélème and the fleet of ships are not made out of *Larrix*, but instead out of "vray Pantagruelion," or real cannabis (Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 512).

This is the true context for the final poem of *Le Tiers Livre*. Rabelais illustrates that he is perfectly aware of the intoxication to be had from smoking or ingesting cannabis, and associates this with the positive and utopian consequences of wine-based intoxication. In order to achieve a more peaceful state of cooperation, it is the transformation of the *symposion* into the *synthumion* that Rabelais proposes to the peoples of the Middle East and India, where cannabis is used more widely than wine. As a means to reach said distant regions of the Earth, Rabelais absorbs the discovery of the New World into his model of utopia and manifests it in a fleet of ships rigged and stocked with cannabis. With the abbey of Thélème now rendered mobile, Rabelais is free to extend his model of peaceful intoxication not only from Christianity to Islam and Hinduism, where he recognized it was sorely needed, but also from Europe unto the entire planet and indeed out into space. Such is his opinion of the powerful industrious and intoxicating applications of cannabis.

To Conclude.

It is with a clear knowledge of the myriad applications of cannabis that Rabelais pens his personal herbal at the end of *Le Tiers Livre*. Its many uses become clear when compared to the “series” that Bakhtin maintains are indicative of Rabelais’s style (*Chronotope* 170). As a textile, it encompasses both the human clothing series and the death series (in its capacity as a hangman’s noose). As an intoxicating medicine that has an effect on the body and can arouse sexual desire, cannabis is related to the drink and drunkenness series, the human body series, and the sexual series. Finally, its capacity to incite hunger and its nutritious seed allow it to be categorized in the food series.

Furthermore, the sale of cannabis as a textile, a foodstuff, or an intoxicant contributes positively to the economy of France, be it on the farm of his father at La Devinière, in the stalls and shops of pepperers and apothecaries in Montpellier, or even in the markets of Lyon. Remarkably, cannabis has an influence even on the economy of the battlefield, generating income for travelling merchants and improving relationships between their distinct cultures even as their militant clients make war to the exact opposite effect. As a humanist in line with Thomas More, Rabelais condemns aggressive wars waged to exchange human lives for wealth.

In his second book, *Gargantua*, Rabelais takes Erasmus’ positive opinion of the good-natured folly of the *symposion* and submits it as a valid solution to Picrochole’s aggression and greed. He expands the peaceable intoxication of wine into a series of jolly banquets that culminate in the foundation of a forward-thinking, “critical” utopian abbey where all can dispose of their free will. By the time Rabelais sits down to begin work on his third book, he has already made considerable progress defining his particular approach to the

themes of intoxication and utopia. Nevertheless, the fruity approach of wine is confined to Europe and to its principal religion, both of which are relatively small when placed in a global context.

As a remedy, Rabelais applies cannabis to his model of utopian intoxication, and this herbaceous approach works quite well. Unlike grapes, this remarkable plant grows like a weed the world around, and as an added bonus, there is no lengthy fermentation process involved. The medieval man simply dries the plant and smokes it. Furthermore, there is precedent for the use of cannabis in both Hindu and Muslim societies. As such, cannabis becomes the global replacement for wine in the Thelemites' ongoing quest for harmony and understanding between men. His aim is to strengthen diplomatic, mercantile, and spiritual ties through the intoxicating effects of smoking cannabis in international unison.

Nevertheless, if Rabelais wishes for France to find common ground with India and the Middle East, then he cannot remain in a minority of Frenchmen who are aware of the peaceable relationship-building aspects of the plant. In the Pantagruélion episode, Rabelais becomes like a mountebank or a hawker of chapbooks (Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 186), advertising his extraordinary plant in a manner that is simultaneously plain and cryptic. On the surface, he advocates for its textile advantages as he extrapolates the maritime exploration made possible by cannabis first to the entire world and then out into space. Curiously enough, he also sends a message to his readership below the surface, as it were, through a careful attention to his choice of words. Through the use of what Mireille Huchon terms "steganography" (Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 1042), Rabelais weaves covert directions concerning the combustion and inhalation of cannabis directly into his overt discussion of its textile value, as well as indications of what cannabis intoxication feels like and what effects it

has on the body. In this way, Rabelais increases awareness of the intoxicant and prepares his France of the present for his future plans of worldwide cooperation through cannabis.

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