

*Rabelais altérateur: "Graeciser en François."* Romain Menini.

Les mondes de Rabelais 2. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014. 1,144 pp. €49.

In *Rabelais altérateur*, Romain Menini builds on 2009's *Rabelais et l'intertexte platonicien* to show how Lucian and Plutarch, who, like Plato, served as the lens through which Rabelais viewed the ancient Greek cultural legacy, inform the comedic project of the *geste pantagruéline*. To say nothing of his singularly solid command of the Rabelaisian corpus and its secondary literature, Menini's Hellenist chops set him apart from the crowd, and he has produced a veritable treasure trove in which any *Rabelaisant* will find something of interest.

Part 1, "Rabelais altérateur," advances the highly useful concept of *altération* as a way of understanding Rabelais's relationship with both his sources and his readers. Insofar as *altération* connotes change, it provides a more precise alternative to Michel Jeanneret's "poetics of metamorphosis" in that Rabelais does not see himself as creating *ex nihilo*, but as altering existing sources; Rabelais is not so much an "Aut(h)eur" as an "Au(l)treur" (42). *Altération* also connotes mental disturbance and, most interestingly, thirst, which resonates with Pantagruel's origins as an imp sowing salt in sleeping men's throats and captures the way in which Rabelais tantalizes the reader's thirst for knowledge, promising satisfaction only to instill a sense of interpretive lack.

Part 2, "Nasier, le 'nez de Lucian,'" contests Christiane Lauvergnat-Gagnière's claim that Lucian's influence was not essential to Rabelais's project. Menini begins by tracing Lucianism in Rabelais's intellectual and printerly milieu, conjecturing that Rabelais translated Lucian's *Icaromenippus* during his time at Fontenay-le-Comte. Then, through a study of Rabelais's borrowings from *How to Write History* and the *True History*, he makes the fascinating argument that Rabelais plays an irreverent but appreciative Lucian to Jean Boucher's Herodotus, while at the same time reacting against the proliferation of chronicles in France at the time. After an examination of how Rabelais returns to Lucian for the *Quart Livre* and *Cinquiesme Livre* by way of the apocryphal *Navigations de Panurge*, he then shows how Rabelais models the parrhesia of his characters' dialogue and especially his prologues on Lucian. In particular, he traces the Diogenes of the *Tiers Livre* to *Philosophies for Sale* and the inexhaustible wine barrel to the *Hermotimus*, and then points to *Timon, or the Misanthrope* as a source for the prologue of the 1552 *Quart Livre*. The part concludes with a discussion of Lucian's influence on Rabelais's philosophy of laughter and paradoxical encomia.

Part 3, "Autour des 'Moraux de Plutarque': Rabelais polymathe," shows how Rabelais, like most other sixteenth-century authors, uses Plutarch's *Moralia* as a repository of knowledge and as a model of stylistic varietas. It features one of the book's most important contributions: a study of a previously neglected copy of the *Moralia* published by Froben in 1542 with Rabelais's annotations. Even more interesting than the aspects of the *Tiers Livre*, *Quart Livre*, and *Cinquiesme Livre* that Menini traces back to this annotated copy is the portrait it paints of Rabelais as a reader of Greek who reads Latin translations when available and consults something like the 1542 edition of the *Moralia* to check specific pages, passages, or phrases.

The book concludes with an epilogue on the interpretative controversies surrounding Rabelais's prologues, notably that of *Gargantua*. Here, Menini offers an intriguing variation on the pluralist school of thought most commonly associated with Jeanneret, François Rigolot, and Terence Cave. In keeping with the concept of *altération*, he argues that Rabelais both pushes the reader toward multiple interpretations and refuses to allow him to content himself with any given reading.

In this reader's assessment, *Rabelais altérateur* is the kind of study whose theoretical framework and erudition challenge assumptions and change how critics look at Rabelais; I personally found Menini's accounts of the prologues especially enlightening. While its considerable length may be daunting, and while it might have been more appropriate to divide it into two books, one on Lucian and one on Plutarch, Menini's witticisms and wordplay make for an entertaining read. This is a book with which all serious *Rabelaisants* must reckon, and students of Renaissance Hellenism would also profit by it.

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