CLASSICS LIBRARY · STORY MAP

Gargantua and Pantagruel

François Rabelais · *1532-1564* · *Thomas Urquhart and Peter Motteux*

Most noble and illustrious drinkers: so Rabelais opens, dedicating his writings to them, and then comparing his book to the Silenus boxes of old, rough outside and precious within. The hosted text is Urquhart and Motteux's English, five books. For older students (11–12). Teach the comedy, and the serious thing under the jest. No prurience on the map.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What is a school to do with a comic giant-book that hides a serious argument under a rough joke, and how should the Abbey of Thélème be taught without turning "Do What Thou Wilt" into a license?

"Most noble and illustrious drinkers, and you thrice precious pockified blades (for to you, and none else, do I dedicate my writings), Alcibiades, in that dialogue of Plato's, which"

The author's prologue to Gargantua

Rabelais writes of the giants Gargantua and Pantagruel, of a wild education, of war, and of an abbey whose one clause is "Do What Thou Wilt," because, he says, free and well-bred people have an instinct that prompts them to virtuous action. The book is comic, and it is also a serious argument about learning, liberty, and a Christian humanism. Teach it in Urquhart and Motteux's English, for grades 11–12, with tact. No prurience on the map. Editorial matter stands first in this file; quote the prologue and the tale, not only the notes on the translation.

KEY CHARACTERS

Gargantua
The father, whose education and whose abbey are the first book's serious cargo

Pantagruel
The son, whose story and voyages continue through the later books

The author in the prologue
The jester who compares his book to a Silenus box

A ROUGH LID, AND A FINE THING WITHIN

> *"Most noble and illustrious drinkers, and you thrice precious pockified blades (for to you, and none else, do I dedicate my writings), Alcibiades, in that dialogue of Plato's, which"*
>
> The author's prologue to Gargantua

Grades 11–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

Drinkers, and Silenus Boxes

THE AUTHOR'S PROLOGUE TO GARGANTUA

He dedicates the writings to drinkers, then recalls Alcibiades on Socrates and the Silenes: little boxes, rough outside, with fine things within. The jest is a lid. A school should look under it.

- The first words of the prologue are exact, including "pockified blades" as this file prints them. The roughness is the book's manner; do not linger on it, and do not bowdlerize the first clause into a different sentence.
- Editorial notes on Urquhart and Motteux stand first; do not quote them as Rabelais.
- Adult/Advanced, 11–12. No prurience on the map.
- This hosted file contains the five books; label the work honestly as a large collection.

> *"Most noble and illustrious drinkers, and you thrice precious pockified blades (for to you, and none else, do I dedicate my writings), Alcibiades, in that dialogue of Plato's, which"*
>
> The author's prologue to Gargantua

02

Gargantua's Education

BOOK I

The first book is a giant childhood and a debate about learning: a bad education, then a better one, letters and exercise together. The comedy is large; the argument about what a young person should be taught is serious.

- Teach the education as the book's first serious cargo.
- Do not reduce Book I to jokes about a giant's appetite.
- Quote Urquhart and Motteux.
- 11–12, with tact.

> *"Most noble and illustrious drinkers, and you thrice precious pockified blades (for to you, and none else, do I dedicate my writings), Alcibiades, in that dialogue of Plato's, which"*
>
> The author's prologue to Gargantua

03

The Abbey of Thélème

BOOK I, THE ABBEY

In all their rule there was but this one clause to be observed: Do What Thou Wilt; because, the book says, men that are free, well-born, well-bred, and conversant in honest companies have naturally an instinct and spur that prompteth them unto virtuous action.

- Quote the clause with the reason that follows it. Do not teach "Do What Thou Wilt" as a license cut free from that sentence.
- The abbey is a vision of liberty under virtue, not of appetite without a bridle.
- Keep the wording of this English: "Do What Thou Wilt."
- Tact; no prurience.

> *"In all their rule and strictest tie of their order there was but this one clause to be observed, Do What Thou Wilt; because men that are free, well-born"*
>
> The Abbey of Thélème

04

Pantagruel, and the Later Books

BOOKS II–V

The son's story, and the later voyages, continue the comedy and the argument. The file is long. A school should say that this is five books, not a single short novel, and should not pretend to have mapped every episode.

- Label the scope honestly.
- The later books keep the mix of jest and seriousness.
- Do not hunt out the coarsest pages for the lesson.
- Urquhart for the earlier books, Motteux for the later, as this edition presents them.

> *"Most noble and illustrious drinkers, and you thrice precious pockified blades (for to you, and none else, do I dedicate my writings), Alcibiades, in that dialogue of Plato's, which"*
>
> The author's prologue to Gargantua

05

This English

THE EDITION

Thomas Urquhart and Peter Motteux. Editorial remarks on the 1653 text stand first. Quote the prologue and the narrative.

- Catalogue 11–12. Adult/Advanced matter.
- No prurience on the map.
- The Silenus image is the right way to tell students why the roughness is there.
- Complete hosted collection.

> *"Most noble and illustrious drinkers, and you thrice precious pockified blades (for to you, and none else, do I dedicate my writings), Alcibiades, in that dialogue of Plato's, which"*
>
> The author's prologue to Gargantua

A Silenus Box | An Education | Liberty under Virtue | An Abbey | Comedy with a Weight

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 11–12

1. The prologue to Gargantua begins: "Most noble and illustrious drinkers, and you thrice precious pockified blades (for to you, and none else, do I dedicate my writings)." Editorial notes stand first; do not quote them as Rabelais.
2. This is Urquhart and Motteux, five books, 1532–1564. For grades 11–12. Adult/Advanced. No prurience on the map.
3. The Silenus boxes are the book's own image: rough outside, precious within. Teach the jest as a lid.
4. The Abbey of Thélème's one clause is "Do What Thou Wilt," because free and well-bred people have an instinct that prompts them to virtuous action. Do not cut the clause free from that reason, and do not teach it as a license.
5. Label the work honestly as a large five-book collection, not a short novel. Do not hunt out the coarsest pages for the lesson.

Quotations are verbatim from the Thomas Urquhart and Peter Motteux, Project Gutenberg #1200, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/rabelais-gargantua-and-pantagruel/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.