

FRANÇOIS RABELAIS

A contemporary of Leonardo da Vinci and Martin Luther, François Rabelais (1494-1553) was one of the first authors to write in the vernacular. The sixteenth century, now hardly a speck in our rear-view mirror, was a God-centered age that retained its medieval perspective while undergoing the Renaissance's heady humanism. Europe had just discovered the New World and was launching its global program of colonial expansion. All was small and cozy; all related to man. However, we were less than a century away from Galileo Galilei and his life-changing notions. And as fatuous as this may sound, some citizens of France still consider America a cultural wasteland. Many of them still can't forgive us for speaking English (instead of French).

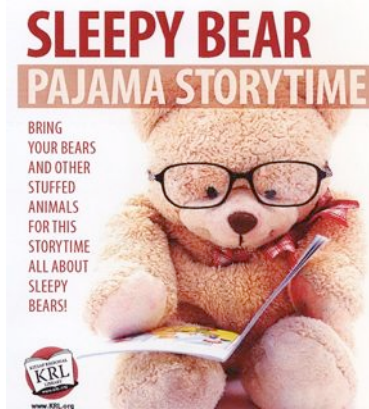
While a youth Rabelais was placed in a Franciscan monastery. After being ordained a priest, he was accused of buying books with the money he'd earned by preaching (instead of chipping in to the community pool). He was placed in solitary confinement – sans books – until a mentor appealed his case to the new king, Francis I. Subsequently reinstated, Rabelais showed his appreciation by leaving the priesthood for good. After sampling several academic facilities he selected the University of Montpellier, and received a bachelor's degree from its School of Medicine. He wandered about for a year then settled in Lyons and became a physician at the city's hospital.

It was one of the most successful Plan B's in history. Apparently Rabelais was quite impressive and, considering the licentious tales he was about to write, was a teetotaler who led a moderately decent life. Rising above the drudgery of his everyday existence, he loved poking fun at his fellow Gallicans who were being frog-marched into the most tempestuous century on record (this despite the two world wars in the last one). His stories feature his Brobdingnagian creations, *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*. (Since the books were banned by both the Sorbonne and the Church, they were instant hits.) Heir to the Kingdom of Utopia, Gargantua goes through various misadventures before returning home where his father, King Grangousier, is being threatened by the warlike Picrochole. Gargantua wins the resulting conflict – helped by his horse, who drowns thousands of the enemy with an easing of his bladder; and by Friar John, a monk who loves fighting more than praying. After a Parisian education, Gargantua's son, Pantagruel, falls under the influence of the dissolute Panurge who entertains us for the remainder of the book.

Throughout his writings, Rabelais's riotous vocabulary showcases his coarse buffoonery. To him, the world's a comedy and he's been given carte blanche to mimic it. Book Four of his Gargantua series, for example, begins in heaven with Jupiter complaining about the tumult being caused by human affairs below. The tale descends to earth where the protagonists undergo a number of Gulliverian adventures before reaching the Temple of the Holy Bottle. There – in an appropriate blend of lubricity and philosophy – the story ends. Like Shakespeare, Rabelais borrowed a lot of his material. But also like the Bard, he justified his appropriations with the announcement that he bettered everything he stole.

– essay by Bill Lounsbury

*KRL has a couple of editions of these great stories
& a Kindle edition is available online for \$3.03*



KIDS !

7 PM, Monday, March 18

Bring your bears and other stuffed animals for this story time all about sleepy bears!

e-Reader Classes at Manchester Library:

Taught by our own Chief Librarian, Zak Sherman on

March 28 from 3:30 – 5 pm

and again on April 19 from 3:30 – 5 pm

Bring your Kindles, Nooks or iPads



Saturday, March 30th

1 – 3 pm

Annual Bunny Hop!

Hunt for Easter eggs, see the Easter bunny, play games and make crafts. Candy for all!

STILL TIME TO PARTICIPATE: Auction Items for Library Fundraiser

We have had a donation of a large work of art called "Land of the Free" by artist Alan M. Hunt. It is hanging above the self-checkout and it is up for raffle. There is also a week's lodging at a foreign location of your choice. Tickets are \$2.00 at the Library. The drawing will be in September 2013 at Amy's on the Bay Takeover, date TBD

Review by your editor: Last month, we recommended *Among Others* (2012) by Jo Walton noting that it was science fiction/ fantasy and winner of Nebula & Hugo awards. Having enjoyed science fiction since I was in 4th grade, I put myself on the KRL "hold list." Last week it arrived! I am now halfway through and thoroughly enjoying the story. The tale is a coming of age story of a young Welsh girl, set in England between 1975-1980. The young girl, Morwenna, is the most prodigious reader and names all the great science fiction writers and most of their books in the course of telling her tale ... which includes her twin sister Morganna, a mad witch and fairies ... (more next month).

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<http://www.manchesterwa.org/FOML/Bookstore%20%20Newsletters.html>