



Gargantua and Pantagruel: A Philosophical Encyclopedia

Beneath the Mask of Jest

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Annotation: One of the invaluable masterpieces of world literature — the French writer François Rabelais's novel cycle "Gargantua and Pantagruel" — serves as the subject of research for this article. The study analyzes the work's compositional structure and ideological-artistic content from a scholarly perspective. Through the characters of Gargantua and Pantagruel and their varied adventures, the article reveals the author's critical attitude toward the society, educational system, and religious-moral views of his era. The distinctive feature of the work lies in the fact that, although it appears outwardly full of humor and jest, this light style skillfully conceals profound philosophical, pedagogical, and social meaning beneath it. The article concludes with scholarly conclusions regarding the work's place in the development of world literature and its significance for the present day.

Keywords: Renaissance, humanism, satire, parody, composition, artistic mastery, critique of education, religious-moral views, humor, philosophical meaning, social critique.

François Rabelais's novel "Gargantua and Pantagruel" is considered one of the most brilliant and immortal masterpieces of French literature. It is precisely this work that brought the writer worldwide fame and engraved his name in history. The creative history of this novel is closely connected with the folk literature of its time. A popular chapbook published in Lyon in 1532, titled "The Great and Inestimable Chronicles of Gargantua," served as a unique source of inspiration for the writer. Building upon this folk plot, Rabelais presented the first part of his work that same year — "The Horrible and Terrifying Deeds and Prowesses of the Most Renowned Pantagruel, King of the Dipsodes, Son of the Great Giant Gargantua." In order to continue the sequence of events and reveal the character's origins, the writer published the second book in 1534 — "The Inestimable Life of the Great Gargantua, Father of Pantagruel." In this work, Rabelais does not merely depict human nature and the image of society; he actively promotes the most progressive ideals of his time — enlightenment, elevated thinking, and the principles of social justice. The most valuable aspect of the novel lies in the fact that its sharp wit, humor, and entertaining adventures are not merely a



means of amusement. Beneath the light-hearted laughter, the author conceals profound truths about life, constantly prompting the reader to reflect and think about the problems of society.

The Harmony of Compositional Structure and Ideological-Philosophical

Content in "Gargantua and Pantagruel"

On the surface, François Rabelais's "Gargantua and Pantagruel" consists of five separate books, which together form a single artistic whole, organically connected to one another. The exposition of the first book begins with the birth of Gargantua: it provides detailed information about how the hero's childhood unfolded, his distinctive character traits, and the affection shown to him by his parents. This section, in fact, lays the groundwork for expressing Rabelais's humanistic views on education — the writer compares Gargantua's two different forms of upbringing (the old scholastic method and the new humanistic method), showing the reader which path truly leads to genuine knowledge and perfection.

In the remaining books, the narrative develops around Gargantua's son, Pantagruel. They depict Pantagruel's birth, his courageous adventures and fantastical life, as well as grand battle scenes. At the same time, the conversations between Gargantua and Pantagruel and various political figures, along with the heroes' attitudes toward injustice in society and the religious views of their era, are analyzed in depth. In this respect, the work serves not merely as an adventure novel but also as a mirror reflecting the social, political, and religious life of its time.

Seriousness Behind the Jest:

The Philosophical Layer of the Work

One of the most significant artistic achievements of this work is that, although it is built on the surface around light-hearted humor and jest, it conceals an immense and profound philosophical meaning within. At the beginning of his book, Rabelais addresses the reader directly, warning them against passing hasty judgment. The author emphasizes that drawing conclusions based on outward appearance is a mistake: just as one cannot determine a person's worth by their clothing, one cannot underestimate a book's content based on its light, humorous style. Here, Rabelais finds a distinctive figurative language — he compares the book to a bone, and the hidden truth within it to the marrow, expecting the reader to act with the same patience and eagerness as a dog that values the marrow inside the bone. A dog holding a bone does not discard it hastily; rather, it gnaws and breaks it to extract the sweet marrow within, because the true value lies not in the outer layer but in the inner depth. Likewise, a person reading the book must not be deceived by its superficial, humorous shell, but must seek its inner meaning with patience and discernment.



Through this address, Rabelais also openly states the purpose of his work: his books are not merely entertaining tales but works that encompass important truths concerning religious, political, social, and economic life. The writer does not present these truths openly, in a serious scholarly style — because such an approach could have exposed him to the strict censorship and religious-political persecution of his time. For this reason, he employs the mask of humor and mockery, beneath which profound critical thought and humanistic ideals are concealed. These lines make it even clearer that beneath the surface of jest lies a vast political, social, philosophical, pedagogical, and scholarly mode of thinking — making this work a genuine artistic encyclopedia of the social life and spiritual aspirations of its era. In depicting imaginary countries, characters, and highly exaggerated events, the writer makes extensive use of mockery, irony, and comic exaggeration. In this way, he expresses the humanistic ideals of his time through images rooted in the spirit of folk oral tradition — giant heroes such as Gargantua and Pantagruel, and characters such as Panurge.

Thus, Rabelais's address is not merely a moral piece of advice directed at the reader, but a key, a guideline for reading the work itself: a person who reads the book only as a humorous adventure will fail to grasp even half of its meaning, whereas one who reads it thoughtfully and with diligence will discover from it an immense philosophical treasure.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, it can be said that "Gargantua and Pantagruel" is not merely a humorous tale, but a great work reflecting the transition from the medieval worldview to a new era of free thought. Through humor, the novel exposes the shortcomings of the society of its time — false piety, unjust judicial practices, and outdated methods of education — while at the same time calling upon humanity to strive for knowledge, think freely, and value and fully embrace life. The writer employs humor not merely as a means of entertainment but as a safe and effective way of conveying profound ideas. It is precisely because of these qualities — the harmony of humor and wisdom, of lightness and depth — that the work has retained its value for more than five centuries. To this day, it continues to be read, translated, and deeply studied by scholars across the world, once again confirming that "Gargantua and Pantagruel" stands as one of the eternal monuments not only of French literature but of world literature as a whole.

Foydalanilgan adabiyotlar:

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