

disciplines and their methods, I choose self-consciously among the available fictions of period, playing them against one another but never assuming that how I define and discuss period is a given. Within the confines of any periodization, it should be possible to attend simultaneously to the particular—to the events and representations of a few hours or months—and to continuity and change across time. The project, rather than the periodization, determines whether one can do so.

I agree with Dubrow that students can benefit from being included in discussion of how objects of study are constituted. In a course I recently taught on “the literature of Restoration England,” for instance, I invited students to consider why they had previously been taught Milton in “Renaissance” classes, even though the work that they studied, *Paradise Lost*, was published in 1667. What difference would it make—both in assessments of that work and in constructions of “the Restoration” and its literatures—to include Milton in the Restoration? Although students at first found this line of inquiry baffling and provoking, it forced them to think, usually for the first time, about periods as “heuristic devices” rather than as “definitive categories,” in Dubrow’s useful terms. It also revealed the juggling that is always involved in creating (rather than discovering or describing) periods and their literatures.

Research under way on the processes by which periods have been shaped and named will lead, I hope, not to a new or generational consensus but to more discussion, to more theoretically and historically informed choices among the options, and perhaps even to a broadened range of possibilities.

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The Mass and the Eucharist in Rabelais

To the Editor:

I very much enjoyed “Rabelais, Misogyny, and Christian Charity: Biblical Intertextuality and the Renaissance Crisis of Exemplarity” (109 [1994]: 225–37), François Rigolot’s contribution to the cluster on early modern women. I would, however, invite Rigolot to consider two issues, the first fairly obvious, the second, which is both the context and a consequence of the first, not.

Given the onomastics of *Panurge*, the pervasive food metaphors, the motif of Lent, and the intertext

of Matthew 4, which treats Satan’s temptation of Christ in the wilderness, Rigolot might consider the centrality of the Mass, proposed in its own ideal form as an exemplary meal, to the narrative that he analyzes. Both Christology and the Mass, or sacramental meal, that Christology underwrites serve as the lady’s implicit rebuke to Panurge, which accompanies her explicit one.

Part of the irony attaching to the rebuke recalls the crisis of exemplarity to which Rigolot refers the reader, as well as the second of the two issues that I wish to mention. In the period of which Rigolot writes, there was a good deal of theological ink spilled, often with harsh and even lethal consequences, over the significance of the centering rite of that exemplary meal, the Eucharist. Rigolot passes over this issue when he observes that Rabelais revised the time of the episode from “la grande feste du Corps-Dieu” ‘the feast of Corpus Christi’ to “la grande feste du sacre,” the second locution, as Rigolot notes, referring “either to the Holy Sacrament or to the crowning of a king” (231).

My point is that the theological place, the historical moment, and the ecclesiastical time of year in which Panurge and the Parisian lady play out Rigolot’s crisis of exemplarity foreground the theological dispute over the Eucharist, which reached a crisis during the Renaissance and which, as Pietro Redondi has shown in chapter 7 of his *Galileo: Heretic* (1986), was as much at issue in the dispute over representation that led to the prosecution of Galileo (and of Giordano Bruno before him) and to the rise of the Counter-Reformation as Galileo’s heliocentrism was. That is, the representation—indeed, the fate—of exemplarity depends in some important metaphysical ways on whether the exemplum is really or virtually present in the instance, much as the importance of Eucharist depends on whether the Lord is really or virtually present in the Host. At least some of the problems underwriting the reconstruction of “the lady’s character as an unexpected and problematic example of *imitatio Christi*” (230) arise from the simultaneous calling into question of eucharistic real presence and waning of the cult of the Virgin at the end of the Middle Ages. Indeed, these two events are probably related in ways that would repay further study. While these points are not crucial to Rigolot’s argument, they may be worth considering, given his desideratum of establishing “a horizon of expectation” (225).

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