

Humanities 3  
 Professor John Hoon Lee  
 Fall 2014

Writing Assignment #2: Rabelais and Montaigne

Note: Evidence for your essay must be based only on the assigned texts.

1. Upon meeting the astrologer Herr Trippa, Panurge affirms that the first principle of philosophy is “know yourself” (p. 307); and similarly, Montaigne argues that “the first lessons” in educating the student should be to “teach him to know himself” (p. 52). Do the authors mean the same thing or a different thing? Write a thesis-based essay in which you compare or contrast the authors' views on the significance of “knowing oneself”.
2. “Where Nature is concerned, nothing is unique or rare: but where our knowledge is concerned much certainly is, which constitutes a most pitiful foundation for our scientific laws, offering us a very false idea of everything” (Montaigne, “On Coaches,” pg. 341).

As this quotation indicates, Renaissance epistemology (how one knows something) is fundamentally tied to the question of art versus nature. Is truth discoverable? If so, how is it discovered -- through knowledge of Nature, through the skill of human artifice, or through a combination of both? Using Montaigne’s Essays and Rabelais’ Gargantua and Pantagruel, write a thesis-based essay in which you compare or contrast each author’s understanding of the role of Nature and artifice in the search for truth.

3. Our friend Niccolò Machiavelli tells us that humans are “ungrateful, fickle, liars and deceivers, fearful of danger and greedy for gain” (The Prince, pg 46). Is this true? Are we that despicable? What do Rabelais and Montaigne say about who and what we are? What is the essence of our human nature? Using Rabelais and Montaigne – write a thesis-based essay in which you compare or contrast the two authors’ conceptions of human nature.

Note: In a compare OR contrast essay, you must do the following in the introductory paragraph:

- A. Establish the authors’ views on the given theme.
- B. Assert your own argument about the differences OR the similarities between the two texts/authors on the given theme.

Length: 5-7 pages

Due: At lecture, Tuesday 25 November. Please hand your essay to your section teacher after lecture. Late papers will be penalized by the subtraction of one third of a letter grade per day. Finally, don't forget Turnitin.com!