

Plautus, Panurge, and 'les aventures des gens curieux'

Neil Kenny

An enigmatic phrase

If the first encounter between Pantagruel and Panurge, in Chapter 9 of Rabelais's *Pantagruel* (1532), has become one of the most famous episodes in French fiction, this is partly due to its haunting, enigmatic quality.¹ At first glance, this opacity seems to be wholly on the side of Panurge and his many languages, whereas linguistic clarity seems to lie with Pantagruel, persisting as he does with French. However, as so often in Rabelais, it is the apparently familiar that turns out to be the most opaque and puzzling of all.

For example, even one of Pantagruel's clearest-seeming phrases has provoked disagreement among scholars over its basic meaning. Pantagruel says of Panurge:

Voyez-vous cet homme, qui vient par le chemin du pont Charanton? Par ma foi, il n'est pauvre que par fortune: car je vous assure que, à sa physionomie, nature l'a produit de riche et noble lignée, mais *les aventures des gens curieux* le ont réduit en telle pénurie et indigence.²

What does 'curieux' mean here? The most influential interpretation has been provided by Gérard Defaux. He argues that Pantagruel is invoking the ancient, patristic, and humanist tradition which condemns *curiositas* as an intemperate desire to know and to see, as a *discendi cupiditas* or a

¹ See Terence Cave, *Pré-Histoires II: langues étrangères et troubles économiques au XVI^e siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 2001), 189. On this episode, see Cave's Part 1. For examples of the abundant scholarship on it, see his page 27n.

² François Rabelais, *Les Cinq Livres*, ed. Jean Céard, Gérard Defaux and Michel Simonin (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1994), 351–53 (my italics).

concupiscentia oculorum. Defaux, by emphasising the connection between this occurrence of 'curieux' and Chapter 9's undeniably rich imitation of Homer's *Odyssey*,³ argues not only that Rabelais is aligning Panurge with Odysseus, but that in so doing Rabelais makes Panurge an exemplar of *curiositas*, since for humanists Odysseus was *the* classic exemplar of that vice.⁴ However, this interpretation has various problems which, without invalidating it, do mitigate its claims. First, by no means all of the twenty-two occurrences of the 'curiosity' family of terms in Rabelais's chronicles are pejorative, and only a single one of them, in the 1552 *Quart livre*, is of the noun ('curiosité' (1165)) rather than of the adjective or adverb, which suggests that in 1532 *curieux* did not necessarily strongly evoke the rarer noun forms *curiosité* or *curiositas*.⁵ Secondly, it is not clear that for humanists Odysseus was *the* classic exemplar of *curiositas*: there were many others, ranging from Icarus to Phaethon. Thirdly, although Defaux does demonstrate that Odysseus was called *curiosus* by ancient sources including Plutarch (in translation) and Cicero, and that he was called *curieux* indirectly by at least one humanist,⁶ none the less these terms and *curiositas* are absent from almost all the evidence that Defaux cites in relation to Homer's hero (chs 1 and 3).

A different reading is provided by Alfred Foulet, who speculates that 'curieux' was a printer's error for 'curiaux', that Pantagruel's remark is anti-aulic, and that it is adventures typical of courtiers that have harmed Panurge.⁷ Although Foulet's conclusion is unconvincing, his argument

³ On this imitation, see also Terence Cave, 'Panurge and Odysseus', in *Myth and Legend in French Literature: essays in honour of A.J. Steele*, ed. Keith Aspley, David Bellos, and Peter Sharratt (London: MHRA, 1982), 47-59.

⁴ Gérard Defaux, *Le Curieux, le glorieux et la sagesse du monde dans la première moitié du XVI^e siècle: l'exemple de Panurge (Ulysse, Démosthène, Empédocle)* (Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum, 1982).

⁵ Whereas considerable space was devoted to *curiosus* in contemporary dictionaries, *curiositas* was either altogether (Ambrosio 1542); *pino*, *Dictionarium multarum linguarum* (Venice: Paulo Manuzio, 1542); Robert Estienne, *Dictionarium, seu latinae linguae thesaurus* (Paris: R. Estienne, 1531)) or else granted only minimal space.

⁶ *Le Curieux*, 37, 65, 154.

⁷ Alfred Foulet, "Les aventures des gens curieux", *Romanic Review*, 54 (1963), 3-5. Michael Downes takes Foulet's interpretation further: 'Panurge, Ulysse et les "gens curieux"', *Études Rabelaisiennes*, 13 (Geneva: Droz,

does have the merit of reminding us that in 1532 *curieux* often did *not* specifically denote the desire for *knowledge* (the *discendi cupiditas*), but that it *did* almost always denote 'care, anxiety', like its etymon *cura*.⁸ Shortly before the publication of *Pantagruel*, Robert Estienne defined 'Curiosus' as 'Curieux, & soingneux a faire quelque chose, ou qui se soucie trop & prend trop de chagrin de ses affaires ou de celles d'autrui'.⁹

I argue below that when Rabelais introduces Panurge he is imitating not only Homer, Virgil, the Bible, and so on, but also one particular passage from Plautus which propelled a semantic strand of *curiosus* that seems to have been overlooked in modern scholarship both on Rabelais and on early modern curiosity.¹⁰ It is primarily from that locus that Rabelais derives the phrase 'gens curieux'. But that does not make the Plautus locus *the* source, *the* key that unlocks Rabelais's phrase and episode by dispelling their opacity, for, if Pantagruel's explanation of Panurge's piteous state is 'elliptical and mysterious',¹¹ this is not only because it makes the reader ask narrative questions such as 'How does Pantagruel know about these adventures?' and 'What *are* they?', but also because Rabelais is rewriting an inherently opaque, polysemic, and unsettling locus, of which the key term — *curiosus* — had always been enigmatic anyway. Viewed in this light, modern disputation (including my own) about the meaning of 'gens curieux' is *necessarily* unresolved, since it is itself snarled up in the textual play between different strands of meaning, rather than unravelling them. The Plautine locus reveals not a systematic moral message (as does the *Odyssey* for Defaux) but rather an unresolved generation of meaning that takes the form of an

1976), 139-45 (144).

⁸ Defaux too is acutely aware of this 'care, anxiety' sense of *curieux*, but he extrapolates more readily from it to the 'desire for knowledge' sense.

⁹ *Dictionarium, seu latinae linguae thesaurus* (1531).

¹⁰ For example, Jean Céard, ed., *La Curiosité à la Renaissance* (Paris: SEDES, 1986); Defaux, *Le Curieux*; Nicole Jacques-Chauffain and Sophie Houdard, eds, *Curiosité et 'libido sciendi' de la Renaissance aux Lumières*, 2 vols (Fontenay-aux-Roses: ENS Éditions, 1998); Neil Kenny, *Curiosity in Early Modern Europe: Word Histories* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1998). My *Uses of Curiosity in Early Modern France and Germany* (forthcoming, Oxford University Press), does not study this overlooked semantic strand.

¹¹ Jerome Schwartz, *Irony and Ideology in Rabelais: structures of subversion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 28.

imaginative reconfiguration of a polysemic ancient text, a reinvention of the past.

This reconfiguration may well have been of the Plautus locus both in its original context and also in one or more of the various excerpted, decontextualised forms in which it circulated, for example in dictionaries or commonplace-books. Although Rabelais's debt to compilations such as Erasmus's *Adagia* is well-known, much remains to be established about the ways in which he uses such manuals. The present investigation is inspired by the challenge laid down by Ann Moss at the end of her magisterial study of commonplace-books:

The most informative place of all to look for the influence of the commonplace-book on vernacular production would be in vernacular works themselves, a project we must leave for another time and to other enquirers. It is a project to be pursued in non-literary works as well as various forms of fiction ...¹²

The circulation of a locus from Plautus

In 1531, the year before the publication of *Pantagruel*, Robert Estienne revolutionized the new genre of the printed dictionary with his *Dictionarium, seu latinae linguae thesaurus*, which included some French translations. The entry for 'Curiosus' is one sub-division within the 'Cura' entry.¹³ The meanings of 'curiosus' are divided into three paragraphs, each corresponding to one category: vicious ('In malum. '), virtuous ('In bonum. '), and lamb-related – the taxonomy would have pleased Borges. The third category reads as follows:

Curiosus agnus, Ung agneau qui est fort maigre, qui na que la peau & les os. Plaut. in Aulul. 16.26, Etiam agnum misi. E. quo quidem agno sat scio magis curiosam nusquam ullam esse bestiam. M. volo ego scire, qui sit agnus curiosus. E. qui ossa atque pellis totus est, ita cura macet: quin exta inspicere in sole etiam vivo licet, ita is pellucet quasi laterna punica.

¹² *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 211.

¹³ The 'Cura' entry is reproduced and studied (but without reference to the Plautus locus) in Kenny, *Word Histories*, 53–56.

The quotation consisting of Latin dialogue will be discussed below. It is from a comedy by Plautus, the *Aulularia* (*The Pot of Gold*). The skinny lamb mentioned in this play takes up an astonishing one third of the space devoted to 'Curiosus' in 1531. The lamb continues to appear under 'Curiosus' in later Estienne dictionaries, but the proportion of space that it occupies becomes progressively smaller. In the 1536 edition of the Latin dictionary it is 'A curious lamb, skinny, as if worn out by care' ('Curiosus agnus, Macilentus, quasi cura confectus'). The entry in the 1546 Latin/French dictionary reads: 'Curiosus agnus. Plaut. *Maigre, comme il estoit amaigri de soulci*'.

This locus from Plautus is also cited and discussed, again under 'Curiosus', in the Calepinus (first edition 1502) which, when Rabelais was composing *Pantagruel*, was the most widely used dictionary of the time.¹⁴ The Calepinus even extrapolates from the Plautus locus to interpret Apuleius's phrase 'agnum incuriosum' (*Florida*, 2) as denoting a *fat* lamb (rather than an 'incautious' one, as modern scholars would have it). However, the strange status of the skinny lamb as a major semantic strand of *curiosus* eventually diminished, in both the Estienne dictionaries and the Calepinus. When in 1553–1554 Robert Estienne published a version of the Calepinus that was supplemented with additions derived from his own dictionaries, the sole major structural change that he made to the Calepinus entry for 'Curiosus' was to delete Plautus and his lamb from it altogether.¹⁵ Thus, it was precisely at the time when *Pantagruel* was written that the influence of this skinny lamb on the meaning of *curiosus* was at its peak. Not that this influence was a passing fad: it survived even into the eighteenth century.¹⁶

¹⁴ For example see the 1518 (Paris: Josse Bade) and 1542 (Paulo Manuzio: Venice) editions. Defaux quotes the start of the 'Curiosus' entry in the Calepinus (using the Josse Bade edition of 1514) but not the passage on the lamb (*Le Curieux*, 71).

¹⁵ Calepino, *Dictionarium* (Geneva: R. Estienne, 1553–1554). On Estienne's reasons for producing this hybrid dictionary, see Elizabeth Armstrong, *Robert Estienne, Royal Printer: an historical study of the elder Stephanus*, rev. ed. (n.p.: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1986), 44.

¹⁶ The influence of the lamb locus on the meaning of *curiosus* was renewed later by Denis Lambin's famous Plautus commentary: Plautus, *Opera* (Paris: Jean Macé, 1576), 180a. Lambin explains that curious people ('curiosi') are, like this lamb, skinny and worn-out with care. As late as 1714, a German university dissertation cites Lambin's comments when defining *curiositas*:

Dictionaries were not the only means by which Robert Estienne promoted the circulation of this Plautus locus and numerous others as fragments of discourse, excerpted from their original contexts. Estienne's commonplace-book of *sententiae* and proverbs taken from Roman authors includes the three lines from the *Aulularia* that describe the lamb as all skin and bones, emaciated by care ('Ossa, atque pellis totus est, ita cura macet ...').¹⁷ The lines excerpted gave readers no idea that in their original context they refer to a lamb: when re-using the decontextualized phrasing themselves, readers could re-apply it to anything or anyone. They were encouraged to do so even by the edition of Plautus that Estienne printed shortly before the appearance of *Pantagruel*: although its readers had the original context before their eyes, a few striking turns of phrase were capitalized, in order to encourage readers to excerpt and re-use them in other contexts:

M. Volo ex te ego scire, quī sit agnus curio.

E. QUI OSSA, ATQUE PELLIS TOTUS EST, ita cura macet ...¹⁸

Panurge and the locus from Plautus

The descriptions of Panurge in Chapters 9 and 13 of *Pantagruel* contain direct echoes of this locus from Plautus. Decontextualizing the locus in the way that was encouraged by humanist culture, Rabelais displaces the lamb's characteristics onto Panurge, who is similarly 'curieux'. Both are worn down (Estienne's 'confectus') or reduced (Rabelais's 'reduct') from their natural state, the lamb by care (Estienne's 'soulcy' and

Georg Ernst Stahl (*praeses*) and Giovanni Francesco Donzelina (*respondens*), *Dissertatio inauguralis medica de medicina medicinae curiosae* (Halle: University of Halle, 1714), 9. For the notion that curious people are thin, see also Madeleine de Scudéry, *Célinde*, ed. Alain Niderst (Paris: Nizet, 1979; first edition 1661), 47 ('une Amie ... qui n'aura jamais d'embonpoint, parce qu'elle est trop curieuse'); Michael Watson (*praeses*) and Andreas Rose (*respondens*), *Exercitatio academica de curiositate*, in Daniel Hartnack, ed., *Curiosa theologica* (Wedel: Heinrich Werner, 1690; first edition 1652), 760 ('emaciatius vultus Curiosorum').

¹⁷ *Sententiae & proverbia* (Paris: R. Estienne, 1536), 9.

¹⁸ Plautus, *Comoediae*, XX (Paris: R. Estienne, 1530), 36^v.

'cura'), Panurge by his adventures.¹⁹ In Chapter 9, this reduction is initially of Panurge's elegance ('pitoyablement navré en divers lieux, et tant mal en ordre') and opulence ('pauvre ... pénurie et indigence'), whereas in the skinny lamb's case, the reduction is of body mass ('amaigri', 'Macilentus'). But the similarity between them is soon reinforced. When, in Chapter 13, Panurge is about to recount one of the adventures that have reduced him to his present state — his escape from the hands of the 'Turks'²⁰ — the *physical* thinness that was implicit in Chapter 9, as another dimension of his reduction, is now made explicit: 'car il était *eximé* comme un hareng soret. Aussi allait-il du pied comme un chat *maigre*' (387; my italics). It is revealing that these first two analogues cited for Panurge's skinniness are both from the animal world. Within a few lines, his skinniness is being mentioned yet again, this time within his account of his Turkish adventure:

Les pillards Turcs m'avaient mis en broche tout lardé, comme un connil, car j'étais tant *eximé* que autrement de ma chair eût été fort mauvaise viande, et en ce point me faisaient rôtir tout vif. (389)

Too thin to be eaten? This description of the curious Panurge's paltry flesh all but states that he is, like Plautus's curious lamb, all skin and bones ('qui na que la peau & les os'; 'QUI OSSA, ATQUE PELLIS TOTUS EST').

At this point, with Panurge about to be eaten, with the question of skinniness raising that of edibility, let us leave him cooking for a while and return to Plautus's play.

Rabelais and Plautus

While there is, in my view, no doubt that Rabelais knew the Plautus locus, up till this point I have considered his rewriting of it only in so

¹⁹ The more sustained emphasis in later books — the *Tiers livre* and *Quart livre* — on Panurge's care and anxiety may involve a further, looser imaginative echo of this locus.

²⁰ On the Turkish episode in the light of the encounter between Pantagruel and Panurge, see Timothy Hampton, *Literature and Nation in the Sixteenth Century: inventing Renaissance France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), ch. 2.

far as he may have known it as an already decontextualized excerpt, for example in a dictionary or a commonplace-book, such as one of those produced by Robert Estienne.²¹ For Rabelais to have imitated the locus to the extent that I have sought to establish so far, he would not have needed to have first-hand knowledge of the play from which the locus was taken. This still leaves open the question: did Rabelais know the *Aulularia* directly?

Rabelais's knowledge of Plautus, as of numerous other ancients, was based at least partly on intermediate sources. Of the chronicles' six direct references to Plautus by name, all — with perhaps just one exception — were drawn from humanist compilations by the likes of Erasmus, Caelus Rhodiginus, and André Tiraqueau.²² However, that certainly does not exclude the possibility that Rabelais also knew Plautus directly: it seems highly likely that he did, though neither this question nor that of the importance of Plautus for Rabelais have received much scholarly attention, so far as I know. Although Plautus was not printed as much as Terence,²³ he was still printed often, and it has been argued that his impact on early modern comic theatre was at least as great as that of Terence.²⁴ Shortly before the publication of *Pantagruel* in 1532 Johannes Gyymnicus printed an edition of Plautus with commentary by Erasmus and others in Cologne (1530), and in Paris Robert Estienne printed two editions of Plautus (1529, 1530).²⁵ Plautus and Rabelais share many recurrent concerns: money, eating, drinking, hunger, the unruliness of the body, poverty, wordplay,

²¹ Whereas the question of Rabelais's knowledge of Robert Estienne's publications has not, to my knowledge, been studied, on the other hand we do know that Estienne soon knew Rabelais's chronicles well, drawing on them lexicographically in his *Dictionnaire françois-latin* of 1549, but later condemning them morally (Armstrong, *Robert Estienne*, 89, 251–52; Lazare Sainéan, 'Un lecteur de Rabelais entre 1540 et 1549', *Revue des études rabelaisiennes*, 8 (Paris: Champion, 1910), 188–90).

²² See 29, 551, 827 (the possible exception), 1169, 1197, 1383 (a false reference). See Jean Plattard, *L'Œuvre de Rabelais (sources, invention et composition)* (Paris: Champion, 1910), 225–56, 261.

²³ See Harold W. Lawton, *Térence en France au XVI^e siècle*, 2 vols (Paris: Jouve et Cie, 1926).

²⁴ Marie Delcourt, *La Tradition des comiques anciens en France avant Molière* (Paris: Droz, 1931), 7n.

²⁵ See Armstrong, *Robert Estienne*, 69, 81n.

neologisms, carnival (Plautus's plays were performed in Rome on festive days). On the face of it, although it seems certain that Rabelais had direct as well as mediated knowledge of the more morally preoccupied, less earthy Terence,²⁶ for whom Montaigne (in 'Des livres') professes the greater admiration, none the less it is with Plautus's writing that Rabelais's seems to have richer connections.

Moreover, Rabelais mentions directly by name only three of Plautus's many comedies, and one of these is indeed the *Aulularia*, the source of the lamb locus. In the prologue to the *Tiers livre*, the narrator, worried about his text's likely reception, declares:

et soit mon adventure telle que du coq de Euclion, tant célébré par Plaute en sa *Marmite* et par Ausone en son *Gryphon* et ailleurs: lequel pour en grattant avoir découvert le thesaur, eut la coupe georgée. (551)

Euclio the miser, the main protagonist of the *Aulularia*, punishes by death the hapless cockerel that scrapes the earth above his buried treasure. Rabelais's immediate source here is probably a commonplace-book,²⁷ but 'tant célébré' suggests how well known was not only the cockerel locus but also the play itself. Indeed, Euclio himself acquired such fame in the early modern period that his name became a generic one for misers in general ('Eucliones').²⁸

A closer look at the lamb locus in its home context, that of the *Aulularia*, suggests that Rabelais's initial presentation of Panurge in Chapters 9 and 13 of *Pantagruel* probably does involve imitation not only of the locus, but also of its surrounding context in the play.

Panurge and the 'Aulularia'

How does talk of a curious, skinny lamb arise in Plautus's play? The miser Euclio plans to marry off his daughter to an old man, Megadorus. Because Euclio is so mean, it is Megadorus who provides the supplies for the wedding feast, sending them to Euclio's house. They include

²⁶ See Lawton, *Térence*, 60, 192–94.

²⁷ See Jean Céard's note in Rabelais, *Les Cinq Livres*, 550n.

²⁸ See Plautus, *Comoediae*, XX (Cologne: Joannes Gymnicus, 1530), 157–58; Watson and Rose, *Exercitatio*, 756.

two lambs, one fat and one thin: unbeknown to Megadorus, his sly slave manages to get the fat lamb sent back to his master's own household, leaving Euclio with only the thin one. Euclio then complains to Megadorus about the quality of the provisions, including the lamb:

... *E[uc]lio*. quo quidem agno sat scio
Magis curiosam nusquam ullam esse bestiam.
M[eg]adorus. Volo ex te ego scire, qui sit agnus curio.
E[uc]lio. QUI OSSA, ATQUE PELLIS TOTUS EST, ita cura macet:
Quin exta inspicere in sole etiam vivo licet:
Ita is pellucet, quasi laterna Punica. (ll. 561-66)²⁹

Euclio. Indeed I know that a more *curiosus* beast than this one doesn't exist.
Megadorus. I'd like you to explain to me what a *curio* lamb is.
Euclio. It's all skin and bones, because it's emaciated by *cura* (care). You could put that lamb in the bright sun and inspect its intestines: it's as transparent as a Punic lantern.

It is with heavy irony on Plautus's part that he has Euclio ascribe *cura* to this lamb, since that is precisely what is repeatedly ascribed throughout the play to Euclio himself, a miser who is constantly anxious that his hoard might be discovered. Indeed, at least one early modern reader diagnosed miserly 'Eucliones' as themselves suffering from *curiositas*.³⁰ *Cura* is already being displaced from lamb onto human even in the original context of this locus, before it is decontextualized, de-lambled, and re-applied to other humans by commonplace-books or by Rabelais.

Let us return now to Panurge on his Turkish spit, at the point in his narration where the question of his skinniness raises that of his edibility. Panurge and Plautus's lamb are united not only by the *cause* of their skinniness — being 'curieux' — but also by its *effect*: being 'curieux' has left each of them barely edible. In the sentence quoted earlier, Panurge describes how the Turks could only turn him into a decent meal on the spit by attaching bacon to him, as they would to a rabbit ('tout lardé, comme un connil'). This is thus the third animal to which he has been compared in rapid succession: a smoked herring, a thin cat,

²⁹ Plautus, *Comoediae*, XX (Paris: R. Estienne, 1530), 36^v.

³⁰ Watson and Rose, *Exercitatio*, 756.

a roast rabbit The first two mainly express thinness; the third expresses edibility, as also does a fourth, that is evoked a little later in the chapter. After being saved from the spit and killing his chief captor, the half-roasted Panurge ('à demi rôti') runs for it: 'Et dieu sait comme je sentais mon épaule de mouton' (393).³¹ The curious Panurge is now even closer to Plautus's curious lamb, except that it is as mutton that he is dressed. The locus from *Aulularia*, having been humanized, is now being re-animalized.

If the *Aulularia* locus is the major intertext in Rabelais's representation of the Turkish adventure as the kind undergone by 'gens curieux' like Panurge, it is perhaps not the only ancient locus involved. More speculatively, one might identify two others.

One is a passage in which Varro argues that *cura* is thus called because the heart burns with it ('quod cor urat'), and that being *curiosus* involves an excess of such heart-burning *cura*.³² This locus was known in Rabelais's time: for example, Bernardus Saracenus quotes it when explaining the *Aulularia* lamb locus in his commentary on Plautus, first printed in 1499.³³ In Chapter 13 of *Pantagruel*, Rabelais may be literalizing not only certain standard figurative topoi regarding the Turks,³⁴ but also this philological-medical explanation of curiosity, transforming it into an 'aventure[] des gens curieux' in which hero, villains, and city alike all burn. The lexis of cooking and burning, so rich and insistently repeated in Chapter 13, may echo both Varro (burning) and the *Aulularia* (in which cooking is constantly referred to). Thus, the Varro locus may be one of the intertextual elements in the curious Panurge's thirst and 'gorge sèche' (359) (*urere* could also mean 'to parch, dry up'), caused both by his dehydrating Turkish adventure and then also by his subsequent meeting with the thirst-inducing Pantagruel (Panurge explicitly connects the two in the next Rabelais quotation below).³⁵

³¹ See also 395: 'l'odeur de ma paillarde chair demie rôtie'.

³² Varro, *De lingua latina*, 6.46.

³³ See Plautus, *Comoediae viginti* (Venice: Melchiorre Sessa and Pietro Ravani 1518), LXXXIV^v. Similarly, Cicero on the 'care which cooks' someone ('curamve ... quæ nunc te coquit': Cicero, *Cato Maior de senectute*, I.1; Cicero was in turn quoting Ennius).

³⁴ See Hampton, *Literature and Nation*, 50 ff.

³⁵ A parched tongue is described as one of the symptoms of *curiositas* in a 1652

The curiosity-dehydration link may be generated not only by Varro but by Plautus too: in the *Aulularia*, immediately after Euclio's denigration of the skinny lamb, Megadorus tries to cheer him up with the promise of a drink:

M[egadorus]. Potare ego tecum hodie Euclio volo.

E[uclyio]. Non potem ego quidem hercle. *M[egadorus]*. at ego iussero Cadum unum vini veteris à me afferrier.

E[uclyio]. Nolo hercle: nam mihi bibere decretum aquam est.

M[egadorus]. Ego te hodie reddam madidum, si vivo, probe:

Tibi an decretum est bibere aquam? (ll. 569-74)³⁶

Megadorus. Euclio, I'd like to have a drink with you today.

Euclio. A drink! By Hercules, I certainly won't be having one myself.

Megadorus. And I will order a vat of vintage wine to be brought over from my house.

Euclio. But I don't want any, by Hercules, for I've resolved to drink water.

Megadorus. Upon my life, I'm going to get you properly sozzled today: you've resolved to drink water, have you?

The theme of imbibing water rather than wine — highlighted here through heavy repetition in two lines ('Ego ...') that themselves became florilegium pieces in Rabelais's time³⁷ — also occurs in his Chapter 13, where it again sits immediately alongside the too-skinny-to-be-edible theme, but now following rather than preceding it. Panurge says:

Ce vin est fort bon et bien délicieux, mais plus j'en bois, tant plus j'ai soif. Je crois que l'ombre de monseigneur Pantagruel engendre les altérés, comme la lune fait les catarrhes.

A quoi se prirent à rire les assistants. Ce que voyant, Pantagruel dit: Panurge, qu'est-ce que avez à rire?

— Seigneur (dit-il), je leur contais comment ces diables de Turcqs sont bien malheureux de ne boire goutte de vin. ... Les pillards Turcqs m'avaient mis

dissertation (Watson and Rose, *Exercitatio*, 751).

³⁶ Plautus, *Comoediae*, XX (1530), 36^v.

³⁷ Albrecht von Eyb, *Margarita poetica* (Basel: Johannes Amorbach, Johannes Petri and Johannes Froben, 1503), E[1f]. On this work, see Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books*, 71.

en broche tout lardé, comme un conuil, car j'étais tant eximé que autrement de ma chair eût été fort mauvaise viande ... (387-89)

And towards the end of the chapter there reappears the same nexus of motifs — burning, cooking, being hungry/thin, being thirsty, drinking water not wine. Kind Turks take pity on an ungrateful Panurge:

Quand je fus descendu en la rue, je trouvai tout le monde qui était accouru au feu à force d'eau pour l'éteindre. Et me voyant ainsi à *demi rôti*, eurent pitié de moi naturellement, et me jettèrent toute leur eau sur moi, et me rafraîchirent joyeusement, ce qui me fit fort grand bien. Puis me donnèrent quelque peu à *repâitre*; mais je ne *mangeais* guère, car ils ne me baillaient que de l'eau à boire, à leur mode. (393; my italics)

The miserly abstention from wine of Euclio — whose wasting anxiety associates him with the curious skinniness of the lamb that he scorns — is rewritten both as the miserly abstemiousness of the caricatured Muslims and also as the involuntary abstemiousness of Panurge.

Connections between Panurge and Euclio may be diffused even more widely in *Pantagruel*. Panurge's 'aventures des gens curieux' associate him primarily with expenditure, not only of energy, body fluids and body mass but also of money (Panurge's loss of opulence being one of the symptoms which Pantagruel diagnoses as stemming from such adventures): and his constant expenditure of money is described in terms of a diarrhoea, a wasting away of the body. The narrator, studying the same 'physionomie' that Pantagruel earlier diagnosed as 'curieux', tells Panurge: 'vous êtes malade à ce que je vois à votre physionomie, et j'entends le mal: vous avez un flux de bourse' (415).³⁸ By contrast, Euclio hoards money. But each is also associated with the opposite: Panurge with finding new ways of *obtaining* money to spend, Euclio with *expending* energy in worrying about money and in fear of being *poor* (which he also pretends to be throughout the play). In both texts, the lexis of curiosity (*cura/curiosus/curieux*) helps produce the disquieting symbiosis between the twin motifs of lack and excess.³⁹

³⁸ See also 407: 'il était ... sujet de nature à une maladie qu'on appelait en ce temps-là, faute d'argent, c'est douleur non pareille'.

³⁹ On this disquieting symbiosis in Rabelais's chronicles in general, see Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: problems of writing in the French Renaissance*

A third standard locus connected with curiosity, in addition to those derived from Plautus and (possibly) Varro, may also be imitated in Chapter 13. Panurge is now on his way out of the Turkish city that he has set on fire:

je me retourne arrière, comme la femme de Loth, et vis toute la ville brûlant, comme Sodome et Gomorre. Dont je fus tant aise que je me cuide conchier de joie. Mais Dieu m'en punit bien. (395)

Whereas Lot's wife is turned into a pillar of salt by God because she turns round to view the burning Sodom (Genesis 19:26), Panurge is suddenly attacked by dogs intent on eating him. In the early modern period, and probably before, it seems that this story of Lot's wife was a standard exemplum of curiosity.⁴⁰ Rabelais appears to be weaving one more intertextual thread into his representation of Panurge's Turkish escapade as an 'aventure[] des gens curieux'.

At the very least, Rabelais's evocation, in Chapter 9, of the 'aventures des gens curieux' — such as Panurge's Turkish adventure (Chapter 13) — imitates a locus from the *Aulularia*. I would argue further that at the very most, these two chapters partly constitute a set of imaginative variations on various ancient texts which are thrown together by a virtual, commonplace-style heading such as 'curiosi'.

An enigmatic locus

Such source-hunting does not provide a single neat answer to the question of what Pantagruel means by 'les aventures des gens curieux'. Rabelais's imitation of the locus from the *Aulularia* opens up a rich

(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), especially 183–222.

⁴⁰ See also *La Curiosité fructueuse* (Paris: Bauche Père and Christophe David, 1739), 8: 'En eff[et] si l'on consulte les Histoires tant Saintes que Profanes, on y voit en cent endroits que cette passion [sc. la curiosité] a presque toujours été fatale à ceux qu'elle a séduit. Le châtime[n]t de la femme de Loth, changée en statue de Sel, en est un exemple redoutable'. Although this is a much later work, its exempla of *curiosité* are highly conventional (Eve, Pandora, and various males) and the inclusion of Lot's wife is most probably commonplace, derived from an earlier (for example, patristic) source, that I have not yet been able to identify.

narrative vein in which the 'curieux' are people (or animals) who expend energy, who are reduced from their natural state, who waste away (whether physically, through deprivation and burning, or emotionally, through anxiety, as in Euclio's case). In *Pantagruel*, the 'curieux' are *not*, on the other hand, primarily presented as those who suffer from an excessive desire for knowledge. And although Pantagruel's phrase, by linking Panurge's actions to a catastrophic outcome, has the air of being an introduction to an exemplary, cautionary tale, as if the subsequent revelation of Panurge's adventures will enjoin the listeners against being 'curieux' themselves, in fact Panurge's claim about his extraordinary victory over the Turks, plus the fact that his adventure produces dazzling discourse, partly counters such a moralizing reading: it seems that depleted 'gens curieux' have the capacity to rehydrate, whether by having water thrown over them (by the friendly Turkish crowd) or else by drinking wine (provided by Pantagruel) that will not fully slake their thirst but will give them enough energy to tell their tale and perhaps undergo future adventures.

Moreover, if the intertextual relation with the *Aulularia* locus does not reveal that the phrase 'gens curieux' has a single meaning or moral, this is not only because of the richness of Rabelais's imaginative recasting of it, but also because the locus was already opaque anyway. In my English translation (in the previous section), I retained the key Latin terms *curiosus*, *curio*, and *cura*, because the characteristically exuberant Plautine wordplay between them is not only untranslatable but also unclear. Euclio's comment that this is the most *curiosus* lamb in existence is initially baffling, like a riddle. Megadorus's answer, far from being a straightforward request for clarification, actually confuses matters more, for he asks Euclio what he means not by a lamb that is *curiosus* but by one that is *curio* — although that is not what Euclio actually called it. Euclio then ignores this discrepancy when explaining the wordplay: a *curiosus* (or perhaps *curio*) lamb is one emaciated by *cura*.

The opacity of Euclio's initial comment becomes even more evident when we realize that this is probably the third oldest attestation of *curiosus* on record, and that Plautus himself seems to have coined the term.⁴¹ Unlikely as it may seem, the whole subsequent Western history

⁴¹ André Labhardt ('Curiositas: notes sur l'histoire d'un mot et d'une notion',

of curiosity (*curiositas*, *curiosité*, and so on) can be traced back to Euclio's contorted wordplay and to a couple of earlier occurrences in Plautus. Whether or not Rabelais realized this, he *is* likely to have been aware that the *Aulularia* locus was notoriously opaque: in 1576, Euclio's phrase 'magis curiosam' was called 'ambiguè dictum, & obscurè dictum' by Lambin,⁴² echoing the way in which Rabelais's own 'gens curieux' phrase strikes a modern critic (Schwartz) as 'elliptical and mysterious'. From antiquity onwards, the strangeness of this wordplay by Plautus stimulated imitation and philological comment, some of which is reported in the sixteenth century in dictionaries and Plautus commentaries.⁴³ Euclio's gloss on how he gets from *cura* to

Museum Helveticum (1960), 206–24 (206–207)) points out that the two earliest attestations of *curiosus* are those found in a speech by Gelasimus in Plautus's *Stichus* (ll. 198–208). *Stichus* (200 BC) was probably written a little earlier than the *Aulularia*, as also probably was Plautus's *Amphitryon*, which contains one occurrence of *curiose* (as Estienne points out: *Dictionarium* (1531)). The neologistic unfamiliarity of *curiosus* in the *Stichus* is shown by the fact that, like Euclio, Gelasimus explains its meaning for the benefit of the audience. The two occurrences in the *Stichus*, like the one in the *Aulularia*, were decontextualized as excerpts by humanists: for example, both are included in Estienne's *Sententiae & proverbia* (41): '¶ Sed curiosi sunt hic quamplures mali, / Alienae res qui curant studio max[i]mo, / Quibus ipsis nulla est res, quam procurent, sua. / ¶ Curiosus nemo est, quin sit malevolus'; moreover, both *loci* from the *Stichus* are included in the florilegium by Octavianus Mirandula, *Viridarium illustrium poetarum* (Paris: Denys Rosse, 1513), CXXXIX, on which see Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books*, 95; moreover, the second locus ('Curiosus nemo est ...') is included in Eyb's *Margarita poetica* (E2) and is partly capitalised in Estienne's 1530 edition of Plautus (*Comoediae XX*, 226^v–[227^r]).

⁴² Plautus, *Opera*, 180a.

⁴³ Plautus's 'emaciated with care' sense was imitated in c. 110 BC in a comedy by Lucius Afranius, and both were cited by the grammarian Nonius Marcellus in the early fourth century AD (*De compendiosa doctrina*, ed. Wallace M. Lindsay, 2 vols (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1903), 32, 121). The phrase 'Curionem agnum' was also attributed to Plautus and explained in the second century AD by Sextus Pompeius Festus (*De verborum significatu quae supersunt*, ed. Wallace M. Lindsay (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1913), 52) in a lexicon that is an abridgement of the lost *De significatu verborum* by Verrius Flaccus (d. 14 AD) and was itself later summarised in an epitome by Paulus Diaconus (eighth century AD). For later references back to this tradition, see Calepino, *Dictionarium* (1542), 'Curiosus' (Festus); Plautus, *Comoediae*

curiosus clarifies one sense of *curiosus* ('emaciated by care'), but Megadorus's mention of *curio* adds a further denotation — 'a leader or official of a political, military, or religious assembly (*curia*)'. This is so disconcerting that 'magis curiosam' has even sometimes been interpreted as a scribe's error for 'magis *curionem*', or else as a phrase that is then comically misheard by Megadorus.⁴⁴ Some sixteenth-century comment on the passage explained the jump from *curiosus* to *curio/curia* by making both derive from *cura*, with *curiosus* meaning 'emaciated by care' and *curio/curia* referring to the care that officials take of the populace.⁴⁵ While Foulet and Downes are probably wrong to emend 'gens curieux' to 'gens *curiaux*', Rabelais's phrase may indeed evoke courtiers after all, but distantly, as a supplementary connotation rather than by an alternative denotation. Although Plautus's lamb may thus have been polysemic, in about 1532 the main denotation that it contributed to the term *curiosus* was 'emaciated with care', while on the basis of *other* ancient texts, including the *Stichus* by Plautus himself, *curiosus* also meant 'having too much care [*cura*] for multiple, unnecessary, or inappropriate things', or even, in certain contexts, 'having too much desire for knowledge'. It was only from the 1550s onwards that some humanists made concerted efforts to take the lambish leanness out of *curiosus*, or at least to disentangle it from these other senses of the adjective.⁴⁶

viginti (1518), LXXXIIIv ('No[n]ius').

⁴⁴ For a survey of Plautus scholarship on this passage, see *Aulularia*, ed. W. Stockert, 2 vols (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1983), ii, 155–56.

⁴⁵ See Calepino, *Dictionarium* (1542), 'Curiones', 'Curiosus'. The Calepinus argument that *curiosus* and *curia* both derive directly from *cura* is an explicit attack on Lorenzo Valla, who connects *curiosus* even more closely to *curia* by arguing that *curiosus* derives directly from *curia* which in turn derives from *cura* (*Elegantie de lingua latina* (Venice, 1505), IX). Varro too links *curia* to *curiosus* (*De lingua latina*, 6.46).

⁴⁶ In his 1576 commentary on Euclio's words, Lambin distinguishes between lamb- and non-lamb-related meanings of *curiosus*: 'Nam curiosa bellua accipi potest, vel macilenta, & quasi curis confecta, ut sunt curiosi: quo modo vult accipi Euclio: vel propriè nimis multa, & aliena, & non necessaria curans' (Plautus, *Opera*, 180a). Although Robert Estienne excises the *Aulularia* locus from the 'Curiosus' entry in the 1553–1554 Calepinus (see above), the locus still figures elsewhere in this edition, quoted in the neighbouring entry for 'Curiones', as it was in earlier editions.

Rabelais's narrative amplification of the phrase 'les aventures des gens curieux' reveals the distinctive way in which humanist culture shaped so-called 'concepts'. As used by Pantagruel, the term 'curieux' carries not a single meaning but a limited nexus of meanings that are linked less by semantic logic than by the cluster of *loci classici* that were habitually associated with one another under commonplace-style headings such as 'curiosity', whether in printed or private commonplace-books, in other compilations, or else in the memories of sixteenth-century writers. Humanist culture shaped hundreds of 'concepts' in this way, as mobile, open clusters of *loci*. And those *loci* that happened to be prominent under any given commonplace-style heading played a large role in humanist understandings of the corresponding 'concept'. If being 'curieux' in *Pantagruel* involves what may seem to be a random combination of qualities — being emaciated by care, depleted, dehydrated, lamb-like, edible or inedible — this is because one opaque, contorted, and contested locus from Plautus loomed large in contemporary understandings of 'curieux'. And just as the locus itself is grounded, in this case, in humour, phonic similarity, and wordplay rather than in logic, so the reasons for this kind of decisive prominence enjoyed by a locus may also have been textual, material, pragmatic, and contingent, rather than logical. For instance, at least part of the reason why lamb-related meanings take up one third of the space devoted to *curiosus* in Robert Estienne's Latin dictionary is simply that his initial skeleton draft of this monumental work drew on two authors only — Plautus and Terence.⁴⁷ It is arguable that in all periods 'concepts', if they exist at all, are open-ended amalgams, anthologies, clusters of meaning: the resonance of Rabelais's reference to 'gens curieux' reminds us that this was especially true within humanist culture.

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Bibliography

Primary

- Calepino, Ambrosio, *Dictionarium multarum linguarum* (Venice: Paulo Manuzio, 1542).
- , *Dictionarium* (Geneva: R. Estienne, 1553–1554).
- La Curiosité fructueuse* (Paris: Bauche Père and Christophe David, 1739).
- Estienne, Robert, *Dictionarium, seu latinae linguae thesaurus* (Paris: R. Estienne, 1531).
- Eyb, Albrecht von, *Margarita poetica* (Basel: Johannes Amorbach, Johannes Petri, and Johannes Froben, 1503).
- Festus, Sextus Pompeius, *De verborum significatu quae supersunt*, ed. Wallace M. Lindsay (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1913).
- Mirandula, Octavianus, *Viridarium illustrium poetarum* (Paris: Denys Rosse, 1513).
- Marcellus, Nonius, *De compendiosa doctrina*, ed. Wallace M. Lindsay, 2 vols (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1903).
- Plautus, *Comoediae viginti* (Venice: Melchiorre Sessa and Pietro Ravani, 1518).
- , *Comoediae XX* (Paris: R. Estienne, 1530).
- , *Comoediae XX* (Cologne: Joannes Gymnicus, 1530).
- , *Opera* (Paris: Jean Macé, 1576).
- , *Aulularia*, ed. W. Stockert, 2 vols (Stuttgart: B.G. Teubner, 1983).
- Rabelais, François, *Les Cinq livres*, ed. Jean Céard, Gérard Defaux, and Michel Simonin (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1994).
- Scudéry, Madeleine de, *Célinthe*, ed. Alain Niderst (Paris: Nizet, 1979; 1st edition 1661).
- Stahl, Georg Ernst (*praeses*) and Giovanni Francesco Donzelina (*respondens*), *Dissertatio inauguralis medica de medicina medicinarum curiosae* (Halle: University of Halle, 1714).
- Sententiae & proverbia* (Paris: R. Estienne, 1536).
- Valla, Lorenzo, *Elegantie de lingua latina* (Venice: 1505).
- Watson, Michael (*praeses*) and Andreas Rose (*respondens*), *Exercitatio academica de curiositate*, in Daniel Hartnack (ed.), *Curiosa theologica* (Wedel: Heinrich Werner, 1690; 1st edition 1652).

⁴⁷ See Armstrong, *Robert Estienne*, 84–85.

Secondary

- Armstrong, Elizabeth, *Robert Estienne, Royal Printer: an historical study of the elder Stephanus* (rev. ed.; n.p.: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1986).
- Cave, Terence, *The Cornucopian Text: problems of writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).
- , 'Panurge and Odysseus', in *Myth and Legend in French Literature: essays in honour of A. J. Steele*, ed. Keith Aspley, David Bellos, and Peter Sharratt (London: MHRA, 1982), 47-59.
- , *Pré-Histoires II: langues étrangères et troubles économiques au XVI^e siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 2001).
- Céard, Jean (ed.), *La Curiosité à la Renaissance* (Paris: SEDES, 1986).
- Defaux, Gérard, *Le Curieux, le glorieux et la sagesse du monde dans la première moitié du XVI^e siècle: l'exemple de Panurge (Ulysse, Démosthène, Empédocle)* (Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum, 1982).
- Delcourt, Marie, *La Tradition des comiques anciens en France avant Molière* (Paris: Droz, 1931).
- Downes, Michael, 'Panurge, Ulysse et les "gens curieux"', *Études Rabelaisiennes*, 13 (Geneva: Droz, 1976), 139-45.
- Foulet, Alfred, "'Les aventures des gens curieux"', *Romanic Review*, 54 (1963), 3-5.
- Hampton, Timothy, *Literature and Nation in the Sixteenth Century: inventing Renaissance France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001).
- Jacques-Chaquin, Nicole and Sophie Houdard (ed.), *Curiosité et 'libido sciendi' de la Renaissance aux Lumières*, 2 vols (Fontenay-aux-Roses: ENS Éditions, 1998).
- Kenny, Neil, *Curiosity in Early Modern Europe: Word Histories* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1998).
- Labhardt, André, 'Curiositas: notes sur l'histoire d'un mot et d'une notion', *Museum Helveticum* (1960), 206-24.
- Lawton, Harold W., *Térence en France au XVI^e siècle*, 2 vols (Paris: Jouve et Cie, 1926).
- Moss, Ann, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).
- Plattard, Jean, *L'Œuvre de Rabelais (sources, invention et composition)* (Paris: Champion, 1910).

- Sainéan, Lazare, 'Un lecteur de Rabelais entre 1540 et 1549', *Revue des études rabelaisiennes*, 8 (Paris: Champion, 1910), 188-90.
- Schwartz, Jerome, *Irony and Ideology in Rabelais: structures of subversion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).