

Reply:

I am grateful to Stuart Peterfreund for his perceptive remarks on my article. I agree that theological debates over the Eucharist were often of crucial significance to Rabelais's contemporaries. As I have pointed out, serious scholarly work has established a horizon of expectation that removes Rabelais from suspicions of anachronistic libertinism and rationalism and places him squarely, though not exclusively, within Erasmian culture. I mentioned Gérard Defaux's *Pantagruel et les sophistes*, Edwin Duval's *The Design of Rabelais's Pantagruel*, Michael A. Screech's *L'évangélisme de Rabelais*, and Florence M. Weinberg's *The Wine and the Will: Rabelais's Bacchic Christianity*, and I could have listed several other critical works that give a prominent role to militant evangelical thinking in the fashioning of Rabelais's ideas.

This influence is undoubtedly present in Rabelais's later works, especially the *Quart livre*, but is less certain in the single episode of *Pantagruel* on which I concentrated—Panurge's and Pantagruel's amatory adventures with a Parisian lady. *Pantagruel*, Rabelais's first book, was written and published before the famous Affair of the Placards (17–18 Oct. 1534), when violent attacks against the Mass were posted all over France, even on the door of the royal chamber, leading the previously sympathetic king to see the Reformation as a dangerous political movement. Some of Rabelais's later textual revisions may be attributed to his reaction to the affair, but it is not always easy to trace direct connections between Rabelais's early fiction and specific political events or theological issues.

Regarding the wider issue of symbolic representation, I agree that the Renaissance concept of exemplarity must somehow be related to contemporary epistemological issues. Yet I have no solid evidence that Rabelais's works may have called into question the dogma of the eucharistic real presence. As several recent studies have shown, the Renaissance drive toward contingency, originality, and individuality was not a move out of the theological worldview but a phenomenon that remained deeply grounded within the scholastic, especially the nominalist, tradition. Theological paradigms can and do illuminate the way Renaissance writers conceived of their fictional worlds. The danger, however, is that theology may be used as a master text with extraordinary claims over other disciplines. Theology should be chosen as a key *modus interpretandi* not with the assumption that it is closer to metaphysical truth but because, as Ullrich Langer observes (*Divine and Poetic Freedom in the Renaissance: Nominalist Theology and Literature in France*

and Italy, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990), it offers the most elaborate intellectual discourse available in the Renaissance.

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Rhetoric in Euripides's *Hecuba*

To the Editor:

James L. Kastely's "Violence and Rhetoric in Euripides's *Hecuba*" (108 [1993]: 1036–49) recognizes that "[m]ost defenses of rhetoric appeal to utility at some point and argue that in a less than perfect world rhetoric holds out the possibility for noncoerced agreement, in which persuasion rather than force determines action." Kastely argues impressively that such an account of rhetoric's power assumes the availability of an audience that can be persuaded. His discussion of *Hecuba* centers on the question of rhetoric's efficacy "when auditors fail to hear a rhetor because their hold on power is sufficiently secure that rhetoric, with its concern for reasoned persuasion, is irrelevant" (1036). One might conclude from Kastely's argument, however, that any rhetoric that remains marginalized is necessarily powerless.

Kastely notes the precarious position of rhetoric in a world in which "a hierarchy of power relations immures the powerful, away from the pain of others." He adds that "[a]s long as the powerful remain indifferent to suffering, rhetoric will lack an opening." *Hecuba*'s violent revenge creates an opening for rhetoric because those in power feel pain and must themselves cry out for justice. The achievement of the play, Kastely concludes, is its dramatization of what is necessary to "change a world of brutality to a world in which rhetoric is possible" (1047). But it is, I think, necessary to recognize the implications and limitations of positing a world in which the powerful must suffer before effective rhetorical action can be possible.

Kastely argues that *Hecuba* is placed, as a disempowered but skilled rhetor, in a situation in which "power preemptively forecloses" any opening for public discourse. He suggests that Odysseus's rejection of *Hecuba*'s plea reflects the process of institutional and cultural containment, which Stephen Greenblatt defines as the established power's permitting rather than repressing resistance so that apparently subversive acts become the "very condition of power" (*Political Shakespeare*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985, 57). Kastely thus

proposes that Euripides “sees rhetoric as endangered not because force actively suppresses speech but because those in power need not heed rhetoric” (1037).

But Kastely is primarily concerned with the question of the rhetoric’s power to accomplish its intended ends and with the personal power, or lack of power, of a particular rhetor. An alternative and broader reading would recognize that Hecuba’s rhetorical act is not a completed text and that its significance lies beyond its effect on Odysseus or its specific subject. What rhetoric is concerned with is a complex social process of speech, context, and reception in which nondominant logoi, or antilogoi, continuously interact with and challenge the dominant logoi. Hecuba’s speech is an attempt not merely to oppose Odysseus and the existing dominant power but to challenge the principles on which that power is based.

Throughout the play, Hecuba shows the existing authority, which represents itself as self-evident, eternal, and immutable, to be culturally and socially generated and thus arbitrary and contingent. Hecuba’s appeal to *nomos* is an appeal to the understanding of that concept as conventional rather than natural. And she demonstrates repeatedly that *nomos* does not exist naturally or command universal authority and acceptance; it is, rather, the product of laws and customs. Although Hecuba’s rhetoric is ineffective in persuading Odysseus, it demystifies and subverts his authority by revealing that the event’s conclusion was not immanent and unalterable but determined by social and political forces—forces that can and should be challenged, as Jonathan Dollimore argues: “although subversion may indeed be appropriated by authority for its own purposes, once installed it can be used against authority as well as used by it” (*Political Shakespeare* 12). Hecuba’s repeated argument that the existing power originates in custom rather than in an eternal order of things subverts the status of the dominant ideology. Her rhetoric insists that political “domination is not a static unalterable thing; it is rather a process, one always being contested, always having to be renewed” (Dollimore 14).

Literary and rhetorical theories identifiable as new historicism, cultural materialism, or cultural studies have been concerned with the operations of power and with the historical, social, and political conditions under which discourse is produced. Although these critical approaches originated in the early 1980s, a number of their practitioners have more recently come to recognize the opposition between containment and subversion as too polarized and reductive. A particular discourse must be understood in terms of the multiple positions of the speaker, writer, performer, spectators,

and readers involved in the production, reproduction, or consumption of the discourse in the complex process of the discourse’s being spoken, written, or enacted (Louis Montrose, in *The New Historicism*, ed. Harold Veenser, New York: Routledge, 1988, 23).

The immense importance of Hecuba’s speech as a rhetorical act itself becomes more apparent when the play is placed in a larger context. Athenian drama was performed only once a year as the center of the festival honoring Dionysus and was produced and supported under political auspices. The festival consisted of a public ceremony including government officials and priests and was intended to express civic pride and to unite the community in religious convictions. It was within this context that Euripides presented his play and revealed the existence of oppositional and alternative positions. In doing so, he demonstrated that it is, in fact, the ceaseless interchange of logoi and antilogoi that opens up possibilities for an effective marginal rhetoric and an effective challenge to the dominant authority.

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Felicia Hemans

To the Editor:

Tricia Lootens’s “Hemans and Home: Victorianism, Feminine ‘Internal Enemies,’ and the Domestication of National Identity” (109 [1994]: 238–53) usefully helps refurbish a poet the Victorians read avidly—from Landon and Barrett Browning to Tennyson, whose “Demeter and Persephone” directly echoes Hemans’s first “Invocation” in her “Female Characters of Scripture,” in *Poetical Works* (Philadelphia: Grigg, 1836, 373–75). Yet one wishes for a more complex understanding of nineteenth-century patriotism than what Lootens offers. Although the fashionable trinity of race, class, and gender excludes religion, religious ideologies have always commingled with secular forces in shaping national identities.

When one considers the pervasive Hebraizing tendencies of British culture since the Reformation, it seems liminary to interpret nineteenth-century Christian poems on Hebrew themes without reference to official British attitudes toward the status of Anglo-Jewry and thus the nation. Lootens, however, views Hemans’s “The Hebrew Mother” without cultural reference; the “exotic” heroine, Lootens writes (pushing the Hebrew away from local pertinence), surren-