CHAPTER 6

The Gunpowder Revolution in Literature: Early Modern Wounds in Folengo and Rabelais

Guillemette Bolens

This essay begins with a desire to account for two strange wounding gestures in Folengo's and Rabelais's literary works. The attempt to understand these gestures will take us into a discussion of one of the most radical technological changes of the sixteenth century, the so-called Gunpowder Revolution, and the profound changes it prompted in both the nature of warfare and the cultural understanding and representation of the human body in literature. The first of these wounding gestures, in Folengo's *Baldo* (1517/1552), consists in a character using Adam's Edenic apple as a cannonball propelled to kill.[1] The second, in Rabelais's *Gargantua* (1534), involves striking and dismantling enemies by means of the shaft of the Cross. By focusing on such peculiar narrated movements, I wish to emphasize the distinction made in early modern literature between the act of *striking* and the act of *shooting*. Indeed, these two types of action and their related kinesic verbs were invested with moral values at a time when the gunpowder revolution was progressively changing warfare practices, the experience of embodiment and kinesic imagination.[2] In Folengo, the epic hero Baldo fights against an army of devils. His superiority is manifest in

G. Bolens (✉)
University of Geneva, Switzerland

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that he never uses artillery, unlike his evil adversaries. He strikes rather than shoots. Meanwhile, the impact of his powerful hand on his enemies' bodies is ultimately that of an explosion. In Rabelais, Frère Jean withstands the attack of the Close of the abbey of Seuilly by Picrochole's ransacking troops in a memorable and detailed act of mass slaughter, performed by means of the shaft of the Cross. In both Folengo and Rabelais, the hero strikes rather than shoots, but his blows end up being as destructive as gunpowder. My purpose is to understand such narrated gestures and highlight their significance in early modern literature.

In "Elaborated Knowledge: Reading Kinesis in Pictures," Ellen Spolsky writes:

> All understanding is a result of interpretation, from identifying object boundaries to reading literary texts, and all interpretation is cognitively continuous. Aesthetic judgments are not different knowledge so much as elaborated inferences produced at one end of a scale of complexity. The quantum advantage to the organism of having a variety of windows on the world, even when those windows produce gaps that must be filled inferentially, is that those gaps are the loci of creativity. Not only is there no need for all systems to be entirely translatable into one another, but such an arrangement would actually be a disadvantage because it would be entirely rigid. It would close all possibility of reaction to new situations, or to old situations in new ways. The gaps in the system—the places where inferences must be constructed—are sites of productive indeterminacy in all brain functions.[3]

The potentials of a productive indeterminacy may be thought to be at work when Folengo and Rabelais react in their art to the disturbing situations elicited by the gunpowder revolution. Through fiction, they invest new meanings in already powerful symbols, such as the Edenic apple and the Christian cross. I will claim that Rabelais in particular does so in order not so much to condone violence as to raise the problem of mass violence, in all its concrete and kinesic implications.[4]

According to J.R. Hale:

> Portable firearms and artillery came radically to affect the conduct and conditions of war. For the soldier they changed the equipment he wore and carried; the formations which affected his morale and practice in combat; the nature of his wounds, for they broke bones and led to loss of limbs by gangrene; and, more conjecturally, his chances of being killed.[5]

Concerning literature, Michael Murrin writes in *History and Warfare in Renaissance Epic* that the gun posed a problem for the writers of romance and epic that had no parallels in tradition. Crossbows and the heavier armour they necessitated or the enceinte castles of the thirteenth century had not much altered the romancers' craft. But writers in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were faced with the new technology of firepower, developed between 1440 and 1530. The use of the gun in warfare challenged the basis of their fictions and provoked strong responses.[6]

Murrin explains how the "Olimpia episode in Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* [1516/1532] presented the negative critique of the gun in its classic form and set the model for writers outside of Italy," later including Milton.[7] Namely, firearms are for cowards, who shoot from a distance instead of meeting their adversaries in close contact and in a spirit of fair play. But, as Murrin notes, distance weapons were hardly new in the sixteenth century: the use of slings, javelins, thrown spears and bows had been a feature of warfare for centuries, and more recently heavy crossbows had given them greater destructive power. What made portable firearms and handguns so troubling was the fact that they placed devastating destructive power into the hands of combatants alien to the chivalric circle of elite heroism, who might bring to the narrative of knightly combat the kinds of destructiveness hitherto associated only with magical or superhuman prowess. The prospect of such enticing yet horrific power in such hands created an ideological dilemma for writers of the early part of the sixteenth century. For example, in the passage of *Baldo* that we will consider, Folengo echoes Ariosto's negative opinions on guns, while his fiction adds a level of complexity to the matter.[8] Indeed, Baldo, being heroic and praiseworthy, does not use firearms, and yet he manages nonetheless to reproduce their catastrophic physical impact. Through a deft manoeuvre, Folengo registers the spectacular impact of the gunpowder revolution in his text without compromising his hero's chivalric identity as a consequence.

In the general context of the long-lasting Great Italian Wars (1494–1559), Folengo and Ariosto were both writing just a few years after the battle of Ravenna in 1512, where France and the Duchy of Ferrara fought against Spain and the Papal States. According to Murrin, "Ravenna was perhaps the bloodiest battle of the century. Fourteen thousand people died."[9] Murrin quotes Jacopo Guicciardini describing it to his brother: "It was a horrible and terrible thing to see how every shot of the artillery made a lane through those men-at-arms [the Spanish heavy cavalry], and how helmets with the heads inside them, scattered limbs, halves of men, a

vast quantity, were sent flying through the air."[10] Although Folengo condemns firearms for allowing cowards to murder commendable men from afar, he also describes Baldo's action in ways that resonate with the above description: "[I]t is satisfying to describe some of Baldo's blows ["iuvat alquantos Baldi describere colpos"]. […] With the point of his blade, he lops off the arms, legs and horned heads of these infernal soldiers and makes them flap through the skies" ["at maxime puntis,/spiccat ab Inferni soldatis brachia, gambas,/cornutasque facit volitare per aëra testas"] (XIX, 319–21). The enemies of Baldo in this passage are devils, but Folengo's hero inflicts his violence on humans with equal gusto and efficacy. The important point is that he uses his sword or his bare hands to achieve such effects, not guns.

More than against artillery in general, Ariosto reacted against the development of the harquebus, "which immediately preceded the composition of the Olimpia episode, [and] gave rise to his moral analysis that modern technology was incompatible with chivalry."[11] Folengo proffers similar arguments. Despite the fact that his work is often parodic, meshing extreme vulgarity with chivalric claims in ways that make any clear-cut moral assessment unwieldy, his objection to the harquebus is unambiguous. Kelly DeVries and Robert Douglas Smith explain that "by the closing decade of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries a wide range of gunpowder artillery had developed, from small handguns and large battlefield pieces to huge siege guns."[12] While the "hand cannon was a clumsy weapon, and a thoroughly inaccurate one," the harquebus "had much greater possibilities":

> A metal tube, mounted on a wooden stock and fired from the shoulder, by means of a touchhole and a match device, it was not a difficult weapon to handle. Its ball had considerable penetrating power, and it was accurate.[13]

Again, the damage the harquebus was liable to cause did not match nor guarantee the courage and moral merit of its owner. Thus firearms changed the rules of the game.

> The invention of gunpowder weapons had an impact not only on warfare, but on society and the state as well. Most knights, nobles, and princes seem not to have welcomed the introduction of gunpowder weapons. Traditional medieval warfare respected their social status, leading frequently to ransom rather than death following capture. But gunpowder weapons had no such respect for class, and nobles risked death as much from gunshot as did non-noble soldiers.[14]

Fiction evinces reluctance to accept such facts by staging heroes impervious and immune to firearms. In Folengo, cannonballs never actually reach Baldo, and in Rabelais, Gargantua is too gigantic to be harmed by them. Gargantua is shot with cannons, falconets and harquebuses at the Chasteau du Gué du Vede. Once he has had explained to him that the projectiles he feels hitting his head (all shooters are aiming at his head) are neither gadflies nor grape-pips, he takes a massive tree and razes the castle to the ground, crushing those inside to pieces: "Par ce moyen feurent tous rompuz et mis en pieces ceulz qui estoient en icelluy" ["By which means all inside were crushed and smashed into smithereens"].[15] Gargantua's suprahuman physicality achieves the type of destruction expected from bombards and cannons—albeit by striking (with a tree), not shooting—while he himself is impervious to the effect of the enemy artillery.

When Gargantua later combs his hair, making numerous cannonballs fly from his head, his father Grandgousier asks whether these are fleas, which he calls "les éperviers de Montagu" ["the sparrow-hawks of Montaigu]," that is, the fleas plaguing students in the college of Montaigu, ruled by the infamously cruel Beda. Beyond the general humour of the scene, Ponocrates' prompt reaction conveys serious overtones: had he been the king of Paris, he would have burned this college to ashes for the cruelty inflicted on its students, and with it its principal and regent "qui endurent ceste inhumanité davant leurs yeulx estre exercée" (103) ["who tolerate such inhuman behaviour before their very eyes"] (321). The humour of a giant mistaking cannonballs for thrown grapes thus leads to a protest against cruelty inflicted upon defenceless victims. Anger is expressed at such mistreatments, along with a wish for justice and punishment by fire. It is equally perceptible in Gargantua's vengeful devastation of the Chasteau du Gué du Vede with all those inside. Violence is presented as legitimate and is performed by Folengo's and Rabelais's positive characters in retaliation for undeserved aggression and cruelty, as well as perhaps for resorting to gunpowder. In addition to this, Rabelais introduces an issue that is not problematized in Folengo's mock epic, namely, the impact of violence on those who witness it. How does one react to a scene of violence? If one fights back, as Frère Jean does in the Close of the abbey of Seuilly, and as Ponocrates suggests he would were he king of Paris, how is their violence to be assessed in relation to that of their enemies?

The evolution of artillery and firearms in the late Middle Ages and early modernity changed the way wounding and killing were enacted and pragmatically understood, as well as the way they were ethically justified, and

inscribed within prior epistemological traditions regarding embodiment and justice. This development had an impact on medicine as well, since new types of wounds required new forms of cure and medical care—when possible at all.[16] The French military surgeon Ambroise Paré played a decisive role in this respect.[17] Paré published his treatise on wounds in 1551 and began his address to King Henry II with a description of firearms.[18] His comments are unambiguous: firearms are utterly devastating. The development of surgery was urgent and had to be concurrent with that of warfare.

Most notably, the changes caused by the advent of firearms had an impact on the way embodiment was experienced, as well as imagined, fictionalized and fantasized. Literature is a key source of evidence for such an evolution, which is particularly notable in descriptions of fights and wounds, as the latter enact the type of embodiment and kinesis that made sense to authors and readers. We saw that Murrin situates the transitional period at stake between 1440 and 1530.[19] With *Gargantua*, Rabelais stands at the end of this historical period, while another text, *The Alliterative Morte Arthure*, dated to the beginning of Murrin's temporal span, is instrumental to understanding the paradigm shift caused by the use of gunpowder.[20] This strikingly violent text offers numerous descriptions of wounds as they are being inflicted, of projected missiles that predate the gunpowder revolution, and of an aristocratic attitude that is still liable to scorn common fate in the face of catapulted or projected missiles.[21] Passages from this fifteenth-century epic poem will help us assess the mutation manifest in Folengo and Rabelais.

In the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, as in other medieval epics or romances, a wound typically perforates the body and exposes its inner organs.[22] A knight levels his lance, rides at full speed against his opponent, and spikes him "through the small ribs a span above the waist/so steel plate and spleen were skewered on the spear" ["Aboven the spayre a span, among the short ribbes,/That the splent and the spleen on the spere lenges"; 2060–61].[23] The wounding gesture is located with precision. It pierces the body all the way through an inner organ, the spleen, which remains stuck on the spear. The blood then spills out from a victim whose general shape is preserved despite an imminent death. The body is not dismantled. The blood runs out and even sprays out when the horse leaps forward ["The blood sprent out and spredde as the horse springes"; 2062], but the body remains whole enough finally to fall onto the ground.

It is not rare for opponents to talk to each other before fighting, either simply to provoke the confrontation or also to perform a coded exchange of insults called flyting. In terms of proxemics, it means that the adversaries are close enough to do so: they are, if not at speaking distance, at least at yelling distance. In a passage depicting a duel, Sir Gawain asks his adversary to quit boasting, before they start duelling. They begin by exchanging words, before doing their best to kill each other. Once silent, they level their lances, spur their steeds at full speed, and strike:

> Coupen at aunter by craftes of armes
> Til both the cruel speres brusten at ones;
> Through sheldes they shot and sheered through mailes
> Both sheer through shoulders a shaft-monde large. (2543–46)
>
> [striking freely with all the strength they could summon/until both spear shafts shuddered and shattered;/through shields they shot and sheered through chain mail,/spiking shoulders to the depth of a span.]

Duelling in this passage conforms to typical medieval representations of jousting: opponents ride against each other and strike when close enough to use held lances and wielded swords. Their weapons may burst at the shock, but not their bodies.

Moreover, the distance separating the knights cannot exceed the length of their weapons. Throughout the Middle Ages the implicit rule is very clear: the closer the nobler. The Old English verb *sceotan*, to become Middle English *shoten*, used in "Through sheldes they shot" (2545), does not mean that the knights hurl their spear, but rather that they thrust them through their adversary's shield, and press them further into the chain mails until the spears penetrate deeply into their respective shoulders. When they resort to swords, they strike ("Full stoutly they strike"; 2553) and stab at each other's stomach with steel points ("Stokes at the stomach with steelen pointes"; 2554).

Even in scenes of slaughter and stampede, embodiment implies the preservation of a general corporeal bulk:

> Woundes of wale men workand sides,
> Faces fetteled unfair in feltered lockes
> All craysed, for-trodden with trapped steedes,
> The fairest on folde that figured was ever,
> As fer as a furlong, a thousand at ones! (2148–52)

> [Admirable men, all maimed and mauled,/filthy hair framing once-fair features (faces),/were trodden and trampled by horses in their trappings,/the fairest on earth that were ever formed;/for as far a furlong a thousand lay felled].

In this massacre, dying adversaries cover the ground, but are nevertheless left with a face: "Faces fetteled unfair in feltered lockes" (2149). Bodies are trodden and trampled, and that very fact suggests that they still exist as some kind of whole after the moment of death.

This was less likely to be the case after a gunpowder explosion. The imagination of an early sixteenth-century writer such as Folengo has adjusted to an increased probability of bodily radical dismemberment in combat, as is evidenced by the way he fictionalizes corporeal destruction. In the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, violence is pervasive and frighteningly graphic, but gunpowder has not yet modified literary representations of warfare: knights clash and strike at each other in close contact with swords and wielded spears. They suffer atrocious injuries, sometimes cleaving a body in two or plunging a blade into an enemy's face, but they are not shattered into shreds of flesh. If they throw missiles, it is from siege engines that hit and smash targets. Mechanics are involved, not powder and firepower. A final passage from the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* shows the implications of such a distinction.

Arthur is besieging the city of Metz in Lorraine. He begins by looking for the best locations to set up siege engines intended to damage the city's protective walls and inner buildings. Inspecting the fortress, he walks by its walls without armour or shield, despite a rain of arbalesters' shots aimed at him ("Allblawsters at Arthur egerly shootes"; 2426). Arthur deems it impossible for commoners' crossbow bolts to wound the anointed king that he is: the "King shrugged off those shafts" ("The king shunt for no shot"; 2428). The plot here condones this fictional assumption, notwithstanding the fact that it draws attention to the near insanity of such an act of bravery: "'Sir,' said Ferrar, 'you flirt with folly ("a folly thou workes")/ in nearing those walls so noticeably noble, ("thus naked in thy noblay")/ coming singly to the city suited only in a surcoat'" (2432–34). After ridiculing the fear of his knight, Arthur claims that the crossbowmen may "win no worship of me" (2444): they will soon lack bolts and arrows, for "Shall never harlot have happe through help of my Lord,/To kill a crowned king with crimson annointed" ("My Lord would not allow any knave to have luck/in killing a crowned king with chrism anointed";

2446–2447). Siege engines and the kind of damage they cause have not yet changed the imagination of writers and their audience.

Such a scene could be written in the England of 1400–1440, despite the use of cannons since the fourteenth century.[24] Mentalities and fiction have not yet shifted to what may be found in Folengo's macaronic epic.[25] *Baldo* was written during the Great Italian Wars, when gunpowder was becoming paramount in the logistics of combat and in the way warfare was conceived. Anointed or not, an aristocrat would be less and less likely to pose as being immune to commoners' bolts and arrows.[26] Indeed, leaders progressively came to stay out of the battlefield to control their tactics from afar, when traditionally they were expected to fight in the middle of the fray.

Folengo and Adam's Apple

In 1517, Folengo wrote a macaronic epic that extended fictionality to new frontiers.[27] In Book 19, Baldo battles against 600,000 armed devils (l. 272). He fights with a contact weapon: his sword. "So the valorous spirit of the heroic Baldo suddenly awakens, and drawing on the fierce courage in his heart, he rushes into the middle of the devils with his sword gleaming" ("brando rutilante," l. 267). He strikes on all sides, while the devils stab him "with hoes and pitchforks and pliers, hooks, grapnels, flaming claws and horns, and scratch and jab him with their horns" (ll. 289–91). But the "might of the Baldensian sword arm strikes like lightning, with thrusts, slashes and various battle strokes" ["Fulminat ensigero Baldensis forcia brazzo/et cum mandrittis, et cum fendentibus, et cum/diversis Guerra tractis"] (ll. 317–19). The hero performs typical chivalric gestures of close combat.

Particular moves are then described. Baldo slays the devil named Malatasca, "whose corpse runs about here and there without its innards ("absque corada"; l. 379), carrying its head which Baldo had lopped off" (378–80).[28] Baldo grabs another devil, Malacoda, "by the tail and swings him around like a sling. Then opening his fist, he releases him into the air ("inde manum slargans hunc lassat abire per auras" l. 383), and off he goes to fall down eight miles away" (ll. 381–4). Three devils try to flee, until "Malabolgia lugs a bag heavy with round cannonballs, and the blackguard launches tough nuts" ("Ecce gravem tundis bolzam Malabolza balottis/baiulat et lanzat crudas boiazza nosellas"; ll. 387–8). These descriptions present a gradation from using a sword in order to perforate and eviscerate, to throwing a body away from one's bare hands,

and finally to hurling cannonballs. This last operation is performed by a devil named "Bad-Cannonballs" *Malabolza*, and it triggers the narrator's scandalized reaction:

> Non tamen ad Baldum timidus manigoldus acostat;
> sat sibi quod feriat nec non lontanus amazzet,
> ut nunc qui schioppos, ut nunc qui tempore guerrae
> archibusa ferunt, moschettos paraque moscas. (II. XIX, 387–92)
>
> [But the cowardly rapscallion doesn't go near Baldo; he is content to wound and kill from a distance, like those who nowadays carry rifles and during wartime carry harquebuses, muskets and "fly-swatters"].

Then follows the canonical attack against firearms:

> Isn't it true that any knave, any lice-ridden, greasy scullery-boy, any bread thief hiding behind a wall, watching quietly, taking aim from afar and squeezing the trigger with a rogue hand that should be cut off, can make "toof, taff" echo through the air. Such a one will kill you all by himself and penetrate your chest all by himself—even yours, O most stalwart Giovanni delle Bande Nere of the Medici clan, whose tremendous strength is known throughout the world! (ll. 393–400)

The narrator thus comments on this outrageous mode of modern killing, then listing contemporary figures unfairly killed in this way.

This outburst is followed immediately in the text by a remarkable event. Bombs launched by a flying adversary are imagined. Pragmatically impossible at the time, what will become only too real in the twentieth century after the inception of aeronautical warfare is here conceptualized in a sixteenth-century context via fictionalizing acts.[29]

> Sic Malabolza procul, nunc sub, nunc supra volando
> dardeggiat valido pomranzia ferrea brazzo,
> quae tam praecipiti mandantur fulgure Baldo,
> quam si bombardis ruerent scoccantibus arcem. (vv. 410–13)
>
> [And so Malabolgia from a distance, flying now low, now high, hurls iron oranges with his robust arm, which are fired off at Baldo with lightning speed, like bombards destroying a fortress.]

Whereas the lightning simile was originally used to qualify Baldo's sword, it is now associated with cannonballs.

On the one hand, Malabolgia adopts the typical distance of the coward who shoots from a safe position. But, on the other, he can maximize the use of cannonballs since he is able to fly, being a supernatural creature. He may even adjust his height and shoot from the right altitude. The concrete and the imaginary intermingle to produce unexpected configurations.[30] The latter are staged in the highly and ever fictional framework of a battle against devils, semi-parodic of a long European cultural and religious tradition, whose double literary apex are Dante's *Divine Comedy* in the Middle Ages, and Milton's *Paradise Lost* in the modern era.

In Folengo, the biblical tradition is invested with new fictional possibilities. Baldo reacts promptly to the shooting. In order to protect himself, he shrewdly grabs Beelzebub and turns him into a shield, thus warding off Malabolgia's cannonballs. While impacted by the missiles, Beelzebub remains whole for some time. Malabolgia is ordered by other devils to stop firing, because Beelzebub is "foremost leader and arch-devil":

> However, Malabolgia pays no attention at all to such an order and instead takes up the apple with which he had once felled Adam [capit pomum, quo quondam stravit Adamum; l. 439] and throws an apple-bomb [*pomatamque tirat*, l. 440], not like those usually fired by Neapolitan youths, but like those from a Milanese cannon, a culverin (sed quam colubrine Milani; l. 441). It screams as it flies by, and its flame sheds light. (ll. 438–42)

Beelzebub is hit by the apple and "feels two of his ribs break" (l. 444). The whole army turns in anger against Malabolgia, but Baldo helps him. He "puts his sword back in its sheath, with both hands he grabs Beelzebub by the feet" and starts swinging his body down onto the devil's own soldiers, lacerating him on the latter's horns, pitchforks and hooks (ll. 445–54). It will be the hero's thrashing and slashing movements that ultimately will prove most efficient, not the shooting and bombing gestures of the devil.

A dissention in the army ensues and the devils stop harassing Baldo with pitchforks and cannonballs ("seu forchis sive balottis"; l. 494). Baldo "has nothing in his hands to fight with any longer; in fact, his sword rests in its sheath and does not want to leave it" (ll. 496–497). We are next told why Baldo finds himself empty-handed. "After an hour of serving as a club, Beelzebub is reduced to 170,000 bite-size pieces; only one of his goosefeet remained in Baldo's hand, but some of his parts, like the spleen,

the offal and the intestines, hang from trees; the rest were minced into tiny particles by Baldo's arm ("per Baldi brazzum tridefacta minutim"; l. 503) and sprayed onto the black face of each devil ("aspersere nigram faciem cuiusque diabli"; l. 504)" (ll. 498–504). Then Beelzebub "went looking for fragments of his body parts" ("ibat membrorum quaerens fragmenta suorum") (ll. 505–506). At this stage, the narrator makes a comment that evinces all the potentials of human imagination and capacity for fictionalizing acts.

> Certamenter habet pro doia plangere causam
> sed quae membra sibi doleant nessuna trovantur,
> non qui bagnentur pietosis fletibus occhi,
> non quae lingua cridet magnis urlatibus 'Oyme',
> non qui cum gemitu tampellent pectora pugni. (ll. 507–511)
>
> [He certainly has good cause to cry in pain, but the parts that could weep for him cannot be found. There are no eyes that might moisten with piteous tears; no tongue which might cry out, "Woe is me!" in loud shrieks; no fists which might hammer at a chest with a hollow sound].

The victim has lost his face. He is looking for his face and, thereby, for the facial organs (eyes and tongue) that would enable him to cry, scream, and vent his distress. The rest of his body is equally concerned by his search, as he is looking (without eyes or hands) for his fists and chest, wishing to bang his torso to further express his pangs at being disembodied—an ultimate kinesic paradox. Folengo's fictionalization of disembodiment (even more radical than dismemberment) is both remarkably original and eminently situated within history. Kinesic analysis is a way of acknowledging such originality and historical situatedness. To address the above passage, readers resort to their kinesic intelligence, whereby they make sense of all manner of possible and impossible movements and actions, including disembodiment, while they also situate these very movements in a context that provides an orientation to their interpretive efforts and the type of inferences the text may lead them to adduce.[31]

The fact that Baldo uses his hands only, not even his sword, is stressed. He fights in close contact, notwithstanding his adversaries' supernatural nature. Meanwhile, direct contact with him results in the type of disintegration cannonballs and firearms produce, suggesting that the superhero has the same impact artillery does. His heroism is able to produce the results afforded by new technologies. Novel modes of killing affect the relation to

embodiment and the way this relation feeds the imagination—for better or for worse. Notably, in this passage, Adam's Edenic apple is reinvested in unprecedented ways. The formal analogy between apple and cannonball provides a link between destruction as narrated in Genesis (the Fall and the origin of doom) and destruction as imagined in Book 19 of *Baldo*. In the latter, to destroy is to use the same traditional key object or affordance, the biblical apple, loaded with symbolic implications of catastrophe, but with a gesture that differs radically. From transgression by ingestion and incorporation, Adam's apple becomes a projectile wherewith to shoot one's enemy. The act of transgression looks like the latest available technological development. As such it benefits from the positive qualification of lightning, usually saved for divine or semi-divine attributes. Adam's apple in Folengo and, as we now shall see, the shaft of the Cross in Rabelais are similarly reinvested with new meanings and functions.

Rabelais and the Shaft of the Cross

In Rabelais, Frère Jean, a Benedictine monk of the abbey of Seuilly, slaughters soldiers intent on sacking the place. He does so in close contact and by means of the shaft of a Cross. He even impales them with it: "Sy quelq'un gravoyt en une arbre pensant y estre en seureté, icelluy de son baston empaloyt par le fondement" (80) ["If any one clambered into a tree and thought he was safe up there he impaled him with his shaft through the fundament"] (295). Whether with Adam's apple or the shaft of the Christian cross, such use of symbolically charged objects calls for attention. Admittedly, Frère Jean does not use the Cross itself but the staff that supports it. Still, it is not any kind of staff: by being defined in its association with the Cross, it connects the latter to Frère Jean's action.

The abbey of Seuilly is attacked and pillaged by troops belonging to Picrochole, a king who wages war by means of all kinds of artillery.

> [F]eut par son esdict constitué le seigneur Grippeminaud sus l'avantgarde, en laquelle feurent contez seize mille hacquebutiers, vingt cinq mille avanturiers. À l'artillerie fut commis le grand escuyer Toucquedillon, en laquelle feurent contées neuf cens quatorze grosses pieces de bronze, en canons, double canons, baselicz, serpentines, coulevrines, bombardes, faulcons, passevolans, spiroles, et aultres pieces. (76)
>
> [By his edict the Seigneur de Grippeminaud was placed in the vanguard, which comprised sixteen thousand men armed with harquebuses and

> twenty-five thousand soldiers of fortune. The ordnance was entrusted to Toucquedillon, the Grand Equerry; in which were counted nine hundred and fourteen great bronze guns: cannons, cannon-royals, basilisks, serpentines, culverins, bombards, falcons, passé-volants, falconets and other field-pieces]. (291)

The reader is thereby reminded of artillery in all its forms, shortly before Frère Jean's great act of slaughter in the Close of the abbey.

After Picrochole's troops have reached and savagely plundered the town of Seuilly, the main part of the army departs, leaving behind a few hundred men, who break into the Close of Frère Jean's abbey to waste, spoil and steal. The monks are helpless. Seeing their source of wine threatened, Frère Jean decides to take action. He grabs the shaft of the Cross, which is concrete, made of the heart of a cornel-tree, and said to be as long as a lance ("long comme une lance"). Just like a lance, it impacts bodies quite directly, Frère Jean striking in the old fencing style, that is, indiscriminately: "frapant à tors et à travers à vieille escrime" (79). Despite its lance-like length, Frère Jean does not throw, propel or hurl his recycled weapon. With it, he smashes, thrashes, strikes, thrusts, hits, breaks and the like.

> In some cases he battered their brains out ["es uns escarbouilloyt la cervelle"]; in others, he fractured their arms and legs ["es aultres rompoyt bras et jambes"]; in others, he dislocated the vertebrae of the neck ["es aultres deslochoyt les spondyles du coul"]; and in others, he ruptured the kidneys ["es aultres demoulloyt les reins"], bashed in their noses ["avalloyt le nez"], blacked their eyes ["poschoyt les yeulx"], smashed their mandibles ["fendoyt les mandibules"], knocked their teeth down their throats ["enfonçoyt les dens en la gueule"], stove in their shoulder-blades ["descroulloyt les omoplates"], gangrened their legs ["sphaceloyt les greves"], dislocated their thighs ["desgondoyt les ischies"] and splintered their fore-arms ["debezilloit les fauciles"]. (295)[32]

Through anatomical specification, Rabelais describes wounds that smack of both Homeric and medieval epics. Meanwhile, the very listing of the wounds is less common and suggests thorough dismantling, where each victim adds to an overall fictional body torn to pieces. Ultimately, the general impression is that of slaughter by explosion owing to the fast succession of radical strokes. Only here, the explosion is that of Frère Jean's vengeful energy, not the blast caused by the ignition of gunpowder. Gargantua a few pages later

will have the same—albeit less detailed—devastating impact on Picrochole's army in the Chasteau du Gué du Vede. Frère Jean and Gargantua are in this sense comparable to Baldo, who shatters Beelzebub to pieces.

Florence Weinberg spells out the problem that Frère Jean's massacre poses to critics: "Thus, in order to protect Rabelais' honour for the twentieth-century reader, we try to avoid the accusation of sadism. How to explain that Rabelais created this merry murderer? That he enjoyed so much the surgical depiction of a barbarous violence?"[33] Weinberg offers an answer to this by way of an allegorical and anagogical reading: "Those who ransack the vineyard represent the enemies of the true faith," namely, "any group separated from the spirit of the true Christianity and the Evangelical Church. […] Jean defends the vineyard, source of the wine that symbolizes the essence of Christianity. […] He is situated on an anagogical and allegorical level, as *co-operator of God*."[34] In order to spare Rabelais from the accusation of sadism, Weinberg makes a fundamentalist out of him, who would be happy to kill in the name of his faith as long as a symbolic rationale might allow it.[35] But if such is the case, then what is the point of Rabelais's anatomical precision? Is it enough to think that the doctor in him yielded to scientific temptation? And how are we to account for the cynical reference in the text to murdered women and children, the "usual" collateral victims of wars and massacres? (297).

In *L'Esthétique de Rabelais*, Demerson offers a different perspective. He reads in Frère Jean's violence a way to call into question "typically epic values." […] "Indeed, in him (Jean), Rabelais evinces that which constitutes the spirit of epics: presumption and cruelty. Frère Jean's epic has the frenzied rhythm, the joyful cruelty of classical and modern heroic poems. […] Such horrors find their source in Homer, as well as Virgil."[36] In her essay, Weinberg argues against Demerson's reading: "Demerson invents a Jean who is to be reprimanded, in contrast to a Rabelais who slyly condemns the savage values of epic songs."[37] The contrast between Weinberg's and Demerson's interpretations suggests that Rabelais succeeded in raising the problem of violence. Violence was, is, and remains, a problem. To try and offer a palatable solution (Evangelic or parodic) to the slaughter episode might be missing Rabelais's point.

An alternative approach may be to focus on kinesic information *per se* and grapple with the specific function violence has in a given text. Indeed, wounds in Homer's *Iliad*, in Virgil's *Aeneid*, and in Rabelais's *Gargantua* serve entirely different purposes. For one thing, they are the expression of distinct logics of embodiment, and they cannot be reduced to anachronistic

notions of cruelty.[38] Rabelais conveys Frère Jean's action via the extensive repetition of kinesic verbs of physical impact, emphasizing dismantling by contact. This aspect of the text addresses one central problem in the advent of firearms, topical at the time, that is, the anonymity of the killer. In the Close of Seuilly, violence has a name. Not so when one is shot from afar. Frère Jean has a face, it is even "bien fendu de gueule" (78) ["loud-mouthed"] (293). Such a blunt endorsement of agency has an assertive quality that becomes highly significant if we place it in the context of the gunpowder revolution. Thus, the point might possibly not be symbolic via anagogy, or ethical via parody. Rather, it would be literal and kinesic. It answers the question of agency by giving a face to he who strikes. It is not meant to reduce the horror of violence, quite the contrary. It is a way of calling it by its name: a human destroying other humans. The wound remains open. Rabelais is not trying to reduce the fracture. He lexically performs the de-anatomization of bodies into smithereens.

In her introduction to Ambroise Paré's *Treatise on Wounds*, Marie-Madeleine Fragonard highlights the modernity of Paré's efforts. He was a surgeon, not a learned doctor trained in Hippocratic and Galenic theories. The horror of firearm wounds prompted him, like other surgeons before and after him, to find concrete and straightforward solutions to new injuries, "sans caution d'autorité et sans latin!" [without the backing of authorities nor Latin!][39] Paré wanted urgently to teach the remedies he had discovered. Before him, Rabelais, a trained doctor, writes a literature for the people, whether bishops or "vérolés" (5) ["pox-ridden patients"], with extensive references to European culture and knowledge, as a humanist who could read Latin and Greek, and was versed in all manner of French dialects. Yet, despite this distinction, Rabelais, just like Paré, was surely faced with the wounded bodies that covered the battlefields of his time. He may thus have tried to come to terms with acts of mass violence, both as doctor and writer. In the slaughter passage, by means of literature, Rabelais lexically spells out the wounding impact of cannon shooting. In verbal proliferation, each carefully selected medical and anatomical term participates in a scene, where Frère Jean's explosive action makes us imagine and conceptualize the multiple moments that constitute the radical and sudden disintegration of human bodies.[40]

Ellen Spolsky explains that "the prevailing contracts of fiction guide us in exercising our innate abilities to move between types and tokens, both concrete images and abstract concepts being open sets."[41] Rabelais with his cross and Folengo with his apple fired like a cannonball produce

fictional acts, which lead us to exercise our cognitive and intellective "abilities to move between types"—say, a kinesic distinction between shooting and striking—"and tokens"—say, Folengo's apple and Rabelais's cross—"both concrete images and abstract concepts being open sets."[42] Via such open sets, or levers of productive indeterminacy, literature sets the mind open and invents new ways of relating to a novel reality, via writers' and readers' cognitive acts grounded in kinesic intelligence and imagination. By focusing on concrete historical aspects in order then to adduce possible kinesic inferences from the texts, I hope to have shown how an enhanced attention to kinesis in literary analysis may shed light on challenging fictional gestures, expressive of complex connections between historical facts and the imaginary power of literature.

Notes

1. Teofilo Folengo used the pseudonym Merlin Coccaie. Ann Mullaney writes in her introduction to her translation of Folengo's *Baldo*, "Folengo clearly reached a large public. One enthusiastic reader was François Rabelais (1494–1553), also a one-time Benedictine monk, who borrowed episodes from *Baldo* and adapted many of Folengo's traits, such as his predilection for synonyms, his use of long lists and fictional authorities, his occasional intromission of the authorial "I," and his devotion to the bottle."; see Teofilo Folengo, *Baldo*, trans. Ann E. Mullaney (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 2:vii. A French translation of *Baldo* was published in 1606 as the *Histoire macaronique de Merlin Coccaie, prototype de Rablais* [sic], signalling in its title Folengo's influence on Rabelais. A well-known borrowing is the episode of Panurge and the sheep. Also, "the French writer honours Folengo by placing him last on the long list of books in the Library of St. Victor: *Merlinus Coccaius, De patria diabolorum* (Merlin Cocaio, On the Devil's Country), right after *Antidotarum animae* (Antidotes for the Soul)"; see Folengo, *Baldo*, trans. Mullaney, 1:xviii. The first edition of *Baldo* came out in 1517 and the last in 1552, several years after Folengo's death in 1544. Mullaney uses Mario Chiesa's edition for her translation, which I cite throughout this essay; Teofilo Folengo, *Baldus*, ed. Mario Chiesa, and trans. Gérard Genot and Paul Larivaille (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2007).

   On Folengo's artistic endeavour and style in his fascinating mix of Latin and dialectal Italian, a linguistic cookery that explains the name macaronic, formed on the name of the Italian pasta *macaroni*, see Michel Jeanneret, *Des mets et des mots: banquets et propos de table à la Renaissance* (Paris: José Corti, 1987), 202–3. See also Marcel Tetel, "Rabelais et Folengo,"

Comparative Literature 15, no. 4 (1963): 357–64; A. E. B. Coldiron, "Macaronic Verse, Plurilingual Printing, and the Uses of Translation," in *Early Modern Cultures of Translation*, ed. Karen Newman and Jane Tylus (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 56–75; Barbara C. Bowen, "Rabelais and Folengo Once Again," in *Rabelais in Context. Proceedings of the 1991 Vanderbilt Conference*, ed. Barbara C. Bowen (Birmingham, AL: Summa Publications, 1993), 207–31.

2. See Geoffrey Parker, "The Gunpowder Revolution," in *The Cambridge History of Warfare*, ed. Geoffrey Parker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 101–14.
3. Ellen Spolsky, "Elaborated Knowledge: Reading Kinesis in Pictures," *Poetics Today* 17, no. 2 (1996): 158–9.
4. My focus is on kinesis and the gunpowder revolution. Therefore I will not discuss the status of religious symbols in the Reformation.
5. J. R. Hale, *War and Society in Renaissance Europe 1450–1620* (Leicester: Leicester University Press and Fontana Press, 1985), 46. "Gunpowder consists of three ingredients—saltpeter, sulphur, and charcoal—the best proportions being approximately 75% saltpetre, 10% sulphur, and 15% charcoal."; see Kelly Devries and Robert Douglas Smith, *Medieval Military Technology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 152.
6. Michael Murrin, *History and Warfare in Renaissance Epic* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 123.
7. Murrin, *History and Warfare in Renaissance Epic*, 123.
8. Regarding Ariosto, complexity and tension are also perceptible, but extra-textually. Indeed, Ariosto's patron, Alfonso d'Este, was famously keen on developing artillery, and "gained a European-wide reputation as an innovator in the manufacture of powder." His "court of Ferrara was always among the leaders in the arm race"; see Dave Henderson, "Power Unparalleled: Gunpowder Weapons and the Early *Furioso*," *Shifanoia* 13–14 (1992): 110, 116. Piero Floriani calls Alfonso d'Este "l'un des plus grands artilleurs de son temps"; see his "Guerre et chevaliers 'avec reproche' dans le *Roland Furieux*," in *L'Homme de guerre au XVIe siècle*, ed. Gabriel-André Pérouse, André Thierry and André Tournon (Saint-Etienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Etienne, 1992), 298.
9. Michael Murrin, *History and Warfare*, 125.
10. Murrin, *History and Warfare*, 125.
11. Murrin, *History and Warfare*, 128.
12. DeVries and Smith, *Medieval Military Technology*, 144–45.
13. Maurice Keen "The Changing Scene: Guns, Gunpowder, and Permanent Armies," in *Medieval Warfare: A History*, ed. Maurice Keen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 280.
14. DeVries and Smith, *Medieval Military Technology*, 156.

15. François Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Mireille Huchon (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 101; François Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, trans. M. A. Screech (London: Penguin Classics, 2006), 318. All subsequent references are to this edition and translation are supplied in parentheses.
16. DeVries explains that "It was not until 1460 that any surgical manual even mentions gunshot wounds, and it was even later before these wounds are given specific and distinct treatment in surgical writings."; Kelly DeVries, "Military Surgical Practice and the Advent of Gunpowder Weaponry," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 7 (1990): 133.
17. "In 1536, at the siege of Turin, French military surgeon Ambroise Paré changed surgical history. At that time, it was the custom to treat gunshot wounds by pouring boiling oil into them, often without removing the fragment or bullet. Paré, having run out of this cauterizing mixture, was forced to use a non-abrasive digestive to treat some of his wounded patients. This surgical procedure ultimately proved that gunshot wounds should not be treated by cauterization. Gunpowder weapons, however, had been in use for more than two centuries before Paré's discovery"; see DeVries, "Military Surgical Practice": 131. See also Jean Céard, "La médecine de l'homme de guerre à la Renaissance," in *L'Homme de guerre au XVIe siècle*, ed. Gabriel-André Pérouse, André Thierry and André Tournon (Saint-Etienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Etienne, 1992), 229–40.
18. Ambroise Paré, *La manière de traiter les plaies*, ed. Marie-Madeleine Fragonard (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France et Genève, 2007), fol. aa ii.
19. Murrin, *History and Warfare in Renaissance Epic*, 123.
20. Lee Patterson, *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 212: "The poem survives in a single manuscript of about 1440, but was probably composed in the form in which we now have it about forty years earlier." … "The manuscript is Lincoln Cathedral MS91, written by Robert Thornton," hence called the Lincoln Thornton. It is even likely that the poem was "composed over a considerable period of time, through a process of accretion and revision familiar to medieval literature, and that it embodies a kind of historical layering, with level laid on level."
21. Hale, "Gunpowder and the Renaissance," 120: "The chivalrous contempt for firearms as a coward's weapon had been anticipated by a scorn for missile weapons that went back to the Greeks." Hale provides examples from Euripides and from various early modern texts written in Italy, France, Germany, Spain and England. Guns were deemed both cowardly and devilish. However, opinions were more nuanced in England, owing to the crucial role played by longbows in the Hundred Years War. "English pride in her missile troops, the archers, meant that while Englishmen could

condemn guns as being devilish or deride them as inefficient, few thought of them as cowardly" (122). See also Evelyn Tribble, "Where are the Archers in Shakespeare?" *ELH* 82 (2015): 789–814.

22. On this logic of embodiment, see Guillemette Bolens, "La momification dans la littérature médiévale: L'embaumement d'Hector chez Benoît de Sainte-Maure, Guido delle Colonne et John Lydgate," in "La pelle umana/The Human Skin," ed. Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, special issue, *Micrologus* 13: 213–311; Guillemette Bolens, *La Logique du corps articulaire: Les articulations du corps humain dans la littérature occidentale* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007), "Introduction."
23. *The Alliterative Morte Arthure: The Death of King Arthur*, trans. Simon Armitage (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 2012). All references are to this edition, with line numbers supplied in parenthesis.
24. The English king Edward III used cannons "to create noise and panic" in the battle of Crécy during the Hundred Years War and "by 1400 gunpowder weaponry appeared in nearly every engagement of the war"; see DeVries, "Military Surgical Practice," 135.
25. Floriani, "Guerre et chevaliers," 295: "Le développement rapide de l'art de la guerre n'implique pas … un changement aussi rapide des conceptions et des valeurs qui sont liées à la guerre: l'idéologie nobiliaire de l'aristocratie européenne, pour laquelle la valeur individuelle est la seule mesure du jugement militaire, impose encore ses lois." [The rapid development of the art of war does not imply … a correspondingly rapid change in the mentalities and values linked to war: the noble ideology of the European aristocracy, for whom individual value was the sole measure of military judgement, continues to dominate.]
26. DeVries, "Military Surgical Practice," 136: "This interest in gunpowder weaponry increased as the war progressed. As guns became more numerous and more accurate and powerful, more soldiers were killed and wounded. Small guns fired metal balls, usually made of lead or iron, and larger guns fired stone balls, especially fashioned for that purpose. Gunshot wounds from both these weapons could be and were often fatal; metal balls could pierce the skin, while larger stone balls could kill on impact with the body or by splintering into fragments which would then enter the torso or limbs. Sometimes in medieval chronicles these fatalities are unnamed, mostly because of their low station, but on other occasions gunshots killed more prominent victims. In 1383, at the siege of Ypres, a 'very brave English esquire,' Louis Lin, was killed by a cannon shot. In 1414, the Bastard of Bourbon was killed by gunshot at Soisson. In 1438, Don Pedro, the brother of the king of Castille, was decapitated by a gunshot during the siege of Capuana at Naples. […] Finally, in 1460, James II of Scotland died when one of his large cannons exploded next to him. Perhaps the most famous

death by gunshot during the Hundred Years War occurred in 1428 when Thomas Montagu, earl of Salisbury and leader of the English forces in France, 'a worthi werrioure amonge all Cristen men,' was killed at Orleans when a stone cannon ball fired from a bombard (the largest type of siege gun) shattered and mortally wounded him in the head."

27. On Folengo's poetry, see Coldiron, "Macaronic Verse," 56–75.
28. Folengo, ed. Mullaney, 1:xvii: Folengo "borrows and distorts many of the names of Dante's devils." See also Marcel Tetel, "Rabelais et Folengo: *De Patria Diabolorum*," in "Rabelais en son demi-millénaire," ed. Jean Céard and Jean-Claude Margolin, special issue, *Études Rabelaisiennes* 21 (1988): 203–24. One of the devils in Folengo is named Bombarda: i.e. cannon.
29. On fictionalizing acts, see Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).
30. Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary*; Ellen Spolsky, *The Contracts of Fiction: Cognition, Culture, Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Ellen Spolsky, "Why and How to Take the Fruit and Leave the Chaff," *SubStance* 30, 1/2 (2001): 177–98.
31. Perceptual simulations are central to the cognitive efforts that ground kinesic intelligence; see Guillemette Bolens, *The Style of Gestures: Embodiment and Cognition in Literary Narrative* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012).
32. For the French original, see Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 79.
33. Florence Weinberg, *Rabelais et les leçons du rire: Paraboles évangéliques et néoplatoniciennes* (Orléans: Paradigme, 2000), 74.
34. Weinberg, *Rabelais et les leçons du rire*, 75.
35. Anthony Russell writes that, "Like Rabelais, Folengo wrote a mock-epic informed by the spirit of evangelical radicalism central to reformist ideology. Both authors, moreover, levelled some of their most savage satire against the absurdities of theological discourse. Both were monks who left their monasteries on account of their heterodox beliefs and who spent much of the remainder of their lives as wanderers, either defending, concealing, or apologizing for those beliefs." Russell further remarks that "the Baldus would have constituted for Rabelais the only example of a fictional work written in the epic mode with an explicit contemporary reform polemic as one of its central motivations." See Anthony Presti Russell, "Epic Agon and the Strategy of Reform in Folengo and Rabelais," *Comparative Literature Studies* 34, no. 2 (1997): 119–48.
36. Guy Demerson, *L'Esthétique de Rabelais* (Paris: Sedes, 1996), 136–37. See also Guy Demerson, "Violence: Humanisme et facétie," *Europe* 757 (1992): 67–79.
37. Weinberg, *Rabelais et les leçons du rire*, 74.

38. In *La Logique du corps articulaire*, I analyse the logic of embodiment that is extant in the *Iliad*. Some aspects of embodiment in Virgil's *Aeneid* are discussed in Guillemette Bolens, "Le corps de la guerrière: Camille dans l'Enéide de Virgile," in *Körperkonzepte/Concepts du corps: Contributions aux études genre interdisciplinaires*, ed. Franziska Frei Gerlach, Annette Kreis-Schinck, Claudia Opitz, Béatrice Ziegler (Münster: Waxmann, 2003), 47–56. For more on the logic of embodiment, see also Guillemette Bolens, "Continuité et transformation des logiques corporelles," *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* 25 (2003): 471–80.
39. Paré, *La manière de traiter les plaies*, 11.
40. Jean-Charles Sournia writes of this scene "Bien entendu Rabelais use et abuse de tous les procédés. Il ajoute les spondyles aux vertèbres, alors que vertèbre est un vieux mot français compris de tous, quand spondyle est nouveau et inconnu des lecteurs, d'autres fois il prend un mot pour l'autre" ["Of course Rabelais uses and abuses every trick in the book. He attaches the spondyls to the vertebrae, when in fact 'vertèbre' is an old French word understood by everybody, whereas 'spondyle' is new and unknown to his readers; at other times he uses the one for the other"], "Le vocabulaire médical de Rabelais," in "Rabelais pour le XXIe siècle," ed. Michel Simonin, special issue, *Études Rabelaisiennes* 33 (1998): 293.
41. Spolsky, *Contracts of Fiction*, 18.
42. Spolsky, *Contracts of Fiction*, 18.

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