



# Imagining Rabelais in Renaissance England

*Professor Anne Lake Prescott*

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## **Imagining Rabelais in Renaissance England** Professor Anne Lake Prescott

Famed for his learning, wordplay, fantasy and insight, the French writer Francois Rabelais (1494?-1553) was also widely known for scoffing, supposed atheism, salacious writing and irresponsible whimsy. This book explores Renaissance England's response to the humorous yet difficult and ambiguous Rabelais. Anne Lake Prescott describes in detail how a host of English writers - Philip Sidney, Ben Jonson, John Webster, John Donne, James I, Shakespeare and Michael Drayton, among many others - collectively and sometimes individually appreciated and condemned Rabelais. Prescott documents the extent to which Rabelais's name and work permeated Renaissance English literature and thought. Tudor and Stuart writers quoted him, told funny or scandalous stories about him, imitated him, abhorred him, even judged Rabelais without reading him. In this wide range of responses, from the urbanely appreciative to the pompous and grumpy, Prescott finds understandings of cultural ambivalence and the ambiguities of literary reception. She shows that precisely because Rabelais's reputation was contradictory, appropriating his name or words was useful in Renaissance England for expressing division on topics ranging from authorship and sex to heresy and political secrets.

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