

**CONFESSIONAL FRAGMENTS: RELIGIOUS BELIEF EXPRESSED
THROUGH BODY PARTS IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH LITERATURE**

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ABSTRACT

How does the body manifest religious belief? What happens when that belief shatters? These questions were critical in sixteenth-century France when religious conflict rattled many individuals' faith. A startling—and related—motif in the literature of the period features one part of the body overwhelming the world. These texts, this dissertation argues, manifest religious belief through this motif. While several scholars have examined the role of fragmentation in Renaissance culture, particularly how this fragmentation intersects with cartography and anatomy, the religious dimension of this phenomenon has not been emphasized enough. Through a method of close textual and visual analysis, this study argues that in an era when openly stating one's personal religious beliefs could have fatal consequences, the digestive tract, heart, and other parts of the body sometimes took on the work of expressing religious belief. This process resembles synecdoche but differs in that, instead of the part *representing* the whole, the part *swallows* it. The word “swallows” is indeed appropriate: the mouth appears in several of these texts as the part that consumes, contains, or incorporates the entirety.

In Chapter One, the Dutch cartographer Abraham Ortelius's 1564 map of the world reveals the cartographer's spiritual inclinations by portraying the world as a heart, or rather, a

lung. In Chapter Two, the Huguenot Jean de Léry's traumatic experiences during the Wars of Religion combine with his time spent among cannibal tribes to force a redefinition of humanness in his memoir, *Histoire d'un voyage faicte en la terre de Bresil* (1578). In Chapter Three, God's sensing, digesting body in the Protestant poet Guillaume du Bartas's hexameron, *La Sepmaine* (1578), functions as a declaration of Calvinist faith. In Chapter Four, Alcofrybas's journey into Pantagruel's mouth in Rabelais's *Pantagruel* (1532) veils a distinctly Christian humanist message. In Chapter Five, the monster Quaresmeprenant in Rabelais's *Quart Livre* (1552) translates a refusal, or perhaps failure, to reconcile religious differences with a refusal to reconcile the parts of Quaresmeprenant's body.