Thomas M. Greene. *Rabelais; a Study in Comic Courage*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970. Pp. 119. \$4.95.

This little volume, which owes much to the best recent criticism of Rabelais, never presents unwarranted “tresaultz sacremens et mysteres horrificques.” The author goes beyond intelligent synthesis to present new points of view and solid insights. The result is a coherent statement of the themes which bind all five books together: Rabelais exploits both the comic perversity of the world, and radiates “serene wisdom,” a gentle and profoundly religious affirmation of moral truth and value.

Greene discusses Rabelais's books in chronological order. Though he points out the structural weakness of *Pantagruel*, he sees unity in the continuous contrast between “Apollonian wisdom” (incarnate in the giants) and “Dionysian energy” (Panurge). The lifelong friendship between Pantagruel and Panurge reflects Rabelais's optimistic view of human nature. *Gargantua*, more obviously a *Bildungsroman* than *Pantagruel*, follows the hero's progress from the “natural chaos of childhood” (p. 36) to serene maturity. The social contexts in which he moves show a similar progress. Rabelais insists on training both body and mind, which Greene believes to be a rejection of the fashionable neo-Platonism of the age, and a foreshadowing of modern monism. Thélème reflects “that heady Italianate optimism which ... released the human creature to godlike flights of achievement and joy” (p. 52), and which, Greene believes, contradicts Rabelais's more modest view of man expressed elsewhere. The *Tiers Livre* marks a change in mood from happy assurance to the Stoic courage of Pantagruel, to which Rabelais opposes the hesitations and doubts of Panurge. The two major themes, the nature of truth and that of action, are explored through Panurge's uncertainty whether to take any action in view of obscure human knowledge of the future. Greene sees Panurge as an anguished “modern,” and decries overly severe judgments which portray him as a cowardly reprobate. Though Rabelais now appears more skeptical of human wisdom, “the new Pantagruelistic spirit, tempered by struggles [and symbolized by Pantagruelion], is still more indestructible than the easier optimism of Thélème” (p. 80). The narrative of the *Quart Livre* focusses sharply on the contrast between nature and its abuses, the natural and the monstrous. Successive pairs of opposites exemplify the main theme, while Pantagruel represents Rabelais's explicit ideal, *médiocrité en tout*. The “low-keyed and inconclusive ending” to the *Quart Livre* is seen as symptomatic of Rabelais's failing resilience, a “dispirited dryness” which will be reversed by the triumphant ending of the *Cinquième Livre*. In the *Isle Sonnante* and *Grippeminauld* episodes, Greene detects an increasing feeling of the helplessness of men of common sense when faced with a cruel and irrational society. He reminds the reader of Rabelais's “anachronistic modernity” (p. 106). The oracle of the bottle, reaffirming Rabelais's courage, invites us all to “Trinch!”—to engage in life and the pursuit of truth, which lies buried and “abscond,” like God. Rabelais's doctrine of *engagement*, presupposed in Books I-II, becoming the focus of Book III, carries the voyagers through Book IV to the final Oracle, his paean of praise to life.

Wondering at the friendship of Panurge and Pantagruel, Greene concludes that Rabelais's “anthropology” was particularly optimistic. Perhaps it would be useful to remember that Rabelais the physician recognized that body (Panurge) and mind (Pantagruel) must be in lifelong harmony to maintain health. Greene interprets the more explicit ad-

vocacy of *mens sana in corpore sano* in *Gargantua* as a rejection of the very neo-Platonism which he had embraced in the *Prologue*. Instead, Rabelais's attitude would appear consistent with his medical vocation, and typical of Renaissance syncretism: he is an admirer of Socrates (*mens sana*) as well as of Hippocrates (*in corpore sano*). The exuberantly optimistic Thélème chapters, which Greene believes contradict Rabelais's conservatism elsewhere, might have been added to the book after the *Affaire des Placards*, as a sort of antidote to the encroaching time of bloody persecution.¹ Greene's traditional view of Thélème also ignores Per Nykrog's study, linking the name "Thélème to the *θέλημα* (=Will) of the original Greek Lord's Prayer."² "Fais ce que voudras," an active form of "Thy will (*θέλημα*) be done" indicates that the Thélémites, far from neo-pagan exaltations of man's perfectibility, are continually led by the will of God. (When any Thélémite wishes to drink or play a game, all consent to do the same.) There is thus no contradiction between these chapters and Rabelais's evaluation of human nature elsewhere ("Ne peult estre que meschant sy par grace divine n'est continuellement guidé" I, xxix, 90),³ since the Thélémites are guided by divine grace. The shift from happy assurance to Stoic courage in the *Tiers Livre* may reflect Rabelais's reaction to increasingly difficult times, but it may also reflect a shift in interest from the utopias of the earlier books to everyday problems. It is a gradual emergence from the fairy-tale influence of the *Grandes Chroniques* to the "light of common day." On the opposition of *Physis*/*Antiphysie* in the *Quart Livre*, Greene notes, "A certain naturalism now appears which Rabelais seems to have had no difficulty in reconciling with his faith" (p. 86). Although Rabelais shifts emphasis in the *Quart Livre*, his "naturalism" (interpreted as the world and its creatures in physical and spiritual harmony with the creator's intentions for them) is characteristic of the entire work. It may be seen in the giants' *sophrosyne*, and sharply brings out the disharmony of Panurge (that anguished "modern"), unable to choose, yet obsessed by sexual appetites.

Professor Greene, at pains to indicate Rabelais's pertinence to our times, occasionally forgets to see him in context as a Renaissance man. However, his book performs the double task of providing an excellent introduction for the beginner, and food for thought for the seasoned *rabelaisant*. In conclusion, one might ask: Why has this readable and useful little book not been published also in a paperback version?

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Notes

- 1 M. A. Screech, "Some Reflexions on the *Abbey of Thelema*," *Etudes rabelaisiennes*, 8 (1969) 109-114.
- 2 "Thélème, Panurge et la dive bouteille," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 65 (1965) 385-397.
- 3 Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. J. Boulenger. Paris, Pléiade, 1955.

Terence C. Cave. *Devotional Poetry in France c.1570-1613*. Cambridge: At the University Press, 1969. Pp. xvi, 357. \$11.50.

This study of the relationship between devotional prose and religious poetry during the 'Catholic' and 'Calvinist' revivals is the outgrowth of a doctoral thesis that has successfully shed its utilitarian origins. The title may not seduce those who nowadays look for the Baroque in boldface in any work that deals with the post-Pléiade era, but in this as in other