

The Function of Pantagruelion in Rabelais's *Quart Livre*

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ABSTRACT

The praise of the famous Pantagruelion herb that occupies the last four chapters of Rabelais's Tiers Livre bears on the narrative of the Quart Livre. Although apparently frivolous or superfluous, the use of Pantagruelion as a blow-tube places it in the same class of beings as the other physeter in Rabelais's text—the whale that later appears in chapters 33 and 34 of the Quart Livre. Pantagruel's preparedness for the whale, compared with the misplaced fear of Panurge and overconfidence of the Pantagruelic artillery, rests in part on his knowledge that physeters are governed by necessities, by natures. Connecting Pantagruelion to the whale in this way reveals an order in nature, one that requires belief despite appearances. Pantagruelion supplies or inspires such belief.

Nature and the Pantagruelion Herb

φύσις: *origin, growth, nature, constitution*

φουσητήρ: *a blowpipe or blowtube, the blowhole or spiracle of a whale*

Like many of Rabelais's passages, the praise of Pantagruelion that closes the *Tiers Livre* has a generative capacity, encouraging interpretation. There Rabelais cryptically describes the plant to be brought on board in preparation for the search for the *Dive Bouteille*, which supposedly holds the final answer to Panurge's marriage question, initially raised with the end of the war against the Dipsodians and the onset of political peace in the *Tiers Livre*. The plant's qualities seem to have little to do with this quest. I will suggest that, on the contrary, the Pantagruelion plant is well-suited to answering the question of whether Panurge should marry and to further educating Panurge by giving him the right disposition toward his future and his happiness.

The interpretive history of the Pantagruelion plant is expansive. In 1956, Verdun-Louis Saulnier

identified eight scholarly theories about Pantagruelion as worthy of consideration.¹ Donald Frame's 1977 *Study* catalogued four more.² Saulnier developed what has since been called the *hésuchiste* theory, which presents Rabelais's prudential recourse to shrouded speech and imagery (such as that of the lauded herb) as a way of communicating with fellow *évangeliques* in the face of religious persecution.³ This interpretation prevailed until the 1960s, when scholars began to examine the rhetoric of the Pantagruelion *encomium*, its comical, paradoxical, digressive character, and its lyrical quality. These latter studies consider the Pantagruelion chapters as one whole to be examined independently of the rest of Rabelais's writings.⁴ Louis-Georges Tin reminds us that, after all, the ending of the *Tiers Livre* may perhaps be "un texte sur rien, faisant surgir *ex nihilo aliquid*." But Tin himself—like so many readers, including me—cannot resist probing the rhetorical, hermeneutical, and poetical aspects of the Pantagruelion chapters.⁵

The reading offered here connects Pantagruelion to the narrative of the *Quart Livre* by showing that the plant, a living thing, serves a purpose in the quest for the *Dive Bouteille*, during which Panurge will encounter nature. Under the circumstances of this quest, Panurge cannot discount nature as mere tradition, moralizing, or bloviating as he had discounted the expert consultations of the *Tiers Livre*. Nature's tutelage or correction of Panurge occurs most obviously in chapters 33–34 of the *Quart Livre* when the company, then at sea, spots a whale or *physeter*—think of the false cognate φύσις⁶—approaching. Pantagruelion, also a *physeter*, provides the key to understanding the questers' encounter with the sea creature. And Pantagruel's thoughtful response to the monster makes use of his knowledge of *physeters* as a class of things, all similar though different.

The following argument contains three sections. The first considers a question that occurs after reading the description of Pantagruelion in chapter 49 of the *Tiers Livre*: Is Pantagruelion analogous to Homer's *moly* plant? (Homer is one of the most cited of Rabelais's antique sources.)⁷ An equivocal answer to this question leads to deeper digging. For, aside from providing a physical description of the plant, Rabelais writes that Pantagruelion has a "use" that *moly* lacks. The second section explains the significance of this use, which the narrator describes through a riddle. Via reflection on this riddle, two possible "uses" present themselves: (1) philosophy, or dialectical reasoning, and (2) belief. Or is it (3) both, combined in a kind of Platonic πίστις?⁸ That is, perhaps Saulnier's *hésuchiste* theory was right: Pantagruelion symbolizes belief, but belief in the necessity of things—belief that there is such thing as a mostly *invisible* and yet *intelligible* necessity, an

ordering of the cosmos and a setting of limits on each part of the cosmos—and not religious belief despite persecution by the authorities. Such belief would mean ignoring or looking past the appearance of things in the world. It would mean focusing instead on the principles that often underlie those things which are not so readily available to the eye. This type of belief in necessity is evident not only in the text of the Pantagruelion chapters, nor only in the likeness of Pantagruelion to Homer's *moly* plant, but also in the function of Pantagruelion in the *Quart Livre* as a *physeter*, or blowhole, to match that greater *physeter*, the whale. This function, discussed in the third section of the argument, accounts for the appearance of the goddess of necessity, Atropos, in both episodes.⁹

Understanding the function of Pantagruelion in the *Quart Livre* not only verifies the coherent design of Rabelais's books, but lends credence to the view that Panurge undergoes a series of events intended to lead him to accept his circumstances rather than to try to control his future. Not least of all, the presence of the *physeters* in the *Tiers* and *Quart Livres* suggest a Rabelais advocating a view of nature deserving of or commanding human deference. Rabelais's books serve as a timely reminder in an age of both heady, scientific ambitions and resurgent religiosity. This is why I end my argument by connecting the events of the *physeter* episode with the immediately prior tale that Rabelais's narrator recounts (*QL* 29–32) about the children of Physis and Antiphysie. The characters of these episodes are etymologically kindred, and they in fact relate to the same theme of nature and of our dispositions toward nature.

Pantagruelion as *Moly*: “Rough and Hard to Get at” (*Tiers Livre* 49 and *Odyssey* X)

The praise of Pantagruelion in the *Tiers Livre* begins when the narrator reports Pantagruel is preparing the number of ships that “Ajax de Salamine avoit jadis menées en convoy des Gregoys à Troie” [Ajax of Salamis long ago brought the Greeks as a convoy to Troy].¹⁰ This is only the first hint that Homer's poetry serves as a signpost for these chapters. The narrator drops more breadcrumbs when he lists the attributes of the plant. He notes that Pantagruelion “a racine petite, durette [...]” [has small and tough roots [...]].¹¹ And later, at the beginning of chapter 52, he attests that the truth about Pantagruelion is “d'accès assez scabreux et difficile” [rather rough and hard to get at].¹² As we shall see, this is the verbiage Hermes uses to describe the nature of the *moly* plant to Odysseus in *The Odyssey*. Rabelais's mimicry may suggest the Pantagruelion plant functions in

Rabelais's book just as the *moly* plant functions in Homer's book. The possibility would lend importance to Pantagrueion. Seth Benardete claims the very "peak of the *Odyssey*" occurs when Hermes descends to Odysseus.¹³ Hermes intervenes in Odysseus's situation in *The Odyssey* after his group's arrival on Aiaia, an island inhabited by the powerful goddess Circe. Odysseus had seen a fire in the distance and decided to send a team headed by Eurylochos to investigate.¹⁴ Eurylochos alone returned and reported the fate of the others who had happened upon the household of Circe, accepted "malignant drugs" from her, and "took on the look of pigs." The last Eurylochos knew, his men had been driven by the dread goddess into a hog-sty.¹⁵ Just before Hermes appeared to reveal the nature of the *moly* plant, Odysseus and Eurylochos had disagreed about how to proceed. Odysseus wished to retrieve the men and Eurylochos advised abandonment. But Odysseus felt a strong "compulsion" and determined to save the company.¹⁶

Odysseus then set off to find his companions. Hermes, in the likeness of a man in the bloom of youth, appeared to Odysseus and provided him with a "good medicine" to work against the "malignant medicine" Circe had used on the investigators. He told Odysseus to enter the house of Circe and wait for her to try to strike him with her wand. At her movement he was to draw a sword and rush at her. When she, in fear, would invite Odysseus to bed, Odysseus was not to refuse but rather to obtain her oath to desist. With these instructions delivered, Hermes "administered" the medicine. Benardete points out the medicine works not through its administration to the body, but through Hermes' "explaining" its "nature" [φύσιν] to Odysseus:

So spoke Argeiphontes, and he gave me the medicine, which he picked out of the ground, and he explained the nature of it to me. It was black at the root, but with a milky flower. The gods call it *moly*. It is *hard for mortal men to dig up*, but with the gods all things are possible.¹⁷

In relating this story, Odysseus called Hermes by one of his many epithets, Argeiphontes. The name refers to another instance where Hermes counteracted Hera's magical transformation of Zeus's lover, Io, into a cow. Hera afterward enlisted the giant Argos to guard the enchanted animal. Later, Hermes slew Argos, hence the name Argeiphontes [Argos-slayer]. Yet Hermes himself never uses magic. Hermes works or thinks through the way things are, their being, telling Odysseus about

these things presumably at greater length than Odysseus discusses them with us. As this study of nature applies to the *moly*, without Hermes' help Odysseus may possibly have seen only have seen the plant's white blossom. The root, "hard for mortal men to dig up,"¹⁸ would have remained hidden. Thus Odysseus would not have realized that the white blossom and black root belong together, just as the human body and mind, though also disparate, go together.¹⁹

The root and the flower differ in more than color, however. The root works to keep the plant grounded in one place. The flower, on the other hand, is not only visible but effortlessly gives off pollens that travel and reproduce the plant in scores elsewhere. The reproductive capacities of the flower point to the universality of its nature; the roots, to its particularity. And whereas the flower has a soft beauty about it, the black roots look ugly.

Moly is "hard for mortals to dig up," but not because digging it requires superhuman physical strength. A more plausible answer is that the beauty of the *moly* petals leaves onlookers content with the visible part of the plant, or that it compels them to snap the plant at the stem and take what they see. Either way, the root is simply not recognized or desired. The root goes overlooked as inessential to the plant or as subordinate to the flower. Knowing about this ugly thing requires considerable will to see beyond the visible. Hermes's lesson is not only that nature combines diverse parts into wholes, but also that people keep to the surfaces of things out of an intellectual weakness or blindness. This blindness prevents them from seeing the whole. In this case, being blind means seeing and holding to a prettier picture of life.

The difference between what is invisible and visible, apparent and real, was very important to Rabelais. As George Mallary Masters writes,

All Rabelaisian images play on appearance and reality. They embody a dynamic relationship between external form and intrinsic meaning. They at once express the dialectic of opposites and they are that dialectic. [...]. But, at the same time, the images also signify something else—they point beyond the apparent to an idea.²⁰

My contention about the Pantagruelion plant mirrors Masters's view of Rabelais's work on the whole. The Pantagruelion plant acts to point beyond itself and to a more general idea. This is how it functions as Rabelais's "*moly*." And as in Homer's *Odyssey*, Rabelais's characters discover this

dialectical aspect of Pantagruelion through a literal (but also intellectually important) quest. As Masters concludes, “It [Pantagruelion] represents the wisdom of the sage Pantagruel and symbolizes the quest for self-knowledge.”²¹ And just as Odysseus was aided in his quest with knowledge of the moly plant, which transformed into self-knowledge, Pantagruel and Panurge will be aided in theirs by knowledge of the Pantagruelion plant, which will facilitate the same transformation—by showing them their standing within and in relation to the rest of the cosmos.

In the cases of both *moly* and Pantagruelion, in other words, the plants reveal and teach the operations of nature. Odysseus learned the relationship between disparate parts and the whole—that things that seem not to go together in fact belong together, when the larger entity they belong to is considered. As for Pantagruel and Panurge, they will learn about another equally important aspect of nature: beings that differ in size and appearance can belong to the same class, once their basic functions come into focus and once one finally looks past what is most obvious to the eye. This is the deeper quest that Pantagruel and Panurge will endure—not the physical one of visiting far flung places in the world, but the philosophical one of more deeply understanding the world through dialectics.

If Rabelais's Pantagruelion plant is anything like *moly*, then the narrator's description should produce a view or understanding of nature like the one found in Book X of *The Odyssey*. For the sake of comparison, here is the narrator's full description of the nature of Pantagruelion:

1. Pantagruelion may be “prepared” and put to use.
2. Pantagruelion has small, shallow roots (though “petite” and “durette”) with a blunt white point.
3. Its stem is concave, with a green outside and white inside.
4. Pantagruelion derives its worth from its fiber.
5. Its height ranges from 5' to that of a lance (roughly 10').
6. The Pantagruelion herb dies yearly.
7. It does, however, have evergreen leaves with spikes.
8. These leaves number 5 or 7 in each row, “tant-l'a cherie nature, qu'elle l'a douée en ses feuilles de ces deux nombres impars, tant divins et mysterieux” [so much has Nature cherished it that she has

endowed in its leaves these two odd numbers, so divine and mysterious].

9. The odor of the plant is too strong for delicate noses.
10. But “estainct en l’home la semence generative, qui en mangeroit beaucoup et souvent” [it extinguishes the generative seed in anyone who should eat many of them often]. Greeks used these seeds for desserts.
11. The female has a milky flower.²²

Although this list shares a few things with Odysseus’s description of *moly*, differences are evident. Odysseus’s details were scant. He mentioned only *moly*’s colors, its two parts, and the roughness or softness of those parts. Here readers get many details to organize. First, the Pantagruelion’s roots are white, shallow, and small—not black (though still “petite” and “durette”). Pantagruelion’s roots are similar to those of *moly* in that their shortness suggests that harvesting Pantagruelion does not require great physical strength but strength of another kind—strength of intellect or of constitution. Point 9 reinforces Pantagruelion’s *moly*-like difficulty of access. The strong odor of the plant keeps weak people away. Only those able to ignore its stench can handle the plant. In addition, spikey leaves (point 7) suggest a need for thick skin. This plant too is hard for mortals to dig up.

The third item, the fact that Pantagruelion is concave, will gain importance during the questers’ encounter with the *physeter* in the *Quart Livre*—more about which below.

Even if *moly* serves as a kind of literary model for Pantagruelion, the meaning of Rabelais’s plant exceeds that of *moly*. Consider point 1. Odysseus did not “use” *moly* when he entered Circe’s household except in the sense that it gave him a knowledge of his nature that enabled him to remain firm against Circe’s seductions. Simply by being what it was, *moly* helped Odysseus to realize who he was—a human and not a pig. But chapter 51 of the *Tiers Livre* will suggest that humans use Pantagruelion in ways that improve and change conditions for themselves. This point will be revisited and examined more closely below.

The yearly death (point 6) of Pantagruelion speaks not only to its mortality but also to its continual recurrence, or to the fact that a blueprint for this plant exists somewhere. Its individual specimens inhabit a realm of becoming and perishing, but Pantagruelion keeps becoming and

perishing because of its residence in the realm of being.

Point 10 is, however, enigmatic. The seed of Pantagruelion “extinguishes the generative seed in man.” (This extinguishing of desire is what Panurge most needs in the *Tiers Livre*, and various attempts to extinguish that “generative seed” are made through the consultations, formal and informal.) On a literal reading one might compare Pantagruelion with those plants and drugs responsible for cases of sexual impotence, erectile dysfunction, and the like. Medical researchers know that certain forms of plant life are capable of these effects. The early interpreters of Rabelais accordingly emphasized the sterilizing effects of the hemp seed in their readings of the Pantagruelion chapters.²³

Yet this literal reading does not explain why Rabelais pairs this effect with the apparently unnecessary detail that the Greeks, of all peoples, ate this anti-aphrodisiac for dessert. Keeping this odd pairing in mind, a few interpretive options arise. Such a dessert may represent *philosophy*, the life dedicated to the cultivation of and adherence to *reason* (any subsequent reference herein to *philosophy* indicates such a way of life), for which the Greeks were so well-known. Living a philosophic life means grasping or trying to grasp things as they really are, not as they are expounded by human authorities, nor as they appear to be at first glance. Implying such independent activity, philosophy represents the culmination of learning. It is, so to speak, the last course of one's intellectual development. In its deepest manifestation, philosophy's intense focus on discovering the truth about the cosmos decreases other non-philosophic loves. Philosophy “estainct en l'home la semence generative” by taking erotic focus away from immediate, particular things and connecting the lover of truth to eternity. And the narrator does note that Pantagruelion is of philosophic importance. He expresses surprise that the benefits of Pantagruelion were “hidden for so many centuries from the ancient philosophers.”²⁴

On the note of the narrator's surprise about Pantagruelion's belated discovery, this dessert might also be *belief*.²⁵ For belief reached the Greeks after philosophy did, and so may be the true final course. Christianity opened up God's covenant with the Jews to the Gentiles in Athens, Corinth, Thessaly, and elsewhere in the Hellenic world. Further, just as philosophy makes the lover of wisdom un-erotic with regard to this world by turning attention to the eternal world of intellect, belief makes the faithful un-erotic by turning their attention from this world—often an autonomous and proud attention aimed at figuring out the physics of this world, or an infatuation with its

material pleasures—to the future, the next world, or afterlife. An indication of just this “extinguishing of the generative seed in man” can be found in Genesis 1:28 (ESV): “And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply [...]’” It is indeed an otherworldly kind of human community that needs to be commanded to this sort of activity.

As the narrator discloses more about Pantagruelion, these competing interpretations, *philosophy* or *reason* on the one hand and *belief* on the other, must be weighed against each other or reconciled. A sound interpretation will not only fit the description given of the plant in the final chapters of the *Tiers Livre*, but will also explain how Pantagruelion helps the company during their journey in the *Quart Livre*. I take steps toward refereeing these interpretations by briefly considering the various uses of Pantagruelion offered in *Tiers Livre* 51, and ultimately settle on the answer that Pantagruelion suggests to the reader belief in natural regularities dispersed throughout the cosmos, as well as in human reason’s ability to decipher these regularities. In this sense, Pantagruelion would resemble Homer’s *moly* plant; it would be used as an introduction of sorts to the mysterious but coherent workings of nature, so “rough and hard to get at.”

Philosophy and Belief: The Uses of Pantagruelion (*Tiers Livre* 51)

Chapter 51, which purports to explain the reason for the plant’s name, and which deviates to explain the uses of the plant, supplies the reasons for suspecting that Pantagruelion encourages the synthesis of *reason* or *philosophy* with *belief*.²⁶ The chapter begins with a moral observation, which presents the reader with the first of a series of themes related to these “uses” of Pantagruelion to consider. Thieves, we are told, hate the plant because it can “oppiloit les conduictz, par les quelz sortent les bons motz, et entrent les bons morseaulx, plus villainement que ne feroit la male Angine et mortelle Squinanche” [stop up the passages by which good remarks come out and good morsels come in, more banefully than would a bad choking spell or mortal quinsy]. In short, Pantagruelion acts as a “hart” [halter] and “cornette” [cravat].²⁷ It delivers death, especially to the deserving. The narrator equates this aspect of Pantagruelion with the work of the Greek goddess Atropos.²⁸ Traditionally, Atropos was the oldest of the three Fates and had the job of ending life and ensuring cosmic justice.²⁹ In Plato’s *Republic*, Socrates similarly (but not identically) mentions Atropos in his telling of the myth of Er as the governess of “what is going to be.”³⁰ Thus Pantagruelion, like Atropos, signifies death, inevitability, and necessity, but also the

future and eternity—something that, as La Rochefoucauld later wrote, “ne se peuvent regarder fixement” [cannot be looked on fixedly].³¹ In Rabelais's text, however, some can look at death more fixedly than others. Pantagruelion disturbs mainly the unjust. And on the other hand, Pantagruelism promises to cultivate callousness toward one's future³²—callousness towards Atropos, or an ability to disregard one's fate.

Because of the narrator's focus on thieves as the most fearful of Pantagruelion, one might conclude that the moral, or the law-abiding, can look on death more fixedly. But if the bad fear punishment then the good anticipate rewards. The predispositions of the unjust and the just, combined with the definition of Pantagruelism as contempt for fortuitous things, leads to the conclusion that beholding death fixedly requires transcending morality altogether, or looking on death philosophically (from outside of convention, or from outside of good and bad). At this juncture one cannot ignore what that Rondibilis first brought up in his consultation with Panurge earlier in the *Tiers Livre*: Socrates's famous formulation of philosophy as “meditation de mort” [meditation on death].³³

More evidence of Pantagruelion as a subject appropriate to *philosophy* accrues throughout the chapter. Here is the most prominent piece: the narrator observes that planters harvest Pantagruelion during the draught season, when the Sun “rend tout le monde Troglodyte, et constraint habiter es eaves et lieux subterrains” [forces everyone to live in caves or cellars or other underground places].³⁴ These draught conditions cause thirst, Rabelais's emblem for the desire for wisdom.³⁵ The underground dwellings that Rabelais's narrator describes may remind readers of the cave or shadow world described in Book 7 of Plato's *Republic*. But in the Pantagruelion chapters, the people are not born and reared in the cave with its questionable customs, as in the account of Plato's Socrates,³⁶ but head down into them because of the harsh conditions above ground. In a literal sense, the sun's heat might push people to live underground. In another, figurative sense, the “heat” of the governing authorities' rule can push freethinking and dedication to reason underground. Although advocates of liberalism and individual rights may blame this kind of “heat” for causing science to wither on the vine, Pantagruelion flourishes in draught conditions. Perhaps philosophy withers when generously watered. Great philosophers have sprouted, after all, in persecutory ages.

Pantagruelion as *belief* may be read as a competing alternative to Pantagruelion as a philosophic occasion. That is, the harsh conditions that surround Pantagruelion as *philosophy* may

affirm the need for *belief* as a supplement. Indeed, interpretations of Pantagruelion as *belief* are not new.³⁷ Here I merely suggest that this belief may not be particularly religious faith, but—in a fitting twist for Rabelais—faith in reason or philosophy. Hence my suggestion that readers should investigate a reason/belief duality in the meaning of the plant.

These possibilities need to be considered, then, and can be, by thinking about a list of disparate uses of Pantagruelion that Rabelais provides. The uses on this list support a second-order interpretation of Pantagruelion as *belief*. Although not literal, this interpretation is still warranted by the textual evidence.³⁸ Rabelais describes the uses for the plant by painting a dreary picture of human life without it. Without Pantagruelion,

1. “[...] kitchens would be a disgrace, tables loathsome.”
2. Beds would be “without delight.”
3. Millers could not carry wheat to the mill.
4. Plaster could not be carried to the workshop
5. Water could not be drawn from the well.
6. The art of printing would perish.
7. Human beings would not be clothed.

Additionally,

8. It protects armies against cold and rain.
9. It provides netting for fishermen.
10. It shapes shoes, strings bows, bends crossbows, and makes slingshots.³⁹
11. Dead bodies are always buried with it.
12. It arrests invisible substances.⁴⁰

Plant materials can explain each of these riddles well enough. Linens adorn and give charm to kitchens and tables; blankets give beds delight; bags contain wheat and plaster; rope pulls up water; printing requires paper. And of course plant materials of various kinds are used to produce clothing, weaponry, death shrouds, and sails. But the quality or virtue of *belief* explains the genesis or origin of each use, and it is the genesis that seems to be at stake. As Tristan Vigliano writes, “En réalité,

dans le Pantagruéliion sont réunies toutes les caractéristiques du pantagruélisme *entendu comme illusion*. Il existait avant que son utilité ne fût découverte, et certains continuent à en faire mauvais usage. [...]. Il ne peut être réduit à néant : comme l'illusion, dont nul ne viendra jamais à bout. Il entretient et développe l'activité humaine : comme l'illusion, qui est vivifiante."⁴¹ Although I refer to Pantagruelion as a source of belief rather than as an illusion (as Vigliano does), I agree that Pantagruelion might be conceived of as such a belief-inspiring illusion if readers consider it as the driving motivation behind each of the inventions mentioned.

More than any of the other uses for Pantagruelion, however, points 11 and 12 on the list above suggest that Pantagruelion either stands for or supplies belief. These points, read allegorically, also support (of course with the risk of speculation, and therefore without an authoritative claim), a second-order interpretation of Pantagruelion.⁴² For *if* Pantagruelion symbolizes belief, then bringing fabrics and clothing with oneself to the grave [point 11] implies belief of the highest order—belief in the afterworld.⁴³ The final point, moreover, turns from the realm of the grave and back to another, equally deep sort of belief. Although one can literally interpret the arrest of invisible substances as the arrest of winds by sails [point 12], this usage also demonstrates belief in the regularity and beneficence of nature.⁴⁴ Such belief takes explorers to new worlds far more than do the sails themselves. Alternatively, a plausible reading of “invisible substances” includes an arrest of human souls. Because Rabelais writes of intellectual activity as the human vocation most capable of making such an arrest (think again of Socrates' “meditation de mort,” mentioned, to reiterate, in *Tiers Livre* 31), this usage of Pantagruelion also suggests a link between belief and reason.

A sound interpretation of Pantagruelion should maintain consistency with the end of chapter 51. This section reports that the Olympian gods feared Pantagruel's children would invent or discover an “herbe de semblable energie” [an herb of similar energy] and invade the heavens after seeing humans putting Pantagruelion to its various uses. It ends by stating that the gods convened a meeting about how to respond to the human threat.⁴⁵ Rabelais's story may be derived from those warnings against collective human efforts found in Aristophanes' speech in Plato's *Symposium* or in the Babel story of the book of Genesis.⁴⁶ Regardless of Rabelais's source, however, it is likely that the worry among the divinities that he writes about originates in something stronger than plant material, such as the belief underlying each of the uses. To see how Pantagruelion supplies belief,

readers must examine its function in the quest of the *Quart Livre*.

The Questers' Uses of Pantagruelion in the *Quart Livre*

Thinking about the function of Pantagruelion in Rabelais's narrative means returning to basic questions. The turn from established authorities in the *Tiers Livre* to an independent quest in the *Quart Livre* does not of itself explain the pertinence of the Pantagruelion chapters. The additional fact that Pantagruelion is mentioned only twice in the *Quart Livre*—once in a restatement of the ending of the *Tiers Livre*, and once in a droll way—seems to further diminish the plant's purpose. Here is what the narrator describes Panurge doing with the Pantagruelion plant in chapter 63: “Panurge avecques la langue parmy un tuyau de Pantagruelion faisoit des bulles et guargoulles” [Panurge, through a tube of Pantagruelion, was blowing bubbles with his tongue].⁴⁷ Nothing more is written about Pantagruelion.

There may be no need for more. As Edwin Duval has written, the design of the *Quart Livre* gives weight to the appearance of another bubble-blower: the whale or *physeter* who appears to the questers in the middle of the book.⁴⁸ The Greek term φυσήτήρ means a few things. It may refer to (1) an instrument for blowing, a blowpipe, or tube, (2) the blowhole or spiracle of a whale, or (3) to a kind of whale. But of course, as we have just seen, Panurge later (in *QL* 63) uses the Pantagruelion plant as a *physeter*—a blowhole. Rabelais prepares for this apparently frivolous use of Pantagruelion as early as chapter 49 of the *Tiers Livre*, where, as noted in my earlier discussion of Pantagruelion's qualities, the narrator discloses that the stem of the plant is concave.⁴⁹ Rabelais's plan stews for some time, and for such an odd reason. The difficult question is what all of this means.

Pantagruelion's use as a bubble-blowing device is best understood against the backdrop of the other ways of understanding the other bubble-blower—the whale—that are on offer. Pantagruelion and the whale both stand for natural things, or for living beings that grow. These *physeters* are specimens of *physis* or nature. Yet the very blower of the blowhole, Panurge, seems not to understand this. When the whale approaches the boat, Panurge shouts out in fear and bemoans the coming of the “Leviathan descript par le noble prophete Moses en la vie du saint home Job” [the Leviathan as described by the noble prophet Moses in the life of that holy man Job].⁵⁰ In other words, Panurge understands the *physeter* not according to its nature, but as presented through the

holy revelations. By making this comparison, Panurge is showing that he understands the whale in religious terms, not philosophic ones. According to his analogy, Panurge believes the whale to be capable of anything, not limited by its nature or necessity.

The rest of the chapter consists of Pantagrue's explanation to Panurge of what the *physeter* is and the narrator's description of how Pantagrue confronted and defeated the creature. In other words, Pantagrue appears to Panurge as a kind of Homeric Hermes, who arrives to instruct his Odysseus, Panurge—who had described himself as such during his first appearance in Rabelais's books.⁵¹ Duval demonstrates beyond doubt that Rabelais uses Job 41 as his source text for the questers' encounter with the beast. He points out that each of Pantagrue's actions in his battle against the Leviathan correspond to the rhetorical questions that God poses to Job.⁵² God asks, for example, whether anyone can put a cord through the animal's nose or pierce its jaw with a hook; Pantagrue does just these things.⁵³ But Pantagrue's behavior has heretical ramifications. For according to Church tradition, each of God's questions were to be answered firmly in the negative. Here is what Thomas says about the matter in his *Expositio super Iob ad litteram (Literal Exposition on Job)*:

[...] lest it be believed that man can overcome the devil by his own power he begins to exclude this belief under the figure of Leviathan, concerning whom He shows first that he cannot be overcome through the method by which fish are caught. Hence, He says, "Or will you be able to draw out, namely, from the waters, Leviathan with a hook?" [...] And by this verse is signified that no man can either draw the devil away from his malice or even tie him so that he may not proceed in his malice.⁵⁴

To save Rabelais from heresy, Duval reads Pantagrue as a Christ-like "fishhook" who may legitimately bind the Leviathan.⁵⁵ Although the Savior could rightfully take that kind of action, Pantagrue does not act as the Savior would. Rather than claim that he alone possesses divine power to overcome Satan, Pantagrue reinterprets the Leviathan as an exclusively physical creature and denies one of its main attributes as a devilish Leviathan. Compare Job 41:19–21 with what

Pantagruel says about the whale. Here is the relevant portion of the account in Job:

Out of [the Leviathan's] mouth go flaming torches; sparks of fire leap forth. Out of his nostrils comes forth smoke, as from a boiling pot and burning rushes. His breath kindles coals, and a flame comes forth from his mouth.

And here is how Pantagruel assuages Panurge's fear of the "Leviathan":

Si telle est (dist Pantagruel) vostre destinée fatale, comme naguieres exposoit frere Jan, vous doibvez paour avoir de Pyroeis, Heoüs, Æthon, Phlegon celebres chevaux du Soleil flammivomes, qui rendent feu par les narines : des Physeteres, qui ne jettent qu'eau par les ouyes et par la gueule, ne doibvez paour aulcune avoir. Jà par leur eau ne serez en dangier de mort. Par cestuy element plus toust serez guaranty et conservé que fasché ne offensé.⁵⁶

Several parts of this speech strike the eye. First, Pantagruel refuses to join Panurge in calling the animal a Leviathan, the designation given it by the biblical tradition. He in fact introduces the taxonomic term *physeter*. Second, he goes out of his way to deny that this whale shoots flames as both the biblical Leviathan and the mythical horses of the Sun do. Pantagruel appears not as a soteriological hero, but as a student of nature whose knowledge of nature gives him a proper measure of confidence or belief—belief that this *physeter*, a natural thing, is no Leviathan. He does not extinguish this Leviathan's fire (on Thomas's view, symbolic of the Devil's capacity to stir passions) but instead demystifies the Leviathan⁵⁷ and denies that it has fire at all.⁵⁸

Guy Demerson writes in his article on the nature of water in Rabelais that the element is

au moins aussi pernicieux que l'autre élément dit 'agressif,' le feu.
[...] Pantagruel rappelle les deux malheurs subis par Enée :
l'incendie de Troie et une 'horrible tourmente sus mer' (T 14, 608)
et, déjà au début de *Tiers Livre*, lorsque Panurge évoquait les pires

dangers qui peuvent assaillir quelqu'un, il désignait l'inondation avec l'incendie et l'assassinat : 'au feu, à l'eau ! au meurtre ?'⁵⁹

Demerson's observations are important because, at least at this point in Rabelais's writing, Pantagruel's and Panurge's reactions to or understandings of water seem to be similar.

Pantagruel's understanding of Pantagruelion may then account for his new and different attitude in the *Quart Livre*.⁶⁰

Now, anybody familiar with whales knows all these things that Pantagruel points out. But judging by the reactions of Panurge and the others, those in the company do not seem as though they had this same familiarity. Pantagruel's possession of this knowledge is not explicitly mentioned in this text, although his father's wish for him to become an "abyssme de science" [abyss of knowledge], as Rabelais's narrator elsewhere describes him,⁶¹ means that he likely possesses knowledge that the others lack—or at least that he is likely to possess a certain way of applying newly learned facts. Through this learning, Pantagruel knows not only about what the whale is, but can also abstract and think through its properties as a *physeter*—a being that belongs in the class of beings that Pantagruelion also belongs to.

In many ways the whale and Pantagruelion are nothing alike. One is a plant and the other an animal. One lives on land and the other in the sea. One stands as tall as a human and the other stretches "the size of four acres."⁶² But Pantagruel teaches that these differences must not deceive. To the unschooled it is the height of folly to approach the "Leviathan" with any less fear than Panurge and the others approach it with, but through dialectical reasoning, Pantagruel knows the nature of *physeters* and so he knows their natural limits. Rabelais's description of Panurge's bubble-blowing occurs twenty-nine chapters after the *physeter* encounter, but presumably Pantagruel has seen Panurge idling away time by blowing bubbles with a tube of Pantagruelion before. If it had been silly to fear Panurge's bubbles, then it would be silly to fear the whale's bubbles. The differences run surface deep. In fact, the whale spiracle and Pantagruelion tube operate according to the same principles. Pantagruel is right. As the *physeter* nears the ships, it begins "ject[ant] eau sus les premieres à pleins tonneaux, comme si feussent des Catadupes du Nil en Æthiopie" [spouting water on them by the barrells, as if it were the cataracts of the Nile in Ethiopia].⁶³ There is no fire, hence no Leviathan. The whale blows bubbles with its spiracle just

as Panurge blows bubbles with the Pantagruelion stem.

Pantagruel's demystification of the Leviathan suggests his scientific view of the world, one that rejects the help of revelation. This view has a few important implications. The demystification process—the rejection or removal of the world of spirits—makes the physical world appear as the merely physical world, something within human understanding and so not as grand and mysterious as the magical world that preceded it. Lest humans take newfound confidence in their relatively elevated place in this world too far, Rabelais compares two possible ways of mastering the *physeter*, one failure and one success. First the failure:

L'artillerie tonnoit et fouldroyoit en Diable, et faisoit son devoir de le pinser sans rire. Mais peu profitoit : car les gros boulettez de fer et de bronze entrans en sa peau sembloient fondre, à les veoir de loing, comme font les tuilles au Soleil.⁶⁴

Whereas the biblical view (which Thomas expounded above) asserts that humans cannot master themselves or the external world unless God grants them power to do so, the artillery embodies the human conceit (and a characteristically modern one) of thinking that the world can be overpowered or mastered. This attempt at mastery is the likely alternative to leaning on divine help, especially if the world is hostile to human life. Clearly, though, Rabelais does not support this solution. As Duval writes, “Even the most advanced modern weaponry is powerless to frighten off the beast or to penetrate its skin.”⁶⁵ Human contrivance cannot best the power of the *physeter*. Readers have to look to Pantagruel for another way forward.

Were it not for Pantagruel's intervention in the *physeter* encounter, the failure of modern artillery might speak to the superiority of Thomas's religious view over that of the modern view which, like Pantagruel's, is also demystified. The Pantagruelic solution is one of these three possible alternatives. Rabelais's description of Pantagruel begins with the prince Diogenically watching the artillery unload for some time. As he looks on he considers “l'occasion et nécessité” [the occasion and necessity] of the situation. That is, he thinks about the *nature* of the whale. Then he steps forward with his bow and arrow and pierces the *physeter* through the forehead to close its blowhole.⁶⁶ He continues to shoot arrows through each of the whale's eyes, its tail, as well as three through its spine. Pantagruel finishes the job by putting fifty arrows in each flank. “Adoncques

mourant le Physetere se renversa ventre sus dours, *comme font tous poissons mors* [...]” [Thereupon the *physeter*, dying, rolled over its back, belly up, *as do all dead fish* [...].]⁶⁷ The *physeter* remains subject to the same necessities as all specimens of its kind.

Given Pantagruel's consideration of the occasion and necessity of the whale confrontation, it is fitting that the reappearance of Atropos also links the Pantagruelion and *physeter* episodes. Back in chapter 51 of the *Tiers Livre*, Rabelais's narrator equated Pantagruelion with this goddess of death and necessity.⁶⁸ Atropos is not mentioned again until the *physeter* episode, when Panurge notes that he sees the death-sister appear “sus la hune” [above the topmast], “avecques ses cizeaulx de frays esmouluz preste à nous tous couper le filet de vie” [with her scissors newly ground, ready to cut the thread of our lives].⁶⁹ Fittingly, the goddess of death looks on as Pantagruel brings the *physeter* belly up in the manner of all dead fish. Whereas Panurge responds fearfully to Atropos, according to his thievish disposition, Pantagruel responds philosophically to Atropos, or rather to necessity, knowing that the *physeter* is limited. If Pantagruel serves as a Hermes to Panurge in his explanation of the *physeter*, here he acts as Odysseus himself, firm (as Odysseus was when faced with Circe) because he is sure of what he is dealing with.⁷⁰

The method of archery combined with the presence of Atropos proves that power has little to do with Pantagruel's defeat of the *physeter*. This combination instead suggests that knowledge of the *physeter* and above all of its limitations is the decisive factor. Lacking this knowledge, the artillery utterly misplaced and wasted its power. Among the most important things that Pantagruel does is consider the “nécessité” of the situation. It seems to be no mistake that the first move he makes is to shut the whale's spiracle. This was a thoughtful action, one based on the nature of the specific animal he faced. Yet one might still object that Pantagruel's archery differs from artillery only in its comparative simplicity. Both are forms of technology. This objection may be correct. What, then, is the virtue of simplicity? Rabelais dwells on the point. He attributes adroitness, expertise, deftness, cleverness, and dexterity to various individuals and groups (respectively: Commodus, an Indian archer, the Franks, the Parthians, and the Scythians) known for their abilities with the bow and arrow.⁷¹ Archery depends on certain virtues including tranquility and harmony, but the artillery does not. The bow and arrow require a steady hand. All of the archers mentioned are noted for their incredible accuracy and intense focus. Moreover, archers do not shoot arrows haphazardly but aim specifically for the most vulnerable part of the enemy. Knowing to aim for

the vulnerable part (and what that vulnerable part is) is related to the presence of Atropos that Panurge detects above the topmast. Whereas Atropos strikes fear in the Panurge's heart and reminds him of his contingency, the goddess prompts Pantagruel to remember that everything has a nature and is governed by necessities. This nature cannot be changed or overcome, but it can be realized and used. This usage works through mind, not power, a dichotomy that reminds readers that Rabelais's description of Pantagruel's defeat of the *physeter* excludes the most reputed of the archers: the thoughtful Odysseus, who shot an arrow through twelve axe heads in a contest against the other suitors for his wife.⁷² Thus in Pantagruel's thoughtful employment of his bow against the *physeter*, he also shadows Odysseus as he employs Pantagruelion in this use of the plant: "Par elle sont les arcs tendus les arbestes bandées, les fondes faictes" [By it are bows strung, crossbows bent, and slingshots made].⁷³ This too connects Pantagruelion with *moly*.

Fastilent and the Children of Physis and Antiphysie (*Quart Livre* 29–32)

The story of the *physeter* is not the only important text about nature in the *Quart Livre*. In fact, Rabelais introduces the theme of nature in the episode that immediately precedes the encounter with the whale. This episode does not contain any allusions or references to Pantagruelion, but it nevertheless concerns plants and maintains the same basic teaching suggested by the study of Pantagruel's famous herb.

Nearing the middle of the *Quart Livre*, Pantagruel and his friends pass by the island of Coverup (Tapinois), ruled by Fastilent (Quaresmeprenant). Their guide, Xenomanes, is familiar with this strange king. Upon hearing Xenomanes's low opinion of Fastilent, Pantagruel says he would like to know more: "You'll give me pleasure if even as you have described to me his vestments, his clothes, his way of acting, and his pastimes, you would also explain to me his form [sa forme] and body in all its parts."⁷⁴ In other words, Pantagruel wants to think about Fastilent's nature. Subsequently, Xenomanes details the king's outer and inner parts at great length, and with great wit and humor. The list of parts described has a certain movement, and ends with an account of the various aspects of Fastilent's intellect:

La memoire avoit, comme une escharpe. Le sens commun, comme un bourdon. L'imagination, comme un quarillonnement de cloches.

Les pensées, comme un vol d'estourneaulx. La conscience, comme un denigement de Heronneaulx. Les deliberations, comme une pochée d'orgues. La repentence, comme l'equippage d'un double canon. Les entreprises, comme la sabourre d'un guallion. L'entendement, comme un breviaire dessiré. Les intelligences, comme limaz sortans des fraires. La volonté, comme troys noix en une escuelle. Le desir, comme six boteaux de saint foin. Le jugement, comme un chaussepied. La discretion, comme une mouffle. *La raison, comme un tabouret.*⁷⁵

Each of these similes ridicules Fastilent's mind in some way, mostly by speaking to its frailty or subservience. The last image of reason as a footstool is especially noteworthy. Fastilent is the anti-philosopher. His reason is instrumental. Its very location is inverted. It is not located inside the head, but sits under the feet. Given that much of the episode reads as a satire of Catholic practices, this description of reason as a footstool may be derived from Thomas's well-known formulation of reason as the "handmaiden" of theology.⁷⁶ Two chapters later, Xenomanes concludes his description of Fastilent through a series of similar inversions:

Travailloit rien ne faisant : rien ne faisoit travaillant. Corybantioit dormant : dormoit corybantiant les œilz [...]. Se baignoit dessus les haulx clochers, se sechoit dedans les estangs et rivieres. Peschoit en l'air, et y prenoit Escrevisses decumanes. Chassoit on profond de la mer, et y trouvoit Ibices, Stamboucqs, et Chamoys.⁷⁷

Fastilent inhabits a world without nature. His life consists of contradictions and impossibilities—or at least that is what most people would call his activities.

Xenomanes's description of Fastilent brings to Pantagrue's mind "old stories" featuring the children of two characters he refers to as Physis and Antiphysie. These stories have been long forgotten. Frère Jean says he knows nothing of them.⁷⁸ They consist of an ancient wisdom that has been covered up. In the tales, the children of Antiphysie have perfectly round skulls, with distorted

ears, eyes, and appendages. They do cartwheels and always go around with their legs above their heads.⁷⁹ Antiphysie praises these children of hers and succeeds in convincing “les folz et insensez en sa sentence” [the fools and madmen] (perhaps a large group) that her offspring imitate the “createur de l’Univers” [Creator of the Universe], given that their hair is like the roots of a tree, their legs like its branches, and so on. The story is clearly framed as a critique of religion. Among those persuaded by Antiphysie are the Papelars and “les Demoniacles Calvins, imposteurs de Geneve” [the demoniacal Calvins, impostors of Geneva].⁸⁰ True to his form, Rabelais does not discriminate here. He attacks both Catholics and Reformers.

But aside from these satirical punches pulled, the story also condemns any effort, religiously motivated or not, to override nature. Nothing about Antiphysie is inherently religious. Antiphysie, according to Pantagruel, has simply always been adverse to and envious of Physis. As Rabelais writes, this animosity dates back “*de tout temps*” [from all time].⁸¹ Antiphysie was not born of Christianity or any other particular religious sect. There is something about humans—at least there is something about a part or faction of them—that does not want to be subjected to nature. In the following chapters, the Pantagruelic company’s varied reactions to the *physeter* (especially those of Panurge and the artillery), more and less mindful of the creature’s nature as a member of this class, depict the contents of the story of Physis and Antiphysie.

A Positive Teaching

Pantagruelion embodies the theme or question of nature, which was already being established during the consultations of the banquet in the *Tiers Livre*. There Hippothadée had denied the reality of “nature,” which is rather God’s “pleasure.”⁸² Rondibilis, on the other hand, suggested the inscrutability of nature. Although he did exhort Panurge to become “an architect of natural consequences,” such an architect learns to deal with nature’s mysteriousness.⁸³ But if the beginning and middle of the *Tiers Livre* give a negative teaching about nature, then the ending of the *Tiers Livre* and the middle of the *Quart Livre* offer a positive teaching. The passages about Pantagruelion and the *physeter* found in those segments of Rabelais’s books discourage readers from attempting to overpower other beings or nature itself, as the questers’ artillery had attempted to do. Yet they also discourage lying prostrate before others’ displays of power. The presence of nature means that one’s place in the world is not determined by power relations. Discerning one’s

true place in the order of nature means thinking about limitations. This has the double-advantage of instilling humility (when grasping one's limits) and granting belief or trust (when grasping others' limits). The belief in nature (or πίστις) for which Pantagruelion stands, and which Pantagruelion inspires, is exemplified in the unlikely scenario of the *physeter*, an animal that is much more powerful than the Pantagruelic comrades but that is nonetheless governed by Atropos—as Panurge unwittingly revealed by blowing into his stick of Pantagruelion, the other *physeter*.

Of the three views presented in the *physeter* episode (the religious, the modern, and the Pantagruelic), only the Pantagruelic view respects and takes its bearings from nature. There is a certain kinship between the religious and modern views in that both deny nature its rule. The consequences of these views of course differ. The religious view grants that the “Leviathan” may do anything—though a water animal, it may shoot fire. The modern view opposes the power of nature with the power of art. Both are nonetheless children of Antiphysie. As a child of Physis, Pantagruel observes Pantagruelion and, through it, sees harmonious principles at work in the world. These principles may not be simply intuitive. It takes much thought to see that the Pantagruelion and *physeter* are more alike than not. Reflecting on the “occasion and necessity” of a given situation, one may begin to see that the limits of nature are different—perhaps more accommodating of human life, less hostile—than had been expected. Still, one gains wisdom from Pantagruelion with difficulty. The meaning of the plant proves “rather rough and hard to get at.”

Endnotes

1. Saulnier, “L'Énigme du Pantagruélion” 51–56; see also Saulnier, *Rabelais I*.
2. Frame 62.
3. Louis-George Tin writes, for example, that the hemp plant (which Pantagruelion is compared to) was used during the reign of Francis I to suppress Lutherans in France (Tin, “Qu'est-ce que le Pantagruelion?” 130).
4. Tetel, *Étude sur le comique de Rabelais*; Losse 62–3; Rigolot 61.

5. Tin, “Qu’est-ce que le Pantagruelion?” 126. More recently, Tin has revised his position, now making the provocative and exciting insight that, as Pantagruelion is made from hemp, it culminates in the book of Pantagruelism itself, and therefore does represent a certain human industry and progress of the kind Rabelais participated in. See Tin, “Le Pantagruelion” 124.
6. See Kinser 93n1.
7. For a list of Rabelais’s Homeric references and allusions, see Silver.
8. That is, both reason and belief combined in a kind of trust or belief in the orderliness of the cosmos. See Plato, *Republic* 190 (510a4–6).
9. The goddess Atropos is also mentioned in *Quart Livre* chapter 27. François Rabelais, *Oeuvres Complètes*, *Quart Livre* chapter 27, 603. Huchon is referred to hereafter by abbreviated references to each book: ‘P’ (*Pantagruel*), ‘G’ (*Gargantua*), ‘TL’ (*Tiers Livre*), ‘QL’ (*Quart Livre*), and ‘CL’ (*Cinquiesme Livre*). Book abbreviations are followed by chapter number and page number. I consulted Frame’s English edition alongside Huchon’s French. François Rabelais, *Complete Works* 496. I refer to Frame hereafter as ‘CW’ followed by page number. Deviations from Frame’s translation reflect my interpretation of Rabelais’s French. Subsequent citations to both editions are placed in footnotes and separated by a forward slash. For example, *QL* 27, 603 / *CW* 496. There Pantagruel insists that the threat she poses is overstated, and in fact that “all human souls are exempt from the scissors of Atropos.” In *Tiers Livre* 51 and *Quart Livre* 33, which contain the episodes examined in this article, Atropos appears as an active character in the text, and one more capable of harm—at least from the narrator’s and Panurge’s perspectives. In *TL* 51, the narrator corrects those who have blamed Pantagruel for having them “by the throat,” for it was, he says, truly Pantagruelion (with which Atropos is associated). In *QL* 33, Panurge claims that he sees Atropos above the topmast of the ship, ready to take the lives of the crew. These differing views correspond well, we shall see, to the different dispositions of each character in the *physeter* chapters.

10. *TL* 49, 500 / *CW* 402.
11. *TL* 49, 501 / *CW* 402.
12. *TL* 52, 509 / *CW* 409.
13. Benardete 84.
14. Homer 156–158 (10.155–220).
15. *Ibid.* 158–159 (10.235–260).
16. *Ibid.* 159 (10.260–270).
17. *Ibid.* 160 (10.302–306). Italics mine. See also Benardete 86. Lattimore translates θεοὶ δέ τε πάντα δύνανται as “the gods have power to do all things.”
18. Cf. the description of Pantagruelion at *TL* 52, 509 / *CW* 409.
19. This is a summary of Benardete's argument. See Benardete 86.
20. See Masters 18.
21. Masters 23.
22. *TL* 49, 501–502 / *CW* 402–403.
23. Saulnier, “L'Énigme” 51; see also Tin, “Qu'est-ce que le Pantagruelion?” 129.
24. *TL* 51, 508 / *CW* 408.
25. Surprisingly, the use of dessert as an emblem of philosophy or belief was not typical during the Renaissance. It cannot be found in the writings of Erasmus, for instance. As far as I can tell, this emblem may be a unique contribution of Rabelais's.
26. Tin observes that a literal understanding of the plant does not account for its being named after Pantagruel. I do not agree with him on all points about Pantagruelion, but

- this is an important insight. See Tin, “Qu’est-ce que le Pantagruelion?” 130.
27. *TL* 51, 506 / *CW* 406.
28. *TL* 51, 506 / *CW* 406. See the Online LSJ definition of ἀτροπος: “not to be turned, unchangeable, eternal” (273).
29. See Hesiod lines 218–223: “Also Night bore the Destinies and ruthless avenging Fates, Clotho and Lachesis and Atropos, who give men at their birth both evil and good to have, and they pursue the transgressions of men and of gods: and these goddesses never cease from their dread anger until they punish the sinner with a sore penalty.” That Atropos and her sisters punish the gods suggests necessity or nature limits or stands above the gods.
30. Plato, *Republic* 300 (617c4).
31. See La Rochefoucauld 406 (maxim 26). The translation is mine.
32. Or, “gayeté d’esprit conficte en mespris des choses fortuites” [gaiety of spirit confected in contempt for fortuitous things]. See *QL*, prol 523 / *CW* 425.
33. *TL* 31, 451 / *CW* 353. Compare with Plato, *Phaedo* 34 (64a7).
34. *TL* 51, 506 / *CW* 407.
35. See *TL* prol, 349 / *CW* 257: “[...] drinking I deliberate, I discourse, I resolve and conclude.” Italics mine. Critics note that terms related to drink do have an equivocal meaning for Rabelais, however. Thomas Greene states it plainly: “The impulse to drink is not consistently represented as appealing.” See Greene 181. André Winandy writes, for another example, that to drink is “to have a certain pondered yet exalted openness to the fullness of human experience, that of bodily functions and that of mental, spiritual aspirations [...].” He also recognizes that Rabelais’s “‘honest boozier’ [...] becomes a seeker of the obvious, but also of that which is hidden from him.” Ultimately, though, these “hidden things” pertain to the “discovery of the body.” See Winandy 10; 16; 11; 10; 17. For a book-length study of the theme of drinking in all of

- Rabelais's five books, see Weinberg. Other critics point out that there is a sense in which drink, in the *Gargantua* prologue, is referred to somewhat pejoratively or at least nonchalantly as "mere" drinking. See Cave et al. 709–16. Among many others, see also Walker 130 for more examples of this reading of the prologue.
36. Plato, *Republic* 193–196 (514a–517d).
37. "The repeated claim," writes Duval, "that fire actually purifies and whitens asbestine Pantagruelion [...] suggests an analogy between Pantagruelion and faith, whose symbolic color is white and which is traditionally said to be tested by tribulation as gold is tested by fire" (Duval 210).
38. Marie-Luce Demonet has recently written a compelling chapter on the force and importance of literally interpreting Rabelais's body of work. She not only calls attention to the flightiness of critical efforts to seek the "plus haut" meaning of Rabelais's writing, but also finds value in the literal as such. At the least, readers should never close off their openness to these various levels of reading, if they feel inclined to one or the other. See Demonet 211–236.
39. This use of Pantagruelion is addressed in my discussion of the *physeter*.
40. *TL* 51, 507–508 / *CW* 407–408.
41. See Vigliano 634. ["In reality Pantagruéliion puts together all the characteristics of pantagruelism understood as an illusion. It existed before its usefulness was discovered and certain people continue to put it to bad use. [...] It can't be reduced to nothing: like an illusion, of which nothing will ever come to fruition. *It undergirds and develops human activity: like an illusion, which is life-giving.*"] Italics mine.
42. I heed Duval's understanding of the Pantagruelion plant as a "test of Pantagruelism in the reader." See Duval 212: "The reader who treats it as either an enigma to be deciphered or as errant foolishness is to be condemned as a Panurgian reader [...]."
43. Ancient philosophers such as Aristotle treated the afterlife seriously. See Aristotle 16–

- 18 (1100a23–1101b10). For more on Aristotle regarding the afterlife, see Pritzl 101–111. Apocryphally, Rabelais’s dying words are said to have been “I seek a great Maybe.” This disposition would not only suggest belief, but the synthesis between belief and reason.
44. Even the use of Pantagruelion to capture wind echoes *The Odyssey*. Odysseus receives the gift of bagged winds from Aiolos just before arriving at Aiaia and meeting Circe. If the events there are any indication, humanity’s ability to use Pantagruelion to capture wind is not simply good. The bag of winds episode emphasizes the human misuse of wind-power. See Homer 152–153 (10.19–27).
45. *TL* 51, 509 / *CW* 409.
46. See Quint 167–171.
47. *QL* 63, 687 / *CW* 579.
48. *QL*, 33–34. See Duval 21–22.
49. See point 3 on the above list of Pantagruelion’s nature.
50. *QL* 33, 616 / *CW* 508.
51. *P* 9, 249 / *CW* 166.
52. Duval 130–131.
53. *QL* 34, 619 / *CW* 511.
54. Aquinas, *The Literal Exposition on Job* 454–455.
55. Duval 133. Frank Lestringant, on the other hand, connects the *physeter* to Rabelais’s anti-Catholic disposition. “Il [the *physeter*] se trouve donc naturellement du côté de Quaresmeprenant” [It is found, naturally, on the coast of Quaresmeprenant], he notes.
56. *QL* 33, 617 / *CW* 508–509: “If such,” said Pantagrue, “is your ill-fated destiny [that is,

- being destroyed by the Leviathan's fire], as Frère Jean was stating a while ago, you should be afraid of Pyroeis, Eous, Æthon, and Phlegon, the famous flammivomous horses of the Sun, who breathe out fire through their nostrils; but of *physeters*, which spout nothing but water from their blowholes and from their throats, you should have no fear at all. Never from their water will you be in danger of death. By that element you will rather be made safe and preserved than troubled and harmed." Italics mine.
57. For similar readings, see Smith 113; Williams 61. For the contrast between Panurge's and Pantagrue's reactions in the episode, see Tetel, "Le Phyetère bicéphale" 58–59.
58. Myriam Marrache-Gouraud has noted that the theme of fear plays a most prominent role in the *Quart Livre*. Although much of the book, on this reading, is about correcting Panurge's misplaced fear, it is important to note that it is not always Panurge who is fearful and Pantagrue who is brave. On the contrary, Pantagrue shows fear—but only when reasonable. Panurge, on the other hand, sometimes expresses confidence when fear would be more proper. See Marrache-Gouraud 136ff.
59. Demerson 20. Water is "at least as pernicious as the other element deemed 'aggressive,' fire [...]. Pantagrue recalls the two misfortunes suffered by Aeneas: the Trojan fire and a 'horrible storm above sea' (T 14, 608), and already at the beginning of the *Tiers Livre*, when Panurge evoked the worst dangers that can attack someone, he equated the flood with fire and murder: fire, water! murder?"
60. Pantagrue's transformation reflects, in an inverse way, an adage of Erasmus (quoted by Demerson in this connection) that begins with the declaration that the fire, the sea, and woman are three evils. But as Erasmus's adage proceeds, water is said to be more fearful than fire, and woman more fearful than water. Pantagrue, by contrast, views water as a thing to be feared less than fire, and has been in the process, of course, of purging Panurge's fear of women. See Erasmus II, 2, 48.
61. *P* 8, 245 / *CW* 161.
62. The size that Thomas attributes to the whale on Pliny's authority. See Aquinas, *Job*

- 454.
63. *QL* 34, 618 / *CW* 509.
64. *QL* 34, 618 / *CW* 509: “The artillery hurled thunder and lightning like the Devil, and tried its best to prick it and not in jest. But this was doing little good; for the iron and bronze cannonballs, as they sank into its skin, seemed to melt, to see them from a distance, as tiles do into the sun.”
65. Duval 130.
66. *QL* 34, 618–619 / *CW* 509–511.
67. *QL* 34, 620 / *CW* 511. Italics mine.
68. *TL* 51, 506 / *CW* 406.
69. *QL*, 33, 617 / *CW* 509.
70. This is all the more fitting in light of Panurge’s need to be educated, given that Panurge foolishly likened himself to Odysseus in his debut in Rabelais’s work. See *P* 9, 249 / *CW* 166.
71. *QL* 34, 618–619 / *CW* 510.
72. See Homer 319 (21.409).
73. *TL* 51, 507–508 / *CW* 407–408. See point 10 on the list describing Pantagruelion’s “uses” in the discussion of Pantagruelion as belief.
74. Frame translates *sa forme* as “his physique.”
75. “He [Fastilent] had a memory like a scarf. Common sense, like a drone. His imagination, like a carillon of bells. His thoughts, like a flight of starlings. His conscience, like an unnesting of young herons. His deliberations, like a pouchful of barley. His repentance, like the carriage of a double cannon. His enterprises, like the

ballast of a galleon. His understanding, like a torn breviary. His notions, like snails crawling out of strawberries. His will, like three walnuts in a dish. His desire, like six trusses of sainfoin. His judgment, like a shoehorn. His discretion, like a mitten. His reason, like a footstool." *QL* 30, 610 / *CW* 502. Italics mine.

76. Aquinas, "Summa Theologica" 9 (Q. I, Art. 5).

77. "He worked doing nothing, did nothing working. He had eyes open sleeping, slept with his eyes open. [...]. He bathed on top of high steeples, dried himself in ponds and streams. He fished in the air and there caught decuman crayfish. He went hunting in the depths of the sea and there found ibexes, wild goats, and chamois." *QL* 32, 614 / *CW* 506.

78. *QL* 32, 614 / *CW* 507.

79. *QL* 32, 614 / *CW* 507.

80. *QL* 32, 614 / *CW* 507.

81. *QL* 32, 614 / *CW* 507. Italics mine.

82. *TL* 30, 446 / *CW* 350.

83. *TL* 32, 453 / *CW* 355.

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