

fearful" (p. 8), and that his obvious principal function is to "bring the central themes of Rabelais's work to life" (p. 8).

In chapter one, Ragland considers the various critical interpretations of the character advanced since the time of Rabelais. In chapter two she develops her own position based largely on the psychoanalytical theories of literary character proposed by Surmelian, Harvey, and Forster. The remaining chapters examine Rabelais's texts, accumulating evidence and giving credence to Ragland's primary stand.

A perpetual child-figure, Panurge is seen as a medium through which the reader participates in Rabelais's essential fantasy—"the desire for free expression pitted against a search for certain security" (p. 29). He embodies the implicit intellectual/emotional tension common to all men throughout time and space, expressing the "existential reality of the human condition" (p. 36). Once one has accepted this point of view, one reads *Rabelais and Panurge* with pleasure and profit. Ragland successfully avoids the use of jargon despite her psychoanalytical approach to the subject. She substantiates her premises and interpretations, sometimes with clear textual analyses, sometimes allowing Rabelais's works to speak for themselves.

One minor quibble: Ragland occasionally repeats herself, leaving the reader with the impression that he is covering the same ground a second time. On the whole, *Rabelais and Panurge* is a work of sound scholarship and refreshing honesty. Ragland presents a truly original interpretation of the essential role of Rabelais's most ambiguous and paradoxical character.

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Et cinq Bouteilles de Vodka

Translated from the Russian by Marina Gorbov

Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont, 1975. Pp. 220.

"Yo-ho-ho! et cinq bouteilles de vodka!" (p. 27), bellows a landlocked pirate aboard a train from Siberia steaming through a Ukrainian night in Yuri Vetron's stark and well-paced tale of a modern gangster's communion in "solitude" with "Dieu" or "le diable" (p. 10). The fate of Vetrov's protagonist, Igor Belaev, like that of Frank White in Paul Bailey's *A Distant Likeness*, expresses the essential unreason of existence, in which distinctions between crime and law have little or no meaning.

Belaev ("l'Intellectuel") has a profound respect for "les lois du milieu" (p. 9), the code of the Soviet underworld. By returning a stolen suitcase to its owner, Natacha, his childhood sweetheart, however, he acts according to his own conscience and thus deprives his comrades of their share of the booty. They suspect that he has not returned the stolen item and is keeping the money for himself, a suspicion validated in their eyes by their subsequent arrest the night of their arrival at Poltava, the Intellectual's native town. Belaev also is self-deceived. Thinking that he and his comrades have been betrayed by his old friend and associate, Kostia l'Abruti, he lies in wait for the traitor, only to learn the identity of the true informer, "le Noiraud," moments before the latter (with the permission of Sergueevitch and Protzenko, local agents of society's law) kills the faithful Kostia, who had unmasked the traitor. Belaev avenges the death of his friend, but finds this noble deed misread by the underworld, which believes that Belaev killed both "le Noiraud" and Kostia to ensure their silence and his cover as a police informer. Now hunted by both the police and the underworld, Belaev, with the help of Natacha, goes into hiding.

Unknown to Belaev, however, the traitor had been followed by Sergueevitch, whose subsequent testimony during a drinking bout clears Belaev in the eyes of the criminal world, an ironic turn of events which the protagonist finds both perplexing and improper. Ironically, Protzenko and Sergueevitch arrange the murder of

a shrewd and just police inspector from Moscow, Ignace Savitsky, whose investigation threatens to implicate them in the murder of Kostia, while Belaev decides to abandon the brotherhood of the underworld and begin a new life with Natacha. But the Intellectual's decision leads quickly to disillusionment: she refuses to leave her husband. Now that Belaev is no longer a criminal in hiding, he has lost, in her eyes, "un certain romantisme" (p. 217); but, as a perennial outlaw in the eyes of society, his future will always be uncertain ("tu restes toujours dans le vague," she informs him, p. 218). Completely isolated now that he has deserted the underworld and has been deserted by Natacha, he escapes to Siberia, there to live under police surveillance. Suspended between two worlds, he comes to find himself marooned in a universe of profound irony: "Je voyais grand et j'ai calé sur une broutille. Tout ça parce que, une fois de ma vie, j'ai décidé d'être bon,

de ne pas agir selon les lois du milieu mais selon ma conscience, tout simplement" (p. 9). This irony is mirrored in the chart of Belaev's odyssey: the tale begins and ends in Siberia—"Chacun de ses pas était comme doublé, dédoublé, répété" (pp. 136-37)—a doubleness reflected also in the moral inversion of lawless agents of law. As Sergueevitch preaches to Protzenko, "Nous luttons contre le Milieu, n'est-ce pas? Et pour cela, tous les moyens sont bons. Tous" (p. 37). In such a context, it becomes difficult indeed to distinguish the pirates from the sober seamen. Marina Gorbov and the Éditions Robert Laffont merit our gratitude for making available this fine tale, which takes us beyond the banal melodrama of the common *roman-policier*, into the truly ironic world of crime and law, fashioned here with an art concealing art.

Camille R. La Bossière