It seems ironic that Rabelais, with his humanistic reverence for ancient wisdom, should deviate constantly from the classical ideal, "moderation in all things." He combines one extreme: the grotesquely comic, with the other: the deeply religious. These opposite poles, frequently to be found in the same text, are nowhere more apparent than in his chapter on Gargantua’s clothing and ornament, "comment on vestit Gargantua." This chapter, often taken merely as an illustration of the author’s delight in description, does offer a coherent message beyond the mere amusement of grotesque exaggeration. In modern critical terms, it might be said that Rabelais’ semiotics, though obscure to today’s reader, point in directions decipherable by one familiar with certain ancient authorities, especially Plato, who provide much material for Rabelais’ play and elaboration. The interpreter must also be aware of the vast importance of the Pauline tradition, interwoven at various levels of the author’s writing. Any reader with only a casual acquaintance with Rabelais will readily recall how he uses Alcibiades’ praise of Socrates / Silenus in Plato’s Symposium in the Prologue to Gargantua; any reader familiar with the work of M. A. Screech is aware of Rabelais’ extensive exploitation of St. Paul in, for instance, his Tiers Livre.

After a few lines of introduction in which we are told that Gargantua’s livery is white and blue (explained in the following chapter as signifying "joye céleste"), and that the records of Montsoreau retain a description of how the young giant was dressed, the
author devotes a short paragraph each to the shirt, jacket and trousers. He has now arrived at the codpiece, an object of some fascination since he composes two paragraphs about it, one of them lengthy. Characteristically, he is poking fun at hallowed tradition; here at elaborate descriptions of a hero’s clothing or arms (Achilles’ or Aeneas’ shield, or Jason’s cloak) by choosing the most grotesque object on which to concentrate. There is a serious side to Rabelais’ bawdiness, however. To use Bakhtin’s term: if he “carnivalizes” serious texts or institutions by ridiculing them and turning them bottoms up, he likewise has a serious intent as he does so. It is the critic’s task to turn his text upside down again, in order to make clear just what the serious starting point may have been.

The main features of Rabelais’ description of the codpiece run as follows: The buckles that attach the codpiece to the trousers are adorned with two emeralds as large as oranges because (here Rabelais playfully cites Orpheus and Pliny) this stone has erec-}
codpiece will come the seed for the future giants who are to be the
continuing rulers of Rabelais' "utopia" (the name he had given to
their kingdom in *Pantagruel*). This Utopia is heavily inspired by Plato's
*Republic*, in which Socrates expresses his deep concern that there be
a succession of superior Philosopher Kings who could maintain the
integrity of the Republic. The penis is the "emerald," as source of
the material being of the future giants: upon this rock will be founded
the ideal state. Simultaneously, the shape and decoration of the
codpiece resemble the horn of plenty: the very one Rhea gave to the
baby Jupiter's nurses Adrastea and Ida. On the grotesquely comic
level, it contains delights aplenty for the ladies; on the serious level,
a plenitude of seed for future generations. We are directed back in
an ever-turning cycle to an identification of man's reproductive power,
his seed, with the greening, flowering, fruiting capacity of the earth,
our home and universal source.

The enthusiastic account ends on a note of self-restraint; perhaps
Rabelais pretends to realize that he has gone on too long. He promises
more information in a book he has written: *De la dignité des braguettes.*
On the surface a comic topic, on second thought, it contains a lesson
that can be inferred once one has peeled away the multiple layers of
reference. Here is a passage that mentions a book. The book celebrates
codpieces. Codpieces were part of a dress-code, *semata*, to draw
attention to the penis, which can itself be seen as a symbol of the
capacity of mankind (in this case, giantkind) to reproduce. ³ Beyond
this multi-leveled play with a bawdy topic, it can also be affirmed
that reproduction is a serious matter, and one that greatly preoccupied
Rabelais. Nothing is more important than continuation of the species
and, in particular, the finest exemplars of the species. What more
worthy topic could be imagined? Hence: *de la dignité des braguettes.*

The clothing description continues. The shoes and belt are de-
scribed, then Gargantua's sword and poignard, neither of which is
real: the sword is of wood rather than of Valientian steel, and the

³ One can add to these layers. This is a remark in an article about Rabelais' chapter, "Comment on vestit Gargantua," and you are a reader reading this remark.
dagger of “cuir bouilly” (boiled leather), a detail that underscores the peace-loving nature of the giants. After the purse, robe and hat, Rabelais arrives at the hat-feather, a blue pelican plume, with a hat-medallion of enamel portraying an androgyne with the motto ΑΓΑΠΗ ΟΥ ΖΗΤΕΙ ΤΑ ΕΑΤΤΗΣ, “Charity seeks not its own advantage,” I. Cor. 13:5. If it were not for the obvious symbolism of the medallion-plus-motto (about which much has been, and continues to be, written), no one would pause over the pelican feather. Normally, however, one would think that a more appropriate decoration would be an ostrich plume, a pheasant or peacock feather; the oddity of a pelican plume, a blue pelican plume, gives the reader pause. It is used here because of the ancient belief that the mother pelican pierces her breast to feed her young on her own substance. This self-sacrifice was used in medieval Church symbolism to portray Christ’s redemptive sacrifice. The pelican signifies Christian charity. The feather is blue, whereas pelicans are white, brown, or grey. Since Gargantua’s livery is blue and white, we are reminded that blue signifies “choses célestes,” an appropriate color to accompany a symbol of Christian charity.

Rabelais’ androgyne-figure, which actually depicts the “beste à deux dos” (“un corps humain ayant deux testes, l’une virée vers l’autre, quatre bras, quatre piedz et deux culz” — “a human body having two heads, one turned toward the other, four arms, four feet and two bottoms”), has long been recognized as comically different from the source that Rabelais claims to draw on, Plato’s description in the Symposium of the nature of man at its mystical beginning. The androgyne, according to Plato’s Aristophanes, had two heads turned away from each other:

The androgyne . . . partook of man and woman both. But the name is used now only as a reproach. Then also people were shaped like complete spheres. Their backs and sides made a circle. They had four hands, with the same number of legs and two faces — completely the same — on top of a circular neck. These two faces were set on opposite sides on one head, with four ears. And there were two sets of sexual parts, and whatever else one imagines goes along with this arrangement.

A number of critics have noticed the difference between Aristophanes’ androgyne and Rabelais’, among them, Lazare Sainéan, Jean Plattard and Nan Carpenter. In the most recent study on this anomaly, Jerome

Schwartz argues that Rabelais may have been adapting Ficino's interpretation of the androgyne myth as the soul's desire for redemption and renewed wholeness through love, a mystical union described in St. Paul's first Letter to the Corinthians (13:12): "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face."\(^6\) Schwartz's idea appears to be most likely, particularly since the motto "charity seeks not its own advantage," drawn from 1 Cor. 13:5, follows directly upon St. Paul's lengthy development:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. . . . (1 Cor. 12:12-13)

As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those parts of the body which we think are less honorable we invest with the greater honor. . . . God has so adjusted the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body. (I Cor. 12:20-25)

It is striking that the motto for Rabelais' androgyne should be drawn from a Pauline context that stresses the unifying of many bodies into one. The second quotation, on the dignity of the "less honorable parts" of the body (which is the Christian congregation), could be profitably applied as well to the celebrated codpiece; it all the more justifies Rabelais' enthusiastic description, and his promise to write "De la dignité des braguettes."

Marriage rhetoric in Rabelais' time dwells upon the unity between man and wife: "Marriage charnel . . . (fait) non seullement de deux corps ung, mais qu'il n'y ait aussi entre eux que ung coeur, vouloir, désir et affection."\(^7\) Schwartz' presentation does not deny the presence of the "beste à deux dos," but underscores Rabelais' apparent wish to show that love is a continuum: the self-love of the androgyne is akin to the selfless agape of the motto. "The whole device is emblematic of the undifferentiated complex wholeness of experience, both physical and spiritual, which Renaissance man sought to achieve."\(^8\) Schwartz, in emphasizing serious meaning, necessarily somewhat neglects the comically grotesque side of the device, an aspect per-

\(^{6}\) Schwartz, pp. 271-72.

\(^{7}\) Quoted in Schwartz, p. 274: "Carnal marriage . . . not only makes one of two bodies, but there also is only one heart between them, one will, one desire and affection."

\(^{8}\) Schwartz, p. 275.
ennially present in Rabelais, who always tests man’s gravest and most exalted ideas by linking them to the grossly physical, as he had done with the codpiece. They are “carnivalized” in order constantly to remind us that our feet are of clay; our greatest inventions are owing to “Messer Gaster” (“Sir Belly”); the greatest philosopher was produced by the “vivificque union” of the “beste à deuys dos” (“the life-giving union of the two-backed beast”). Rabelais here, as elsewhere, maintains balance by ambiguity: the deep and spiritually symbolic on one side, the grossly, earthily comic on the other. These are his polar deviations from his professed ideal: the golden mean.

Johann Fischart, whose translation-adaptation of Gargantua, the Geschichtklitterung, was first published in 1575, has made a number of contributions to this passage that can — as near-contemporary reception — enlighten and inform our own reading of Rabelais. Fischart, who often interpolates huge additions into the text he is “translating,” renders this passage with only minor changes. He apparently understood Rabelais’ androgyne-figure, which had become a commonplace by his time, to be a symbol of the perfect marriage that he had celebrated in an earlier chapter (five) of the Geschichtklitterung, especially since he emphasizes the physically loving union by translating “deux testes, l’une virée vers l’autre” as “die Taubenschnebel stracks gegen einander kehrt” (“the dove-bills directly turned towards each other”), a description which employs the dove, once sacred to Venus and still favored to portray gentle, faithful (but physical) love. It is precisely this androgyne that figures in Holtzwarth’s Emblemata Tyrocinia as the image of perfect conjugal love. Holtzwarth’s little volume appeared first from Bernhard Jobin’s press, with a foreword by Johann Fischart on the history and uses of emblems. Fischart must have seen the engravings for the volume before the publication date; at any rate, he shares the vibrant enthusiasm for the bond of matrimony expressed in emblem 35. The engraving depicts man and wife with one torso in a close but somehow chaste embrace, like the tree in the background being embraced by a grapevine. Tree and clinging vine traditionally signify male and female, respectively; here, the vine is a grape, which further symbolizes life (wine was thought to become blood immediately when drunk). The sun appears to be rising on the right: a good omen for the future of the loving couple, indicating the dawning of real Knowledge, if interpreted in Platonic terms [see Figure 1].

9 See Johann Fischart, Geschichtklitterung (Gargantua): Text der Ausgabe letzter Hand von 1590, ed. Ute Nyssen and Hugo Sommerhalder (Düsseldorf 1963).
10 Fischart, p. 171.
Amor coniugalis.

Vxor laetitiae consors simul atque doloris,
Tesla me feriant tela cruenta uelim.
Tesla me rapiant opem crudelia fata,
Et mea mors soluat membra repente necans.
Vt, quae iunxit amor communi foedere lecti,
Vrna etiam iungat corpora bina leuis,
Ossaque tumba olim uenerandi testis amoris
Iuncta eadem simili conditione tegat.

Figure 1
A very likely source for this emblem, as well as for the androgyne on Gargantua's hat-medallion, is the "second-stage" androgyne in Aristophanes' speech, where he speaks of loving couples:

Whenever the pederast, or any other sexual type, meets a half that is the same sort, they are overwhelmed with wonder by the affection, the joy of intimacy, and the love. They don't ever want, one might say, to be separated from one another, not even for a second. . . . Imagine Hephaestus standing over them as they were lying together in this embrace, with his tools ready, and he says: . . . "Do you want to be melded together as much as possible, and not have to leave one another, night or day? If this is what you want, I am willing to join you and weld you into one and the same being. You'll become one self out of two, and you can live as one, with the two of you sharing a life in common as a single being. And when you die, there in Hades, too, instead of two there will be one and you will share death. But look — is this what you want? Will you be satisfied if this should happen?" We know that not a single one of them would refuse such an offer.12

For some reason, this second androgyne has been neglected by critics of Rabelais. It would appear probable that Rabelais and his contemporaries used this passage extensively, although their Christian bias caused them to ignore Aristophanes' homosexual zeal, and to concentrate on the heterosexual union mentioned by him, which was the only one sanctioned by the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Fischart may not merely have been thinking of physical matrimony; he may have known of and approved the more spiritual implications that accompany the device, since he translates literally what Rabelais had to say regarding Plato in his "Sammenpausen oder Symposi." He cleverly parallels the Greek title with Germanic syllables that unfold the meaning of the original language: Sammen = together; pausen = pause (to drink and to converse). He also incorporates in his "Sammen" the idea of unity expressed by the androgyne. Samen = semen, seed; a "Samen-pause" is not only the joy of the marriage-bed, but also that moment where the seed for everything human was first sown, as Aristophanes' tale tells us: "im geheimnussamen Anfang die menschlich Natur einlebig gewesen sey": in its initial secret togetherness (or, equally possible, in its initial secret seeds [and -nuss (= nut) + -samen doubles the connotation in nuce]), human nature was single-lived; it existed in a single life. Infolded in Fischart's affirmation is the wholeness and unity of Adam before Eve was separated from him (from it), as the Fathers of the Church also

12 Plato, p. 65.
interpreted Aristophanes’ meaning. Among the Fathers, Clement of Alexandria believed that in Christ’s new kingdom man and woman would be reunited (cf. Gal. 3:28). Johannes Scotus Eriugena *(De divis nat.* II. 4) goes so far as to call the risen Christ the Androgyne, an idea that the gnostics had employed; the androgyne was a symbol for the One, the supreme God. Rabelais and Fischart both may have known some of these ideas; Fischart at any rate beautifully embodies the mystical origin of human nature in one word: his coinage “Geheimnussamen.”

Gargantua wears a golden chain around his neck “faicte en forme de grosses bacces (baies), entre lesquelles estoient en œuvre gros jaspes verts, gravéz et taillés en dracons tous environnéz de rayes et estincelles, comme les portoit jadis le roy Necepsos; et descendoit jusques à la boucle du hault ventre: dont toute sa vie en eut l’émolument tel que sçavent les médecins gregoys.” The Pharaoh Necepsos, a great astrologer and magician, wore such a necklace, attributing his advanced age to the beneficent influence of the jasper. Rabelais’ text forges the link, especially important to the earlier humanists, between the new lore of emblems and devices and ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics and culture. The mention of King Necepsos brings up automatic associations with the superior lore of antiquity, its knowledge of one-to-one correspondences between signs (hieroglyphics, for example) and natural forces, its supposed ability to manipulate these forces through the use of such signs. Gargantua’s “dracons” are not the diabolical serpents of the Judeo-Christian tradition, but the more beneficent dragons of Egypt, Greece and Rome. Rabelais’ spelling, which transliterates Greek δράκων (= serpent or dragon), makes the classical context even clearer. In Egypt, the dragon was the symbol of fertility that decorated Pharaoh’s throne. In Greece it was a guardian spirit, a spirit of prophecy, and a sign for rebirth and immortality. As Ouroboros, the serpent / dragon biting its own tail, it signified eternity. In Roman iconography, the serpent accompanied Juno and Minerva when they went to war.

13 Engelbert Kirschbaum, *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie* (Freiburg 1968- ), I: 118.

14 Rabelais, pp. 29-30: “... made in the form of great berries, among which were worked huge jaspers, engraved and cut with dragons surrounded by rays and sparks, as King Necepsos used to wear them, and it hung down to the upper opening of the stomach, from which he enjoyed the benefit all his life long, as the Greek physicians know.”


Rabelais the physician, this necklace of gold and jasper with its
dragon-devices is a talisman that protects the neck, chest and upper
stomach of his prince, guaranteeing the healthy functioning of the
most vital organs.

The giant’s gloves are made of monster-hides: of “lutin” (= evil
sprite) — skins bordered with werewolf pelts. They seem to signify
that the wearer has triumphed over evil.

Gargantua wears three rings. The first is worn in order to renew
the ancient sign of nobility (like the Roman equites). Johann Fischart’s
translation adds the authority of Pliny 33. 1 and of “de jure aureorum
Annulorum” from the Codex Justiniani 6. 8 (Mommsen, p. 247). He
apparently knew that only the equites had the right to wear rings,
hence the term “jus annulorum” that expresses the dignity of the
knight.17 This ring, worn on the left pointer finger, is also, from its
position, a sign of authority. It is briefly described as a carbuncle
the size of an ostrich egg, set in “seraphic” gold. This is not only the
most noble metal and the worthiest stone; it immediately arouses
thoughts of the throne of God surrounded by Seraphim. The car-
buncle, considered to be its own source of light, was a medieval and
Renaissance symbol for the love of God or for the word of God that
enlightens the darkness.18 The nobility implied here is not merely
that of the Roman knight, but one even more antique: of man before
the fall, pure within himself and secure in the word of God and in
his charity, a security and power that radiates outward from the
pointer finger of the prince to his subjects.

The second ring is to be worn on the left ring finger (le doigt
médical for Rabelais; the “Artztfinger oder Herztfinger” — “the
medical or heart finger” — for Fischart). This ring, rather than
affecting the prince’s subjects, touches the medical well-being of its
wearer. As Fischart’s translation makes clear, it was believed to be
the finger leading to the heart and hence influencing “heart-felt”
convictions, courage, and consequent behavior. This ring is made up
of four metals: gold, silver, copper (or brass) and steel (iron), in such
a magical way that the metals do not touch each other. These metals
evoke multiple associations, first with Hesiod’s Works and Days. They
are, in descending order of virtue, the metals that characterize the
ages of man: the Golden Age, first and best, where men knew no
pain; the Silver, where men were more foolish, but still lived long

17 Cf. M. A. Screech’s note 116 to this passage, p. 62 in François Rabelais,
Gargantua: première éd. crit. faite sur l’Éditéo Princeps, ed. Ruth Calder and M. A.
Screech (Geneva 1970).
18 Rabanus Maurus, Patrologia Latina 111, 470s, cited in Kirschbaum, I. 579.
and largely untroubled lives; the Copper, a heroic age; and the Iron, our own miserable age of wars, pestilence and family discord. Plato in his Republic uses these metals to symbolize the four types of citizens of the ideal state: the rulers, guardians, artisans and worker-farmers (414a ff.), none of whom is to mingle with any other class. These metals are also linked by Plato with the four greatest virtues of wisdom, courage, temperance and justice. Plato’s most striking passage dealing with the four metals occurs in his description of the collapse of the ideal state. The rulers’ heirs, less cultivated than themselves, “will be unable to assay either the races of Hesiod or those born among you of gold, of silver, of brass and of iron; and the iron mingling with the silver, the brass with the gold will result in a mixture that lacks equality, justice and harmony. Wherever this happens, it engenders war and hatred” (Republic VIII. 546d-547a).

This ring that is most intimately to influence the giant’s behavior reminds him constantly as ruler of his ideal kingdom to keep the four metals apart; in other words, to prevent intermingling between the different social levels within the state, since Plato equated these levels with difference in quality. Any mixing would mean adulteration to him. The four metals also remind him to cultivate the virtues of wisdom, courage, temperance and justice. As already noted, the giant’s kingdom had been named Utopia in Pantagruel, after Thomas More’s idealized state; in Gargantua, the epitome of a perfect republic will be Thélème. Rabelais’ skepticism that such a harmonious republic could be possible is manifested in the problem of the ring’s manufacture: it requires a powerful captain and a great alchemist, Alcofribas, who has already done the impossible by extracting the Quintessence, to forge such a ring; it would require a much greater effort, perhaps by the Creator himself, to forge such a state!

There are still other meanings present in the four metals. In alchemical terms, Mars = steel, Venus = copper, the sun = gold, the moon = silver. These analogies were doubtless implicit in Rabelais’ text, since he calls himself Alcofribas the alchemist to remind the reader of them; certainly Fischart understands, and makes them explicit. In his version, Gargantua is to possess the strengths conveyed by the masculine sun, the feminine moon (the genders are reversed in German), warlike Mars and loving Venus — two masculine, two feminine forces — without any confusion among them. The citizens

19 For a recent study of utopian echoes in Rabelais, especially as they apply to Thélème, see Michaël Baraz, “Rabelais et l’Utopie” Études rabelaisiennes 15 (1980), pp. 1-29.
of his state, 50 percent men, 50 percent women, are to work in harmony without any bastardizing alloy.

The third ring, on the right “doigt médical,” also exerts power over the giant’s physical well-being. This ring, in the form of a spiral set with precious stones, combines the symbolism of the circle — the perfect or divine figure often used as a metaphor for God — with upward movement, clearly denoting aspiration toward the highest things. Since this is the medical finger, the spiral may represent a coiled serpent, symbol and avatar of the healing god of Greece and Rome, Asclepius. The finger about which the “serpent” twines resembles Asclepius’ magical staff. Three stones are set within the spiral: “un balay en perfection, un diamant en poincte et une esmerault de Physon” (p. 30, “a perfect ruby, an exquisite diamond and an emerald of Physon”). The colors of the three stones signify several things at once. Red has traditionally meant divine love or charity, white means the purity of faith, green signifies hope; in other words, they symbolize faith, hope, charity, the three theological virtues, the greatest of which is charity (in yet another covert allusion to 1 Cor. 13, used in the androgyne device and its inscription). The colors also correspond to the colors of three of the four elements: red = fire (also the celestial spheres), diamond = air, green = earth. In choosing these elements, Rabelais implies the union of the highest and the lowest; the creation reflects God’s love (the Divine Fire) through the medium of the air. Since the emerald comes from Physon, one of the four rivers of Paradise, the “earth” meant here is not the sad and sinful world we know, but the earth perfect and uncorrupted before the Fall, as God originally created it. Hence, the ring signifies the perfect union between Creator and creation — a Utopian union — and a promise of salus, health, salvation, in a restoration of prelapsarian wholeness.20

20 One of the finest passages on precious stones and their significance is in Goethe, Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche, ed. E. Beutler (Zürich 1953): “Die aristotelische Lehre beherrschte zu damaliger Zeit (Cellinis) alles, was einigermassen theoretisch heissen wollte. Sie kannte nur vier Elemente, und so wollte man auch nur vier Edelsteine haben. Der Rubin stellte das Feuer, der Smaragd die Erde, der Saphir das Wasser und der Diamant die Luft vor. Rubinen von einiger Grösse waren damals selten und galten achtzehn den Wert des Diamanten. So stand auch der Smaragd in hohem Preise. . . . Dass einige Steine im Dunkeln leuchten, hatte man bemerkt. Man schrieb es nicht dem Sonnenlicht zu, . . . sondern einer eigenen inwohnenden Kraft, und nannte sie Karfunkel . . .” p. 873. (“At Cellini’s time, Aristotle’s teaching dominated everything that could roughly be called theoretical. This teaching recognized only four elements, and so the ancients also wanted only four precious stones. The ruby was the image of fire, the emerald of earth, the sapphire of water, and the diamond of air. Rubies of considerable size were rare at
By choosing three stones, Rabelais has picked the traditionally divine number (for Christians, the Trinity) for the medical finger of Gargantua’s right hand. On his left ring-finger he wears the earth number, four (earth has four seasons, four directions; in antiquity, four main rivers, four main winds, four elements, etc.); while on the right “medical” finger the three divine virtues have a vertical (upward-spiralling) movement relating creation to Creator, the medical associations underscoring healing and saving power. The earthly virtues on the left “heart” finger express the ideal “horizontal” relation among peoples. Thus the Socratic excellences and the theological and healing virtues are united in the giant who will become Rabelais’ next philosopher-king: not merely a Platonic figure, but a perfect Pauline-Christian Prince. His kingdom will unite its members in the one body of the state (cf. St. Paul on the Christian community, I Cor. 12), but without intermingling and thus bastardizing their functions. It is also significant that in all Gargantua wears three (not four or more) rings, doubly underscoring the essentially spiritual rather than bodily or earthly significance of this giant.

Fischart does not change the essence of these symbols, and both authors lighten their gravity by carnivalesque joking. Rabelais introduces Hans Carvel, who estimates the third ring’s extravagant worth. The name Carvel immediately diverts the mind to the bawdy story of his ring, told by Rabelais in his Tiers Livre. Fischart had already anticipated the actual naming of Carvel by calling the right “doigt médical” the “arsfinger der rechten hand.”

Through his carefree syncretism, drawing equally on Pauline and Platonic sources, Rabelais has outfitted his young giant in clothing that has serious significance. The codpiece celebrates his reproductive power, its dignity and necessity, in order to maintain the line of philosopher-kings in Utopia. The hat-feather, revealed to be yet another symbol for Christian charity, underscores the explicitly Pauline message on the hat-medallion: “Charity seeks not its own advantage,” and the androgynous figure, which echoes the same idea in pictorial terms, incorporates the idea of divine love (caritas) and perfect physical love: the marital union. As it was intended to be,

the time, and were valued at eight times the worth of diamonds. The emerald was also highly priced. . . . The ancients had noticed that some stones shone in the dark. They did not ascribe it to sunlight . . . but to their own indwelling power, and named them carbuncles. . . .”) See also Kirschbaum, under Farbensymbolik, Ad. de Vries, Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery (Amsterdam 1976), under specific colors. For information on Asclepius’ staff, see Der kleine Pauly, ed. K. Ziegler, et al. (Munich 1979), 5, col. 335, in S. Oppermann’s article, “Stab.”
the medallion is emblematic of the giant’s ideals and moral principles. He has chosen charity as his emblematic virtue, since “the greatest of these is charity” (I Cor. 13:13). With the necklace, Rabelais returns to antiquity, borrowing the idea from the Egyptians that jasper is a semi-precious stone with protective powers over life and fertility, as its green color would indicate. From Egypt, Greece and Rome comes the idea that serpents or dragons have protective functions. As guardians they symbolize fertility, rebirth and immortality, and are prophetic (like Python at Delphi). The stones of the necklace and the design in which they are worked reinforce each other to form a potent device for the health and protection of its wearer. While the necklace, like the codpiece, seems to function in relation to the body, the rings, like the hat-medallion, are spiritual; they have moral (and some political) meaning. The ring on the pointer finger indicates that its wearer will rule with authority and with charity. Its power radiates from the wearer outward. The second ring on the “heart finger,” made of gold, silver, copper and iron, refers to Hesiod’s ages of man, to Plato’s discussion of the four virtues (wisdom, courage, temperance and justice) and to his ideas on the class system in the ideal republic. It also refers to the balance among marital, creative and venereal forces, the “masculine” powers versus the “feminine.” This ring’s power works inwardly. It also reminds its wearer that constant vigilance is necessary to maintain harmony within the state. The third ring, with its three stones whose colors signify faith, hope and charity, links the wearer with his divine source.

Rabelais has clothed and ornamented his future philosopher-king with all the artistry at his command, in the finest and rarest of materials. The key to the chapter lies not in the grotesque exaggeration of size and the insistence on the quantity of materials needed to make up the items of clothing — an aspect that has caught and held the attention of most readers — but in the details of ornament. Rings and pins are still thought to indicate much about the wearer’s personality and judgment; sometimes they are overtly symbolic. For Rabelais, they amount to a semiotic system of “body language” that provides a key to the character, ideals and intentions of his paradigm for a perfect ruler, the young Gargantua.

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