



# Understanding Rance: The Spirituality of the Abbot of La Trappe in Context (Cistercian Studies)

*David N Bell*

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Both during his lifetime and afterwards Armand Jean le Bouthiellier, the abbe de Rance, was a controversial figure. Alive, he was extravagantly admired by many, yet had, as one recent biographer observed, 'an unhappy genius for incurring hostility unnecessarily'. Dead, he continued to evoke extreme reactions—he was either loved or loathed. One biographer nicknamed him 'the thundering abbot'; others depicted him in hagiographical panegyrics. The present volume sets Rance against the colorful and extravagant world of seventeenth-century France and corrects both masterly and entertaining caricatures by exploring the world which surrounded and formed this ever fascinating monk: the privileged circles of the ancient regime in which Rance moved from his birth in 1626; and the austere monastic environment he created at la Trappe. 'This is not so much a book about Rance as around Rance, Dr Bell writes. 'I do not expect that it will persuade people who do not like Rance to like him; it may, however, serve to explain why he said and did what he said and did in the way that he said and did.'

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