

"BAISE M'ENCORE, REBAISE MOY, ET BAISE": NEOPLATONIC LOVE, CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY, AND LOUISE LABÉ'S CONSTRUCTION OF AUDIENCE.



Sandro Botticelli, "Venus and Mars" (1485), London: The National Gallery.

NEOPLATONIC THEORY OF LOVE

- Evident in Labé's sonnets IX & XIII, and crucial for understanding sonnet XVIII
- Key aspect in Renaissance reception of Petrarchism
 - In RVF 366- Petrarch turns his love and attention from Laura to a love of the Virgin Mary, using similar language and imagery as he used to describe Laura.
 - Allowed Petrarchan poetry to be adapted and used as an illustration of Neoplatonic ideas about love, and later, to be adapted to religious ends during the Catholic (Counter-)Reformation
- Well-known ideas circulating in early modern Lyon
 - Symphorien Champier (1471–1539)
 - Maurice Scève (1500–1564)
 - Antoine Héroët and group around Marguerite de Navarre (sister of François Ier)
 - 1542 - *La Parfaite Amye, Androgynie* (Héroët - published with Étienne Dolet)
- Neoplatonic theory of love: based on theory of Diotima's ladder as described in Plato's *Symposium*
 - Ultimate object of Eros - desire to possess/conquer its object
 - Ascent from lust to morality -
love of beauty in one person > all persons > beautiful ideas > form of beauty > form of the good=God
- Renaissance Theorists:
 - Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) - *De Amore* - 1484, *Sopra lo amore* 1544
 - Pietro Bembo (1470–1547) - *Gli Asolani* - 1505
 - Baldassare Castiglione (1478–1529) — *Il Cortegiano* (1528)
 - Dolet publishes a French translation of the book of the Courtier (Jacques Colin) in 1537 and 1538.
 - Book IV- Character of Pietro Bembo & Theory of Neoplatonic love
 - Strong Petrarchan echoes
 - Focus on the soul's ascent and eventual union with God
 - Theory of the kiss (mors osculi)
 - Leone Ebreo (Judah Leon Abravanel) (1464–1523) — *Dialoghi d'Amore* (1535)
 - Active dialogue between a man (Filo) and woman (Sophia)
 - Christian dimension to love between men and women
 - Idea of the union of souls further developed by incorporation of Aristotle's idea of *Philia*
 - Two souls in love - mutually transform each other to become both 1 and 4
 - Greater agency for the beloved woman?

MYTHOLOGY AND INTERTEXTUALITY IN LABÉ'S ÉLÉGIES

- Elegy form - Classical (couplets six feet & five feet)
- French elegy - two rhyming couplets (no feet)
- Crucial subtext for Élégies are Ovid's (43 BC-17 AD) *Heroides*
 - Fictional love letters written by classical and mythological heroines (often abandoned) to their lovers
- First of the *Heroides* - Love letter from Penelope to Odysseus

Haec tua Penelope lento tibi mittit, Ulixe; *This your Penelope sends to you, too-slow Ulysses;*
nil mihi rescribas attinet: ipse veni! *a letter in return does me no good; come yourself!*

- Arachne (from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*) - III.35
- Bradamante & Marfisa III.41-42 - Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*
- Mythological loves - ought to be read through the lens of *Heroides*:
 - Paris & Oenone (*H.*5)

Nympha suo Paridi, quamvis suus esse recuset *The Nymph sends words you ordered her to write,*
mittit ab Idaeis verba legenda iugis. *from Mount Ida, to her Paris, though you refuse her.*

- Jason & Medea (*H.*12)

Exul inops contempta novo Medea marito *Scorned Medea, the helpless exile, speaks to her recent*
dicit, an a regnis tempora nulla vacant? *husband, surely you can spare some time from your*
 kingship?

- Is this a Petrarchan position on love?
 - *Si meritoient elles estre estimees,*
Et pour aymer leurs Amis, estre aymees.
S'estant aymé on peut Amour laisser
N'est il raison, ne l'estant, se lasser? (Labé, *Élégie* III.89-92)

LABÉ'S CONSTRUCTION OF AUDIENCE (FOR DISCUSSION IN SEMINAR)

- For whom is Labé writing? Who do her élégies, sonnets, and collection of *Euvres* address?
- What kind of audience do her writings attempt to construct? Is it exclusively female?
- Is Labé's sonnet 5 similar to or different from Petrarch's *RVF* 311 on the nightingale? Why?
- What do we make of sonnet 24? Is this similar to or different from Petrarch's appeal for sympathy?
- Is Labé simply citing Neoplatonic ideas in her poetry, or is she criticising them as she does with Petrarchan motifs?

Prefatory letter to Clémence de Bourges:

- What is the social institution that Labé condemns at the outset of this letter?
- How does Labé's description of her education in this letter contrast with that in Élégie III?
- What does Labé mean in regard to the social position of women when she writes:
'je ne puis faire autre chose que prier les vertueuses Dames d'eslever un peu leurs esprits par-dessus leurs quenoilles et fuseaus, et s'employer à faire entendre au monde que si nous ne sommes faites pour commander, si ne devons nous estre desdaignees pour compagnes tant es afaires domestiques que publiques, de ceus qui gouvernent et se font obeir'
- Where do you see the tension between the manuscript tradition of women's writing and the dangers of publication in this letter? What does Labé advocate and why?
- Is Labé appropriating any traditionally 'male' forms of expression here to articulate her thoughts?
- Can we consider this an early feminist manifesto? Why or why not?
- In light of this letter, what do you make of Huchon's thesis that Labé was a literary fabrication?