IN THE SHADOW OF NARCISSUS: LYRIC POETRY AND THE ORIGINS OF FEMINIST SUBJECTIVITY IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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May 2021

IN THE SHADOW OF NARCISSUS: LYRIC POETRY AND THE ORIGINS OF FEMINIST SUBJECTIVITY IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

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Cornell University 2021

My dissertation explores how two early modern women poets from France—Louise Labé and Catherine des Roches—position themselves as speaking subjects in a field historically dominated by men. I analyze how they adopt, adapt, and ultimately reject the traditional power dynamics that silence and exclude them. By constructing a relational subject position, these poets defy their own marginalization and write in service of a community of women. They inscribe the female body and voice into their texts, imbuing them with difference and creating a style of writing that resembles *l'écriture féminine.* My first chapter examines how Labé uses mimicry to assert her authorial voice and establish her own subjectivity, which differs from the narcissistic model of her male interlocutors because it is less focused on the poetic self. The absence of the *je/moi* (I/me) in Labé's poetry is a choice that highlights the precarious position she occupies as a woman poet and creates a new model of female subjectivity. I dedicate two chapters of my dissertation to Catherine des Roches' narrative poem "Agnodice," one which deals with the figure of Envy and the other with Agnodice. I argue that Envy plays a crucial role in the poem. She both opens and closes the poem, and significant time is given to developing her character. While Envy functions as the main antagonist, her presence adds a level of ambiguity to the text. She complicates not only how we

read the men in the story as villains, but also how we read Agnodice as a hero. Envy acts as a foil to Agnodice, purportedly the first female gynecologist in ancient Greece. While Envy destroys community, Agnodice rebuilds it. She works in service of the collective good and establishes a mode of engagement between women that leads to their health and happiness. Agnodice becomes a mouthpiece for Catherine, who creates a new model of literary production in which women take on a more active and inclusive role. Her goal, in my view, is to replace a poetic tradition predicated on singularity with a more collaborative enterprise.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Julia Anna Karczewski was born in San Diego, CA. She received a double B.A. in French and International Studies from the University of California, Irvine and an M.A. in French from Middlebury College and Cornell University. She is currently working as a teaching assistant in the Department of Romance Studies at Cornell University.

To Kathleen

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my graduate committee: Kathleen Long, Marilyn Migiel, and William Kennedy. My deepest gratitude goes to Kathleen for her willingness to take me on as a graduate student. She encouraged me to study poetry and saw potential in me when I failed to see it in myself. Her open mindedness, patience, and encouragement over the years have been invaluable and her feedback on my work unparalleled. Without her, I never would have made it this far in my academic journey. I would like to thank Marilyn for accepting me into her writing group and providing me with the intellectual community I so craved. I appreciate all the time and attention she has given in reading over my materials; the quality of my work has certainly improved from having her on my committee. I would also like to thank Bill for putting up with me well into retirement and for always being so generous with his time and support.

I am grateful to everyone within the broader Cornell community who—in one way or another—has turned me into the scholar I am today. I thank my teachers, my peers, my students, and the members of the writing group. I would also like to thank Cornell University for its many years of support.

On a more personal note, I would like to thank those responsible for my mental well-being. I am grateful to my friends and loved ones for sharing in the good times and the bad. Finally, I am forever indebted to my parents for their emotional and financial support over the years—*dziękuje wam obu bardzo mocno za wszystko.*

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INTRODUCTION

My dissertation explores how two early modern women poets from France—Louise Labé (c.1524-1566) and Catherine des Roches (1542-87)—position themselves as speaking subjects in a field historically dominated by men. I analyze how they adopt, adapt, and ultimately reject the traditional power dynamics that aim to silence and exclude them. The Neoplatonic and Petrarchan models that form the basis for lyric poetry in the sixteenth century privilege male subjectivity. The poet takes on the role of gazing and speaking subject, while the woman becomes gazed at and spoken about. The male lyric tradition focuses on the poet's experience—his love, his hopes, his dreams, his suffering, his sorrow, etc.—at the expense of the beloved. Often, the female subject is completely evacuated from the text. When present, she is either described negatively or objectified.

Louise Labé and Catherine des Roches defy their own marginalization by playing with the conventions of lyric poetry.[1] Labé challenges the narcissistic, Petrarchan model that silences the female beloved by rewriting the position that the poetic speaker and beloved occupy. As a woman writer, she takes on the role of the seeing and speaking subject. However, her speech does not come at the expense of his. Instead, Labé acknowledges the subjectivity of her beloved as well and the effect his voice and gaze have on her. In doing so, Labé creates a lyric model that centers less

[1] I will subsequently refer to Catherine des Roches simply by her first name, Catherine. I do not intend this to be derogatory, but simply a means of distinguishing Catherine and Madeleine des Roches without having to spell out their full names each time. See Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 41-44.

around the poetic self. In its place, she creates an interactive model that includes the other and grants subjectivity to both the speaker and beloved. Catherine further extends this possibility for interaction outward, beyond the amatory couple. Like Labé, Catherine creates a relational subject position and inscribes the female body and voice into her texts. She plays with genre and literary precedent, altering her source material in order to adapt it for a larger community of women. In doing so, Catherine creates a style of writing that resembles *l'écriture féminine.* This "women's writing" diverges from the male literary models available in that "woman gives woman to the other woman" ("la femme donnera la femme à l'autre femme").[2] In doing so, Catherine offers a poetic model that is more interactive, inclusive, and ethical.

State of the field

In her book *This Sex Which is Not One* (*Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*), Luce Irigaray introduces the concept of "*the economy of the Same*" ("*l'économie du Même*") which she defines as "a project of diversion, deflection, reduction of the other in the Same. And, in its greatest generality perhaps, from its power to *eradicate the difference between the sexes* in systems that are self-representative of a 'masculine subject'" ("un projet de détournement, de dévoiement, de réduction, de l'autre dans le Même. Et, dans sa plus grande généralité peut-être, *d'effacement de la différence des*

[2] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Summer, 1976): 881, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173239; "Le rire de la Méduse," *L'Arc*, vol. 61 (1975): 44.

sexes dans les systèmes auto-représentatifs d'un 'sujet masculin'").[3] While Irigaray uses this term in a twentieth-century discussion relating to the history of philosophic discourse, the idea of an economy of sameness could just as well be used to describe the Neoplatonic and Petrarchan models dominating lyric poetry in the sixteenth century. As their names would imply, these poetic traditions are based on masculine subjectivity and the effacement of the feminine Other.

Petrarch (1304-1374) wrote his most famous poetic collection, *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (also known as *Il Canzoniere*), between 1327 and 1374, although the work was not published until 1470. His poems, the majority of which he wrote in sonnet form, focus largely on his love for Laura. That being said, his verse is more often about an engagement with the self than with his beloved. In fact, the unrequited love of the Petrarchan lyric is often conditioned on the beloved's absence, thus allowing him to write even in the wake of his beloved's death. Modern day scholarship divides Petrarch's poems into those he wrote when Laura was alive (*in vita*) and those he wrote after her death (*in morte*). The poet's physical and temporal distance allows him to express his own feelings of torment and helplessness in the face of a supposedly cold and cruel lover. The beloved is effaced in favor of narcissistic auto-representation that highlights the poet's own suffering. This pain, coupled with desire and longing, allows him to recreate the female figure in his own image. Silenced, she becomes the target of the masculine gaze: an object of fantasy, praised

[3] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One,* trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 74, italics in the original; *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1977), 72, italics in the original.

and idealized for her perfection and beauty. As Nancy Vickers has shown, "Laura is always presented as a part or parts of a woman" whose body and voice Petrarch then scatters throughout his rhymes.[4]

Petrarch helped set the standards of early modern poetry and has heavily influenced French lyric poets. This is especially true for a poet like Maurice Scève (c.1504-c.1564), whose poetic collection *Délie, objet de plus haulte vertu* (1544) is considered the first French *canzoniere*. Sixteenth-century French poets like Scève took Petrarch's propensity to fragment the female body to an extreme with the blazon. Clément Marot popularized the anatomical blazon as a poetic genre when he held a literary competition in 1536 to see who could write the best poem celebrating a singular body part of a woman. The resulting poems praised—or, in the case of the *contreblason,* maligned—various individual body parts, some conventional to lyric poetry (such as the beloved's eyes, nose, lips, hair, etc.) and others more outlandish. Scève famously won the contest with a poem about an eyebrow. His poems, like those of the other male *blasonneurs,* compare women's body parts to other objects or things. Through these detailed descriptions and comparisons, the male poet not only objectifies but also effaces the female beloved. This approach to poetry, rooted as it is in rivalry with other men, is more about establishing personal and poetic mastery than it is about praising the beloved.

Literary competitions such as the one organized by Marot show that when male poets engage with one other, they do so in the form of competition. These male

[4] Nancy J. Vickers, "Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme," *Critical Inquiry* 8.2 (Winter 1981): 266.

poetic communities operate in a hierarchical manner, with one winner crowned poet laureate. While the male poet allegedly writes in service of his beloved, his poetry helps establish his own literary legacy. His poetic success only increases his own glory, and thereby the amount of authority and prestige he possesses within the field. The very title of Scève's poetic work *Délie*, itself an anagram for *l'idée*, shows how the female figure serves as means of conveying the male poet's ideas and establishing his genius for all posterity.

Given the gender expectations inherent in the masculine tradition of lyric poetry, female poets needed to find a way to make themselves heard. They negotiated a position as speaking subjects in a system predicated upon their silence and exclusion. The rise of feminist scholarship in the 1980s led to an increased awareness of these female writers and, more broadly, a reevaluation of the status of women's literature within the canon. Scholars of early modern French poetry began asking how women poets positioned themselves as speaking subjects in a field dominated by men. Feminist scholarship began examining how women writers adapted the conventions of male discourse as a means of legitimating their own writing and calling into question the role assigned to women by their gender.

Louise Labé and Catherine des Roches benefitted from this renewed attention. Louise Labé, also known as *La Belle Cordière* (the beautiful ropemaker), has become one of the most famous poets from Renaissance France and one of the few women to enter the French literary canon. This is even more impressive considering the modest quantity of her literary output. The prominent printer Jean de Tournes published her one and only collection of writings, *Les Oeuvres*, in 1555. Labé's works are composed

of a dedicatory epistle, a debate between Love and Folly, three elegies, twenty-four sonnets, and an additional twenty-four praise poems written by Labé's contemporaries in her honor. Labé's writings, whether in poetry or prose, show off her erudition and willingness to participate in the cultural and intellectual debates of the time, such as the *querelles des femmes*. Her prefatory letter, written to Clémence de Bourges, has cemented Labé's status as a champion of women. In it, she famously encourages "virtuous ladies to raise their minds a bit above their distaffs and spindles" ("les vertueuses Dames d'eslever un peu leurs esprits par-dessus leurs quenoilles et fuseaus") so that they may "surpass or equal men" ("passer ou egaler les hommes").[5] Labé advocates passionately for women's education and participation in the field of letters, putting her proto-feminist proclivities on full display. Labé directly addresses other women in both her verse and her poetry, using her writings to cultivate a sense of community with other women.

Labé was born and raised in Lyon, an important cultural and intellectual hub during the sixteenth century. The daughter of a wealthy rope maker, she received a humanist education and participated in a literary circle now referred to as *l'école de Lyon.* This coterie—which included other prominent poets like Maurice Scève and Pernette du Guillet—was heavily influenced by Petrarchan and Neoplatonic tropes. Yet Labé rewrites the male lyric in significant ways. Her poetry is remarkable for its frankness; at a time when women's silence was expected, Labé did not hesitate to

[5] Louise Labé, *Complete Poetry and Prose: a Bilingual Edition,* ed. Deborah Lesko Baker, trans. Annie Finch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 42-43.

speak openly of her desire.[6] Her poetry also displays a remarkable engagement with the other, whether on the physical, emotional, or intellectual level. Like many of her contemporaries, she echoed her male predecessors as a way of tapping into literary history. While early modern poets used imitation to show off their erudition and increase their prestige, this technique has been particularly problematic for women writers. Labé's textual borrowings have been turned against her and used to further silence her.

In 2005, Labé seemingly marked her entrance into the French canon when she figured on the *aggrégation,* a competitive certification exam that allows candidates to teach at the high school or college level in France. However, the following year, Sorbonne professor Mireille Huchon published her now infamous book *Louise Labé: Une créature de papier* (2006). As the title suggests, Huchon argued that Labé was in fact a "creature of paper" and that her poetic *oeuvre* was written by the male poets of her time. While many critics rushed to Labé's defense, Huchon's book showed how easy it still is to discredit a woman's voice and demonstrated how "Women who reverse gendered hierarchies and aspire to masculine-coded social roles are therefore liable to provoke misogyny."[7]

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[6] Although many biographical details of Labé's life remain speculative, her behavior caused just as much scandal as her verse. She supposedly had several lovers including Olivier de Magny, dressed like a man, and rode into battle. Labé's detractors referred to her as a courtesan. See Deborah Lesko Baker, "Volume Editor's Introduction," in *Complete Poetry and Prose: A Bilingual Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 4-5.

[7] Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 102. This type of misogynistic backlash happens within Catherine des

Even modern critics who acknowledge Louise Labé's accomplishments as a writer have debated exactly how to interpret her subjectivity. In her essay "Mirrors of the Subject: Women Poets of the Renaissance," Colette Winn "seeks to articulate the phenomenon of effacement and dispersion, characteristic of feminine writing, and its manifestations in Renaissance women's love poetry."[8] Winn discusses many of the strategies employed by Labé that reveal "the masked and fading appearance of the subject, a sign of women's uncertain, ever-lacking (perhaps as yet unknown) identity": the general lack of "I" pronouns; the fact that when Labé does use "I" pronouns, it is often in the hypothetical form; her use of object pronouns instead of subject pronouns; her abstraction of the singular "I" pronoun into the collective "we," etc.[9] All of these strategies are undoubtedly present in Labé's work. However, I interpret them more positively than Winn does. While Winn sees these rhetorical strategies as indicative of the difficulty Labé has in expressing her subjectivity, I argue that Labé is thinking about subjectivity differently. She does not simply imitate the same subjectivity represented in male lyric poetry; expecting her to do so falls into the trap of *l'économie du Même*. Instead of reproducing a narcissistic poetic model, Labé creates an alternative model less focused on the self.

Roches' poem "Agnodice" when the figure of the foreign Lady provokes Envy's ire and causes the men to forbid women from studying.

[8] Colette Winn, "Mirrors of the Subject: Women Poets of the Renaissance," in *Understanding French Poetry: Essays for a New Millennium*, ed. Stamos Metzidakis (Birmingham, Ala.: Summa Publications, 2001), 121.

[9] Winn, "Mirrors of the Subject," 121-27.

Labé purposefully revises the poetic model available to her. Ann Rosalind Jones has explored how Louise Labé takes possession of masculine discourse and uses it on behalf of her own sex. In a book chapter titled "Eros Equalized: Literary Cross Dressing and the Defense of Women in Louise Labé and Veronica Franco," Jones examines how Labé defies poetic conventions and challenges gender expectations. She argues that in a desire to equalize eros between lovers, Labé "imagines an erotic ideal neither of dominance nor of submission but of difference-dissolving, gender-blurring unity. Even as Labé attacks the privileges her beloved enjoys, […] she fantasizes that they can rise to a new level of equality in the form of a shared identity."[10] Again, I worry that reading Labé's poetics as "difference-dissolving" forces her into *l'économie du Même;* Labé's otherness risks being absorbed into a masculine sense of oneness under the guise of equality.

While Labé may mimic the male voice and position, she still retains her difference. Labé proclaims her own subjectivity, one that is not single, unified, and unique but rather more ambiguous and relational. This notion of multiplicity and exchange can also be gleaned in the poetry of Catherine des Roches. She does not write uniquely (or even primarily) for a male audience, but for a larger community of women. While her poetry may be based on male literary forms, she removes herself from the male lyric economy that excludes her and she develops a new model of poetics, based on a more feminist, plural, and collective form of being.

[10] Ann Rosalind Jones, *The Currency of Eros: Women's Love Lyric in Europe, 1540-1620* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 161.

In comparison with Labé, interest in the Dames des Roches has been more recent and more modest in terms of volume. Madeleine Neveu (c.1520-87) and Catherine Fradonnet, better known as the Dames des Roches, were a mother-daughter pair who wrote in the second half of the sixteenth century. Madeleine was married twice, both times to lawyers. While her first marriage produced three children, only Catherine (1542–1587) survived. After the death of her second husband, Madeleine dedicated herself to Catherine's humanist education. Catherine famously, and controversially, never married but chose to follow in her mother's footsteps and devote herself to intellectual pursuits. Together, the Dames des Roches ran a literary salon out of Poitiers and co-published three volumes of work: *Les Oeuvres* (1578-79), *Les Secondes Oeuvres* (1583), and *Les Missives* (1586). Each volume is organized in the same way, with Madeleine's contributions preceding those of her daughter's. Remembered for their strong mother-daughter bond, both Catherine and Madeline died on the same day from a plague that ravaged the city.

Despite the centrality of the Dames des Roches to the intellectual landscape of Poitiers and the substantial body of work they published, most of the scholarship that deals with their poetry has concentrated on Catherine. This emphasis on Catherine's work is perhaps not surprising, given that the quantity of her written work is about double that of her mother's. Within the scholarly criticism, "La Puce" (*Les Secondes Oeuvres*, 1583) and "Le Ravissement de Proserpine" (*Les Missives,* 1586) have garnered the most attention. Each of these poems is representative of the larger poles of interest surrounding the Dame des Roches' work. "La Puce" ("The Flea"), Catherine's contribution to a poetic contest that occurred at one of their salons,

positions her writing vis-à-vis that of her male contemporaries. Participants were asked to write poems on the topic of a flea that had supposedly landed on Catherine's breast during the meeting. In contrast, "Le Ravissement de Proserpine" ("The Ravishment of Proserpina") focuses on the mother-daughter relationship central to both the myth of Ceres and Proserpina and to the Dames des Roches' identity as poets.

Most scholarship on Catherine des Roches either examines how she situates herself in relation to male communities or in relation to the mother-daughter bond, and has yet to explore how Catherine situates herself vis-à-vis a larger community of women readers and writers. To my mind, the most significant work done on women's writing communities in the Dames des Roches' work is Kendall Tarte's "Early Modern Literary Communities: Madeleine Des Roches's City of Women."[11] This piece examines how various intertexts, including Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies* and Du Bellay's "La Musagnoeomachie," influence Ode 3. Following Tarte's lead, I explore similar notions of community building in Catherine des Roches' poetry, with a particular emphasis on the narrative poem "Agnodice" (*Les Oeuvres,* 1578) and its intertexts.

My Project

My dissertation is structured around three female figures—Echo, Envy, and Agnodice—each of which presents a challenge or critique to existing literary models.

[11] Kendall B. Tarte, "Early Modern Literary Communities: Madeleine Des Roches's City of Women," in *Writing Places: Sixteenth-Century City Culture and the Des Roches Salon* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), 201-18.

My first chapter, which deals with Louise Labé's poetry, uses the figure of Echo to interrogate what it means to speak as a woman. I examine how Labé uses mimicry to assert her authorial voice and argue that even when Labé echoes her male contemporaries, she nevertheless asserts her own subjectivity. This subjectivity distinguishes itself from the narcissistic model of her male interlocutors because it is much less focused on the poetic self. While Labé's poetry theorizes what a female poetic subject would look like, Catherine des Roches explores the implications of creating a community of women poets. My second chapter explores how Catherine uses the figure of Envy to critique existing poetic models, which are based on hierarchy and competition. The third chapter deals with the figure of Agnodice, purportedly the first female gynecologist in ancient Greece. In contrast to the destructive model of community offered by Envy, Agnodice offers a constructive one. She creates an interactive poetic model, founded on notions of compassion and care. Moreover, in contrast to male poetic communities that operate largely through competition and exclusion, women's literary communities offer more ethical and inclusive modes of writing.

Echo

The first chapter of my dissertation is dedicated to Louise Labé's poetry. I analyze three of her sonnets—Sonnets 2, 16, and 6—in which the poetic "I" is absent. Reading Labé's work against that of her male interlocutors shows how unusual this is. Much like the male lyric poet, Labé finds herself a victim of unrequited love. Her poetry, however, demonstrates that it is possible for the poetic speaker to lament the

vicissitudes of love without falling into self-absorption. She regularly privileges the other in her sonnets and acknowledges the body and voice of her beloved. In this regard, she challenges the narcissism at the heart of the male lyric tradition.

The first sonnet I look at—Sonnet 2—has two important intertexts: Petrarch's Sonnet 161 and Olivier de Magny's Sonnet 55. Petrarch's sonnet serves as a basis for Labé and Magny's sonnets, both of which share an identical octave. Several scholars have focused their commentary on the shared octave and the questions of authorship that arise from it. They have acknowledged that Labé's gender imbues her octave with a difference and argued that even when Labé uses the same words as Magny, she says something different.[12] To begin to better understand how this is possible, it is useful to revisit the myth of Echo and Narcissus as a means of interrogating authorship and imitation. Just as Narcissus mistakes Echo's voice for an empty echo without meaning, women's poetry is often interpreted as a meager imitation of the male poetic voice. However, this only allows for a narrow interpretation of narrative voice, one in which sameness is reflected back onto the initial speaker. While Narcissus is only willing to accept a voice similar to his and is only willing to allow for one interpretation of Echo's speech, Echo actually breaks this illusion of sameness. Her unique positionality and

[12] Cécile Alduy, "The Anatomy of Gender: Decoding Petrarchan Lyrics (Labé, Scève, Ronsard)," in *Teaching French Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation,* ed. Colette Winn (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2011), 227; Françoise Charpentier, "Préface," in *Œuvres poétiques précédées des Rhymes de Pernette du Guillet avec un choix de blason du corps féminin,* ed. Françoise Charpentier (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), 29; Ann Rosalind Jones, "Assimilation with a Difference: Renaissance Women Poets and Literary Influence," *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981): 147-150. doi:10.2307/2929897; William J. Kennedy, *Authorizing Petrarch* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 166-67.

perspective imbue her speech with a different or even opposite meaning to her male counterpart, even if she is using the exact same wording. While Narcissus rejects her difference, she appropriates this very difference to create a unique voice for herself.

Labé performs speech in much the same way as Echo. Like Echo, even when Labé uses the same model or the same words as her male counterparts, she fills those words with a different meaning. More than that, Labé conscientiously and actively uses echoing as a tool to challenge what it means to be a poet writing in the lyric tradition. In doing so, she foreshadows the way in which Irigaray suggests that women use *mimétisme* to challenge the subordinate position of the female. I argue that Labé uses *mimétisme* to upset and ultimately reconfigure the poetic models of her predecessors in order to account for another subjectivity besides that of the male.

Reading the entirety of sonnet 2 alongside its intertexts gives a much better understanding of the focus of each sonnet and the work that each author is doing. Petrarch emphasizes his own suffering at the expense of his beloved, who is completely evacuated from the sonnet. Labé and Magny's joint octave intermingles the body and voice of both speaker and beloved to express their shared passion. However, when read with the rest of Magny's poem, it becomes clear that this heightened emotionalism from the octave only serves to dramatize the male speaker's suffering. Magny ultimately reverts back to Petrarchan narcissism. In Labé's poem, this confusion of bodies and voices from the octave continues into the sestet. It introduces the possibility of exchange between speaker and beloved. Labé thereby troubles a poetic model based on the self (and thus on exclusion) and instead offers a poetic model where inclusion and interaction are possible.

Detailed, sustained readings of sonnets 16 and 6 provide a better understanding of how Labé reconceptualizes female subjectivity. Looking at the entirety of each sonnet, instead of at extracts, forces the reader to confront moments in the text where Labé acknowledges the limits of her speech alongside moments where she shows off her poetic mastery. The absence of the "I/me" *(je/moi)* pronouns in Labé's poetry is a choice that highlights the precarious position she occupies as a woman poet and creates a new model of female subjectivity that is relational instead of self-centered. Even when Labé adopts an active position as a speaking and gazing subject, she is careful not to silence the beloved. In this regard, she offers an alternative poetic model that grants personhood and voice to both the speaker and beloved, regardless of their respective genders.

Envy

The second and third chapters of my dissertation are devoted to Catherine des Roches' narrative poem "Agnodice," with one chapter dedicated to the figure of Envy and the other to Agnodice. Despite what the title of the poem may imply, Agnodice does not appear until half-way through the poem. Instead, the first half of the narrative is dominated by Envy. Catherine writes a lengthy introduction that sets Envy up as the primary antagonist and foil to Agnodice. Envy both open and closes the poem, and Catherine spends a significant amount of time developing her character. Envy, however, has been neglected. Most scholars have focused their attention on the role the husbands play in the poem when they forbid their wives from studying.

Understanding how Envy functions complicates not only how we read the men as villains, but also how we read Agnodice as a hero.

The poem begins with the figure of Envy, whom Catherine describes as the worst of all sins since no good can be derived from her. While Envy spreads her venom throughout the world, she has touched no country more than ancient Greece. Through the chapter, I point out the different ways in which Catherine adapts the figure of Envy. Her version distinguishes itself from the depiction of Envy found in Ovid and in the popular conceptions of envy circulating in the early modern period. For one, Catherine's version of Envy is more autonomous. Catherine writes a more active and independent Envy who, instead of functioning at the whim of a goddess, sets and peruses her own agenda. This version of Envy is also more productive; she reproduces other vices and sins.

Catherine also changes who becomes infected with Envy. Instead of operating amongst women as she does in Ovid, Catherine's version of Envy operates amongst men. Catherine enumerates various prominent Athenian male figures—from political, military, and intellectual walks of life—that have all been targeted by Envy. Among these male heroes is Phocion, whose envious countrymen have denied him burial in his homeland. When a foreign Lady gives a speech supporting Phocion's burial, she provokes Envy's ire.

Catherine uses the foreign Lady to create a new genealogy of female heroes. The foreign Lady functions as both a break in the catalogue of male heroes and as a precursor to Agnodice. Catherine uses the foreign Lady to comment on the precarious position that women occupy as speaking subjects. Catherine adapts this figure from

Plutarch, turning her from private figure—a wife who buries her husband's ashes—into an anonymous, public one. The foreign Lady's call to action, while technically addressed to the gods, leaves open the possibility for female participation. The foreign Lady strives both to re-establish the connection between Phocion and the citizens who denied his burial and to create a more inclusive community altogether. However, the sympathy and compassion she displays provokes Envy's fury. The foreign Lady's speech ends up having repercussions for all women. Envy, who dislikes the very kindness and generosity that the foreign Lady displays, breaks the communal bonds the foreign Lady tries to rebuild.

Envy retaliates against the foreign Lady by making husbands jealous of their wives. The men then deny women access to books and learning, causing the women to fall ill. Catherine blurs notions of accountability and imbues this passage with ambiguity. On the one hand, Envy provokes the men's behavior, seemingly absolving them of guilt. On the other hand, the husbands in Catherine's poem are not Envy's passive victims, but rather her active hosts. While Envy may be at the origin of the men's tyranny, they also embrace her. The men act with agency, going so far as to mock and jeer at their own wives. Catherine binds the women's physical and intellectual well-being together. After their husbands' cruelty, the wives do not dare to help one another. They lose access to both their medical and intellectual communities. While the men may be unwilling to help their wives, Agnodice arrives on the scene willing to do just that.

Catherine thereby shifts gender expectations. The men in her poem—whether the Athenian heroes or the husbands—display Envy; the foreign Lady, Agnodice, and

the wives all display courage and virtue. This is not to say that women's lives are not impacted by Envy—they very much are—but rather that the women themselves never become envious. Catherine's version of Envy operates more insidiously and destructively. Instead of simply having the men infected with Envy be consumed by her, they externalize their envy by taking it out on their wives and Agnodice. Even Envy functions relationally. She works through an intermediary to break the bonds that tie people together.

Agnodice

My last chapter deals with the second half of Catherine des Roches' poem "Agnodice," where Agnodice appears in order to heal the women. Agnodice disguises herself as a man so that she can learn medicine and treat the women. They initially refuse Agnodice's help, thinking she is a man. Agnodice reveals herself to the women and heals them, provoking Envy's ire. Envy makes the men suspicious of Agnodice. While the men condemn Agnodice to death, Agnodice proves her own innocence through a compelling verbal and physical display. Moreover, she convinces the men to restore to women their right to an education.

Little has been published on this poem. The scholarly studies that do exist tend to focus on the provocative nature of the narrative, and specifically on the moments when Agnodice reveals her physical body. However, as with Labé's poetry, there is much more to these scenes than pure eroticism. Catherine's poem lays out some of the difficulties faced by women who strive to rival men in their respective fields. On the surface, Agnodice's story concerns a female medic denied her right to practice.

However, the lessons within the story are applicable to the female poet. The poem shows the risks (whether to the physical body, voice, or reputation) associated with entering a male dominated field. It also exposes the various systems that are disadvantageous to women, including the marital system (husbands become the tyrants of their wives), the educational system (men take away women's access to books), and the justice system (Agnodice goes on trial at the end of the poem). Catherine shows, through Agnodice's tribulations, the power of and the need for a community of women who help each other.

Catherine uses her depiction of Agnodice to fundamentally rewrite the behavioral parameters available to women; she adapts source material from Gaius Julius Hyginus (c.64 BC–AD 17) and Ovid in order to make Agnodice more sympathetic and more eloquent. While in Hyginus' version of the tale Agnodice's desire to learn medicine precedes her desire to help others, in Catherine's version, kindness and compassion for others drive her. Catherine's Agnodice is more altruistic; she sees the women's pain and suffering and wants to help them. Catherine similarly deviates from source material when she likens Agnodice to Medusa. Although Agnodice stuns the men into silence, she does so with her speech and not her looks. Catherine not only gives woman a voice, but a powerful one at that.

Like Envy, Agnodice functions relationally. Through her rhetorical choices, Catherine draws a comparison between Agnodice and the foreign Lady and a contrast between Agnodice and Envy. While the foreign Lady acted as a precursor to Agnodice, Agnodice acts as Envy's opposite. While Envy destroys community, Agnodice rebuilds it. She works in service of the collective good and establishes a

mode of engagement between women that leads to their health and happiness. In this regard, Agnodice becomes a model for Catherine's poetic project and serves as a mouthpiece for the author. While she uses the language and poetic forms the male poets popularized, she does so in order to advocate for a new type of feminine writing. Catherine offers a model of literary production in which women, as both readers and writers, interact.

Catherine redefines the literary blazon. She takes a genre written by men for men and adapts it to a female context. Instead of fragmenting the female body, Catherine uses the blazon to paint a comprehensive portrait of Agnodice. She focuses not only on her physical attributes, but on her character, intellect, and speech as well. By doing so, Catherine portrays Agnodice's eroticism and virtue side by side. However, Agnodice is not simply a static image at which the women gaze; instead she and the wives interact. There is a reciprocity to their actions. Just as the women read Agnodice's body, so do the readers of the text. As Catherine reimagines it, the blazon becomes an active and inclusionary medium. By inscribing the female body, voice, and gaze into the text, Catherine approaches a style of writing that resembles *l'écriture féminine.* She takes a genre associated with male competition and repurposes it to symbolize female cooperation. In doing so, Catherine challenges a poetic tradition predicated on singularity and offers in its place a more collaborative enterprise.

Instead of perpetuating a masculine, hierarchical poetic model based on envy and competition, Catherine's "Agnodice" makes new modes of interaction possible. Through the character of Agnodice, Catherine demonstrates what a community of readers and writers who support and encourage one another would look like. She

envisages a poetic community grounded in an ethos of care. Like Labé, Catherine provides new poetic models that offer more ethical and inclusive modes of writing. Both Louise Labé and Catherine des Roches use their poetry to fundamentally alter and rewrite the way men and women interact. Instead of silencing and excluding the female subject, these female poets give women agency and voice.

CHAPTER 1

ECHO WITH A DIFFERENCE:

LOUISE LABÉ AND FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY

A History of Silencing

As Luce Irigaray points out in *Speculum de l'autre femme*, woman is often "off-stage, off-side, beyond representation, beyond selfhood" ("hors scène, hors representation, hors jeu, hors je").[1] This observation certainly applies to the Neoplatonic and Petrarchan poetic models of the sixteenth century, which are based on masculine subjectivity. While it is common for the male lyric poet to proclaim his love and devotion to an absent beloved, his verse is often more representative of himself (and his own longing, suffering, and torment) than of his beloved. The female—reduced to silence—instead becomes an object of the masculine gaze, lauded for her beauty and perfection. This silencing raises interesting questions for the female poet. How does she inscribe herself into a tradition that has denied her a voice and excluded her from the literary scene?

At a time when it was seen as more appropriate for a woman to wield a spindle rather than a pen, women often turned to mimicry as a way of easing into the poetic tradition. However, if women did primarily choose to imitate their male colleagues and predecessors, it was not because of a lack of female role models (both Marie de France and Christine de Pizan would have served as excellent models). Instead, imitation served a political purpose.

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[1] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 22; *Speculum de l'autre femme* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1974), 21.

> (A) woman poet could turn this imbalance in cultural power to her own ends: she could advance her career by invoking the names and imitating the vocabularies of famous male colleagues. By naming a master, she could construct a literary self through her affiliation with his circle and citation of his work. Presenting her poems as a series of responses to a famous man reflected favorably on the woman whose lyrics demonstrated her familiarity with his texts and testified to the social bond implied by her choice of him as addressee. In such a case, the woman writer not only recognizes the otherness of the man; she appropriates his difference—that is, his public reputation—for herself.[2]

Female poets would echo the male voice intentionally as a way of tapping into male literary history and showing competence and mastery of male poetic forms. While imitation was supposed to be a means to increase the power and prestige of female poets, this technique has been turned against them. It has been misused as a way to further silence the female voice.

The textual borrowing that all Renaissance poets engaged in has been particularly problematic for female authors as it has led to questions of their authenticity. This is particularly true for Louise Labé, whose one and only book was published in Lyon by Jean de Tournes in 1555. It is composed of a dedicatory epistle, a debate between Love and Folly, three elegies, and twenty-four sonnets. While short in length, the quality of the poetry has helped secure Labé a fixed place in the French canon. Yet, almost five centuries later, some still struggle to accept how a woman, and one of the merchant class at that, could have produced such powerful verse.[3] While the authenticity of the historical figure Louise Charley is not in question because of a will

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[2] Ann Rosalind Jones, *The Currency of Eros: Women's Love Lyric in Europe, 1540-1620* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 81.

[3] Labé was also known as “La Belle Cordière” in reference to her father’s rope making business.

and other archival evidence, her poetic capabilities are. In fact, the most comprehensive claim against her authorship came in 2006 when Mireille Huchon published her controversial book *Louise Labé: Une créature de papier*. As the title would imply, Huchon argues that Labé is nothing but "a brilliant fraud" ("une supercherie brillante"), "a chimera" ("une chimère"), and a "strawman" ("une femme de paille").[4] According to her, Labé's *oeuvre* was written by men operating in her circle, men such as Oliver de Magny, Jacques Peletier du Mans, Clément Marot, and Maurice Scève amongst others.[5] Huchon's entire thesis assumes that women are intellectually incapable of writing poetry. Denying Labé a voice in this way undermines her creativity, ingenuity, talent, and genius. In this atmosphere of poetic and critical misogyny, it is worth asking how women can claim or reclaim their own voice to assert their capacity to speak.

The challenges to Labé's poetic subjectivity then are two-pronged: on the one hand, she faces an external challenge to her literary persona from some current day criticism; on the other hand, she faces a silencing from within the poetic genre and the Petrarchan norms governing it. In this chapter, I would first like to look at an example of the kind of textual borrowing that has allowed the authenticity of Labé's work to be questioned. Comparing Labé's Sonnet 2 to the other poetic works it is in dialogue with shows how Labé's intertextuality has been misread. Reading these poems through Ovid's myth of Narcissus and Echo is useful to better understand how Labé is

[4] Mireille Huchon, *Louise Labé: Une créature de papier* (Genève: Droz, 2006), 271, 14, and 275 respectively.

[5] Huchon, *Louise Labé*, 274.

asserting her own subjectivity even as she echoes her male contemporaries. This subjectivity is different from the narcissistic model of her male interlocutors, as it is much less focused on the self. The second half of the chapter will look at two of Labé's sonnets that deal specifically with the poetic *I*. Close reading of sonnets 16 and 6 show how Labé writes her own model of female subjectivity that differs from the narcissistic model offered by the male tradition. The absence of the *je/moi* in Labé's poetry is a deliberate choice. It not only highlights the precarious position she occupies as a female poet, but also disrupts traditional power dynamics by constructing a subject position that is relational instead of self-centered.

Petrarch's Sonnet 161: A Foundational Text

One of the most striking examples of poetic dialogue occurs between Francesco Petrarca, Louise Labé, and Olivier de Magny (allegedly her lover and the beloved of her poems). While on the surface it may look as if Labé is simply mimicking or echoing her male colleagues, she in fact transforms the models they provide.[6] To begin, it is worth taking a brief moment to look at Petrarch's Sonnet 161 from the *Rime Sparse* as it serves as inspiration for the other two poems. Petrarch's

[6] There have been many books and articles published by feminist critics that examine how Labé adapts Petrarchan norms. See for example: Deborah Lesko Baker, *The Subject of Desire: Petrarchan Poetics and the Female Voice in Louise Labé* (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 1996); Karen F. Wiley, "Louise Labé's Deceptive Petrarchism," *Modern Language Studies* 11, no. 3 (1981): 51-60, doi:10.2307/3194379; Zahi Zalloua, "Refashioning the Beloved in Louise Labé's Love Poetry," *Romance Notes* 44, no. 1 (2003): 21-29, http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.cornell.edu/stable/43802337.

version is consistently self-reflective since the poet focuses primarily on the effect love has on him and his poetic journey.

> O passi sparsi, o pensier vaghi et pronti,
> o tenace memoria, o fero ardore,
> o possente desire, o debil core,
> Oi occhi miei (occhi non già, ma fonti);
>
> o fronde, onor de le famose fronti,
> o sola insegna al gemino valore;
> o faticosa vita, o dolce errore,
> che mi fate ir cercando piagge et monti;
>
> o bel viso, ove Amor inseme pose
> Gli sproni e 'l fren ond' el mi punge et volve
> Come a lui piace, e calcitrar non vale;
>
> o anime gentili et amorose,
> S' alcuna à 'l mondo, et voi, nude ombre et polve:
> deh, ristate a veder quale è 'l mio male!
>
> O scattered steps, O yearning, ready thoughts, O tenacious memory, O savage ardor, O powerful desire, O feeble heart, O my eyes, not eyes but fountains—
>
> O leaves, the honor of famous brows, O sole ensign of the twin deservings, O laborious life, O sweet error, which make me go seeking across shores and mountains—
>
> O lovely face where Love has put both the spurs and the rein with which he rakes and turns me as he pleases, and no kicking avails—
>
> O noble loving souls, if there are any in the world, and you, naked shades and dust: ah, stay to see what my suffering is![7]

In the first stanza, the poet focuses on his own torment and helplessness: the "savage ardor ("fero ardore," 2) and "powerful desire" ("possente desire," 3) that dominate him are nothing in comparison to his "feeble heart" ("debil core," 3). This disparity

[7] Petrarch, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The* Rime Sparse *and Other Lyrics*. trans. and ed. Robert M. Durling (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), 306-7.

has provoked the romantic journey that Petrarch alludes to in the opening of the sonnet. He highlights the "scattered steps" ("passi sparsi," 1) he has taken and how his love has caused him to "go seeking across shores and mountains" ("ir cercando piagge et monti," 8). Petrarch is mostly concerned about his own emotional voyage and the *passi sparsi* he needs to take on his poetic journey towards the *Rime Sparse;* his romantic journey is integrally tied to his poetic one. Therefore, when Petrarch references "sweet error" ("dolce errore," 7), he not only alludes to his physical and emotional wanderings, but also his literary ones. As much as he might lament his misery, this suffering has a poetic purpose and has led to his "laborious life" ("faticosa vita," 7). The leaves which form the "honor of famous brows" ("onor de le famose fronti," 5) are laurel leaves. They not only represent poetic glory, but also symbolize Petrarch's beloved Laura.

The opening of the first tercet, and specifically the reference to Laura's "lovely face" ("bel viso," 9), initially makes it seems as if Petrarch's focus shifts outwards after the volta. This, however, is the one and only reference to Laura in the entire poem. Her beauty simply serves as the site of Petrarch's torment. Anthropomorphized, Love holds the reins over the poet in the third stanza. Petrarch describes how he "rakes and turns me as he pleases" ("mi punge et volve / comme a lui piace," 10-11). No amount of protest—or "kicking" ("calcitrar," 11)—will change his situation. In the final tercet, Petrarch appeals to "noble loving souls" ("anime gentili et amorose," 11) for sympathy. While there is no explicit mention of his readers, Petrarch clearly intends to include them in this apostrophe. The poetic audience bears witness to the true subject of Petrarch's poem: "my suffering" ("mio male," 14).

Blurring the Corpus

Both Louise Labé's Sonnet 2 in *Les Oeuvres* (1555) and Olivier de Magny's Sonnet 55 in *Les Souspirs* (1556) are directly inspired by Petrarch's sonnet. To complicate this intertextuality even more, both Labé and Magny's poems open using the exact same lines. This shared octave copies not only the same structure and rhyme scheme as can be found in Petrarch's octave, but most noticeably, repeats the plethora of apostrophes scattered throughout his poem.

> O beaux yeux bruns, ô regards détournés,
> O chauds soupirs, ô larmes épandues,
> O noires nuits vainement attendues,
> O jours luisants vainement retournés !
>
> O tristes plaints, ô désirs obstinés,
> O temps perdu, ô peines dépendues,
> O mille morts en mille rets tendues,
> O pires maux contre moi destiné.[8]
>
> O beautiful brown eyes, o glances turned away,
> O hot sighs, o tears that stretch so far,
> O dark nights awaited in vain,
> O luminous days in vain to come back,
>
> O sad laments, o obstinate desires,
> O lost time, o wasted pains,
> O thousand deaths in a thousand tightened snares,
> O worse evils destined against me.[9]

[8] Labé and Magny use different orthography. Since my comments in this section apply to both poems, I have chosen to modernize the spelling. The original orthography of each poem can be found later in the chapter when I cite each poem in full.

[9] I have adapted this translation from Ann Rosalind Jones, "Assimilation with a Difference: Renaissance Women Poets and Literary Influence," *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981): 148. doi:10.2307/2929897. Her translation reads: "O beautiful brown eyes, o glances turned aside, o hot sighs, o poured out tears, o dark night awaited in vain, o bright days in vain to come back: o sad laments, o stubborn desires, o misspent time, o

This octave goes even further than Petrarch's in emphasizing the hardships of love. The vocabulary is darker: sighs, tears, sadness, pain, lost time, death, traps, and ills dominate the first eight lines. However, the most significant change has to do with the referents. From the beginning of his sonnet, Petrarch refers to himself; it is fairly clear that it is his steps, his thoughts, his memory, etc. that are in question. Labé and Magny's version shifts the focus outward. Petrarch's internal gaze becomes exteriorized. For example, instead of referring to "my eyes" ("occhi miei," 4) as Petrarch does, they refer to the "beautiful brown eyes" ("beaux yeux bruns," 1) of the beloved. This distinction between self and other becomes more complicated as the sonnet progresses, especially if gender is taken into account. Are the "glances turned away" ("regards détournés," 1) indicative of female modesty or male indifference? If the former, how do we reconcile them with the "hot sighs" ("chaud soupirs," 2) that follow? Do the tears in the poem belong to the pair of eyes described earlier, or has the subject switched? Given that Petrarch describes his eyes as "not eyes but fountains" ("occhi non già, ma fonti," 4), should we read the "tears that stretch so far" ("larmes épandues," 2) as belonging to the male speaker? Or, even differently still, should we assume that the eyes, looks, sighs, and tears are shared by both parties?[10]

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wasted pains, o thousand deaths laid in a thousand nets, o fiercest ills aimed against me."

[10] Françoise Charpentier sees an "intentional indistinction" ("indistinction voulue") of bodies while François Rigolot points out how "through the magic of words, the bodies will lose their individuality" ("par la magie des mots, les corps vont perdre leur individualité"). See Louise Labé, *Œuvres poétiques précédées des Rhymes de Pernette du Guillet avec un choix de blason du corps féminin,* ed. Françoise Charpentier (Paris:

Not only is there a blurring of identities in the first few lines, but there is also a poetic doubling that continues throughout the octave. The first and second stanzas share very similar structures. The first two lines of each stanza contain two apostrophes per line. In both stanzas these are followed by two longer apostrophes. This creates a doubling effect not only between the stanzas, but within them as well. The use of alliteration, rhyme, and repetition adds to this effect. Alliteration is prevalent throughout the poem, whether with "beaux yeux bruns" (1), "noires nuits" (3), or "mille morts en mille rets" (7). Similarly, the *t* and *p* of "temps perdu" (6) echoes the "tristes plaints" of the previous line (5). The assonance between "noires *nuits*" and "jour *luis*ants" (emphasis mine) helps draw attention to the chiasmus within this structure, with darkness (*noire*) opposed to glistening (*luisant*) and night (*nuit*) contrasted with day (*jour*). The expression "in vain" ("vainement") follows each of these expressions, so that it repeats in lines three and four. Through all of this doubling and confusion, the speaker's body, pain, and desire intertwine with the beloved's.[11]

Since Magny and Labé share these verses, there is also doubling of voices that occurs between the two poems. Given the short time frame between the publications

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Gallimard, 1983), 29 and François Rigolot, *Louise Labé lyonnaise, ou, La Renaissance au féminin* (Paris: Champion, 1997), 89. My translation.

[11] Catherine M. Müller has written on the figure of the double in relation to Louise Labé's *Débat de Folie et d'Amour* and Sonnet 8. See "Celebrating Difference: The Self as Double in the Works of Louise Labé," *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance Et Réforme*, New Series / Nouvelle Série 23, no. 1 (1999): 59-71, http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.cornell.edu/stable/43445230.

of each poems, it is hard to know which one was actually written first. [12] Trying to establish the primacy of one is ultimately less interesting and less important than exploring the questions that arise from this confusion.

> The sharing and apportionment of their verse raise fundamental questions about authorship and authority […] Do these lines represent a collaborative endeavor fashioned jointly by a male and female author? Or do they represent the work of one author that the other borrows and appropriates? And is the appropriation itself a creative act by virtue of being situated in a new context?[13]

Critics have reacted differently to these questions. As already discussed, Huchon has chosen to question Labé's authenticity as a poet. That said, even critics who acknowledge the authenticity of each poem debate the effect of their shared intertextuality. Ann Rosalind Jones for example has written that "the status of the lines as shared property dissolves boundaries between inner and outer world, female and male lover, first and second author, owner/imitator of the quatrains… the parallel established between the sonnets of Labé and Magny effaces sexual and textual difference."[14] I join other critics in resisting this reading. As William J. Kennedy points out, "The identity of Labé's octave with Magny's give rise to a stunning recognition that even when men and women use exactly the same words, they are not really saying the same thing at all."[15] Similarly, Françoise Charpentier acknowledges

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[12] For example, Fernand Zamaron believes that Magny copied Labé, while Rigolot argues Labé copied Magny. See Fernand Zamaron, *Louise Labé, dame de franchise* (Paris: Nizet, 1968), 165-67 and Rigolot, *Louise Labé lyonnaise*, 89.

[13] William J. Kennedy, *Authorizing Petrarch* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 166-67.

[14] Jones, *Currency of Eros*, 165.

[15] Kennedy, *Authorizing Petrarch*, 167.

that, “The same subject does not have the same impact when uttered by a masculine and feminine voice” (“Dit par une voix féminine et masculine, le même propos n’a pas le même retentissement”).[16] Both poems have something to say and say it differently, regardless of the octave they share. Even though Labé uses the same words as Magny, she appropriates them, makes them her own, and imbues them with a different meaning than that found in Magny’s sonnet.

A Resounding Echo

To better understand how this is possible, is useful to consider the myth of Narcissus and Echo.[17] This myth addresses the relationship between a female voice and the male she is supposedly imitating. Examining this myth closely will show how Labé, like Echo, can mimic or even copy her male colleagues without having to give up her own personhood, perspective, voice, or right to authorship.

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[16] Françoise Charpentier, “Préface,” in *Œuvres poétiques précédées des Rhymes de Pernette du Guillet avec un choix de blason du corps féminin,* ed. Françoise Charpentier (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), 29.

[17] For a broader understanding of how the myth of Narcissus and Echo has been adapted in early modern French and Italian poetry see: Deborah Lesko Baker, *Narcissus and the Lover: Mythic Recovery and Reinvention in Scève’s* Délie (Saratoga, Calif.: Anma Libri, 1986); JoAnn DellaNeva, “Poetry, Metamorphosis, and the Laurel: Ovid, Petrarch, and Scève,” *French Forum* 7, no. 3 (1982): 202-203, 207-208 http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.cornell.edu/stable/40551335; Emma Herdman, “Folie and Salmacis: Labé’s Rewriting of Ovid,” *The Modern Language Review* 108, no. 3 (2013): 782-801, doi:10.5699/modelangrevi.108.3.0782; Ann Rosalind Jones, “New Songs for the Swallow: Ovid’s Philomela in Tuilla d’Aragona and Gaspara Stampa,” in *Refiguring Woman: Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance*, ed. Marilyn Migiel and Juliana Schiesari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 263-69, 276-77.

The story of Narcissus and Echo can be found in book three of Ovid's *Metamorphoses.* The portion that is familiar to most readers tells the story of a youth who falls in love with his own reflection. Not recognizing it as his own, Narcissus is so captivated by his own image that he is unwilling to leave it even for food and drink. Upon his death, Narcissus is transformed into the flower that bears his name. This popular recounting of the tale leaves out one important character: Echo. She is in love with Narcissus and tries to engage him both verbally and physically. He however, spurns her, causing Echo to waste away and lose her body entirely, so that only her voice remains. Narcissus not only rejects Echo, but everyone around him, including other nymphs and men. One such scorned youth curses him: "So may he himself love, and not gain the thing he loves!"[18] The story of Narcissus and Echo can therefore be interpreted as a story of unfulfilled desire for both characters. However, it is Echo's desire for Narcissus brings them together in the first place and provokes their verbal exchange. As Anne Berger points out, "At the beginning of language is the desire of the other: the story of Narcissus and Echo is in this sense a tale of the constitution of the living-speaking subject as desiring subject" ("au commencement du langage serait le désire de l'autre: l'histoire de Narcisse et d'Echo est bien en ce sens une fable de la constitution du sujet vivant-parlant, comme sujet désirant").[19] While Echo tries to interact with and embrace Narcissus, he rejects the other in favor of himself.

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[18] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1916), 3.405.

[19] Anne-Emmanuelle Berger, "The Latest Word from Echo," trans. Rachel Gabara, *New Literary History* 27, no. 4 (1996): 633, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20057380;

Other critics such as Aimé Boutin have pointed out that the emphasis on desire and sexual difference in this myth is underscored by the context in which the story is presented.[20] Directly preceding it is the story of Tiresias, who has to settle a dispute Zeus and Juno were having over whether males or females experience more sexual pleasure. Having been transformed into a woman for seven years, Tiresias agrees with Zeus that women do. In retaliation, Juno blinds Tiresias, but Zeus makes up for his blindness with the gift of prophecy. The chapter then shifts to the story of Echo and Narcissus and reveals that Narcissus was born as a result of the rape of the nymph Liriope by the river god Cephisus. When asked whether Narcissus would reach old age, Tiresias replied "If he ne'er know himself."[21] Not only does this introduction provide a genealogy for Narcissus that shows he is the product of misplaced desire, it also foreshadows the struggles Narcissus will have with his own self-awareness.

Given the interplay between desire, language, and identity, it is unsurprising that psychoanalysis uses the tale of Echo and Narcissus as a foundational text—it plays a key role in both Freud's concept of narcissism as well as Lacan's Mirror Stage. However, both analysts deviate drastically from their source material. In his 1914 paper "On Narcissism: An Introduction," Freud discusses how narcissism plays into the development of sexuality.

"Dernières Nouvelles D'Écho," *Littérature*, no. 102 (1996): 85, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41713323.

[20] Aimé Boutin, *Maternal Echoes: The Poetry of Marceline Desbordes-Valmore and Alphonse De Lamartine* (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 2001), 71.

[21] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 3.348.

> The term narcissism is derived from clinical description and was chosen by Paul Näcke in 1899 to denote the attitude of a person who treats his own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is ordinarily treated—who looks at it, that is to say, strokes it and fondles it till he obtains complete satisfaction through these activities.[22]

This etymology is already problematic as it fools the reader into thinking that Narcissus reaches some sort of satisfaction at the end of the tale, which he never does. Furthermore, this definition conflates sight and touch, and completely leaves sound (echo) out of it. Yet, Echo is an integral part of Narcissus's story. Her presence shows that Ovidian narcissism involves another person, even if it is through the rejection of their desire and their physical body. While Narcissus certainly does look at himself, part of his curse is precisely that he cannot "stroke" or "fondle" his image. Touch, or more specifically lack thereof, is highlighted throughout the text. Touch, along with sight and sound are all key elements within the myth that merit further exploration.

The first attempt at any sort of physical contact in the story comes from Echo. She engages verbally with Narcissus, and it is this verbal engagement that entreats her to come out of the woods and attempt physical contact. Echo,

> comes forth from the woods that she may throw her arms around the neck she longs to clasp. But he flees at her approach and, fleeing, says: "Hands off! Embrace me not! May I die before I give you power o'er me!" "I give you power o'er me!" she says, and nothing more. Thus spurned, she lurks in the woods, hides her shamed face among the foliage, and lives from that time on in lonely caves.[23]

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[22] Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 73.

[23] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 3.387-94.

It is Echo's attempt to touch Narcissus that ultimately frightens him off. As already mentioned, this crucial moment in the text leads to Echo's metamorphosis. If Ovid highlights Echo's embarrassment through her blushing face, it is to emphasize that this corporeality is something she is about to lose. Narcissus rejects Echo's material body and instead falls for a simulacrum of his own. Try as he may, Narcissus cannot touch his own reflection. The narrator is the first one to point this out: "How often did he plunge his arms into the water seeking to clasp the neck he sees there, but did not clasp himself in them!"[24] Soon, however, Narcissus comes to the same realization: "You would think he could be touched—so small a thing it is that separates our loving hearts."[25] This is no small obstacle however—Narcissus remains out of grasp, even to himself. If Narcissus cannot obtain (both literally and figuratively) what he desires, it is because he has failed to recognize his own reflection in the water and thinks that he is someone else. It is only later that he realizes, "I burn with love of my own self; I both kindle the flames and suffer them."[26] But by that time it is too late—Narcissus is doomed to love in vain. By falling in love with his own reflection, Narcissus has fallen in love with an empty form that "has no substance of its own."[27] In this way, emptiness and longing are pitted against fullness and satisfaction, with physicality playing a key role in the fulfillment of desire.

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[24] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 3.428-29.

[25] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 3.453.

[26] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 3.464.

[27] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 3.435.

However, this is not the first misidentification in the tale. Not only does Narcissus fail to recognize his own reflection, but he fails to recognize Echo's voice and her declaration of love; his is a double misrecognition, both visual and aural. It is worth examining the dialogue that takes place between Narcissus and Echo in order to better understand how this confusion takes place. In doing so, it becomes clear that Narcissus mistakes Echo for an empty voice, an echo without meaning. While he thinks that she is simply repeating what he said and reflecting his sameness back onto him, Echo in fact modifies the meaning behind Narcissus's words all the while repeating them. For example, when Narcissus first asks, "Is anyone here?" Echo responds, "Here!"[28] The simple alteration of an interrogative question into statement allows Echo to assert her own personhood, even if Narcissus fails to acknowledge her. Similarly, when Echo repeats Narcissus's suggestion "Here let us meet," her response contains a level of enthusiasm not present in the first speech act.[29] Echo's eagerness comes across when the narrator highlights her alteration in tone by explicitly stating that Echo was "never to answer other sound more gladly."[30] However, Narcissus doesn't expect or allow for Echo's difference and instead is only willing to accept someone who is similar to himself in both speech and appearance. This situation presents "the impossible dialogue which takes place between Narcissus and Echo, such that Narcissus cannot be sure of the origin or meaning of a word that he

[28] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 3.380.

[29] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 3.387.

[30] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 3.386-87.

recognizes neither as his own nor as that of the other" ("l'impossible dialogue qui se noue entre Narcisse et Écho, tel que Narcisse ne peut s'assurer de la provenance et du sens d'une parole qu'il ne reconnait ni comme la sienne, ni comme celle de l'autre").[31] While Narcissus can hear Echo's speech, he refuses to really listen. Instead of allowing a place for her and acknowledging her unique perspective, Narcissus is only interested in hearing a repetition of his own voice.

Narcissus reveals that he doesn't recognize Echo as the source of his echo when he spurns her. As previously mentioned, Narcissus reacts negatively to Echo's enthusiasm and her physical presence by fleeing the scene and telling her to get her hands off of him. His reaction precisely illustrates the argument Luce Irigaray makes in her essay "When Our Lips Speak Together" ("Quand nos lèvres se parlent") about the lack of space and mobility women are afforded in the speech. She writes,

> S'ils disent: "viens," alors tu peux t'avancer. A peine. T'ajustant au besoin qu'ils ont ou non de la présence de leur image. Un pas, ou deux. Sans plus. Ni exubérance ni turbulence. Sinon, tu casses tout. La glace.[32]
>
> If they say "come," then you may go ahead. Barely. Adapting yourself to whatever need they have, or don't have, or the presence of their own image. One step, or two. No more. No exuberance. No turbulence. Otherwise you'll smash everything. The ice, the mirror.[33]

This is exactly the mistake Echo makes. When Narcissus calls her, she rushes forward too quickly and too exuberantly, breaking the illusion of sameness Narcissus was

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[31] Berger, "The Latest Word from Echo," 625; "Dernières nouvelles d'Écho," 76.

[32] Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1977), 207.

[33] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One,* trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 207-8.

expecting. However, even in this moment of rejection, Echo reaffirms her attachment to Narcissus. In repeating his last words ("I give you power o'er me"), Echo again inflects them with new meaning. While Narcissus shuts down any possibility of verbal or physical exchange, Echo uses the exact same words to say just the opposite: she reiterates her openness and desire for Narcissus. Therefore, even though Narcissus and Echo rely on the same speech, their different perspectives imbue that speech with different meanings.

It is important to remember that Echo's exchange with Narcissus and her resulting transformation is an echo in itself. She suffers not only one, but two metamorphoses in the text. As Berger points out, Ovid presents his readers with "two fables in one, two 'metamorphoses' in and for one echo, or two echos given by Ovid's text to the sad story of his nymph; and one cannot tell which one is or reproduces the original event, that made Echo what she is" ("deux fables en une, deux 'metamorphoses' en—et pour—un écho, ou deux échos donnés par le texte d'Ovide à la triste historie de sa nymphe, sans que l'on puisse déterminer lequel est ou reproduit l'événement original, qui fait d'Echo ce qu'elle est").[34] Juno limited the power of Echo's voice after she boldly used her speech to detain the goddess so that she did not stumble upon Zeus's infidelities with the other nymphs. Punished thus for her trickery, Echo is no longer able to initiate speech.[35] However, as her dialogue with Narcissus shows, she is still able to *con*verse or maintain a dialogue with someone else. The text

[34] Berger, "The Latest Word from Echo," 623; "Dernières nouvelles d'Écho," 74.

[35] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* 3.359-69.

makes clear the tenuous position that she holds: Echo is described as, "a certain nymph of strange speech … who could neither hold her peace when others spoke, nor yet begin to speak till others had addressed her."[36] Even though Echo has been constrained in her ability to speak, she has learned how to adapt her discourse to this constriction. If anything, language becomes even more central to Echo's identity. After her interaction with Narcissus, Echo undergoes her second transformation. Ironically, Echo loses her physical body in order to fully embody her voice. In this sense, her metamorphoses do not represent a loss, but rather a fulfillment of her being. Berger reads Echo's metamorphoses in these positive terms—for her, Echo is "without a body and without limits: a privilege of speech as the expression of consciousness, as the witness of being in its permanence" ("Sans corps et sans limite: privilège de la parole comme expression de la conscience, comme témoin de l'être en sa permanence").[37] While Narcissus's voice and consciousness die with his body, Echo is able to live outside of her body through the power of her voice. Her story is about what endures in speech beyond physical existence, and in this regard, she resembles a poet.

Magny's Sonnet 55: More of the Same

While Narcissus only reads Echo's voice as a reflection of his and is only willing to allow for his interpretation of her speech, Echo is in fact searching to create

[36] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* 3.357-58.

[37] Berger, "The Latest Word from Echo," 623; "Dernières nouvelles d'Écho," 73.

a whole new meaning out of his words. Similarly, when Labé draws inspiration from Petrarch, she infuses her text with a whole new meaning and challenges the poetic models available to her. This technique contrasts with what Magny is doing in his poem. His poem resembles Petrarch's far more closely than Labé's does. He reproduces the narcissistic poetic model that focuses on the self. Magny's Sonnet 55 in full reads :

O beaux yeux bruns, ô regards destournez,
O chaults souspirs, ô larmes espandues,
O noires nuicts vainement attendues,
O jours luysans vainement retournez:

O tristes pleints, ô desirs obstinez,
O tens perdu, ô peines despendues,
O mille morts en mile retz tendues,
O pires maulx contre moy destinez :

O pas espars, ô trop ardente flame
O douce erreur, ô pensers de mon ame,
Qui ça, qui là, me tournez nuict et jour,

O vous mes yeux, no plus yeux mais fonteines,
O dieux, ô cieux et personnes humaines,
Soyez pour dieu tesmoins de mon amour.[38]

O beautiful brown eyes, o glances turned away,
O hot sighs, o tears that stretch so far,
O dark nights awaited in vain,
O luminous days in vain to come back,

O sad laments, o obstinate desires,
O lost time, o wasted pains,
O thousand deaths in a thousand tightened snares,
O worse evils destined against me

O scattered steps, o too ardent flame,
O sweet error, o thoughts of my soul,

[38] Olivier de Magny, *Les Souspirs*, ed. David Wilkin (Genève: Droz, 1978), 65-66.

Which turn me here and there, night and day,

O you my eyes, no longer eyes but fountains,
O gods, o heavens and human beings
Be witness to my love.[39]

Magny does more than draw inspiration from Petrarchan themes; he borrows, repeats, and—in many instances—translates Petrarch's exact expressions.[40] Thus, "o passi sparsi" (1) becomes "O pas epars" (9); "o pensier vaghi et pronti" (1) becomes "O pensers de mon ame" (10); "o dolce errore" (7) becomes "O douce erreur" (10); and "oi occhi miei (occhi non già fonti)" (4) becomes "O vous mes yeux, non plus yeux mais fonteines" (12). It is no coincidence that all of this intertextuality occurs in the sestet. This shifts the focus back onto the poet as the poem progresses. Magny may open the poem by referencing the eyes of his of his beloved, but his vision becomes more and more internalized as the poem progresses. Any muddling of bodies or voices from the first eight lines is straightened out.

A strong engagement with the self is part of both Petrarch and Magny's poetic model. The last line of the octave, with the explicit reference to the self (*moi*), functions and a lens that refocuses the attention onto the speaker: "O worse evils

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[39] Jones, "Assimilation with a Difference," 149. I have modified the last two lines of Jones's translation from "o gods, o heavens, be for god's sake witnesses to my love."

[40] For a more comprehensive discussion of Petrarch's influence on Magny, see for example: Leon E. Kastner, "The Sources of Olivier De Magny's Sonnets," *Modern Philology* 7, no. 1 (1909): 27-48, http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.cornell.edu/stable/432461; Mark S. Whitney, "Olivier de Magny's *Amours de Castianire*: Laura Dedux?" *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 45, no. 2 (1983): 257-71, http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.cornell.edu/stable/20676860 and "Petrarch's Influence on Olivier De Magny's 'Amatory Odes' of 1559," *Studies in Philology* 66, no. 1 (1969): 60-69, http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.cornell.edu/stable/4173628.

destined against me" ("O pires maulx contre moy destinez"). From this point on, references to the self abound. The intertextuality with Petrarch's poem makes it clear that "scattered steps" (9) and "sweet error" (10) referenced in the next lines are the poets. The possessive adjective "my" (*mon/mes*) appears three times in the sestet: "my soul" (mon ame, 10), "my eyes" (mes yeux, 12), "my love" (mon amour, 14). The direct object pronoun "me" (*me*) also makes an appearance in the phrase "turn me" (me tournez, 11). While Magny opens his poem by referencing another, this Other is completely evacuated by the end of the poem. His poetry allows for only one type of subjectivity—his own.

Like Petrarch, Magny ends his poem by turning to the audience and asking for a witness to his amatory suffering. While Petrarch entreats "noble loving souls… stay to see what my suffering is" ("anime gentili et amorose… ristate a veder quale è 'l mio male," 12-14), Magny asks human beings to "be witness to my love," ("personnes humaines / soyez temoins de mon amour," 13-14). Love doesn't explicitly torment the speaker in Magny's poem like he does in Petrarch, but all the images of pain and suffering make it clear that Magny too has been tormented by love. Even when he is not copying Petrarch word for word, Magny nevertheless mimics the same themes that are present in Petrarch's poetry. He therefore recreates more of the same: Magny's poetry acts as a mirror, reflecting Petrarch's poetic vision two hundred years later.

Labé's Sonnet 2: An Alternative Poetic Model

Labé however rejects this narcissistic poetic model in favor of one that allows for more ambiguous and plural subjectivities predicated not on sameness but rather on

multiplicity and exchange.[41] She conscientiously uses mimicry and echo as tools to question what it means to be a female poet. In doing so, she foreshadows the way in which Irigaray suggests that women use *mimétisme* to challenge the subordinate position of the female.

> Il n'est, dans un premier temps, peut-être qu'un seul "chemin, "celui qui est historiquement assigné au féminin : *le mimétisme*. Il s'agit d'assumer, délibérément, ce rôle. Ce qui est déjà retourner en affirmation une subordination, et, de ce fait, commencer à la déjouer.[42]
>
> There is, in an initial phase, perhaps only one "path," the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of *mimicry.* One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it.[43]

Labé uses *mimétisme* to upset, undue and ultimately edit or correct the poetic models that the male tradition has made available. Instead of being reduced into one (masculine) voice, she uses her poetry to create an echo that allows for multiple voices to be heard. She is offering a new type of reproduction, one that includes the construction of a female subjectivity.

In this regard, the opening octave operates very differently for Labé than it does for Magny. For him, the opening octave functions like a lens. It takes an image that is blurred and confused and focuses it onto one subject—the poet. For Labé

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[41] Making a similar point in her reading of these sonnets, Yandell argues that Petrarch and Magny's sonnets are "solipsistically focused on the poet himself" whereas Labé embraces reciprocity. See "Louise Labé's Transgressions" in *High Anxiety: Masculinity in Crisis in Early Modern France*, ed. Kathleen P. Long (Kirksville, Mo.: Truman State University Press, 2001), 6.

[42] Irigaray, *Ce sexe*, 73-74, italics in the original.

[43] Irigaray, *This Sex*, 76, italics in the original.

however, the confusion of the opening octave prefigures the confusion of bodies and voices that can be found in the sestet.

O beaus yeus bruns, ô regars destournez,
O chaus soupirs, ô larmes espandues,
O noires nuits vainement atendues,
O jours luisans vainement retournez :

O tristes pleins, ô desirs obstinez,
O temps perdu, ô peines despendues,
O mile morts en mile rets tendues,
O pires maus contre moy destinez.

O ris, ô front, cheveus, bras, mains et doits :
O lut pleintif, viole, archet et vois :
Tant de flambeaus pour ardre une femmelle!

De toy me plein, que tant de feus portant,
Et tant d'endrois d'iceus mon coeur tatant,
N'en est sur toy volé quelque estincelle.[44]

O beautiful brown eyes, o glances turned away,
O hot sighs, o tears that stretch so far,
O dark nights awaited in vain,
O luminous days in vain to come back,

O sad laments, o obstinate desires,
O lost time, o wasted pains,
O thousand deaths in a thousand tightened snares,
O worse evils destined against me.

O laughter, forehead, hair, arms, hands and fingers,
o plaintive lute, viol, bow and voice:
so many torches to set a woman on fire!

I reproach you because, although you bear so many fires,
feeling out my heart with them in so many places,
not a single spark has flown onto you.[45]

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[44] Louise Labé, *Oeuvres Complètes: Sonnets, Élégies, Débat de Folie et d'Amour, Poésies,* ed. François Rigolot (Paris: Flammarion, 1986), 122.

[45] Jones, "Assimilation with a Difference," 148-49. In line 11, I have changed "women" to "woman."

Instead of serving a clarifying purpose, the "me" ("moy") in the last line of the octave only further muddles the speaker and beloved's subjectivities. If Labé were to follow the poetic model offered by Petrarch and Magny, she would turn inward towards the self in the sestet. Labé does not do this. When she mentions "O laughter, forehead, hair, arms, hands and fingers" ("O ris, ô front, cheveus, bras, mains et doits," 9), Labé is not referring to herself but to the beloved. However, this is not immediately clear given the confusion of bodies that operates in the octave, and the gesture towards the self in line eight. Only at the end of the first tercet, with the declaration "so many torches to set a woman on fire" ("Tant de flambeaus pour ardre une femmelle," 11), does it become obvious that Labé is in fact referring to her beloved in these lines.

This reversal constitutes a creative act. Labé takes the poetic tradition of the blazon and plays with the conventions of the genre by inverting the expected gender roles. Cécile Alduy observes that, "there exists no such thing as a canon of masculine beauty in Petrarchan poetry. Labé subverts gender role [*sic*] not only by her sulfurous admission of carnal desires but also by pointing out the rhetorical void left for the lady to reciprocate as poet."[46] In this case, Labé's gender does not allow her to echo her male predecessors in the same way that they can echo each other. Simply by virtue of being a female poet, she must invent or create a poetic space for herself.

[46] Cécile Alduy, "The Anatomy of Gender: Decoding Petrarchan Lyrics (Labé, Scève, Ronsard)," in *Teaching French Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation,* ed. Colette Winn (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2011), 227.

By including this mini-blazon in her verse, Labé highlights the multiplicity of tools that the lyric poet has at his disposal to win over his female beloved. In addition to the physical attributes listed above, Labé also adds musical and poetic talent to his list of qualities. The plaintive lute which she cites is typically associated with the famous poet and musician Orpheus. Labé's beloved shares Orpheus's gift for poetry and music. She lists the "viol, bow and voice" ("viole, archet et vois," 10) as part of the tools available to him to help seduce her. It is important that Labé lists her partner's poetic voice as one of the reasons for her passion; instead of trying to silence her beloved, Labé acknowledges the power of his speech over her. It would seem, however, that this power is not shared by the female speaker.

Labé ends the poem by lamenting the fact that no sparks have flown onto her beloved. She describes her own passion using a semantic field related to fire, with words such as "torch" ("flambeau," 11), "set…on fire" ("ardre," 11), "fire" ("feux," 12), and "spark" ("estincelle," 14). While this is a common trope in lyric poetry, Echo's passion for Narcissus is described in similar terms. The narrator remarks how Echo "was inflamed with love and followed him by stealth and the more she followed, the more she burned by a nearer flame, as when quick-burning sulphur, smeared round the tops of torches, catches fire from another fire brought near."[47] Labé finds herself in a similar predicament as Echo. Her passion has been enflamed, but even though she copies her male beloved's words, they are ineffective in igniting his passion for her. To be clear, this predicament is more reflective of the type of self-enclosed

[47] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 3.371-74.

subjectivity perpetuated by male poetic models perpetuate than of the quality of Labé's verse.

Labé proposes an alternative poetic model that allows for gender difference and gives space to the other. Her last stanza differs significantly from that of Petrarch and Magny. Instead of making a grandiose appeal to the gods, the heavens, and humanity, Labé instead makes a much more personal appeal and addresses her beloved directly through her statement "I reproach you" ("De toi me plein," 12). Here, I would argue that Labé engages in a play on words between the adjective *plein* (full) and the verb *se plaindre* (to complain). The latter interpretation is more grammatically and logically obvious given the "sad laments" ("tristes pleins," 5) and "plaintive lute" ("lut pleintif," 10) mentioned earlier in the poem. However, Labé could conceivably fill herself with her beloved's voice while expressing her own complaint, such that the sad laments of the female and the plaintive lute of the male combine in harmony. In fact, the last four lines of the poem are particularly melodic. Like the word *plein*, the word *tant* is also repeated three times: "tant de flambeau" (11), "tant de feux portant" (12), and "tant d'endroits" (13). The hard *t* sound is further multiplied in the two occurrences of the word *toi* ("de toi me plains," 12; "sur toi volé," 14) and in last word of each line of the final tercet ("portant," 12; "tâtant," 13; and "estincelle," 14). This musicality highlights Labé's poetic virtuosity and talent.

Labé uses her verse to construct a different poetic model, one that grants personhood and voice to both the speaker and beloved. However, as critics like Colette Winn have pointed out, this is not an easy process: "Ironically, the first word to disappear from a woman's vocabulary, as she attempts to construct her authorial

persona, is the pronoun 'I' … No doubt, this is called poetic licence, yet the recurrence of this omission in Louise Labé's poetry is not without meaning."[48] Unsurprisingly then, the poetic I or "je" is evacuated in this stanza, as verse twelve should read "de toi [je] me plein." As Labé constructs her own voice and subjectivity as a poet, she rejects the narcissistic, male model in favor of a new type of female subjectivity.

Sonnet 16: Fanning the Flames

In her sonnet sequence, Sonnet 2 is the first instance of the disappearance of the pronoun "I" but it is certainly not the only one. I would like to propose looking at two other sonnets in which this omission takes place. Close readings of sonnets 16 and 6 will show how Labé claims a feminine subjectivity that is rooted in her identity as a poet. Similarly to how she does in sonnet 2, Labé complains of a lack of interest on behalf of her beloved in sonnet 16. The crux of the sonnet revolves around the speaker's account of her ill-timed passion; she falls for her beloved just as he falls out of love with her.[49] However, before turning to this personal account of her amatory experience in the final sestet of her sonnet, Labé first presents her audience with three distinct images: the return of fair weather after a storm (1-3), sunset and moonrise (4-6), and the retreat of a Parthian warrior who fires an arrow as he leaves (7-8). Each

[48] Colette Winn, "Mirrors of the Subject: Women Poets of the Renaissance," in *Understanding French Poetry: Essays for a New Millennium*, ed. Stamos Metzidakis (Birmingham, Ala.: Summa Publications, 2001), 122.

[49] For Lawrence E. Harvey, "The central theme of sonnet XVI is the suffering caused by an ironic *décalage* in love." See *The Aesthetics of the Renaissance Love Sonnet: An Essay on the Art of the Sonnet in the Poetry of Louise Labé* (Genève: Droz, 1962), 59.

depicts a certain type of transformation or reversal, prefiguring the beloved's change of heart described in the final sestet.

> Apres qu'un tems la gresle et le tonnerre
> Ont le haut mont de Caucase batu,
> Le beau jour vient, de lueur revétu.
> Quand Phebus ha son cerne fait en terre,
>
> Et l'Ocean il regaigne à grand erre:
> Sa sœur se montre avec son chef pointu.
> Quand quelque tems le Parthe ha combatu,
> Il prent la fuite et son arc il desserre.
>
> Un tems t'ay vù et consolé pleintif,
> Et defiant de mon feu peu hatif:
> Mais maintenant que tu m'as embrasee,
>
> Et suis au point auquel tu me voulois:
> Tu as ta flame en quelque eau arrosee,
> Et es plus froit qu'estre je ne soulois.
>
> After a time in which thunder and hail
> have beaten the mountains—the Caucasian height—
> a fine day comes, and they're clothed again in light.
> When Phoebus has covered the land with his circling trail,
> he dives to the ocean again, and his sister, pale
> with her pointed crown, moves back into our sight.
> When the Parthian warrior has spent some time in the fight,
> he loosens his bow and turns from his travail.
> When I saw you plaintive once, I consoled you, though
> that provoked my fire, which was burning slow.
> But now that you have given me your embrace
> and I am just at the point where you wanted me,
> you have quenched your own flame in some watery place;
> now it's colder than my own could ever be.[50]

Sonnet 16 has, for the most part, been overlooked in literary criticism and has not garnered nearly as much attention as Labé's more popular sonnets. In fact, to my

[50] Louise Labé, *Complete Poetry and Prose: a Bilingual Edition*, ed. Deborah Lesko Baker, trans. Annie Finch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 203.

knowledge, there is no article-length study devoted to it. The few paragraphs that have been written on it focus primarily on the structural level; that is, how the poem shifts from the more abstract and mythological octave to the more concrete and human sestet. More specifically, Lawrence E. Harvey points out how repetition is used within the octave in service of a thematic progression that culminates in a portrayal of pain and suffering.[51] While Gillian Jondorf reiterates and slightly elaborates on these remarks, it seems that critics have generally avoided any type of detailed textual analysis. [52] I would therefore like to propose a close reading of this poem in order to elucidate the logical threads which allow Labé to weave together the seemingly disparate images that operate in this poem. In doing so, I would like to shift the emphasis from the themes of pain and suffering, to what I believe is a *prise de conscience* that operates not only on the romantic or amatory level, but on the poetic level as well.

Labé shows off her literary acumen by taking common images in lyric poetry and tying them to specific mythological referents. When Labé talks about a storm, she is not speaking about just any storm, but one that beats down on Mount Caucasus. This location is important, as it is the place where Prometheus was chained to a rock for having stolen fire from the Gods. Worse still, Zeus condemns Prometheus to have his liver ripped out every day by a vulture. Since he is immortal, Prometheus's liver would regenerate every night and his suffering continue in perpetuity. On the one

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[51] Harvey, *The Aesthetics of the Renaissance*, 60.

[52] Gillian Jondorf, "Petrarchan Variations in Pernette Du Guillet and Louise Labé," *The Modern Language Review* 71, no. 4 (1976): 775. doi:10.2307/3725950.

hand, Prometheus's theft of fire cements his reputation as cunning and deceitful; on the other hand, he gives fire to mankind. In doing so, he bestows not only literal light upon the human race, but symbolic enlightenment (knowledge, understanding, intellect, etc.) as well. Those of Labé's readers who possess this mythological literacy will understand how this reference lays the groundwork for the connection in Labé's poem between concepts like fire (or physical light) and intellectual enlightenment, links that only become clearer in the following verses.

If Labé includes references to mythological figures in her description of a storm, she also personifies certain weather events by making them the subjects of the sentence. Moreover, she associates verbs that are commonly used with humans with weather instead. Thus, hail and thunder ("la gresle et le tonnerre," 1) are described as beating the mountain (with the verb *battre,* 2), prefiguring the violence and war imagery surrounding the Parthian soldier who fights (significantly, with him Labé uses the verb *combattre*, 7). Similarly, the beautiful day ("le beau jour," 3) is also the subject of the action. He comes literally clothed in light ("vient, de lueur revêtu," 3). This personification allows Labé to seamlessly transition to the figure of Phoebus, god of the sun.

Similarly to how the weather changes from stormy to sunny skies, so too the sky changes from day to night. Phoebus, having circled the Earth ("ha son cerne fait en terre," 4), returns quickly towards the Ocean ("l'Ocean il regaigne à grand erre," 5). Phoebus's sister—his lunar counterpart, Artemis—then shows herself ("sa soeur se montre," 6). Incidentally, Phoebus and Artemis are the children of Zeus, the God who punished Prometheus and who is famously associated with stormy skies and the

thunderbolt in particular. Therefore, as Labé transitions from stormy skies, to sunlight, to moonrise, she also moves through the reigns of Zeus, Phoebus, and Artemis, or from Father, to son, to daughter. Artemis shows herself "with her pointed crown" ("avec son chef pointu," 6). This crown functions simultaneously as an emblem of power and glory and as a reference to the crescent moon Artemis often wears in her hair. Given how Labé links the lexical field surrounding light (fire, flame, daylight, the sun, etc.) to enlightenment, poetry, and intellect via the myths of Prometheus and Phoebus, it is hard not to read into the fact that Labé ends this sequence with Artemis. Just as it is her moment to shine, poetically, it is also Labé's.

While the transition from Artemis to the Parthian may not be as immediately obvious as that from Phoebus to Artemis, a knowledge of Greek mythology again permits the reader close the gap between the two. In addition to being goddess of the moon, Artemis is also known as goddess of the hunt; as such, she is often depicted with a bow and arrow. This is the same weapon that the Parthian wields to fire his famous "Parthian shot," a shot fired backwards by an archer while retreating on horseback. This imagery allows Labé to link the Parthian with the figure of the beloved.

> The Parthian, shooting his arrow as he leaves the field, is used in a particularly ingenious way, for as well as bringing the images down to human scale, he provides a hint of the conventional arrows and wounds of love—which are *not* mentioned in the second part of the poem; the reader is free to associate the Parthian both with Love shooting arrows into the poet's heart and with the poet's lover fleeing, and causing pain as he goes.[53]

[53] Jondorf, "Petrarchan Variations," 775, italics in the original.

The Parthian then serves as a transitional figure from the mythical to the personal. Having fought for a while, he takes flight ("prent la fuite," 8) and loosens his bow ("son arc il desserre," 8). While the Parthian avoids the dangers of his military encounter, the speaker is not so lucky in her amorous one.

The narratives to which Labé refers in the first half of the poem graft well onto the second half. The male lover, inflamed by passion, spreads his flame to the female beloved. But once she is burning hot, he waters down his desire, retreating from the amorous relationship. As the male figure takes his leave, he presumably inflicts pain and suffering in his wake. However, as with so many other allusions in this poem, this is never stated directly by the speaker; rather, it is only implied through the imagery.

> All the motifs of the octave save one—suffering—occur in the sestet. There is no heart-rending emotionalism or hyperbolic rhetoric, only a simple, or even incomplete, statement, which suggests without being explicit and may gain in power by enlisting in this way the imagination of the reader. Such a technique of classical restraint also enables the full effect of the octave background to come through.[54]

It could be said that the final sestet is dominated by various kinds of absences: the absence of passion on the part of the beloved, an absence of explicit suffering, and (and we shall shortly see) the grammatical absence of speaker. In this regard, Labé's poetic project runs counter to the Narcissistic template offered by the Petrarchan model. The speaker's subjectivity is not a given from the start, but rather something she actively constructs by revising the female position as both lover and poet.

The way Labé uses pronouns in the final sestet is significant in this regard. As in much of her poetry, she often drops the pronoun in her verse, instead letting the

[54] Harvey, *Aesthetics of the Renaissance*, 60.

conjugation of the verb indicate to whom she is referring. While this strategy undoubtedly helps Labé meet rhythmic requirements, it often illustrates the point she is trying to make within her poetry as well. This is particularly evident in the first couplet of the sestet. Unlike in the English translation, which adds in two instances of the subject pronoun *I,* in the original French, the *I (je)* is left out of the text: "When I saw you plaintive once, I consoled you, though / that provoked my fire, which was burning slow" ("Un tems t'ay vù et consolé pleintif, / Et defiant de mon feu peu hatif," 9-10). Here, the *I (je)* is implied by the conjugation of the verb *avoir* in the first-person singular *ay: [je] t'ay vù et consolé.* This absence of the first-person pronoun shows the precariousness that Labé occupies as a female poet. Traditionally, the woman is usually gazed upon and spoken about; her assigned gender role and social place deny her the subjectivity of the gazing and speaking subject. However, this is precisely the position that Labé chooses to adopt. She switches gender roles, placing herself in the position of the looker and consoles her beloved. Exactly how Labé consoles him remains ambiguous, but presumably this involves both actions and words.

Labé challenges Petrarchan norms in other ways. In contrast to male lyric poetry which silences the female beloved, Labé's speech does not silence her beloved. In fact, Labé describes him as "plaintive" ("plaintif," 9). Furthermore, the way in which Labé describes her own sentiments as a slowly burning fire ("feu peu hatif," 10) varies largely from the typical ardor described in love poetry. At first, the speaker is reticent towards her beloved, but comforts him nevertheless. Labé engages in an ingenious play on words between *Et défiant* (and defying) and *édifiant* (edifying). She not only defies her passion, but takes on an active role in constructing it. In doing so,

she defies Petrarchan tropes that relegate the female to a passive role. This refutation also takes place on a poetic level, as Labé vocalizes her amatory experience through her writing. This is perhaps one of the reasons that for Wilson Baldridge, sonnet 16 represents, "the moment of crisis that corresponds to the entrance of the speaking subject into the symbolic. Here, Labé puts the amorous quest and the experience of writing into relation" ("le moment de crise qui correspond à l'entrée du sujet parlant dans le symbolique. Labé met en rapport ici la quête amoureuse et l'expérience de l'écriture").[55] The aggrandizement of Labé's passion is directly responsible for her poetic production and her defiance of traditional masculine norms.

The speaker's change in attitude towards the beloved relates back to the various movements and changes that occur in the octave. One of the most obvious ways Labé creates continuity throughout the poem is through her constant use of temporal markers: "After a time" ("Après qu'un tems," 1), "When" ("Quand," 4, 7) and "Once" ("Un tems," 9). It should be explicitly mentioned that each image or situation that Labé presents (i.e., the changing weather, the shift from day to night, the retreating Parthian, and her own amatory situation) is contained within one sentence, but that these sentences are unequally distributed throughout the poem. In other words, the four sentences do not correspond to the four stanzas of the poem. Nevertheless, Labé uses these four sections to mimic on a larger scale the enclosed rhyme scheme of the two quatrains (ABBA). This structure is repeated through the temporal markers at the beginning of each sentence. While they act as a unifying thread between the octave

[55] Wilson Baldridge, "Le Langage de la séparation chez Louise Labé," *Études littéraires* 20, no. 2 (1987): 68, https://doi.org/10.7202/500803ar. My translation.

and sestet, Labé's manipulation of the formula she established in the octave reveals the extent of her inner turmoil.

All three sentences in the octave follow approximately the same format: temporal marker, past tense, present tense. At the risk of restating what has already been said, it might be helpful to highlight how this format operates within each sentence. The poem begins with the temporal marker to indicate a time in which thunder and hail had beaten the mountain, but now the day comes. Here, both the subject changes (from thunder and hail to a fine day) and the verb tense changes between the past and present tense. Then, when Phoebus has made a circle around the world, he returns towards the ocean and his sister shows herself. In this instance, Phoebus acts in both the past and present tense, but Labé adds a second subject (Artemis) who acts in the present tense. Finally, when the Parthian has fought, he takes flight and loosens his arc. As with the previous example, here there are also two verbs in the present tense, but they both belong to the same subject: the Parthian. Opening each sentence in the past tense allows Labé to plunge the reader into a state of anticipation or suspense which she then resolves in the second clause.

Labé begins the sestet by echoing this very format: She starts with the temporal marker ("un temps," 9) and the past tense verbs "saw" and "consoled." However, it quickly becomes apparent that the temporality of these last six lines is much richer and more complex than that of the preceding octave. Labé mixes tenses, alternating multiple times from present tense ("suis," 12; "es," 14) to past tense ("tu m'as embrasee," 11; "tu as…arrosee." 13), and uses both the imperfect tense ("voulois," 12;

"soulois,"14) and the gerund ("defiant," 10) for the first time. This shifting temporality is best exemplified in the last four lines.

> Mais maintenant que tu m'as embrasee,
> Et suis au point auquel tu me voulois:
> Tu as ta flame en quelque eau arrosee,
> Et es plus froit qu'estre je ne soulois. 11-14
>
> But now that you have given me your embrace
> and I am just at the point where you wanted me,
> you have quenched your own flame in some watery place;
> now it's colder than my own could ever be.

While the inclusion of the marker "but now" ("mais maintentant," 11) suggests a shift to the present tense, Labé does not move into the present tense immediately. Instead, she uses the past tense (*passé composé*) to explain that her beloved has embraced her. In the next line Labé actually transitions into the present tense to assert that her feelings have changed from what they previously were: "I am at the point where you wanted me" ("je suis au point auquel tu me voulais," 12). Here, however, Labé's use of the imperfect tense alerts her reader that her beloved's feelings have also changed. He has watered down his passion, which is now colder than Labé's ever was (13-14). The disjunction of tenses in these lines indicates that the speaker and beloved are not in conjunction on an emotional level; they always remain separated by time.

Not only do the verb tenses mimic the muddled emotions of each party, but so too does the rhyme scheme. While the last four verses are orthographically separated into two rhyming pairs (*embrassée*/*arrosée* and *voulais*/*soulais*), when read or spoken out loud, these endings begin to resemble each other; they are certainly less distinct than the alternation between the *-erre* and *-u* endings of the first octave. This highlights the importance of the text as a physical and visual document. Emotions that

in the moment might seem misplaced, confused, or out of time, are catalogued, clarified and more easily comprehended through the process of reading and writing.

The use of the words "but now" ("mais maintenant") at the beginning of line eleven indicates not only a temporal shift, but the shift in tone of the final four verses. In the opening line of the sestet, the speaker is the acting subject: "When I saw you plaintive once, I consoled you" ("Un tems t'ay vù et consolé pleintif," 9). The beloved, in contrast, is introduced though the direct object pronoun *t'*. The speaker and beloved change grammatical roles with the phrase "tu m'as embrasee" ("you kissed me," 11). He becomes the active subject, kissing the speaker and putting her where "you wanted me" ("tu me voulois," 10). In both of these assertions, the beloved is given agency through the use of the second person pronoun *you* (*tu),* while the speaker takes on the role of the direct object. The fact that the beloved begins to dominate the sestet is reinforced sonorously through the inclusion of words with a hard *t* sound: *temps, t', pleintif, hatif, maintenant, tu,* and *ta*. It is at the exact moment when Labé speaks about her beloved's flame diminishing that all the *t* sounds in the poem stop.

Labé's again plays with the usage of pronouns in the final tercet. Unlike the English translation which adds in the first-person pronoun, the French again omits the *I (je)*: "I am just at the point where you wanted me" ("suis au point auquel tu me voulais," 11). As before, the subject is only implied through the conjugation (*suis*) of the verb "to be" (*être*). While the beloved's desire is explicitly stated ("you wanted me;" "tu me voulais"), the female speaker's desire is only implied through the beloved's. As the beloved undergoes a change of heart, his grammatical presence within the poem shifts instead to an absence. For the first time, the second person

pronoun *you (tu)* is omitted. As in the previous example, it is implied through the conjugation (*es*) of the verb *être*: "Et es plus froit qu'estre je ne soulois" (14). The second person has disappeared both metaphorically and linguistically, leaving behind a solitary "je," the first and only one of the entire poem. For this reason, the English translation needs to be amended. The verse "now it's colder than my own could ever be" incorrectly makes it seem as if the beloved's flame is the grammatical subject, when in fact it is the beloved himself. Instead, I would propose the translation "And are colder than I used to be." Admittedly, the last clause of the poem is a bit difficult to translate. *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1694) defines the now obsolete verb *souloir* as "having the custom of" ("Avoir de coutsume").[56] Therefore, the last line would literally translate to "and are colder than to be I have the custom." However, as this formulation proves rather clunky in English, I believe that "than I used to be" provides a happy medium between capturing on the one hand the repetitiveness implied by the verb *souloir* and its conjugation in the imperfect tense, and on the other hand the extent to which the speaker's own subjectivity is at stake in this last annunciation. Ironically, it is through the beloved's rejection that the speaker can find her fullest expression of the self; her amatory misfortunes are tied directly to her poetic becoming.

[56] *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, vol. 2 (Paris: Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1694) in "Dictionnaires d'autrefois," *The ARTFL Project* (Chicago: The University of Chicago), s.v. "souloir," accessed August 3, 2020, https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/publicdicos/query?report=bibliography&head=souloir. All translations from the *Dictionnaire* are my own.

Sonnet 6: A Literary Conquest

Similarly to how she does in Sonnet 16, Labé also moves from the general to the particular in sonnet 6. The two sonnets share a similar structure, in that they both deal with astrological and mythological characters in the octave before turning to the poetic speaker herself in the sestet.

Deus ou trois fois bienheureus le retour
De ce cler Astre, et plus heureus encore
Ce que son œil de regarder honore.
Que celle là recevroit un bon jour,

Qu'elle pourroit se vanter d'un bon tour
Qui baiseroit le plus beau don de Flore,
Le mieus sentant que jamais vid Aurore,
Et y feroit sur ses levres sejour!

C'est à moy seule à qui ce bien est dù,
Pour tant de pleurs et tant de tems perdu:
Mais le voyant, tant lui feray de feste,

Tant emploiray de mes yeux le pouvoir,
Pour dessus lui plus de credit avoir,
Qu'en peu de temps feray grande conqueste.

Twice or thrice blessed the return
Of this bright star, and more blessed still
Whatever his eye honors with a look.
Oh, how that woman would receive a good day,
How she could boast about good fortune,
She who could kiss Flora's loveliest gift,
The most fragrant Aurora ever saw,
And there upon his lips adjourn!
It is to me alone this reward is due,
For so many tears and so much wasted time.
But seeing him, I'll greet him with such joy,
I'll use the power of my eyes so well
To win from him what I am owed,
That in no time I'll conquer him completely.[57]

[57] This translation is adapted from Jones, *Currency of Eros*, 163-64. I have copied the original version below: "Twice or thrice blessed the return / Of this bright star, and

In the first part of the poem (1-3), Labé acknowledges Petrarchan and gender norms; she recognizes both the value of the beloved's presence and the honor his gaze bestows. Referred to as "this bright star" ("ce cler Astre," 2), the male beloved dominates the first sentence of the poem. His return is not only blessed, but "twice of thrice blessed" ("deus ou trois fois bienheureus," 1). Labé inverts the sentence structure by placing the adjective before the noun (normally, in French, it would go after) and does away with any verbs. The quantification at the beginning of the poem combined with inverted sentence structure gives the clause an impersonal and matter-of-fact air. As welcome as the beloved's return may be, Labé recognizes that whatever he looks at is "more blessed still" ("plus heureus encore," 2). The parallel structure between the first statement and the second one creates subject/object confusion. While in the first line the noun ("the return;" "le retour") is described as blessed, in the third verse it is not immediately clear to what the *ce que* (3) refers. Grammatically it could refer to either a person or a thing. Given that in the first line it referred to a thing, the reader is predisposed to interpret it as another intangible noun. It is only in the fourth line of the poem, with Labé's clarifying use of *celle-là,* that it becomes obvious that the grammatical thing upon which the beloved is gazing is in fact a woman.

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more blessed still / Whatever his eye honors with a look /
What a wonderful day that woman would see, / What a great good fortune she could claim, / She who could kiss Flora's loveliest gift, / The
most fragrant flower Aurora ever saw, / And rest a long time upon his lips! /
To me alone this reward is due, / In return for my tears and so much wasted time. / But when I saw him / I'd greet him with such joy, / I'd use the power of my eyes so well /
To win from him what I am owed / That in no time I'd conquer him completely."

The precise identity of this woman remains ambiguous however. Even critics argue over who she is. In the context of this quatrain, it makes sense to interpret this star as the sun, who brings with him the nice, fine, or wonderful day ("bon jour," 4) that the woman receives. François Rigolot therefore believes that the woman is the sun's female counterpart: the moon.[58] However, Deborah Lesko Baker argues that

> Another plausible variation on this popular lyric coupling would be to identify the "she" with Aurora herself, goddess of the dawn (and a sister of both Apollo and Luna), who is specifically named in line 7 and is kissed by the daytime blooming of Flora's (the divinity of spring and flowers) most fragrant gift—most likely, as Rigolot notes, the rose.[59]

While the obscurity of the reference is undoubtedly note-worthy, what interests me personally has more to do with how Labé describes this imaginary figure behaving than her identity in and of itself.

The fourth line of the poem, which first introduces the female figure, can be read in multiple ways. It can be read as part of the first quatrain, that is, as a continuation of the opening three lines. In this interpretation, the female subject appears quite passive, simply receiving "un bon jour." This expression itself is more ambiguous than it would first appear. As already noted, "un bon jour" can be interpreted as a nice day, so that the sun's presence brightens the woman's day. That being said, the expression "un bon jour" is also used to refer to a holiday, particularly a religious one.[60] This interpretation is in keeping with the description of the beloved's

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[58] Louise Labé, *Oeuvres Complètes,* 124n2.

[59] Labé, *Complete Poetry and Prose,* 240n48.

[60] *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française,* vol. 1 (Paris: Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1694) in "Dictionnaires d'autrefois," *The ARTFL Project* (Chicago: The University of

return as blessed and the woman even more blessed for attracting his attentions. Finally, I would argue that "un bon jour" could also be read a "un bonjour," that is to say a verbal greeting. This last interpretation is particularly interesting when you read the fourth verse not as part of the quatrain (in accordance with how a traditional sonnet would be read), but according to the punctuation, which is to say as part of the second sentence.

The significance of the fourth line changes when it is read in conjunction with the line that follows: "Oh, how that woman would receive a good day, // How she could boast about good fortune" ("Que celle là recevroit un bon jour, // Qu'elle pourroit se vanter d'un bon tour," 4-5). Instead of only receiving value from someone else, the woman now creates it for herself by adopting the role of the speaking subject. By imagining a scenario in which the woman can brag about her experience, Labé allows the woman to use her own speech to add value to her beloved's affections. She transitions from an objectified entity that receives honor and glory from the male gaze and from male speech to an active participant in the linguistic economy. The extent of this participation depends on the interpretation of the phase "un bon tour." This expression is again difficult to translate given the many definitions of the word *tour*. All the English translations I have consulted either ignore the phrase completely, or, as Jones does, translate it along the lines of "luck" or "fortune."[61] I would like to offer

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Chicago), s.v. "jour," accessed September 29, 2020, https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/publicdicos/query?report=bibliography&head=%22JOUR%22&start=0&end=0.

[61] See Labé, *Complete Poetry and Prose*, 183; Louise Labé, *Louise Labé's Complete Works*, ed. and trans. Edith R. Farrell (Troy, N.Y.: Whitston Pub. Co.: 1986), 102;

several definitions from *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1694) that seem relevant.

> *Tour,* se dit aussi, De la maniere de traiter, de conduire une affaire… *il a donné un bon tour à cela*
> Il se prend aussi fig. Pour trait d' habileté, ruse, finesse. *Il luy a joüé d' un tour… voila un bon tour.*
> *Tour,* En parlant d' éloquence, de poësie, de style, de periode, se prend pour la maniere dont on exprime ses pensées, & dont on arrange ses termes, soit en parlant, soit en escrivant… *ces vers sont d' un beau tour.*[62]

> Tour, said of the manner of treating, of conducting an affair. *He gave a good* tour *to that.*
> Used figuratively for a stroke of skill, cunning, finesse. *He played a* tour *on him. That's a good* tour.
> Tour, in speaking of eloquence, of poetry, of style, of a period, describes the manner in which one expresses thoughts, in which terms are arranged, either in speaking or writing…*the verses are of a beautiful* tour.

How then are we supposed to interpret the phrase "un bon tour"? Is the woman simply taking credit for a situation that befell her? Or do we give the woman even more agency? Is she boasting about the way she craftily manipulated the situation to attract the beloved's attention? Is she spinning what happened to her advantage to increase her own cultural currency? Or, perhaps most radically yet, could the woman be

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Louise Labé, *Sonnets of Louise Labé "La Belle Cordière,"* trans. Alta Lind Cook (Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 1950), https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015014616513?urlappend=%3Bsignon=swle:https://shibidp.cit.cornell.edu/idp/shibboleth.; Louise Labé, *Love Sonnets,* trans. Frederic Prokosch (New York: New Directions, 1947), https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015004644558?urlappend=%3Bsignon=swle:https://shibidp.cit.cornell.edu/idp/shibboleth.

[62] *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, vol. 2 (Paris : Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1694) in "Dictionnaires d'autrefois," The ARTFL Project (Chicago: The University of Chicago), s.v. "tour," accessed September 29, 2020, https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/publicdicos/query?report=bibliography&head=tour&start=0&end=0.

expressing herself well? Labé herself certainly is. She uses her poetic skills to perform precisely the *bon tour* she ascribes to the female figure in the poem.

As the poem progresses, the female figure takes on a more and more active role. She would kiss her beloved ("baiseroit," 6) and would linger upon his lips ("ferait…sejour" literally "to do" or "to make" sojourn, 8). The verbs, all in the conditional form, become increasingly bold, with the woman eventually pausing to savor a kiss. While this expression of female desire would already be read as audacious, Labé continues to challenge gender norms by likening the man, and in particular his lips, to "Flora's loveliest gift, / The most fragrant Aurora ever saw" ("le plus beau don de Flore / Le mieus sentant que jamais vid Aurore," 6-7). This most beautiful and best smelling gift is most likely a flower, probably the rose. As Jones notes, Labé's "description of the man as Flora's gift, the rose used in classical and medieval poetry as the symbol for a desirable maiden, brings about a change in gender and visual perspective."[63] Labé "flips the script"; she reappropriates the stereotypes men have used in lyric poetry to describe women and applies the same tropes to the male beloved. Significantly,

> the syntax gradually takes the woman through a reversal of roles which repositions the man as the object of three women's acts – the recipient of the female lover's kiss, a gift given by one goddess, Flora, and the source of a fragrance enjoyed by another, Aurora … This is not the exchange of a partial portrait of a woman between men, but the handing on of a desirable man from the goddesses of spring and dawn to a mortal woman.[64]

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[63] Jones, *Currency of Eros,* 163.

[64] Ann Rosalind Jones, "'Blond chef, grande conqueste': Feminist Theories of the Gaze, the *blason anatomique,* and Louise Labé's Sonnet 6," in *Distant Voices Still Heard: Contemporary Readings of French Renaissance Literature*, eds. John O'Brien Jr. and Malcolm Quainton (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 101.

In this regard, a female economy is established with significantly different rules than would typically be found in lyric poetry.

Labé heightens the sensuality of this passage by intermingling sight, smell, touch, and sound. Labé combines sight and smell through the metaphor of the rose. She not only comments on the rose's beauty ("le plus beau don de Flore," 6), but describes Flora's gift as "the most *fragrant* Aurora ever *saw*" ("le mieus *sentant* que jamais *vid* Aurore," 7, emphasis mine). Physical touch and closeness are implied through the kiss. Moreover, Labé imbues the scene with a sonorous quality through the alliteration of the "s" in "sur ses levres sejour" (8).

In the octave, Labé recognizes that the position of the speaking and gazing subject is not historically or traditionally open to women. The complex mythological referents and conditional verbs allow Labé to temper the radicality of her erotic vision; after all, she is only imagining a hypothetical scenario in which an anonymous female figure would kiss her Star. Yet, Labé places herself in exactly this position in the sestet. She suddenly shifts the focus onto herself with the declaration "It is to me alone this reward is due" ("C'est à moy seule à qui ce bien est dù," 9). Labé's use of the present tense makes this statement even more striking. While she cites her tears and lost time to justify why she deserves notice, Labé's prosody also merits attention. The first two lines of the tercet are especially melodic: in the first line Labé carries over the "s" sound from her sensual dream with *c'est, seule,* and *ce* while the following line alternates between the hard *p* and *t* sounds ("Pour tant de pleurs et tant

de tems perdu," 10). Labé uses this rhyming couplet to exhibit the power of her pen and insist that notice fall upon her.

In the last four lines of the poem, Labé enters into the visual economy by using the power of her gaze to conquer her beloved.

> Mais le voyant, tant lui feray de feste,
> Tant emploiray de mes yeux le pouvoir,
> Pour dessus lui plus de credit avoir,
> Qu'en peu de temps feray grande conqueste.
>
> But seeing him, I'll greet him with such joy,
> I'll use the power of my eyes so well
> To win from him what I am owed,
> That in no time I'll conquer him completely.

As in the previous poem, there is a definite shift in tone after the "but" ("mais," 11), which in this instance accompanies a shift in perspective. The beloved's gaze now becomes the speaker's as she takes on the active role. Her double loss of so many tears and so much time wasted ("*Tant de* pleurs et *tant de* temps perdu," 10, emphasis mine) is mirrored by her insistence that she'll greet him with so much joy and use the power of her eye so well ("*tant* lui ferai de fête // *tant* emploierai de mes yeux le pouvoir," 11-12). Instead of using the conditional tense as she did with female figure in the first half of the poem, Labé uses the future tense when referring to her own actions. This is an important and unusual move on Labé's part. As Colette Winn suggests, normally "when she [Labé] says 'I' it is always in the hypothetical form, as if the possibility of being an absolute subject who says 'I' where still forbidden."[65] Here, Labé adopts a stronger verb tense by claiming what she *will* do instead of what she *would* do.

[65] Winn, "Mirrors of the Subject," 122.

Nevertheless, when she does so, the "I" or "je" is dropped; as in sonnet 16, the subject that corresponds to the verb is implied through its conjugation. However, it would be a mistake to read this as an example of subjectivity effaced. In fact, I would argue the very opposite.

There are three instances in which the "je" is absent but in which Labé nevertheless declares what she will do: "I'll greet him with such joy" ("[je] lui feray de feste," 11), "I'll use the power of my eyes" ("[j'] emploiray de mes yeux le pouvoir, 12), and "I'll conquer him completely" ("[je] feray grande conquest," 14). In each of these instances, Labé is claiming a type of mastery. According to *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1694), the expression "faire feste à" is used to mean "to give him a warm welcome, a good treatment accompanied by caresses" ("luy faire un bon accueïl, un bon traittement accompagné de carresses").[66] Labé does not shy away from expressing verbal or physical affection.

> Labé, planning seduction by fair means or foul, declares her confidence in both her words and her look. 'Faire fête à' often means 'to flatter'; she will capture the man with her eloquence. And she describes the effect of her eyes, the 'grande conqueste', by transgendering the military metaphors commonly used in Renaissance men's treatment of love as war. In the final line of the woman poet, the female lover as warrior courts and conquers the man.[67]

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[66] *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française,* vol. 1 (Paris: Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1694) in "Dictionnaires d'autrefois," *The ARTFL Project* (Chicago: The University of Chicago), s.v. "feste," accessed April 21, 2021, https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/publicdicos/query?report=bibliography&head=feste&start=0&end=0.

[67] Jones, "Blond chef," 102.

The poetic "I" is clearly present and active even if it is not explicitly mentioned. It is through Labé's interactions with (and conquest of) her beloved that we get a sense of her strength.

It is worth taking a moment to consider more explicitly the ways in which Labé's amatory conquest functions in this poem, as there is much more at stake than winning over her beloved's affections. Discontent in simply occupying the role of the object upon which the male gazes, Labé engages her beloved visually, promising that "I'll use the power of my eyes so well / To win from him what I am owed" ("Tant emploiray de mes yeux le pouvoir, / Pour dessus lui plus de credit avoir," 11-12). Labé adds a visual component to her verbal and physical conquest. She also imbues her victory with a financial subtext.

> She uses the word 'crédit' here in a sense very different from the courtly language in which it simply means 'favour'. 'Crédit' carries the same mercantile connotations as did 'créance' (a financial obligation, a literal debt) in the sixteenth century…This language of debt-collecting, rather than the claim to erotic reward of courtly love poetry, may well be related to Labé's social status as the daughter of a wealthy artisan-merchant, Pierre Charly, and the wife of another ropemaker-chandler, Ennemond Perrin.[68]

This is not the only example of economic language that can be found in this sonnet. The line "It is to me alone this reward is due" ("C'est à moy seule à qui ce bien est dù," 9) can also be read with commercial undertones. Labé is claiming a good ("bien") that is owed her, one that she has already paid for with tears and time. While the extent to which Labé envisions her conquest as a financial one can be debated, she does seem to be balancing the books so to speak.

[68] Jones, "Blond chef," 102.

Finally, Labé's amatory conquest must be considered in tandem with her poetic one. Labé's triumph at the end of the poem includes not only the mastery of her beloved, but of the genre of poetry as well. To this end, the rhyme scheme is significant, as Labé rhymes "feste" (a party or celebration) with "conqueste" (conquest) and "pouvoir" (power) with "avoir" (to have). Moreover, Labé's insistence to not only equal her beloved but to end up with the upper hand evokes her introductory epistle, where Labé speaks of her desire to see women "surpass or equal men" ("passer ou égaler les hommes").[69] Labé herself is clearly up to the task. Her writings not only engage with poetry at the same high standard as men's poetry does, but her willingness to disrupt the traditional power dynamics of lyric poetry ensures that her works continue to generate economic, cultural, and intellectual value to this day.

[69] Labé, *Complete Poetry and Prose,* 42-43.

CHAPTER 2

CATHERINE DES ROCHES' "AGNODICE," PART 1

ENVY: AN ORIGINS STORY

Versions of Agnodice: Ancient and Modern

In 2016, the French cartoonist Pénélope Bagieu released a feminist comic book entitled *Culottées: des femmes qui ne font ce qu'elles veulent* (*Brazen: Rebel Ladies Who Rocked the World*, 2018).[1] According to the back cover, this series presents anecdotes of heroines "who invented their destiny" ("qui ont inventé leur destin").[2] The thirty women chosen for this two-volume series come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Their country of origin, the time period in which they lived, and their chosen professions range drastically from one selection to the next. While relatively few names would be familiar to the average reader, Bagieu tells each story in a concise, compelling, and humorous way. Her biographies, which range anywhere from three to seven pages, give a brief overview of each woman's life and work. All chapters follow the same basic structure. They all begin with a portrait of the heroine contained in the same ornamental, oval shaped frame. A banderole at the bottom of the frame indicates the subject's date of birth and death. The stories are always drawn in three horizontal panels, typically with three frames in each panel. Each chapter closes with a two-page graphic drawing related to the protagonist's story.

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[1] Pénélope Bagieu, *Culottées: des femmes qui ne font ce qu'elles veulent*, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 2016); *Brazen: Rebel Ladies Who Rocked the World*, trans. Montana Kane (New York: Roaring Book Press, 2018).

[2] My translation.

Among the biographical sketches in *Culottée*'s first volume is that of Agnodice, a female gynecologist from ancient Athens (ca. 350 BCE). According to Bagieu, Agnodice was inspired to become an obstetrician after witnessing women in her family suffer and die during childbirth. Since women were not allowed to practice medicine in Athens at the time, Agnodice travelled to Egypt for her studies. Upon her return, she disguised herself as a man in order to work. As Agnodice's success and popularity grew, the male physicians accused her of abusing her patients. Under trial for malpractice, Agnodice revealed her true identity as a woman, which only angered the men further. Luckily, Agnodice's patients banded together to defend her; they convinced their husbands to acquit Agnodice and to allow women to practice medicine.

Bagieu makes no mention of which materials she consulted in preparation for her work. Her comic book has no preface, introduction, conclusion, or any notes that could offer insight into how she conducted her background research or from where she pulled her source material. However, the earliest mention of Agnodice is from Gaius Julius Hyginus' (c. 64 BCE-17 CE) *Fabulae.* It is believed that Hyginus translated a now lost Greek text into Latin. As such, Agnodice's real name would have been Hagnodike, meaning "chaste before justice."[3] As such, her name references the charges of impropriety laid out against her. [4] Since Hyginus introduces Agnodice in a

[3] Helen King. "Agnodike and the Profession of Medicine," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, New Series, no. 32 (212) (1986): 53-77, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44696917.

[4] Not everyone agrees with this interpretation. Tilde Sankovitch believes the Greek root should be *agnos* (unknown) instead of *hagnos* (chaste). She offers the following

section of the text that refers to "Discoverers and Their Discoveries," he implies that Agnodice "discovered a means to provide for [female] well-being."[5] However, critics like Helen King claim that Agnodice did not discover anything *per se*, but rather learned her craft from a male mentor.[6] Moreover, she makes the point that while her teacher's identity as a historical figure has been confirmed, "*His* reality does not prove hers."[7] Despite her apocryphal status, Agnodice has been used in the history of medicine to set an important precedent regarding women studying and practicing both medicine and midwifery. I am much less interested in whether or not Agnodice was real than I am in how her story has been adapted and retold. As *Culottées* demonstrates, Agnodice's story has made it beyond the field of medicine and into popular culture, which speaks to its compelling nature.

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interpretation of Agnodice's name: "'The Unknown' is full of ideological resonances, evoking the idea of women deeply unknown in their intellectual and creative needs and capacities; of women condemned to un-knowing each other and themselves, and so their potential creativity; of women's problematic and often limited access to knowing through learning, only obtained at the price of occulting female identity; of the danger yet the need inherent in knowing and being known. Agnodice's name is an accusation and a manifesto. It is, in all its resonances, a fitting name for the female Muse she represents." See "The Dames des Roches: The Female Muse," in *French Women Writers and the Book: Myths of Access and Desire* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1988), 64, 67n12.

[5] *Apollodorus'* Library *and Hyginus'* Fabulae*: Two Handbooks of Greek Mythology*, trans. R. Scott Smith and Stephen Trzaskoma (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2007), 274.13.

[6] King, "Agnodike," 53.

[7] King, "Agnodike," 54.

Agnodice's story lays out the difficulties faced by women who seek to question established norms, shows the risks associated with trying to enter a male dominated profession, and exposes the various systems that are disadvantageous to women (such as medicine, education, and law). Yet, despite these obstacles, Agnodice proves herself to be just as (if not more) capable than her male colleagues. Her story demonstrates the power of—and the need for—a community of women who help each other.

Culottées, which Bagieu has dedicated to her daughters, is directed towards a female readership. A simple glance at the graphic imagery that follows Agnodice's story makes it clear that Bagieu hopes to inspire women and to cultivate a sense of power and support amongst them. The two pages that follow Agnodice's story illustrate this point well.[8] They are filled with images of various types of Greek pottery which depict female empowerment and community. Several pieces show women dressed up as men, in the manner or style of Agnodice. One amphora portrays naked, pregnant women proudly parading their bodies. Others have women high fiving, holding hands, or otherwise touching arms and elbows. In case of any ambiguity, the Venus gender symbol abounds.

Bagieu takes artistic liberties not only with the visual aspect of the text, but with the textual aspect as well. Her version of Agnodice's story varies in some slight—yet significant—ways from the one told by Hyginus. One of the most obvious differences between Bagieu and Hyginus' texts has to do with the justification as to

[8] Bagieu, *Culottées,* 100-1; *Brazen,* 98-99.

why women were not allowed to practice medicine in the first place. Hyginus does not offer any sort of explanation. He begins his text matter-of-factly, simply writing, "The ancients did not have midwives, and because of this many women died from a sense of shame because the Athenians made sure that no slave or woman learned medicine."[9] It is unclear how to interpret these lines. Some interpret them as meaning that women never practiced midwifery in Athens before Agnodice's time. Others, who find this an impossible state of affairs, interpret them more leniently. They believe that the law must have recently changed to forbid women the right to practice. As a result, women protested by refusing to see their new, male midwives.[10]

Bagieu favors this latter interpretation in her incipit but frames her narrative differently. Instead of opening her text with a sentence explaining the historical context, Bagieu focuses in on Agnodice from the beginning and quickly establishes her as the protagonist of the story. As with every story in Bagieu's collection, the text begins with a portrait of Agnodice. The next frame, which shows a stork flying over Athens, announces when and where Agnodice is born. The following sentence reads, "As a child, she witnesses women in her family suffer (and die) in childbirth…usually because they try to manage things themselves…rather than call on a (male) physician for help" ("Enfant, elle voit des femmes de sa famille souffrir (et mourir) en couches…généralement parce qu'elles ont préféré se débrouiller entre elles…plutôt

[9] *Hyginus'* Fabulae, 274.10.

[10] King, "Agnodike," 55.

que faire venir un médecin (homme) pour les soigner").[11] This sentence is split across three images, each one illustrating the sentence fragment that accompanies it.

The first image clearly illustrates the women's suffering. Agnodice, behind a wall in the background, peers around a doorway at two women in the foreground, so that the perspective is from inside the room. The woman on the right gives birth, the one on the left stands beside her with a worried expression on her face. The next frame is a close-up of Agnodice looking at a bowl of blood (some of which has spilled) standing by the doorway. She has a look of concern on her face. The image in the third frame is of a hand drawing the curtain in the doorway shut to keep Agnodice out. This time, the perspective is from outside of the birthing room. In the same way that Agnodice is excluded from the scene, so too is the reader because of the change in perspective. This exclusion justifies Agnodice's motivation for learning medicine. While in Hyginus' account Agnodice has an innate desire to learn medicine, Bagieu uses Agnodice's personal experience to explain this desire. The fact that Agnodice witnessed other women's suffering firsthand, but was ultimately unable to help, provides both a visual and emotion catalyst for her actions.

Agnodice's narrative is marked by division, both visually and textually. Bagieu draws important distinctions between the characters in terms of age and gender. The text makes clear that Agnodice's exclusion from the birthing scene based on her age; she is only a child. The women, however, rely on one another for help because they do not trust the male physicians. In the original French, Bagieu writes that the women

[11] Bagieu, *Culottées*, 97; *Brazen*, 95.

"preferred" to manage things themselves. Unlike the verb "to try" which implies some level of uncertainty about women's capabilities, "to prefer" implies a level of choice and agency not present in the translation. It also subtly underscores the mistrust that exists between the men and women. Similarly to how the women refuse to let Agnodice into the birthing room because of her age, they refuse the men because of their gender.

If the women prefer not to allow men into the birthing chamber, it is because the men have made it illegal for women to practice medicine:

> En effet, les Athéniens ont récemment interdit l'exercice de la médecine aux femmes, les soupçonnant de pratiquer des avortements. (Détruisant ainsi le lien de confiance qui existait jusqu'alors entre les femmes médecins et leurs patientes.)[12]
>
> You see, the Athenians had recently barred women from practicing medicine, as they suspected they were providing abortions. (Thus destroying the bond that once existed between women doctors and their patients.)[13]

Bagieu, unlike Hyginus, provides a reason why women were not allowed to practice medicine: they were suspected of practicing abortions. While it is difficult to say for certain, one possible source of inspiration for this explanation could be from Kate Hurd-Mead's *A History of the Women in Medicine* (1938). She includes Agnodice in the chapter on Greek medical women and adds to her account of the story that women were "accused of the ancient crime of performing abortions."[14]

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[12] Bagieu, *Culottées*, 97.

[13] Bagieu, *Brazen*, 95.

[14] Kate Campbell Hurd-Mead, *A History of Women in Medicine* (Haddam, Conn.: The Haddam Press, 1938), 45.

For Bagieu, the interdiction to practice medicine destroys "le lien de confiance qui existait jusqu'alors entre les femmes médecins et leurs patients" ("the bond that once existed between women doctors and their patients"). While the phrase "lien de confiance" is translated as "bond," it literally means "link of confidence." The French incapsulates a bit more explicitly the faith, trust, and security that existed between women before they were denied this sense of community. Within the first page of her text, Bagieu neatly establishes the obstacles facing Agnodice, namely a lack of access, a lack of knowledge, and a lack of community. While Agnodice overcomes all these obstacles, it is worth looking in greater detail at precisely how she does so.

Agnodice travels to Egypt to complete her education since women were allowed to study medicine there. Ironically, she does so "under the guise of visiting a sick friend" ("prétextant une visite à une amie malade").[15] Agnodice uses women's care for one another as an alibi for her trip. While this informal, female form of care is deemed acceptable, Agnodice seeks the education and mastery afforded to males. In Bagieu's rendering of Agnodice's story, Agnodice's competence is at stake.

> Sa solide (et secrète) formation en poche, elle revient en Grèce, bien décidée à venir en aide aux femmes d'Athènes. Elle se résout alors à se déguiser en homme pour pouvoir exercer. Elle rencontre d'abord les mêmes réticences que ses confrères. Mais un jour, elle sauve la vie d'une de ses patientes, qui parle à ses amies de son médecin pas comme les autres. Le bouche-à-oreille fait son œuvre, et Agnodice devient très vite "le" gynécologue d'Athènes. Les autres médecins commencent à s'agacer de ce mystérieux monopole, et finissent par accuser Agnodice d'abuser de ses patientes mariées.[16]

[15] Bagieu, *Culottées*, 98; *Brazen*, 96.

[16] Bagieu, *Culottées*, 98-99.

> With solid (and secretive) training under her belt, she returns to Greece, fully determined to help the women of Athens. She must resort to dressing up as a man. At first, she encounters the same reticence as her male colleagues. But one day, she saves the life of a patient, who tells all her girlfriends about her one-of-a-kind doc. Word gets around and Agnodice quickly becomes *the* go-to ob-gyn in Athens. The other physicians are a little irked by the unusual monopoly, and eventually accuse Agnodice of seducing her married patients.[17]

It is no coincidence that Bagieu describes Agnodice's training as "solid (and secretive" ("solide [et secrète]") since a sense of secrecy pervades the story. While Hyginus disguises Agnodice as a man before embarking on her studies, Bagieu has her don her disguise only upon her return to Greece. That being said, she does keep her gender identity to herself for longer, never letting her female patients in on her secret. Thus, she encounters the same reticence as her colleagues, who are referred to in French as "confrères" (literally, "brothers" or "fellows"). However, Agnodice's skills as a medic set her apart. She saves the life of a patient and afterwards becomes known as "le" ("the," masculine) ob-gyn of Athens by the women, a nomenclature that fuses her popularity and new gender identity into one. Agnodice profits from word of mouth ("le bouche-à-oreille")—a type of female economy—so much so that her reputation begins to threaten her male colleagues'. Her services become so popular that the men lose out on business and begin to get annoyed ("commence à s'agacer"). Once Agnodice becomes a threat to the monopoly men have established, they accuse her of taking advantage of ("s'abuser de") her patients.

Hyginus' text presents things slightly differently. Agnodice encounters reluctance on the part of the women to be treated, but "would lift up her tunic and

[17] Bagieu, *Brazen*, 96-97.

prove that she was a woman."[18] She uses the gesture as a means of establishing trust and commonality with her patients. Ultimately her gender persuades women to work with her. The accusations levied are slightly different too. In Bagieu's text, the men only accuse Agnodice of malpractice. In Hyginus's version, the men also accuse Agnodice's patients of pretending to be sick.[19] In other words, the men believe them to be complicit in Agnodice's scheme. Consequently, the scene in the tribunal unfolds slightly differently. In Hyginus' version, women speak directly to their husbands, proclaiming: "you are not our husbands but our enemies, for you have condemned the woman who discovered a means to provide for our well-being."[20] Distinctions are drawn between husband and wives, men and women, doctors and patients, friends and enemies.

In Bagieu's account, Agnodice only reveals her gender once—in front of the tribunal. When Agnodice exposes herself, it is not intended as a gesture of solidarity, but rather one to prove her innocence. Incidentally, the women are not present at the tribunal, and therefore do not witness this event. They only show up on the scene afterwards and "chastise their husbands, and tell the doctors it was their own fault for being so lame" ("incendient leurs maris, et font remarquer aux médecins qu'ils n'avaient qu`à pas être aussi nuls").[21] By transforming direct discourse into reported

[18] *Hyginus'* Fabulae, 274.11.

[19] *Hyginus'* Fabulae, 274.12.

[20] *Hyginus'* Fabulae, 274.13.

[21] Bagieu, *Culottées,* 99; *Brazen,* 97.

discourse, Bagieu renders this scene less dramatic and impactful than in Hyginus' account. Not only is the format altered, but the content as well. Instead of designating their husbands as enemies and Agnodice as a discoverer, the women in Bagieu's comic simply chastise men for their incompetence. Bagieu once again focuses more on the professional than the personal. This is not to say that Bagieu's text is inferior to Hyginus', but simply that she has a different vision for Agnodice than the original author. Bagieu places the emphasis on Agnodice's competence and capacity to rival men, and less on female community.

The Figure of Envy in Catherine des Roches' "Agnodice"

Bagieu is not the only one to have co-opted this story for her own ends. The sixteenth-century French poet Catherine des Roches also includes Agnodice in her work. She writes a narrative poem about her in *Les Oeuvres* (1578). While her text may nowadays be relegated to academic circles, Catherine's work would have been widely read and circulated during her time.

> The Dames des Roches, mère et fille (mother and daughter), as they were commonly called, rank among the best known and most prolific French women writers of the sixteenth century. Celebrated for their learning and uncommon collaborative mother-daughter bond, they distinguished themselves for their bold assertion of women's right to *auctoritas* (poetic authority) in the realm of belles lettres.[22]

It is precisely this right to *auctoritas* that is at the heart of Catherine's adaptation of Agnodice's story. Her rewriting of this story makes it not only about biological

[22] Madeleine and Catherine des Roches, *From Mother and Daughter: Poems, Dialogues, and Letters of Les Dames Des Roches,* ed. and trans. Anne R. Larsen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 1.

reproduction, but literary and textual reproduction as well. In Catherine's version, the men not only forbid the women from studying medicine, but from studying point blank. Husbands, envious of their wives, ban them completely from books and letters. This causes the women incredible physical and emotional distress. Through a stunning verbal and physical display, she heals the women and convinces the men to allow women to pursue an education. By creating a story in which reading, writing, and rhetoric are synonymous with female health and happiness, Catherine presents women's access to education not as a privilege but rather a fundamental need.

Catherine substantially expands Agnodice's story by introducing the figure of Envy into the narrative. While the poem is 177 lines in total, Agnodice is not mentioned until line 84. Instead, the first half of the poem is dominated primarily by the figure of Envy. Envy both opens and closes the poem, and significant time is given to developing her character. Envy plays a crucial role since she is set up as the primary antagonist in the poem and a foil to Agnodice. Her presence adds a level of ambiguity to the text. On the one hand, she is the source of the men's envy, which would seem to absolve the men of their wrongdoing. On the other hand, Catherine makes the men's agency abundantly clear. Envy complicates not only how we read the men as villains, but how we read Agnodice as a hero.

Catherine begins her poem by enumerating various sins and presenting Envy as the only one from which no good can be derived. She discusses the ills that Envy spreads before listing Envy's victims, one of whom is the Roman general Phocion. When a foreign Lady buries Phocion's ashes, she sparks Envy's ire. Consequently, Envy punishes women by making husbands envious of their wives. They, in turn,

forbid women from reading and learning, which causes them to become ill. Upon seeing their suffering, Agnodice disguises herself as a man, learns medicine, and comes to their aid. This too angers Envy. She again intervenes, this time by causing men to become suspicious of Agnodice's care. They accuse her of licentious behavior. Agnodice defends herself against these charges by showing her breasts and explaining that she did not mean to deceive the men, but only to help their wives. The men, overcome by Agnodice's excellence and filled with pity, ask for forgiveness. This prompts Agnodice to request that they allow women to study. While Envy recognizes her defeat, the poem ends on an ominous note, claiming that Envy has ever since persecuted women as virtuous as Agnodice.

While critics have identified the poem as being about writing and community, they have largely ignored the role Envy plays in the development (or detriment) of such an authorial community.[23] I would therefore like to propose a close reading of Catherine's poem, beginning with Envy. Besides the obvious fact that such a significant portion of the poem merits more attention, looking closely at who Envy targets sheds light on Catherine's poetic project. It offers insight into how Catherine

[23] Sankovitch reads this poem as an example of *écriture feminine.* See "The Dames des Roches," 65. Kendall B. Tarte reads it as "an allegory for Catherine des Roches's role in salon society." See "From the Salon to the Page: Expressing Community in *La Puce de Madame des-Roches*," in *Writing Places: Sixteenth-Century City Culture and the Des Roches Salon* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), 56. Cathy M. Yandall interprets it instead as an "allegory treating the importance of access to read and writing (and by extension, to a humanist education) for women." See "*Le temps retrouvé*: Exemplarity and the Temporal Body in Catherine des Roches" in *Carpe Corpus: Time and Gender in Early Modern France,* (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 2000), 186.

conceives of women's agency and women's writing, and she challenges our notion of what it means to be a hero.

The Figure of Envy in Ovid's Metamorphoses

To understand how Envy functions in Catherine's text, it is useful to first turn to Ovid. The figure of Envy (*Invidia* in Latin) appears in Book 2 of his *Metamorphoses.* Ovid intertwines her story with that of two other female characters, Minerva and Aglauros. While Catherine does not reference either of these characters directly in "Agnodice," it is still worth taking a look at the fuller version of the myth. I suggest starting prior to where Ovid's introduces Envy, with Aglauros. Aglauros' story starts with the birth of Erichthonius, who Ovid identifies as "a child without a mother."[24] Minerva hides the child in a sealed wicker basket and gives it to the three daughters of Cecrops, with "the strict command not to look upon her secret."[25] Of the three sisters, Pandrosos and Herse follow Minerva's orders, but Aglauros cannot contain her curiosity and (after calling her sisters cowards) peeks inside the basket. There she finds Erichthonius with a serpent by his side. This act of disobedience is seen by a crow, who recounts Aglauros's transgression to Minerva.

This story picks up again later in Book 2, the day of a festival dedicated to Minerva. During this festival, Mercury sees and falls in love with Aglauros's sister Herse. He makes his way to the house, announcing that he's come for Herse's sake.

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[24] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1916), 2:553.

[25] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2:556.

Aglauros looks at him "with the same covetous eyes with which she had lately peeped at the secret of the golden-haired Minerva, and demanded a mighty weight of gold as the price for her service." [26] Essentially, Aglauros tries to sell access to her sister. Minerva, who remembers that Aglauros had "with profaning hands" uncovered the basket that kept her secret, becomes angry that she now stands to become rich from "the gold which in her greed she had demanded."[27] Minerva therefore seeks Envy out to punish Aglauros for her misbehavior.

Before presenting the figure of Envy herself, Ovid offers his readers a long and vivid description of her quarters. As Dunstan M. Lowe points out in his work on personification in the *Metamorphoses*, "Invidia is associated with the colour black; disease-like symptoms of wasting and putrefaction; coldness, as a metaphor for sluggishness or inertia; and above all with the evil eye, the sidelong glance of the grudge bearer."[28] The dark, filthy, cold, and obscure nature of her cave seem to prefigure Envy's character. Tellingly, even Minerva refuses to enter Envy's abode. She turns her eyes away at the sight of Envy who is described as "eating snakes' flesh, the proper food of her venom."[29] Minerva orders Envy to infect Aglauros with her venom and leaves as quickly as possible so that Envy may carry out her orders. Once

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[26] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* 2:748-75.

[27] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* 2:755, 2:759.

[28] Dunstan M. Lowe, "Personification Allegory in the *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," *Mnemosyne,* Fourth Series, 61, no. 3 (2008): 426. http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.cornell.edu/stable/27736244.

[29] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,*2:769.

infected, the maddened Aglauros "eats her heart out in secret misery" due to her envy.[30] When Mercury reappears, Aglauros blocks his passage into Herse's room, declaring "I shall never stir from here till I have foiled your purpose."[31] Ultimately, they both get their way. Mercury transforms Aglauros into a stone, and Aglauros prevents Mercury from meeting Herse.

The opening lines of Catherine's poem make it obvious that she has a very different conception of Envy than that presented in Ovid. Instead of aligning Envy with coldness, sluggishness, or inertia, Catherine does the opposite: she aligns Envy with passion, torment, and furor.

> Il n'y a passion qui tourmente la vie
> Avec plus de fureur que l'impiteuse Envie.
> De tous les autres maux on tire quelque bien:
> L'avare enchesné d'or se plaist en son bien;
> Le superbe se fond d'une douce allegresse,
> S'il voit un grand seigneur qui l'honore et caresse;
> Le voleur, epiant sa proye par les champs,
> Soubsrit à son espoir, attendant les marchands;
> Le gourmand prend plaisir au manger qu'il devore,
> Et semble par les yeux le devorer encore;
> Le jeune homme surpris de lascives amours,
> Compose en son esprit mille plaisans discours;
> Le menteur se plaist fort s'il se peut faire croire;
> Le jureur en bravant se pompe dans sa gloire.
> Mais, o cruelle Envie, on ne reçoit par toy
> Sinon le desplaisir, la douleur, et l'esmoy. 1-16[32]

> There is no other passion that torments life
> With more fury that pitiless Envy.
> From all other evils one can derive some good :
> The greedy [man] chained to his gold finds pleasure in his wealth;

[30] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2:805-6.

[31] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2:817.

[32] Madeleine and Catherine des Roches, *From Mother and Daughter*, 122-31.

> The proud man is overcome with sweet delight
> When he sees a great lord honor and flatter him;
> The thief, spying his prey in the fields,
> Smiles at his good luck as he waits for the [unsuspecting] merchants; [33]
> The glutton takes pleasure in eating what he devours,
> And seems by the look in his eyes to devour it still;
> The young man trapped by his lecherous love,
> Composes in his mind a thousand pleasing phrases;
> The liar is greatly pleased when he can make himself believed;
> The one who swears in his bravado is puffed up with glory.
> But, O cruel Envy, one receives from you
> Only displeasure, pain, and sorrow.

As will become more apparent throughout the poem, Catherine's version of Envy expresses agency in a way that Ovid's character simply does not. Her version of Envy is much more active than Ovid's. In fact, fury—and its cousins rage and ire—are traits that are constantly associated with Envy. In addition to this association, the first two times Envy is mentioned, she is qualified as "pitiless" ("impiteuse," 2) and "cruel" ("cruelle," 15). These key terms recur at numerous times. Catherine uses them throughout the poem to either compare or contrast the other characters' behavior with Envy's.[34]

[33] Brackets in the original.

[34] Fury (*fureur*) and its adjectival forms (*fureux, fureuse*) are mentioned five times in the text (2, 126, 132, 140,167), rage is mentioned twice (22, 132), and ire once (54). Cruelty, and its various iterations, is mentioned five times (15, 27, 71, 80, 127). These negative qualities are contrasted with positive ones, like pity and virtue. Various words containing the root "pity" (i.e. *impitieuse, piteux/piteuse, pitié, despiteuse*) occur eight times (2, 53, 78, 86, 129, 148, 163, 166), while virtue is referenced six times (28, 41, 97, 147, 175, 177).

Envy: Alone of All Her Sex

Catherine's associates Envy with various sinful behaviors. She starts her poem in the negative, both grammatically and thematically. Catherine opens with the negative construction "there is no" ("il n'y a," 1), before enumerating an assortment of evils. The vocabulary of the opening lines has clear religious connotations, with words like "passion" ("passion," 1), "torments" ("tourmente," 1), good ("bien," 3) and "evil" ("maux," 3) present. Catherine plays with the Latin root of the word "pity" (*pietas)* in her characterization of Envy as pitiless—Envy is both without compassion and without piety. Wrath or fury, as one of the seven deadly sins, prefigures the list of seven sinners that Catherine presents. She establishes Envy as unique amongst them, since Envy is the only evil from which no good can be derived. To prove her point, Catherine lists a series of additional vices and goes through the benefits that can be gleaned from each one.[35] Nevertheless, Catherine imbues the entire passage with a serpentine quality through a play on the "s" sound: "se" (4, 5, 13, 14), "son" (4, 8, 12), "superbe" (5), "douce" (6), "allegresse" (5), "s'il" (6, 13), "seigneur" (6), "caresse" (6), "sa" (7, 14), "soubsrit" (8), "espoir" (8), "plasir" (9), "semble" (10), "les yeux" (10), "surprise" (11), "lascives" (11), "compose" (12), "espris" (12), "plaisans" (12), "discours" (12), "reçoit" (15), "sinon" (15), and "desplaisir" (15). While the evils described may be comparatively better than Envy in that they at least bring some joy to the subject, Catherine's use of alliteration highlights the sinful nature of each.

[35] This beginning is very similar to emblem XIX from Jean-Jacques Boissard, *Emblemes: nouvellement mis de latin en françois par Pierre Joly* (Metz: A. Faber, 1595), https://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/french/books.php?id=FBOc.

Despite Envy's association with other sins, she stands out for several reasons. As already mentioned, Envy is the only vice from which no good can be derived; she is the worst of the worst. Yet, of all the sins Catherine enumerates, Envy is the only female. This is particularly striking considering that several of the sins Catherine mentions are linguistically feminine in French (for example pride, gluttony, lust, and avarice; *la superbe*, *la gourmandise*, *la luxure*, *l'avarice*). Catherine goes out of her way to associate these sins with men. All the sinners in Catherine's poem are men, and it is ultimately they who embody Envy. While the character Envy is female (as she would be grammatically), envy is a characteristic attributed to the male sex. This contrasts with Ovid's account, where Envy functions among women. Catherine excludes female envy (or any type of female sinning for that matter) from her poem. This is a rather remarkable revision considering how envy has figured in misogynistic representations of women throughout the early modern period. As Aileen Feng points out, envy (or *invidia* in Latin),

> has often been used by male authors to explain the "natural" inclination towards a form of female rivalry that prevents women from being either trustworthy or rational. The trope of female *invidia* is one of the most recurrent and recognizable themes in early modern literary depictions of women, a characteristic attributed to the female sex as a way of explaining women's natural inferiority.[36]

In contrast, the women in Catherine's poem only express positive traits like pity, virtue, honor, chastity. They are the victims of Envy; they never succumb to her.

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[36] Aileen A. Feng, "Desiring Sujects: Mimetic Desire and Female Invidia in Gaspara Stampa's *Rime*," in *Rethinking Gaspara Stampa in the Canon of Renaissance Poetry*, ed. Unn Falkeid and Aileen A. Feng (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015), 76-77.

Men on the other hand succumb to a multiplicity of vices and pleasures. The greedy man "finds pleasure in his wealth" ("se plaist en son bien," 4); the proud man "is overcome with sweet delight" ("se fond d'une douce allegresse," 5); the glutton "takes pleasure" ("prend plaisir," 9) in the food that he eats; the young man composes "a thousand pleasing phrases" ("mille plaisans discours," 12); the liar "is greatly pleased" ("se plait fort," 13) if he can make himself believed. Not only is there a notable use of phrases that involve pleasure, but a certain reflexivity to this passage as well. As just mentioned, the verb "se plaire" (to like, enjoy, find pleasure) is used twice. Other reflexive verbs such as "se fondre" (literally "to melt" but translated as "overcome," 5), "se pouvoir" ("can," 13), and "se pomper" ("puffed up," 14) are also found in the passage. Catherine makes it clear that the men enjoy their sinful behavior because it directly benefits them; they act in their own self-interest.

The men experience sensual pleasure, that is, pleasure derived from the senses. Touch, or physical pleasure, is alluded to through the "douce allegresse" (5) of the proud man and the great lord who caresses him. These terms can be interpreted in multiple ways: "douce" can translate to either "soft" or "sweet," while the verb *caresser* (6) can refer to either a verbal or physical sign of affection.[37] This ambiguity multiplies the pleasure each of these men experience to include not just touch, but taste and sound respectively. Similarly, the young man revels not only in physical or

[37] *Le Dictionnaire de l'Academie Française*, 4th ed., vol. 1 (Paris: Brunet, 1762) in "Dictionnaires d'autrefois," *The ARTFL Project* (Chicago: The University of Chicago), s.v. "caresse," accessed October 7, 2020, https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/publicdicos/query?report=bibliography&head=caresse&start=0&end=0.

amatory pleasure, but in intellectual pleasure as well. He composes "in his mind a thousand pleasing phrases," (or "discourses" in French; "en son esprit mille plaisans discours," 12). Interestingly, Catherine does not refer to him as the lustful man ("le lascif") but rather as "the young man trapped by his lecherous love" ("le jeune homme surpris de lascives amours," 11). In doing so, she differentiates him from all the other sinners. While his love may be lascivious, his is not defined by it. Catherine acknowledges the pleasure that can be gained from intellectual production (composition) and from pleasing discourse. Speech is also implied in the very notion of a liar ("le menteur," 13) and swearer ("le jureur," 14). Like the young man, the glutton too doubles his pleasure through taste and sight. He devours his food twice—once with his eyes and once with his mouth—as reinforced textually by the fact that the verb *devorer* (to devour) appears twice (9, 10). Catherine hints at visual pleasure as well. The proud man is happy if he sees ("s'il voit," 6) a great lord flatter him. The thief smiles while seeing, or more accurately spying ("epiant"), his prey. Catherine, in one way or another, references each of the senses apart from smell.

The men Catherine describes trade not only in moral goods (or rather, evils), but in economic goods as well. She plays on the dual meaning of the word "bien," using its status as a homonym to justify rhyming it with itself in lines three and four. Her lexicon evokes wealth more broadly speaking; she references a greedy man ("l'avare," 4), gold ("or," 4), a thief ("le voleur," 7), and merchants ("les marchands," 8). However, class and respectability seem to be just as important as material wealth. Social status (as indicated by nobility, 6), honor (6), communication (or pleasing discourse, 12), believability (13), and glory (14) all hold value as well.

Envy, who functions differently, disrupts this exclusively male economy. While "from all other evils one can derive some good … one receives from you / only displeasure, pain, and sorrow" (De tous les autres maux on tire quelque bien … on ne reçoit par toy / sinon le desplaisir, la douleur, et l'esmoy, 3, 15-16). The French *on*, which corresponds to the English "one," is "ubiquitous and unquestionably masculine."[38] The verb *tirer*, however, is much more difficult to encapsulate. The translator, Anne Larsen, proposes "derives," but in this context *tirer* could equally well translate to "withdraw," "obtain," or even "extract." The general idea contrasts with that of receiving from line 15. The "from you" (par toy, 15) that follows the verb *reçevoir* highlights the passivity of this construction. Envy shortchanges the economy in which men take what they can for their personal pleasure and enrichment. Instead, the men are given "displeasure, pain, and sorrow" ("le desplaisir, la douleur, et l'esmoy," 16).

Envy's appearance in the poem indicates not only a shift away from the male economy of pleasure, but a shift in style as well. Impersonal narration turns into direct address. Catherine apostrophizes Envy and refers to her using the familiar form of "you" (*tu).* This form of address continues into the next section of the poem:

> A celuy qui te loge, ingrat' et fiere hotesse,
> Tu laisse pour payement le deuil et la tristesse;
> A celuy qui te donne à repaistre chez luy,
> Tu payes pour escot le chagrin et l'ennuy; 17-20
>
> To whoever takes you in, ungrateful and proud guest,
> You leave as payment only mourning and sadness;

[38] Kirk Read, "Touching and Telling: Gendered Variations on a Gynecological Theme," chap. 3 in *Birthing Bodies in Early Modern France: Stories of Gender and Reproduction* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2011), 86.

To whoever gives you food at his home,
You give in return only grief and chagrin;

The beginning of the first two lines of this citation shares a similar structure to the beginning of the following two lines. “To whoever takes you in” (“A celuy qui te loge,” 17) mimics “To whoever gives you” (“A celuy qui te donne,” 19). Since “whoever” (“celuy”) is grammatically masculine, Envy’s host is necessarily male. By making him the subject, Catherine gives him agency. He is not simply passive victim, but an active host. That being said, Catherine alternates these lines two lines that begin with “To whoever” (“A celui qui”) with two lines that also mimic each other, but that begin with Envy: “You leave” (“Tu laisse,” 18) and “You pay” (“Tu payes,” 20). By alternating the subject of the verb, Catherine blurs the distinction between victim and perpetrator. Both Envy and the host are responsible for their actions.

While the host is not without blame for taking Envy in, neither is Envy without blame for being a bad guest. The host gives Envy lodging and food (“te loge,” 17; “te donne à repaistre,” 19). Envy however pays for this hospitality with mourning, sadness, grief, and chagrin (“le deuil et la tristesse,” 18; “le chagrin et l’ennuy,” 20) instead of with money. Catherine emphasizes this unjust compensation through the vocabulary she uses: “you leave as *payment*” (“tu laisse pour *payement*,” 18, emphasis mine) and “you give in return” (“tu *payes* pour escot,” 20, emphasis mine). Omitted from the English translation, an *escot* is “the fee of each individual for what he has eaten and drunk in a tavern, hostelry, or at a feast where one contributes *deniers* per person” (“C’est le fray de chaque personne pour ce qu' il a mangé et beu en une

taverne, hostellerie, ou en un festin où l' on contribue deniers par teste"). [39] Envy violates not only economic expectations, but social ones too. Instead of expressing thanks and humility, Envy is instead "ungrateful and proud" ("ingrat' et fiere," 17). That being said, *fier* needs to be read in its full significance, and not just as proud. The *Thresor de la langue francoyse tant ancienne que modern* (1606) gives the following definition:

> Fier, monosyll. C'est arrogant, superbe, et qui a le regard, maintien, et contenance d'une beste sauvage, que le Latin appelle Fera. […] Le tout est ainsi prins dautant que ce qui suit l'orgueil et arrogance, c'est la cruauté, sauvageté, et inhumanité.[40]
>
> Fier, monosyll. Arrogant, proud, who has the expression, bearing, and countenance of a savage beast, that Latin calls Fera […] Everything is thus taken equally so that what follows pride and arrogance is cruelty, savagery, and inhumanity.

Envy has previously been described as cruel; her savagery and inhumanity will only become more acute as the poem progresses. Already, she functions at the expense of others.

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[39] Jean Nicot, *Thresor de la langue francoyse tant ancienne que modern*, vol. 1 (Paris: Douceur, 1606) in "Dictionnaires d'autrefois," *The ARTFL Project* (Chicago: University of Chicago), *s.v.* "escot," accessed November 19, 2019. https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/publicdicos/query?report=bibliography&head=escot. All translations from the *Thresor de la langue francoyse* are my own.

[40] Jean Nicot, *Thresor de la langue francoyse tant ancienne que modern*, vol. 1 (Paris: Douceur, 1606) in "Dictionnaires d'autrefois," *The ARTFL Project* (Chicago: University of Chicago), s.v. "fier," accessed October 10, 2020, https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/publicdicos/query?report=bibliography&head=fier.

Envy as Antagonist

Envy takes on a more active and more expansive role as the poem progresses. Catherine traces her influence all the way back to Cain and Abel, increasing not only Envy's physical reach, but her temporal reach as well:

> De noz premiers parens tu espris le courage,
> Espandant le venin de ta feilleuse rage
> Sur les divins autels, quand le bras fraternel
> Tua le pauvre Abel invoquant l'eternel.
> Depuis, en te coulant aux autres parts du monde,
> Tu semas en la terre une race feconde
> D'ires, de cruautez, de geines, et de morts
> Qui font aux vertueux cent et cent mille torts. 21-28
>
> You invaded the heart of our first ancestors,
> By spreading the venom of your furious rage
> Upon the holy altars, when a brother's arm
> Killed poor Abel while he prayed to the Almighty.
> Since then, in reaching to other parts of the world,
> You sowed on the earth a plentiful mix
> Of anger cruelty, torture, and death,
> Which upon the virtuous inflicts a thousand wrongs.

Envy has a long history dating back to "our first ancestors" ("noz premiers parens," 21). Catherine rarely uses the first-person plural, and this is the only instance in the poem where she uses pronoun "our" ("noz"). Not only does this create a sense of community and inclusion for the reader, but it also establishes a shared history between the reader and narrator. Moreover, Catherine moves Envy between geographic and temporal spaces. After her reference to Cain and Abel, Catherine enumerates a long list of victims that Envy has targeted "since then, in reaching other parts of the world" ("Depuis, en te coulant aux autres parts du monde," 25). By creating a lineage from Envy's first victims, through ancient Greece, and into the time

of narration, Catherine allows the reader to question Envy's impact beyond these historical referents. Who else has Envy targeted that Catherine does not mention?

Catherine again positions Envy as the acting subject. Literally, Envy takes courage ("espris le courage," 21) from our first ancestors. Larsen translates this line as, "You invaded the hearts of our first ancestors" (21). While the word "heart" never appears in the French, Larsen may be picking up on the etymology of "courage" which comes from *cor*, the Latin for "heart."[41] Catherine's use of the word "courage" is especially interesting if we consider courage not in its modern sense of bravery, but in its older (and now obsolete) usage as liveliness or spirit.[42] Envy overtakes not only our ancestor's hearts, but their very essence. When Cain kills Abel, blood does not spill upon the altar; rather, it is Envy's venom that spreads. Her "furious rage" ("feilleuse rage," 22) becomes his.[43] Even Abel's prayers to God (he is killed "invoquant l'éternel," 24) are not enough to save him. And yet, Catherine's phrasing raises questions of accountability. Envy works through an intermediary, making it unclear to what degree Envy is responsible for Abel's death and to what degree Cain is. This

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[41] *Le Grand robert de la langue française, s.v.* "courage," accessed October 20, 2020, https://grandrobert.lerobert.com/robert.asp.

[42] The first entry of Jean Nicot's *Thresor de la langue francoyse tant ancienne que modern,* v.1 (Paris: Douceur, 1606) defines "courage" as "Courage, quasi Cordis actio, Animus, Audacia, Fiducia, Spiritus." See "Dictionnaires d'autrefois," *The ARTFL Project* (Chicago: The University of Chicago), s.v. "courage," accessed October 20, 2020, https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/publicdicos/query?report=bibliography&head=courage&start=0&end=0.

[43] In the glossary to the Droz critical edition, Anne Larsen translates "feilleuse" as "bitter" (amère) instead of "furious." See Madeleine des Roches and Catherine des Roches, *Les Oeuvres*, ed. Anne R. Larsen (Genève: Droz, 1993), 393.

question is complicated even more by the fact that it is not Cain *per se* who kills Abel, but rather "a brother's arm" ("le bras fraternal," 23). Regardless of the guilty party, the narrator's interjection ensures that we feel sympathy for "poor Abel" ("le pauvre Abel," 24).

The inclusion of this anecdote again highlights the revisions Catherine makes to Ovid's version of Envy for her project. By describing Envy's first victims as male, Catherine transforms Ovid's story of sororal envy between Aglauros and Herse into one of fraternal envy between Cain and Abel. In Catherine's poem, men—and not women—are susceptible to envy. Catherine also changes the way Envy functions. In Ovid's account, the person infected by Envy suffers the consequences of envy. So, Aglauros "eats her heart out in secret misery; careworn by day, careworn by night, she groans and wastes away most wretchedly with slow decay, like ice touched by the fitful sunshine. She is consumed by envy of Herse's happiness."[44] Herse on the other hand is mostly unaffected by Aglauros's envy.[45] Catherine however expands Envy's reach. She sets Abel up as the victim, and not Cain. In fact, Catherine does not even mention Cain directly in this passage. Her entire conception of Envy is much less self-referential. It is not about the person infected with Envy, but the effect that that their envy has on others.

[44] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* 2:805-9.

[45] The only real loss Herse suffers is that Aglauros stops her from marrying Mercury. However, since Herse was never made aware of his intentions in the first place, it is unclear if this is really a loss from her perspective.

While Envy destroys the lives of others, she herself is productive. Catherine writes of Envy,

> Tu semas en la terre une race feconde
> D'ires, de cruautez, de geines, et de morts
> Qui font aux vertueux cent et cent mille torts. 26-28
>
> You sowed on the earth a plentiful mix
> Of anger, cruelty, torture, and death,
> Which upon the virtuous inflicts a thousand wrongs.

This description, with Envy's offspring sprouting from the earth, calls to mind two myths: that of Erichthonius and that of Cadmus. Erichthonius is the infant that Minerva placed in a basket and asked Aglauros and her sisters to watch. While Ovid does not provide any background on Erichthonius besides calling him "the child without a mother," Hyginus does. [46] He explains how Vulcan asked (and had been granted permission) to wed Minerva. However, when he entered her chamber, Minerva defended her chastity. While they were struggling, his semen fell on her leg. She wiped this off onto the earth. As a result, a child who was a serpent below the waist was born. He was named Erichthonius, from the Greek words for struggle (*eris*) and earth (*chthon*).[47] According to Hyginus, Minerva raised the child in secret, and put him in a chest which she gave to Aglauros and her sisters for safekeeping. However, they opened the chest and consequently were driven mad by Minerva, eventually throwing themselves into the sea.

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[46] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2:553.

[47] *Hyginus'* Fabulae, 166.

The second possible reference is to Cadmus. Cadmus kills a serpent and then sows its teeth in the ground. From these springs an army of men, called Sparti (meaning "sown"). They fight one another until only five survive. This story is also included and elaborated upon in Book 3 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.[48] That being said, both Cadmus and Erichthonius are also mentioned in Hyginus' *Fabulae* in the section on "Discovers and Their Discoveries" where the story of Agnodice appears. Hyginus lists Cadmus as "the first to discover how to make bronze" and Erichthonius as the first to bring silver into Athens.[49] While there is no mention of either Cadmus's or Erichthonius's backstory in this particular section, it is conceivable that Catherine would have been familiar with these stories from earlier in the text (or from Ovid). She could easily have been inspired by Hyginus's reference to these men when writing her poem.

Even without these intertexts, the three lines of this section are richer and more complex than they initially seem. I would like to take a moment to re-read the French in comparison to the translation, as I think this is a useful exercise. My intention is not to criticize Larsen's work, but to better understand Catherine's. In line twenty-six, Catherine writes, "Tu semas en la terre une race feconde" which Larsen translates as "You sowed on the earth a plentiful mix." The verb *semer* (to sow) has very masculine connotations. For example, *une semence* in French can refer to both seeds and semen, while *inséminer* means to inseminate. As seen in both the myths discussed above, the

[48] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* 3.1-130.

[49] *Hyginus'* Fabulae, 274.4.

"seeds" that are sown by men generate masculine offspring. The earth or ground however is fertile. Catherine challenges these gender representations by having Envy sow the earth and by describing what she sows in the feminine as "une race feconde." Larsen translates this as "a plentiful mix," but I would have opted for the more literal translation "a fecund race." The adjective *fécond* (fecund) implies generation and fertility. Like Envy herself, Envy's offspring is also productive. Vices reproduce themselves, causing a perpetual multiplication of sins.

The race that Envy engenders is made up of things and not people. It is a fecund race of ire, cruelty, torture, and death "which upon the virtuous inflicts a thousand wrongs" ("*qui font* aux vertueux cent et cent mille torts," emphasis mine). Larsen's translation of "font" as "inflicts" makes the subject of the verb singular instead of plural. In her translation, it is the plentiful mix *which inflicts* the wrongs, and not the nouns (ire, cruelty, torture, and death) *who inflict* them. This again raises important questions regarding the degree to which Envy responsible for these wrongs. Both the verb *faire* and the preposition *à* be translated in multiple ways, making Catherine's phrasing more ambiguous than the translation would imply. The expression "faire à" could equally well be translated as "to do to" or "to "to cause in." While the former would position the virtuous as the victims of evil, the latter positions them as its hosts. Regardless of how the reader interprets this phrase, Catherine clearly embellishes the number of wrongs for dramatic effect. "Cent et cent mille torts" is not only "a thousand wrongs," but "a hundred and hundred thousand wrongs." Catherine does not shy away from hyperbole. Thinking back through the poem, she has indeed listed "a plentiful mix" of horrors up to this point: torment, fury, pitilessness, evil,

displeasure, pain, sorrow, ungratefulness, pride, mourning, sadness, ennui, chagrin, venom, rage, ire, cruelty, and death have all been mentioned at one point or another.

Envy's Effect on the Unparalleled Lives of Men

Catherine then turns her attention to "the Country of Attica" ("la Contrée Attique," 29), which is to say to ancient Athens. The city witnesses ("temoigne," 30) Envy's power more than anywhere else.

> Mais sur tous autres lieux, c'est la Contrée Attique
> Qui tesmoigne le plus de ta puissance inique
> Nenny point pour Thesé de ses parens trahy,
> Pour le juste Aristide injustement hay,
> Ny pour que Themistocle ait fuy dans la terre
> D'un Roy que tant de fois il poursuivit en guerre;
> Ny pour voir Miltiade a tort emprisonné
> Pour Socrate non plus qui meurt empoisonné
> Mais pour toy, Phocion, qui n'eus pas sepulture
> Au pays tant aymé où tu pris nourriture. 29-38

> But more than all other places, it is the Country of Attica
> That bears witness to your unequaled power,
> Not only over Theseus, who was betrayed by his relatives,
> Or just Aristides who was unjustly hated,
> Themistocles who had to flee to the land
> Of a King he had pursued so many times in war;
> Miltiades who was wrongfully imprisoned,
> Or even Socrates, who died of poison,
> But especially over you (Phocion) who received no sepulcher
> In the beloved country where you were born and raised.

Catherine again turns to hyperbolic language. She emphasizes that Athens sees Envy's destruction above or "*more than* all other places" ("*sur* tous autres lieux," 29, emphasis mine). Athens also bears witnesses to Envy's abilities the most ("le plus," 30). Even Envy's power is not just described as power, but as "unequaled power"

("puissance inique," 30). The adjective *inique* does not only mean unequaled, but also "unjust," "mean," and "inequitable" ("injuste, meschant, qui n' a point d' equité").[50]

As proof of Envy's unequaled power, Catherine lists a series of prominent Greek heroes whose lives in one way or another have been affected by Envy. Catherine picks famous Athenians who represent different virtues. Theseus was known for his bravery and courage; amongst other exploits, he completed a journey of six labors and slayed the Minotaur. Themistocles and Miltiades are remembered for their military and political prowess. Aristide and Phocion represent virtue and moral rectitude; they were known respectively as "the Just" and "the Good." Socrates, the Greek philosopher *par excellence*, is renowned for his intellectual and rhetorical capabilities. With the exception of Theseus, all of these men succumb to Envy.

Theseus, the mythical founder of Athens, is "betrayed by his relatives" ("de ses parens trahy," 31) when he first arrives in Athens. He is identified as the son of the King Aegeus, who had been thought childless up to that point. This frustrates Theseus's cousins (the sons of Pallas) who were set to inherit the throne. Viewing Theseus as "an immigrant and a stranger," they decide to wage war against him.[51] One faction attacks the city outright and the other waits in ambush. Theseus, however,

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[50] *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, vol. 1 (Paris: Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1694) in "Dictionnaires d'autrefois," *The ARTFL Project* (Chicago: The University of Chicago), s.v. "inique," accessed October 20, 2020, https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/publicdicos/query?report=bibliography&head=inique&start=0&end=0. All translations from *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* are my own.

[51] Plutarch, "Theseus" in *Lives*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, 11 vols. (London: W. Heinemann, 1914), XIII.

learns of their scheme from a herald and slays all the men waiting in ambush, causing the others to flee.

This anecdote helps frame Catherine's account of Agnodice. It brings up notions of community and belong and shows how Envy thrives on division. Importantly, Theseus does not triumph on his own but with the help of another: the herald who alerts him to his cousins' plans. While the town labels the herald as a traitor, he functions as a savior to Theseus. The herald's military intelligence allows Theseus to outsmart his opponents, slaying half of them and scaring the rest. This however raises the question as to whether Theseus truly overcomes his cousins' envy of him—he kills them along with their envy. Theseus's actions highlight how differently Agnodice functions. Instead of resorting to violence and killing her opponents, Agnodice uses her rhetoric to conquer their Envy and restores peaceful relations between antagonistic parties.

The next three men Catherine cites, Aristide (ca. 530-468 BCE), Themistocles (ca. 524-459 BCE), and Miltiades (ca. 550-489 BCE), were all famous Athenian generals who fought during the Persian Wars. Despite their military collaboration, the three men competed for power and prestige. Aristide and Themistocles had both a personal and political rivalry, [52] with the latter appealing to the masses and eventually getting Aristide ostracized. Plutarch explains how

> it befell Aristides to be loved at first because of his surname,[53] but afterwards to be jealously hated, especially when Themistocles set the story going among

[52] Plutarch describes Themistocles' rivalry with Aristide as having its origins in a love affair, since they were both enamored with the same boy. See Plutarch, "Themistocles," *Lives*, III and "Aristides," *Lives*, II.3.

[53] Aristide was known as "The Just." See Plutarch, "Aristides," *Lives*, VI.

> the multitude that Aristides had done away with the public courts of justice by his determining and judging everything in private, and that, without any one perceiving it, he had established for himself a monarchy…So they assembled in the city from all the country round, and ostracized Aristides, giving to their envious dislike of his reputation the name of fear of tyranny.[54]

Targeted by both his colleagues and countrymen, Aristide nevertheless remained virtuous throughout his ostracism. He even famously wrote his own name down when asked by an illiterate voter to cast a ballot in favor of his expulsion from the city.[55] Given the role Themistocles played in Aristide's ostracism, Themistocles is rather ironically ostracized himself when "his envious fellow-citizens denounced him."[56] He flees Athens, eventually making his way to the court of the king of Persia, "a King he had pursued so many times in war" ("un Roy que tant de fois il poursuivit en guerre," 34).[57]

As for Miltiades, he is known primarily for the role he played in the Battle of Marathon. His ensuing success and glory provoked Themistocles' jealousy and caused him many sleepless nights.[58] Miltiades, carried away by his success at Marathon,

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[54] Plutarch, "Aristide," *Lives*, VII.

[55] According to Plutarch, "as the voters were inscribing their *ostraka*, it is said that an unlettered and utterly boorish fellow handed his *ostrakon* to Aristides, whom he took to be one of the ordinary crowd, and asked him to write *Aristides* on it. He, astonished, asked the man what possible wrong Aristides had done him. 'None whatever,' was the answer, 'I don't even know the fellow, but I am tired of hearing him everywhere called "The Just."' On hearing this, Aristides made no answer, but wrote his name on the *ostrakon* and handed it back." "Aristides," *Lives*, VII.6.

[56] Plutarch, "Themistocles," *Lives*, XXIII.3.

[57] Plutarch, "Themistocles," *Lives*, XXII-XXXI.

[58] "It is said, indeed, that Themistocles was so carried away by his desire for reputation, and such an ambitious lover of great deeds, that though he was still a young man when the battle with the Barbarians at Marathon was fought and the

asked the Athenians for even more ships, money, and an army, promising he would make them even richer. He sailed to Paros but broke his leg trying to lay siege to the city and had to return to Athens. The Athenians took him to court for his deceit and ended up fining him fifty talents, which he was unable to pay. He died, in prison (at least according to Plutarch), from the gangrene in his leg.[59] The stories concerning Aristides, Themistocles, and Miltiades show the more insidious side of Envy; as each man's reputation increases, he becomes not only a target for other's envy, but more susceptible to envy himself.

Socrates, the famous Athenian philosopher, was at the age of seventy accused of impiety and of corrupting the youth.[60] At his trial (399 BCE), he argued that the accusations against him were unfounded and that his accusers had persuaded the jury "by means of envy and slander."[61] The court nevertheless found Socrates guilty and

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generalship of Miltiades was in everybody's mouth, he was seen thereafter to be wrapped in his own thoughts for the most part, and was sleepless o' nights, and refused invitations to his customary drinking parties, and said to those who put wondering questions to him concerning his change of life that the trophy of Miltiades would not suffer him to sleep." Plutarch, "Themistocles," *Lives*, III.3-4.

[59] Plutarch refers to "the imprisonment of Miltiades" and to how "Miltiades, who had been condemned to pay a fine of fifty talents and confined till payment should be made, died in prison." See Plutarch, "Aristides," *Lives*, XXVI.3 and "Cimon," *Lives*, IV.3 respectively. A fuller account of Miltiades exploits after the battle of Marathon and of his death is given by Herodotus. He, however, makes no mention of Miltiades's imprisonment. See Herodotus, trans. A.D. Godley, 4 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), VI.132-136.

[60] Harold North Fowler, "Introduction to the Apology" in *Plato: Euthyphro. Apology. Crito. Phaedo*, trans. Harold North Fowler, vol. 1 of *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), 63.

[61] Plato, "The Apology," 18.D.

condemned him to die by drinking poison. According to Plutarch, "Phocion's fate reminded the Greeks anew of that of Socrates; they felt that the sin and misfortune of Athens were alike in both cases."[62] Phocion (ca. 402-318 BCE) was an Athenian general who was elected to office a record forty-five times.[63] Throughout his career, he pursued peaceful and diplomatic relations with Macedonia, the rising new power in the region. This ultimately got him into trouble, as the Athenians accused him of appeasing the Macedonians at their expense.[64] The court tried him for treason and the sentenced him to death by drinking poison.[65] Since Phocion was denied a burial within Athens and his body was burned beyond the city limits, his wife created a cenotaph for him and caried his ashes back into Athens. A short time later, once the Athenians recognized their error in judgment, they gave Phocion a public burial and set up a bronze statue of him.[66]

The way Catherine presents this list of famous Athenians is as important as each of their individual identities. Catherine reuses vocabulary from the poem that evokes Envy. Even readers who are unfamiliar with the particular histories of each of these men can nevertheless see how Envy has impacted their lives. For example,

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[62] Plutarch, "Phocion," *Lives*, XXXVIII.2.

[63] Plutarch, "Phocion," *Lives*, X.2 and VIII.1-2, respectively.

[64] Plutarch, "Phocion," *Lives*, XXXI-XXXIV.

[65] Phocion was condemned with several others. By the time it was his turn to drink the poison, there was not enough hemlock left. The executioner refused to brew more unless paid, to which Phocion famously quipped that "a man could not even die at Athens without paying for the privilege." See Plutarch, "Phocion," *Lives*, XXXVI.4.

[66] Plutarch, "Phocion," *Lives*, XXXVII.2-3.

Catherine describes Theseus as "betrayed by his relatives" ("de ses *parens* trahy," 31, emphasis mine). The word "relatives" ("parens") brings to mind how Envy targeted "our first ancestors" ("noz premiers *parens*," 21, emphasis mine). Similarly, the description of Themistocles fleeing "to the land" ("dans *la terre*," 33, emphasis mine) of his enemies reinforces Catherine's claim that Envy had sown "on the earth a plentiful mix / of anger, cruelty, torture, and death/ Which upon the virtuous inflicts a thousand *wrongs*" ("en *la terre* une race feconde / d'ires, de cruautez, des geines, et de morts / Qui font aux vertueux cent et cent mille *torts*," 26-27, emphasis mine). The reader can clearly see one of these wrongs in the case of Miltiades who was "*wrongfully* imprisoned" ("*à tort* emprisonné," 35, emphasis mine). This lexical repetition also creates sonorous resonances. The reader not only sees (or reads about) the wrongs that Envy inflicts but hears them as well.

Women to the Rescue

Catherine's list of Athenian heroes provides useful references against which to read Agnodice's story. Much like Socrates and Phocion, Agnodice is also "unjustly condemned to her death" ("injustement condemnée à la mort," 143). The adjective "unjustly" ("injustement") recalls Catherine's description of how Aristide was "unjustly hated" ("injustement hay," 32). Catherine inscribes Agnodice into this genealogy of Athenian heroes targeted by Envy. However, she makes Agnodice more persuasive and victorious than they were. Ultimately, Phocion and Socrates' rhetoric fails them both. Socrates is unable to sway the jury, while Phocion never even gets a chance to argue his case. Instead, the court descends into chaos with multiple parties

shouting over each other.[67] Agnodice, however, stuns the men into silence, gets them to issue her an apology, and advocates for others by asking the men to allow women to study. Where the male heroes have failed, Agnodice succeeds.

Having established that Envy has ruined the lives of a number of male Greek heroes, Catherine singles Phocion out through her direct address to him. Of all the men she lists, he is the only one to whom she refers with second person pronouns. This creates an interesting tension within the text. On the one hand, Catherine seems to want to highlight Phocion's importance by making him the primary subject of the text. However, as the poem continues, it becomes clear that Phocion's centrality to the story depends not on his own actions or exploits, but on that of the foreign Lady who is introduced next.

> Une Dame estrangere, ayant la larme à l'œil,
> Reçeut ta chere cendre, et la meit au cercueil,
> Honorant tes vertus de loüanges supremes,
> Elle cacha tes oz dedans son fouyeur mesmes,
> Disant d'un triste cueur, humble et devotieux :
> Je vous appelle tous, o domestiques Dieux,
> Puisque de Phocion l'ame s'est desliée,
> Pour aller prendre au ciel sa place dediée,
> Et que ses citoyens, causes de son trespas,
> L'ayant empoisonné ores ne veulent pas
> Qu'il soit ensevely dedans sa terre aymée,
> Se montrant envieux dessus sa renommée.
> Aymons ce qui nous reste, honorons sa prison,
> Le feu s'en est volé, gardons bien le tison. 37-52

> It was a foreign Lady who, with tears in her eyes,
> Took your precious ashes and placed them in a tomb,
> Honoring your virtues with highest praises,
> She hid your bones within her very home,
> Saying with a sad, humble, and devoted heart :
> "I call on you all, domestic Gods,

[67] Plutarch, "Phocion," *Lives,* XXXIII.6 and XXXIV.4-5.

> For Phocion's soul has departed
> To go take its prepared place in the heavens;
> The citizens of this country, who have caused his death
> By poisoning him, now refuse
> To have him buried in his beloved land,
> Because they envy his renown.
> Let us treasure his remains, let us honor his new prison,
> The fire has left it, let us guard his ashes."

Catherine's adaptation of this scene, originally found in Plutarch's *Lives*, transforms a private affair—that of a wife's burial of her husband's ashes—into public one. Catherine takes the romantic aspect out of the text by having a foreign Lady bury Phocion's ashes instead. This contrasts with Plutarch's version of events.

Plutarch highlights the devotion and intimacy that exists between romantic partners by having Phocion's wife bury her husband's ashes. She however remains nameless in the text; Phocion's wife is identified only relationally through her husband. When she sets up a cenotaph for her husband, the text emphasizes that this was done in the company of her maidservants.

> The wife of Phocion, however, who was present with her maid-servants, heaped up a cenotaph on the spot and poured libations upon it; then, putting the bones in her bosom and carrying them by night to her dwelling, she buried them by the hearth, saying: "To thee, dear Hearth, I entrust these remains of a noble man; but do thou restore them to the sepulchre of his fathers, when the Athenians shall have come to their senses."[68]

This scene is more likely to be read as an act of private mourning than of public tribute. Female seclusion transforms into secrecy as Phocion's wife hides her husband's bones "in her bosom" and carries them off under the cover of darkness. She is neither seen publicly (by a male audience), nor does she speak publicly. Instead,

[68] Plutarch, "Phocion," Lives, XXXVII.3.

Phocion's wife addresses a prayer to the hearth, who in Greek mythology, is typically personified as a woman. Phocion's wife clearly has no public role; her duty is exclusively to her husband and her home.

Catherine's adaptation re-writes the social position a female can occupy. Instead of highlighting the woman's marital status (as a wife) and her duty to her husband, Catherine foregrounds the woman's social and political status by referring to her as a Lady and a foreigner. Both terms merit consideration, but I would like to start with the latter. Politically, the Lady's status as a foreigner is expressed through her alliance with Phocion. In coming to his defense, she acts against the political will of the citizens who caused his death and refused his burial. However, despite being given the label of a foreigner, the Lady is tied to notions of the domestic. She hides Phocion's bones "within her very home" ("cacha tes oz dedans son fouyer mesmes," 42) and implores the "domestic Gods" ("domestiques Dieux," 44) for help. She blurs not only the boundaries between the foreign and domestic, but between what is hidden (*cacher*) and what is seen, what is interior (*dedans*) and what is exterior, what belongs in the private sphere (the *fouyer*) and the public one. Unlike Phocion's wife who functions only in the private sphere, the foreign Lady adopts a public persona. She functions much like the female poet, and in particular the Dames des Roches (who themselves blur the boundaries between interior and exterior and the public and private spheres through their poetry and through the salon they ran).

Catherine also comments on the woman's gender and social status by referring to her as a Lady (Dame). This appellation makes it clear that she falls outside the long line of male, Athenian heroes listed thus far. And yet, the foreign Lady's display of

compassion ultimately turns her into one of the virtuous that Envy targets. As such, Catherine creates a new genealogy of female heroes who are united in their virtue, compassion, and eloquence. The foreign lady acts selflessly for the good of the community and embodies many of the same virtues as Agnodice; the foreign Lady prefigures Agnodice as a heroine. Catherine refers to the former as "cette dame piteuse" ("this pitiful lady," 53) and to the latter as "une Dame gentille" ("a noble, young Lady," 84) or "Ceste Dame" ("this lady"). The larger community of women and patients in the poem are also referred to as "dames" (73) or "Dames" (102), creating a sense of unity and equality among the women. It is no coincidence that the terms are all reminiscent of the cognomen shared by Catherine and her mother: the Dames des Roches.

A sense of female community is created not only through the foreign Lady's naming but also through her speech and its potential addressees. As mentioned, Catherine's character addresses her prayer to the Domestic gods instead of to the Hearth. In other words, she addresses a masculine audience and is trying to navigate a masculine world. That being said, the way in which Catherine writes the foreign Lady's speech leaves open the possibility for female participation. Catherine's foreign Lady declares "I call on you all, domestic Gods, / […] / Let us treasure his remains, let us honor his new prison, / The fire has left it, let us guard his ashes" ("Je vous appelle tous, o domestiques Dieux, / […] / Aymons ce qui nous reste, honorons sa prison, / Le feu s'en est volé, gardons bien le tison," 44, 51-52). This structure is crucial. In writing "I call on you all" ("je vous appelle tous") first, Catherine allows the reader to

include themselves in this "all" ("tous," 44). It is only in the second half of the phrase that the foreign Lady specifies that she is speaking to the domestique Gods.

Important too is the use of the exhortative. When the foreign Lady commands, "let us treasure his remains, let us honor his new prison / … let us guard his ashes" ("aymons ce qui nous reste, honorons sa prison / … gardons bien le tison," 51-52), the usage of the first-person plural again allows the Lady to enlarge her audience beyond herself and the Gods. The only other time Catherine gestures to the poetic audience is during the narrator's address to Envy earlier in the poem. As already noted, the narrator complains to Envy that "you invaded the hearts of *our* first ancestors" ("de *nos* premiers parents tu espris le courage," 21, emphasis mine). By considering this line in tandem with the foreign Lady, her status as an outsider becomes even more obvious. She is precisely not one of the relatives or ancestors ("parents") to whom the narrator refers, but an anonymous female figure who falls outside of the male genealogy being presented. She theoretically has no reason to be a target of Envy. It is worth asking, why then does she ultimately provoke Envy's ire?

I would suggest that the second half of the aforementioned quotation is illuminating in this regard. The foreign Lady, like all the male heroes who proceed her in the poem, displays courage in the face of adversity. Indeed, the foreign Lady displays remarkable agency in this passage, especially in comparison to the defunct Phocion. The foreign Lady plays an active role in the passage: it is she who receives ("reçeut," 40), who places ("meit," 40), who honors ("honorant," 41), who hides ("cacha," 42), who speaks ("disant," 43), and ultimately who accuses. In contrast, the narrator presents Phocion as someone "who received no sepulcher" ("qui n'eus pas

sepulture," 37). This passive construction reveals little in terms of why Phocion was denied a burial. The foreign Lady begins and ends her speech with similarly passive and obscure constructions. The lines "Phocion's soul has departed" ("l'ame s'est desliée," 45) and "the fire has left it" ("Le feu s'est envolé," 52) do not assign any blame either: these strategic, impersonal, and abstract constructions present Phocion's death as diplomatically as possible.

However, within this rhetorical cushioning, the foreign Lady reveals that Phocion's countrymen caused his death and are therefore at fault. While Phocion's wife modestly implies that the Athenians may have lost their senses, the foreign Lady inculpates them:

> Et que ses citoyens, causes de son trespas
> L'ayant empoisonné ores ne veulent pas
> Qu'il soit ensevely dedans sa terre aymée,
> Se montrant envieux dessus sa renommée. 47-50
>
> The citizens of his country, who have caused his death
> By poisoning him, now refuse
> To have him buried in his beloved land
> Because they envy his renown.

Interestingly, even though the citizens turned against Phocion, the foreign Lady still refers to them as "the citizens of his country" (in French, "ses citoyens" or "his citizens," 47). In doing so, she re-establishes the connection and rhetorically rebuilds the community between Phocion and the citizens who abandoned him. Even though she herself remains anonymous, the foreign Lady fights to increase Phocion's glory and reputation. Her actions ensure his proper burial and her speech his renown. The fact that this selfless gesture solicits Envy's attention and anger could certainly be read as a commentary on what happens when a woman dares express herself, even if this

expression is in the service of men. Speaking publicly is, for a woman, an inherently fraught endeavor. The risk only increases when that speech is accompanied by social critique.

Catherine uses the passage with the foreign Lady to complicate how Envy functions. In considering who Envy targets and how, it becomes clear that both men and women are susceptible to Envy, but in different ways. Catherine plays with the metaphor of hospitality—and in particular the notion of giving and receiving food—that she set up earlier in the poem to establish a link between Phocion and Envy. She introduces Phocion as someone "who received no sepulcher / In the beloved country where you were born and raised" ("qui n'eus pas sepulture / au pays tant aymé où tu pris nourriture," 37-38). The French expression "où tu pris nourriture" literally translates to "where you took food." In thus phrasing the text, Catherine picks up on themes she enumerated earlier in the poem when she introduced Envy:

> Mais, o cruelle Envie, on ne reçoit par toy
> Sinon le desplaisir, la douleur, et l'esmoy.
> A celui qui te loge, ingrat' et fiere hotesse,
> Tu laisse pour payement le deuil et la tristesse.
> A celui qui *te donne à repaistre* chez lui,
> *Tu payes pour escot* le chagrin et l'ennuy; 15-20, emphasis mine
>
> But, O cruel Envy, one receives from you
> Only displeasure, pain, and sorrow.
> To whoever takes you in, ungrateful and proud guest,
> You leave as payment only mourning and sadness,
> To whoever *gives you food* at his home,
> *You give in return*[69] only grief and chagrin;

[69] As discussed earlier in the chapter, the translation here is not quite accurate. It leaves out the notion of paying the *escot*, or price per person for food and drink.

Phocion takes food; Envy is readily given it. He becomes an unwelcome guest even in his homeland, while in contrast, Envy is given full hospitality. The above quotation sheds light on the complex way Envy functions. While Phocion becomes the victim of Envy in the sense that he is killed because of envy, the foreign Lady's speech nevertheless makes clear that it is the citizens who "envy his renown" ("se montrant envieux dessus sa renommée," 50). Again, this phrasing is ambiguous. Do they take Envy in and lodge her, or has she infected them? This situation is complicated even further by the fact that it is not the citizens who have to deal with the consequences of taking Envy in, but rather the foreign Lady herself. If as the narrator claims "one receives from you / Only displeasure, pain, and sorrow" ("on ne reçoit par toy / Sinon le desplaisir, la douleur, et l'esmoy," 15-16), it is the foreign Lady who exhibits these symptoms and who must deal with "mourning and sadness" ("le deuil et la tristesse," 18). Catherine makes this explicit in her presentation of the foreign Lady as someone who "with tears in her eyes, / Took your precious ashes and placed them in a tomb" ("ayant la larme à l'oeil / Reçeut ta chere centre, et la meit au cerceil," 39-40). Incidentally, it is worth mentioning that in French "deuil" ("sorrow," 18) rhymes with "la larme à l'oeil" ("tears in her eyes," 39) and "cerceuil" ("tomb," 40). Similarly, Catherine again picks up on the sorrow ("tristesse," 18) she spoke of earlier by describing the foreign Lady as speaking with a sad heart ("d'un *triste* cueur," 44, emphasis mine). These details place the foreign Lady—who embodies sympathy, compassion, and virtue—as Envy's opposite.

(En)countering Envy

Catherine sets up a direct rivalry between "pitiless Envy" ("l'impiteuse Envie," 2) and the foreign Lady, who she refers to as "this pitiful lady" ("cette dame piteuse," 53).

> L'Envie, regardant cette dame piteuse,
> Dans soy-mesme sentit une ire serpenteuse;
> Roüant ses deux grans yeux pleins d'horreur et d'effroy,
> Ah ! je me vengeray, ce dit-elle, de toy,
> He ! tu veux donc ayder (sotte), tu veux deffendre
> Phocion, dont je hay encor la morte cendre ;
> Saches qu'en peu de temps je te feray sentir
> De ton hastif secours un tardif repentir.
> Car en despit de toy j'animeray les ames
> Des maris, qui seront les tyrans de leurs femmes,
> Et qui leur deffendant le livre et le sçavoir,
> Leur osteront aussi de vivre le pouvoir. 53-64

> Envy, gazing upon this pitiful lady,
> Felt a poisonous anger well up inside;
> Rolling her two great eyes full of horror and terror,
> "Ah, I'll avenge myself on you," she said;
> "So, you foolish woman, you seek to help and protect
> Phocion, whose dead ashes I still hate;
> Know that soon I'll force you to feel
> For your promptness in helping him a tardy regret.
> For to spite you I'll incite
> Husbands to become the tyrants of their wives;
> By keeping learning and books from them,
> They'll take away their very desire to live."

While the foreign Lady spoke with "a sad, humble, and devoted heart" ("d'un triste cueur, humble et devotieux," 124), Envy instead rolls "her two great eyes full of horror and terror" ("ses deux grans yeux pleins d'horreur et d'effroy," 55). Similarly, while foreign Lady received Phocion's "precious ashes" ("chere cendre," 40), Envy on the other hand proclaims she still hates his dead ashes ("je hay encore la morte cendre," 58). Catherine describes the two women in similar but contrasting ways.

Catherine also builds a series of sonorous oppositions into this passage. She associates Envy with serpentine qualities and in particular the "s" sound, which begins to resonate in the text. The style reflects the content most markedly in the line "dans soy-mesme sentit une ire serpenteuse" ("Felt a poisonous anger well up inside," 54). However, the "s" sound also comes across words and phrases like "ses deux grands yeux" (55), "saches" (59), "secours" (60), "les ames" (61), "seront" (62), "sçavoir" (63), "aussi" (64). That being said, in several words and expression, the soft "s" sound contrasts with the harsher "t" sound. This can be heard in words like "cette" (53), "piteuse" (53), "sentit" (54), "serpenteuse" (54), "ce dit-elle," (56), "sotte" (57), "la morte cendre" (58), "sentir" (59), and "hastif secours" (60). The "t" sound is also heavily present in the text and appears in words like "temps" (59), "tardif" (60), and "tyrans" (62). However, it becomes associated with the foreign Lady through the fact that Envy addresses her multiple times using second person form (*toi/tu/te/ton*): "de toy" (56), "tu veux" (57), "je te feray sentir" (59), "ton hastif secours" (60). This sonorous battle between Envy and the foreign Lady mimics a rhetorical one. The foreign Lady and Envy are the only two characters in the poem who enter into direct speech. Everyone else's discourse, including Agnodice's, is always reported by the narrator instead of being quoted.

The foreign Lady's speech inspires Envy to enter into direct dialogue (and competition) with her. This comes across within Envy's speech through the way she uses personal pronouns. Every time Envy talks about what she will do, it is in reaction or response to the foreign Lady: "I'll avenge myself on you" ("je me vengeray…de toy," 56), "I'll force you to feel / For your promptness in helping him a tardy regret"

("je te feray sentir / De ton hastif secours un tardif repentir," 59), and "to spite you I'll incite / Husbands" ("en despit de toy j'animeray les ames / Des maris," 61-62). Envy's animosity towards the foreign Lady comes across in this last example through the word play: "en despit de toy" can mean both "to spite you" and "in spite of you." Envy frames her actions as vengeance and expresses a desire for the foreign Lady to repent ("repentir," 59). However, according to Envy's own accusations, the foreign Lady's biggest sin was her "promptness in helping" Phocion (her "hastif secours," 60). Envy also faults her for wanting "to help and protect / Phocion, whose dead ashes I still hate" ("tu veux aider [sotte], tu veux deffendre / Phocion, dont je hay encor la morte cendre," 57-58). Envy's hatred for Phocion appears to be a secondary cause for her anger. What really bothers her is the foreign Lady's desire to help and to defend Phocion. Envy's dialogue reinforces that fact that she is horrified by the foreign Lady's kindness, generosity, and community building.

Even the insults and threats Envy uses are revelatory of the way she conceives the world. Envy refers to the foreign Lady as "sotte" (57), which Larsen generously translates as "you foolish woman." The adjective "sot" is much stronger than that, meaning "stupid, crude, without intellect or judgement" ("stupide, grossier, sans esprit & sans jugement").[70] Envy uses this insult to reveal the futility of the foreign Lady's actions. She seeks to take away her rival's agency, all the while insulting her

[70] *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, vol. 2 (Paris: Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1694) in "Dictionnaires d'autrefois," *The ARTFL Project* (Chicago: The University of Chicago), s.v. "sot," accessed October 20, 2020, https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/publicdicos/query?report=bibliography&head=sot&start=0&end=0.

intelligence.[71] Envy also tries to dominate the foreign Lady by placing herself in the position of authority and both commanding and threatening the foreign Lady: "Know that soon I'll force you to feel for your promptness in helping him a tardy regret" ("Saches qu'en peu de temps je te feray sentir / De ton hastif secours un tardif repentir," 59-60). Envy herself identifies knowledge and language with power. It is no coincidence that Catherine pairs books with life ("livre," 63 and "vivre," 64) and knowledge with power ("sçavoir," 63 and "pouvoir," 64). Envy carries out her threat, having men become they tyrants of their wives and forbidding them access to books and learning. However, in taking away their books and knowledge, the men are also taking away their wives' desire to live.

Envy and the Origins of Male Tyranny

Given the severity of what Envy proposes, it is necessary to consider the degree to which she is responsible for the men's actions. On the one hand, Envy takes responsibility for the men's actions. She declares "I'll incite / Husbands to become the tyrants of their wives" ("j'animeray les ames / des maris, qui seront les tyrans de leur femmes," 61-62). This phrasing is even more sinister than the translation implies. Literally, Envy animates the souls of the husbands. The husbands' tyranny is seen grammatically as the wives are introduced with possessive pronouns ("their wives;" "leurs femmes," 62) and become the indirect objects of the verbs *défendre à* (to forbid

[71] In Plutarch's text, Phocion's wife displays more clairvoyance and better judgment than the Athenians themselves. Once they come to their senses, they give Phocion a proper burial and erect a statue in his honor. See Plutarch, "Phocion." *Lives*, XXXVII.3.

someone from something) and *ôter à* (to forbid someone from something). The husbands, then, are not entirely without blame. By keeping books and learning from their wives, they take away their will to live ("leur defendant le livre et le sçavoir, / leur osteront aussi de vivre le pouvoir," 63-64). Catherine uses the same verb *défendre* twice in Envy's speech, but in two different contexts with two different meanings. Here, the husbands ban their wives from learning. Earlier, Envy complained of the foreign Lady, "you seek to…protect / Phocion, whose dead ashes I still hate" ("tu veux deffendre / Phocion, dont je hay encor la morte cendre," 57-58). As the translation indicates, in this context, *défendre* means to protect or stand up for. Catherine's contrasting usage of this homonym makes clear that the husbands have no interest in defending their wives.

Catherine continues to shift the blame between Envy and the husbands. After Envy's speech, the narration continues.

> Aussitost qu'elle eut dit, elle glisse aux moüelles
> Des hommes qui, voyans leurs femmes doctes-belles,
> Desirent effacer de leur entendement
> Les lettres, des beautez le plus digne ornement ;
> Et ne voulant laisser chose qui leur agrée,
> Leur ostent le plaisir où l'ame se recrée.
> Que ce fust à l'Envie une grand'cruauté
> De martirer ainsi cette douce beauté ! 65-72
>
> As soon as she had spoken, Envy slips into the hearts
> Of men who, seeing their wives smart and beautiful,
> Seek to erase from their minds
> All learning, that most worthy ornament of beauty;
> And by not leaving them this pleasant occupation,
> They rob from them the very pleasure in which the soul recreates itself.
> How cruel it was for Envy
> To martyrize sweet beauty in this way!

Again, the original text goes even further than the translation implies. Envy slips not only into the hearts of men, but into their marrow ("aux moüelles," 65). Both the first and last lines ("How cruel it was for Envy / To martyrize sweet beauty in this way;" "Que ce fust à Envie une grand' cruauté / De martirer ainsi cette douce beauté," 71-72) implicate Envy in the women's misfortunes. Perhaps because of lines like these, Tilde Sankovitch makes the claim that, "In order to soften that rather harsh indictment of the male sex, Catherine portrays men as being invaded by Envy, and forced by her to behave disgracefully and heartlessly."[72] However, I would argue that the text is not as clear cut.

The men, again, have their part to play. Upon seeing their wives smart and beautiful, they "seek to erase from their minds / All learning" ("desirent effacer leur entendement / Les lettres," 67-68). Catherine makes it clear that this is a wish or desire of the husbands, and not something imposed upon them by Envy. Moreover, the husbands "by not leaving them this pleasant occupation" harm their wives. The English translation is not entirely accurate here. Catherine uses the verb *vouloir* (to want) in her text: "Et ne voulant laisser chose qui leur agree" (69). A more literal translation would read something like "and not *wanting* to leave anything which pleases [or agrees] with them." The reprisal of the verb *vouloir* is important, as it highlights the difference between the men who have ill will towards the woman, and the foreign Lady who *wants* to help ("veut donc ayder," 57) and *wants* to defend ("veut deffendre," 57) Phocion. Again, Catherine draws a contrast between the good-

[72] Sankovitch, "The Dames des Roches," 60.

natured foreign Lady and the mean-spirited husbands, proving that marital status has no impact on behavior.

Following through on their desires, the husbands deprive their wives of "the very pleasure in which the soul recreates itself" ("leur ostent le plaisir où l'ame se recrée," 70). The use of the word "plaisir" brings back to mind the sinners at the beginning of the piece and creates a contrast between the men who relish in sinful behavior and the women who enjoy intellectual pursuits. The pleasure that the wives get from learning is not the same pleasure that the men get from their pastimes; the wives' literary pleasures are not frivolous but essential to their well-being. Catherine's use of the verb *ôter* (to take, to remove) highlights the gravity of the situation by recalling Envy's promise that husbands will take away their wives' very desire to live ("leur osteront aussi de vivre le pouvoir," 64). Catherine establishes a link between intellectual pursuits, pleasure or recreation, and the creation of the self. In its contemporary usage, *recreér* meant something along the lines of to delight in.[73] However, as the translation points out, Catherine potentially engages in word play between *recréer* and *re-créer* (re-create). The soul finds recreation in letters, in the full sense of the term.

It is not only the wives' minds that benefit from study, but their bodies as well. Catherine ties physical and intellectual well-being together. The husbands become

[73] *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, vol. 1 (Paris: Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1694) in "Dictionnaires d'autrefois," *The ARTFL Project* (Chicago: University of Chicago), *s.v.* "recréer" accessed October 20, 2020, https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/publicdicos/query?report=bibliography&head=recr%C3%A9er&start=0&end=0.

jealous when they see their wives "smart and beautiful" ("doctes-belles," 66). Even within this pairing however, brains come before beauty. While the wives' physical appearance is indicative of their overall health, they are never defined solely by their beauty. Besides, Catherine's definition of beauty includes "all learning, that most worthy ornament of beauty" ("les lettres, des beautez le plus digne ornement," 68). Consequently, when Envy martyrizes "sweet beauty" ("cette douce beauté," 72), there is some ambiguity as to whether she is taking away the wives' physical beauty, intellectual refinement, or both.

There are several references to Madeleine's poetry within this passage, with Ode 3 providing one possible source of inspiration for Catherine. In it, Madeleine offers the women of Poitiers examples of famous mythological women to emulate who were "illustrious in their time" ("du siècle digne ornement," 93).[74] Amongst these is Corinna, a Greek lyric poet whom Madeleine describes as "beautiful, learned and well spoken" ("belle, docte, bien disante," 86). While any sort of comprehensive analysis of the links between Madeleine and Catherine's poetry is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is nevertheless worth pointing out that at the very moment in Catherine's text when women are supposedly losing their sense of community and access to literature, Catherine borrows directly from her mother to establish an intertextual community of female poets.

[74] The English translations of Ode 3 are Larsen's.

Catherine then shifts away from describing the tyranny of the men to the consequences their interdiction has on the women. She illustrates the suffering and afflictions women now face.

> Les dames aussitost se trouverent suivies
> De fiebvres, de langueurs, et d'autres maladies,
> Leur faisoit supporter incroyables tourmens.
> Aymant trop mieux mourir que d'estre peu honteuses
> Contant aux Medecins leurs peines langoureuses
> Les femmes (O pitié !) n'osoient plus se mesler
> De s'aider l'une l'autre, on les faisoit filler.
> Leurs marys, les voyans en ce cruel martyre,
> Ne laissoient pas pourtant de gaucer et de rire;
> Peut-estre desirant deux nopces esprouver,
> Ils n'avoient plus de soing de les vouloir sauver. 73-83

> The women soon found themselves beset
> By fevers, faintness, and other illnesses,
> Envy forced them to bear incredible torments.
> They preferred death to the shame of
> Telling the [male] Doctors about their debilitating troubles. [75]
> The women (what a pity!) did not dare
> To help one another, they were made to spin.
> Their husbands, observing them in this cruel martyrdom,
> Did not refrain from mocking and jeering at them;
> And perhaps hoping to marry again,
> They did not care at all to save them.

Soon, the women find themselves enduring all types of afflictions, including "fevers, faintness, and other illnesses" ("de fiebvres, de langueurs, et d'autres tourmens," 75). While most critics have pointed out the physical manifestation of women's suffering presented in these lines, their specific interpretations of these "incredible torments" ("incroyables tourmens," 75) differ.

[75] Brackets in the original.

This seems to be a result of a variation between editions of the text. Both Larsen's critical edition (Droz, 1993) and her bilingual edition (University of Chicago, 2006) are based on a copy of *Les Oeuvres* (1579) held by the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal (4° BL 2912).[76] The scan of the title page that Larsen provides in the critical edition indicates that this copy should be of a second edition printing of *Les Oeuvres*, which is to say "corrected and augmented" ("corrigee & augmentee") by the Dames des Roches themselves. That being said, in both versions of the poem that Larsen provides, line seventy-five ("Envy forced them to bear incredible torments;" "Leur faisoit supporter incroyables tourments") stands alone. It is the only one in the 177-line poem without a pair. In the original French, there is also no subject either; it is not clear who or what is inflicting these torments upon the women. In her critical edition, Larsen footnotes that this is an ellipsis and suggests Envy in parentheses. In the bilingual edition, she makes Envy the subject of the sentence in the English translation and writes a footnote that "among the torments is that of childbirth."[77] She does not explicitly state her source for this inference, but it would appear to be some other edition of *Les Oeuvres*.

A copy held by the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Rés. Ye. 522), which has been digitized through Gallica and is available online, has an extra verse that is missing from the version Larsen cites. Oddly, this is also supposed to be second edition printing from 1579.[78] This version, however, reads:

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[76] I have not had the privilege of consulting this edition in person myself and can therefore only relay the information in Larsen's books.

[77] Madeleine and Catherine des Roches, *From Mother and Daughter*, 286n91.

Les dames aussi tost se trouverent suivies
De fiebvres, de langueurs, & d'autres maladies
Mais sur tout la douleur de leurs enfantements,
Leur faisoit supporter incroyables tourmens[79]

The women soon found themselves beset
By fevers, faintness, and other illnesses,
But above all the pain of their childbirths
Forced them to bear incredible torments.

This variation identifies the pain of childbirth as the source of the women's anguish, which helps explain a number of mysteries. It clarifies why Sankovitch's prose translation includes the phrase, "But especially the pain of childbirth caused them incredible torments."[80] It also supports Kirk Read's interpretation that "the torments of labor are a reminder of woman's original sin, the sin of desire for knowledge whose consequences are likewise linked to her reproductive capacity."[81] While Read is right that the wives' desire for knowledge is linked to their physical well-being, and their reproductive capacities specifically, I do not see any allusions to the wives' original sin in the passage. If anything, I would argue instead that Catherine alludes to the men's' transgressions all the while highlighting the women's chastity.

As illuminating as the extra verse might be, its omission from the text makes it easier to notice several poetic links that Catherine makes between the line "Envy

[79] *Les Oeuvres de Mes-dames des Roches de Poitiers Mere et Fille, 2e éd., corr. et augm. de la Tragi-comédie de Tobie et autres oeuvres poétiques*, (Paris: Abel Angelier, 1979).

[80] Sankovitch, "The Dames des Roches," 60. She writes that "all quotes have been translated from *Les Oeuvres* (second edition)," but there is no indication as to which copy specifically. See "The Dames des Roches," 68.

[81] Read, "Touching and Telling," 90.

forced them to bear incredible torments" ("leur faisoit supporter incroyables tourmens," 75) and other parts of the poem. For starters, she reuses a rhyme scheme; "tourmens" rhymes with "entendement" ("minds," 67) and "ornement" ("ornament," 68). Not only does this further cement the link between beauty, intellect, and physical well-being (or torment), but it recalls the men's malice towards their wives. In these lines, Catherine describes "men who, seeing their wives smart and beautiful / seek to erase from their minds / all learning, that most worth ornament of beauty" ("Des hommes qui, voyans leurs femmes doctes-belles, / Desirent effacer de leur entendement / Les lettres des beautez le plus digne ornement," 66-8). Secondly, the use of "leur" at the beginning of verse seventy-five evokes the two other verses that begin with "leur." Both describe men's cruel behavior towards women: "they'll take away their very desire to live" ("leur osteront aussi de vivre le pouvoir," 64) and they "rob them of the very pleasure in which the soul recreates itself" ("leur ostent le plaisir où l'ame se recrée," 70). While Catherine does not outright accuse the men, she certainly makes associations that implicate the men in the women's suffering.

That being said, Larsen is not wrong to suggest that the wives' torments are caused by Envy. Catherine draws a temporal connection between Envy's actions and the wives' suffering through the use of the adverb *aussitôt*: "As soon has she had spoken, Envy slips into the hearts / of men" ("*Aussitost* qu'elle eut dit, elle glisse aux moüelles / des hommes," 65-66, emphasis mine); "The women soon found themselves beset by fevers, faintness, and other illnesses" ("Les dames *aussitost* se trouverent suivies / de fiebvres, de langueurs, et d'autres maladies," 73-74, emphasis mine). While Larsen translates *aussitôt* as "as soon as" or "soon," *Le Dictionnaire de*

l'Académie française (1694) gives "at the same time, in the moment" ("Dans le mesme temps, dans le moment") as a definition.[82] Catherine collapses the temporal distance between Envy's speech, her slipping into the men's hearts, and the women' suffering; all occur concurrently.

Catherine also complicates the question of who or what is responsible for the pain the women endure through her use of the construction "*faire* + infinitive" (to do something to someone). Catherine previously used this construction in Envy's speech when she promised the foreign Lady "I'll force you to feel / For your promptness in helping him a tardy regret" ("je te feray sentir / de ton hastif secours un tardif repentir," 59-60). Catherine also uses the verb *faire* to describe how Envy's offspring "upon the virtuous inflicts a thousand wrongs" ("font aux vertueux cent et cent mille torts," 28). Is Envy targeting the wives because of their virtue? Is the pain of childbirth part of how Envy gets back at the foreign Lady? All of this intratextuality legitimizes the question of whether the women's torments are caused by childbirth, by the men's neglect and cruelty, or by Envy herself.

Regardless of who is responsible for the women's suffering, the consequences for the women are dire. The wives "prefer death to the shame of / telling the [male] doctors about their debilitating troubles" (brackets in the original; "aymant trop mieux mourir que d'estre peu honteuses / contant aux Medecins leurs peines langoureuses,"

[82] *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française,* vol. 2 (Paris: Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1694) in "Dictionnaires d'autrefois," *The ARTFL Project* (Chicago: The University of Chicago), s.v. "aussi-tost" accessed October 20, 2020, https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/publicdicos/query?report=bibliography&head=%22AUSSI-TOST%22&start=0&end=0.

76-77). The break between these two lines makes it possible to read the first clause independently of the second: the women preferred death to being immodest.[83] The second line qualifies the first, so that the woman prefer death to being immodest by telling doctors about their pain. Either way Catherine highlights the wives' chastity. Despite their "debilitating troubles" ("peines langoureuses," 77), the women longer "dare / to help one another" ("n'osoient plus se mesler / de s'aider l'une l'autre," 78-79). Catherine again plays with enjambment. If the first line is read independently, *se mêler* takes on the meaning of to mix physically or to mingle socially. However, if combined with the following line, the expression becomes *se mêler de*, meaning "to get mixed up in." The women no longer dare to intervene in each other's care.

The women, who have lost access to both their intellectual and medical communities, are instead forced into manual labor and "made to spin" ("on les faisoit filler," 79). Catherine combines the impersonal (albeit, grammatically masculine) *on* ("one") with the expression "*faire* + infinitive" to avoid assigning direct responsibility to either Envy or the husbands. That being said, the husbands contribute actively to their wives' misery.

> Leurs marys, les voyans en ce cruel martyre,
> Ne laissoient pas pourtant de gaucer et de rire;
> Peut-estre desirant deux nopces esprouver,
> Ils n'avoient plus de soing de les vouloir sauver. 80-83

[83] Among the definitions of "honte" given in the *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française,* vol. 1 (Paris: Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1694) are "dishonor," "modesty," "ignominy," "opprobrium," and "infamy." See "Dictionnaires d'autrefois," *The ARTFL Project* (Chicago, The University of Chicago), s.v. "honte" accessed October 20, 2020, https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/publicdicos/query?report=bibliography&head=honte&start=0&end=0, my translation.

> Their husbands, observing them in this cruel martyrdom,
> Did not refrain from mocking and jeering at them;
> And perhaps hoping to marry again,
> They did not care at all to save them.

The word "martyrdom" ("martyre," 80) draws a direct comparison between the men and Envy. The men's observation of "this cruel martyrdom" ("ce cruel martyre," 80) recalls "how cruel it was for Envy / to martyrize sweet beauty in this way" ("que ce fust à Envie une grand' cruauté / De martirer ainsi cette douce beauté," 71-72). This comparison shows how the men in fact behave worse than Envy. Unsatisfied with depriving their wives of their intellectual pleasures ("ne voulant laisser chose qui leur agrée," 69), the men revel in their wives' suffering and "did not refrain from mocking and jeering at them" ("ne laissoient pas pourtant de gaucer et de rire," 81). Catherine reuses the verb *laisser*, relying on its secondary meaning (when used in the negative) of "to cease, to abstain, to discontinue."[84]

The other verbs Catherine uses also highlight the mens' destructive nature. First, the men "seeing their wives smart and beautiful, / seek to erase from their minds / all learning" ("*voyans* leurs femmes doctes-belles, / *desirent* effacer de leur entendement / les lettres," 66-68, emphasis mine). Now, "observing them in this cruel martyrdom / … / and perhaps hoping to marry again / they did not care at all to save

[84] According to *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française,* vol. 1 (Paris: Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1694) "*Laisser,* Se dit aussi quelquefois dans la signification de Cesser, s' abstenir, discontinuer: & alors il ne s' employe jamais qu' avec la negative." See "Dictionnaires d'autrefois," *The ARTFL Project* (Chicago: The University of Chicago), s.v. "laisser" accessed October 20, 2020, https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/publicdicos/query?report=bibliography&head=laisser&start=0&end=0.

them" ("les *voyans* en ce cruel martyre / … / peut-estre *desirant* deux nopces esprouver / ils n'avoient plus de soing de les vouloir sauver," 80, 82-83, emphasis mine). If the sight of their wives flourishing inspires the men's jealousy, the sight of their wives suffering reveals the men's callous disregard. They have no desire to save their wives. While the men may not wish to help, Agnodice arrives on the scene willing to do just that.

CHAPTER 3

CATHERINE DES ROCHES' "AGNODICE," PART 2

ENGENDERING A HERO

Introduction

Catherine des Roches' poem "Agnodice" (*Les Oeuvres,* 1578) provides a sixteenth-century proto-feminist retelling of the narrative surrounding Agnodice, supposedly the first female midwife in ancient Athens. Although scholars believe Agnodice to be more of a fictionalized character than a historical figure, her story is nevertheless an inspirational one that symbolizes the fight for gender equality.[1] Catherine's poetic adaptation focuses largely on Agnodice, the hero in the poem. Catherine, however, reframes her story with the personified figure of Envy functioning as Agnodice's main antagonist.

In the previous chapter, I argue that Envy's role in this poem has been neglected. She both opens and closes the poem, and significant time is given to developing her character. Catherine begins her poem with the claim that Envy is the worst of all sins. She is the only one from which no good can be derived, spreading misfortune and misery instead. Envy's cruelty has touched many parts of the world, but especially Ancient Athens. At the end of a long list of Envy's victims is Phocion, whose envious countrymen deny him burial. When a foreign Lady advocates for Phocion's burial, she further provokes Envy's ire. Envy retaliates by making husbands

[1] Helen King, "Agnodike and the Profession of Medicine," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society,* New Series, no. 32 (212) (1986): 53-77. Accessed July 20, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/44696917.

jealous of their wives. They, in turn, deny their wives access to books and learning. As a result, women find themselves suffering incredible pain and torment. They dare not tell their male doctors about their troubles, nor help one another. To make matters worse, their husbands do not aid them either, but simply mock and jeer at their wives. I argue that Envy's presence adds a layer of ambiguity to the text. On the one hand, she is the source of the men's envy, which would seem to absolve the men of their wrongdoing. On the other hand, Catherine makes the men's agency abundantly clear. Envy complicates not only how we read the men as villains, but also how we read Agnodice as a hero.

Only after this rather lengthy introduction does Agnodice appear. Wanting to help the women, Agnodice disguises herself as a man and learns medicine. She offers her services to the wives, but they—thinking she is a man—refuse her help. Agnodice lets them in on her secret. After a verbal and physical exchange, the women regain their health. Displeased, Envy makes the men suspicious of Agnodice. They capture her and condemn her to death. At this point, Agnodice reveals herself to the men and through her stunning rhetoric convinces them to allow all women to study. Nevertheless, the poem ends on an ominous note. While Envy recognizes she has lost the battle against Agnodice, she continues to persecute other women.

There has been relatively little published on "Agnodice." There are only a handful of articles, book chapters, and/or introductions that mention the poem specifically.[2] Even then, the poem is only mentioned in passing. As far as I know,

[2] See Anne Larsen, "Catherine des Roches (1542-1587): Humanism and the Learned Woman," *Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association*, 8,

there is no article or chapter dedicated entirely to Catherine des Roches' representation of Agnodice. Most of scholarship that does exist highlights the provocative nature of the text; the commentary usually focuses around the lines in which Agnodice reveals her body to either the men or the women. While this is a crucial portion of the text, it is important to situate it within the larger context of the poem. A detailed and sustained reading of the poem provides a more complete picture of both Agnodice's character and of Catherine's poetic project.

Looking closely at Catherine's lexical and syntactic choices shows the ways in which Agnodice is constantly being compared to the other characters. This is especially true of Agnodice and Envy, who act as foils to each other. While Envy destroys community, Agnodice rebuilds it. She works in service of the collective good and establishes a mode of engagement between women that leads to their health and happiness. Agnodice becomes a mouthpiece for the author. Catherine offers a new model of literary production in which women, as both readers and writers, interact. I demonstrate that she repurposes the literary genre of the blazon to allow women to take on an active and inclusive role. Her goal, in my view, is to challenge a poetic tradition predicated on singularity and to offer in its place a more collaborative enterprise.

(1987): 108; Kendall Tarte, "From the Salon to the Page: Expressing Community in *La Puce de Madame des-Roches*," in *Writing Places: Sixteenth-Century City Culture and the Des Roches Salon* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), 26-59; Kirk Read, "Touching and Telling: Gendered Variations on a Gynecological Theme," in *Birthing Bodies in Early Modern France: Stories of Gender and Reproduction* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 77-95; Tilde Sankovitch, "The Dames des Roches: The Female Muse," in *French Women Writers and the Book: Myths of Access and Desire* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1988), 43-71.

Revising A Literary Precedent

The earliest surviving account of Agnodice, and the one from which Catherine most likely drew her inspiration, comes from Gaius Julius Hyginus's *Fabulae.* Hyginus (64 BC – AD 17) transcribed Greek myths (or fables) into Latin, which Catherine would have been able to read thanks to the humanist education provided to her by her mother. Her narrative poem, at 177 lines, is considerably longer than Hyginus's prose account, which total two paragraphs in length. The way Catherine introduces Agnodice varies from the way Hyginus does. Catherine presents an anonymous figure defined primarily by her nobility of both rank and character.

Hyginus' version tells how the Athenians outlawed women and slaves from practicing medicine. Agnodice must therefore resort to dressing up as a man in order to pursue medical training. According to Hyginus,

> A certain young girl named Agnodice desired to learn medicine; because of this desire she cut off all her hair, put on men's clothes, and became the student of a certain Herophilus for formal instruction. After she was trained, whenever she heard a woman was having trouble below her waist, she went to her.[3]

Hyginus forefronts Agnodice's age and innocence by referring to her as a "young girl." He also presents Agnodice's desire to learn medicine as the motivating factor for her crossdressing. Before she can enter the educational system, Agnodice must remove the signs of her femininity—she cuts off her hair and dons men's clothing. Hyginus

[3] *Apollodorus'* Library *and Hyginus'* Fabulae*: Two Handbooks of Greek Mythology*, trans. R. Scott Smith and Stephen Trzaskoma (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2007), Hyg. 274.10-11.

highlights how the intellectual tradition is both gendered and hierarchical. He mentions Agnodice's teacher Herophilus by name, giving him both status and importance. In Hyginus' text, Agnodice only becomes aware of other women's suffering and decides to help them *after* her training. Her desire to learn medicine comes first, and her desire to help others second.

Catherine makes a number of changes to how she introduces Agnodice, the most notable of which is the fact that she omits mentioning her by name. Instead, she introduces Agnodice simply as "a noble young Lady" ("une Dame gentille," 84).[4] This raises questions of identification. It allows the reader to envisage a protagonist who could represent of any number of noble women, including the reader herself:

> En ce temps il y eut une Dame gentille,
> Que le ciel avoit faict belle, sage, et subtile,
> Qui, piteuse de voir ces visages si beaux,
> Prontement engloutis des avares tombeaux,
> Les voulant secourir couvrit sa double pomme
> Afin d'estudier en accoustrement d'homme,
> Pource qu'il estoit lors aux femmes interdit
> De pratiquer les arts, ou les voir par escrit. 84-91

> Now in that time, there lived a noble young Lady,
> Whom Heaven had made beautiful, wise, and subtle,
> Who, full of pity at the sight of so many beautiful faces
> Soon to be engulfed by the greedy tomb,
> Wanted to rescue them. She hid the twin apples [of her bosom],[5]
> So that she could study, disguised as a man,
> Because it was then forbidden for women
> To practice the arts, or even to read about them.[6]

[4] This is not a literal translation as the French text makes no mention of youth.

[5] Brackets in the original.

[6] Madeleine and Catherine Des Roches, "L'Agnodice" in *From Mother and Daughter: Poems, Dialogues, and Letters of Les Dames des Roches,* ed. Anne R. Larsen

Instead of introducing Agnodice as a "young girl" or child, Catherine introduces her as a lady or a grown-up. She also forefronts Agnodice's social status as a noble Lady ("Dame gentille," 84). When Catherine finally reveals Agnodice's name (fifteen lines after she first introduces her), she does so through the phrase "the noble Agnodice" ("la gentille Agnodice," 100). Anne Larsen has pointed out that the adjective "gentille" indicates both kindness and nobility, as can be seen in her translation of "gentille" as "noble" in both this context and the citation above.[7] Catherine clearly intends to play on the dual significance of the terms, as later in the text, she refers to Agnodice's "kind heart" ("gentil cueur," 110).

In addition to Agnodice's gentility, Catherine stresses her other laudable qualities from the beginning. Catherine introduces Agnodice as "a noble young Lady / Whom Heaven had made beautiful, wise, and subtle" ("une Dame gentille, / que le ciel avoit faict belle, sage, et subtile," 84-85). The order of these adjectives is important; it is no coincidence that "beautiful" ("belle") is first on the list. Catherine does not shy away from emphasizing Agnodice's physical beauty, either here or elsewhere in the poem. That being said, it is important to note that Agnodice's beauty is only one of many qualities mentioned in the text. In addition to mentioning Agnodice's physicality, Catherine also remarks upon her wisdom and intellect. Like *gentil,* the adjectives *sage* and *subtil* can be defined in multiple ways. *Sage* certainly means wise

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 122-31,. Unless otherwise indicated, all English translation are Larsen's.

[7] *From Mother and Daughter,* 286n92.

and knowing, but it can also be defined as sensible, well-advised, discreet, judicious, and prudent.[8] As such, *sage* implies that Agnodice possesses good judgement in addition to pure intellect. This intellectual aspect is reinforced through the adjective *subtil.* Among its meanings are *subtilis* (fine, nice, delicate), *argutus* (active, quick, expressive, lively), *non incallidus* (not unskillful or unintelligent), and *ingeniosus* (full of intellect, superior in mind, able, intellectual, clever, ingenious).[9] Furthermore, the fact that Catherine presents all these qualities as coming from heaven ("le ciel," 85) makes it seem like Agnodice's intellectual capacities are innate instead of learned or taught. Even before pursuing a formal education, Agnodice is described as an accomplished woman.

The most significant change that Catherine makes in relation to Hyginus's text has to do with Agnodice's motivation for studying. As previously mentioned, Hyginus presents Agnodice as wanting to study before she becomes aware that women are suffering in childbirth. Catherine reverses the order of these events in her text.

> [Agnodice], piteuse de voir ces visages si beaux,
> Prontement engloutis des avares tombeaux,
> Les voulant secourir couvrit sa double pomme
> Afin d'estudier en accoustrement d'homme, 86-89

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[8] *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française,* vol. 2 (Paris: Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1694) in "Dictionnaires d'autrefois," *The ARTFL Project* (Chicago: The University of Chicago), s.v. "sage," accessed August 3, 2020, https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/publicdicos/query?report=bibliography&head=sage.

[9] Jean Nicot, *Thresor de la langue francoyse tant ancienne que modern*, vol. 2 (Paris: Douceur, 1606) in "Dictionnaires d'autrefois," *The ARTFL Project* (Chicago: The University of Chicago), s.v. "subtil," accessed August 3, 2020, https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/publicdicos/query?report=bibliography&head=subtil&start=0&end=0.

> [Agnodice], full of pity at the sight of so many beautiful faces
> Soon to be engulfed by the greedy tomb,
> Wanted to rescue them. She hid the twin apples [of her bosom],
> So that she could study, disguised as a man,[10]

Agnodice sees the women suffering, decides she wants to help them, and only then finds a means to do so (by dressing up as a man to get an education). In flipping the order of the text in this way, Catherine makes Agnodice seem much more altruistic. It is her kindness and compassion for others that drives her to action, and not her desire for an education in and of itself.

Agnodice: A Relational Figure

Catherine also uses these lines to establish how Agnodice relates to other characters introduced in the poem thus far. She draws a comparison between Agnodice and the foreign Lady and a contrast between Agnodice and the men.

The foreign Lady, who figures prominently in the first half of the poem, can be read as a precursor to Agnodice. Both women display compassion for others and both evoke Envy's ire. When the Athenians deny Phocion a burial, the foreign Lady decides to bury his ashes herself. These actions provoke Envy, who "gazing upon this *pitiful* lady" ("regardant cette dame *piteuse*," 53, emphasis mine) declares: "Know that soon I'll force you to feel / For your promptness in *helping* him a tardy regret" ("Saches qu'en peu de temps je te feray sentir / De ton hastif *secours* un tardif repentir," 59-60, emphasis mine). Like the foreign Lady who tried to offer help

[10] Brackets in the original.

("secours," 60), Agnodice too is described as "wanting to help" ("voulant secourir," 88). Similarly, both women are referred to as "piteuse." It was the sight of a "pitiful lady" ("dame piteuse," 53) that caused Envy's retaliation on the foreign Lady and womankind more broadly. It is no coincidence that Catherine describes Agnodice as full of pity at the sight of other's suffering. She foreshadows that Agnodice will also elicit Envy's attention by describing Agnodice using the same vocabulary as she did for the foreign Lady.

Similarly to how Catherine uses pity to connect Agnodice to the foreign Lady, she also uses pity to highlight how different Agnodice's reaction to the women's suffering is from their husbands' reaction.

> Les femmes (o pitié!) n'osoient plus se mesler
> De s'aider l'une l'autre on les faisoit filler.
> Leurs marys, les voyans en ce cruel martyre,
> Ne laissoient pas pourtant de gaucer et de rire;
> Peut-estre desirant deux nopces esprouver,
> Ils n'avoient plus de soing de les vouloir sauver. 78-83

> The women (what a pity!) did not dare
> To help one another, they were made to spin.
> Their husbands, observing them in this cruel martyrdom,
> Did not refrain from mocking and jeering at them;
> And perhaps hoping to marry again
> Did not care at all to save them.

Through the narrator's interjection, Catherine normalizes pity as a response to the sight of women's suffering and the loss of community between the women. As Larsen's translation indicates, the women no longer dare help one another. This notion of mutual aid, or rather its disappearance, is reflected in the compositional structure of the verses. Catherine uses the two reflexive verbs *se melser* and *s'aider* back to back and follows them directly by the reciprocal expression "l'une l'autre" ("one another"

or “each other”). This intimacy is broken by the grammatical structure of the hemistich “on les faisoit filler” (“they were made to spin,” 79). In the French, the universal male “on” acts upon the women, who have now become the grammatical objects of the sentence. Just as the narrator feels pity, so too does Agnodice. However, while the narrator laments the loss of female community, Agnodice becomes “full of pity at the sight of so many beautiful faces / soon to be engulfed by the greedy tomb” (“piteuse de voir ces visages si beaux/ prontement engloutis des avares tombeaux,” 86-87). Agnodice is moved to action when she sees the women die before their time.

Agnodice’s reaction to the women’s suffering stands in stark contrast to the men’s. The men, also seeing the women (“les voyans,” 80), decided to mock them instead of helping them. The formulation that Catherine uses to describe Agnodice’s willingness to help save the women is reminiscent of the formulation that she used to describe the husbands’ reticence to save their wives. While the men “did not care at all to save them” (“n’avoient plus de soing de *les vouloir sauver*,” 83, emphasis mine), Agnodice “wanted to rescue them. She hid the twin apples (of her bosom) / So that she could study, disguised as a man” (“*les voulant secourir* couvrit sa double pomme / afin d’estudier en accoustrement d’homme,” 88-89, emphasis mine). Both formulations rely on the direct object *les* (the women), the verb *vouloir* (to want to), and the synonyms *secourir* and *sauver* (to save). Moreover, the use of the idiomatic expression “avoir soin de” (to care for) reinforces that fact that Agnodice, unlike the men, cares for the women both literally and metaphorically. Ironically, in order to do so, she must transform herself physically into a man by hiding the signs of her femininity (in this instance, her breasts) and donning men’s clothing.

This contrast between Agnodice's good will and the men's ill will towards the women operates throughout the poem. Both times that Catherine uses the construction *vouloir* + infinitive in relation to the men, it is in the negative form. Prior to explaining how the men did not want to save the women, Catherine also described them as not wanting to let the women study. To do so, she writes, "not leaving them this pleasant occupation / They [the men] rob them [the women] from the very pleasure in which the soul recreates itself" ("ne voulant laisser chose qui leur agrée / leur ostent le plaisir où l'ame se recrée," 69-70). Not only do men deny women pleasure, but—as we have already seen—ultimately their lives. In contrast, whenever the verb *vouloir* appears in relation to Agnodice, it is always used in an affirmative manner. Agnodice is described as wanting to rescue the women ("les voulant secourir," 88), as someone who wanted to deliver them from their languor ("les vouloit delivrer de leur triste langueur," 111), and more broadly as someone who wanted to carry out her good intentions ("voulut effectuer sa bonne intention," 95). Agnodice is undeniably a positive force in the women's lives.

Just as the verb *vouloir* provides a better understanding of how Agnodice's behavior contrasts with the men's, so too does the verb *voir* (to see). While sight operates in too numerous and complex ways to do justice to entirely in this analysis, isolating how the verb *voir* functions throughout the poem shows that sight can be a source of pleasure, expose one's character, and convey knowledge. Catherine first uses the word *voir* in the portion of the text where she enumerates all the vices that are supposedly better than Envy. She explains how "the proud man is overcome with sweet delight / when he *sees* a great lord honor and flatter him" ("Le superbe se fond

d'une douce allegresse / s'il *voit* un grand seigneur qui l'honore et caresse," 5-6, emphasis mine). Here, sight undoubtedly brings pleasure in the form of "sweet delight" ("douce allegresse"). However, the context imbues this pleasure with a negative quality, as sight is linked to status, power, pride, honor, and vanity.[11]

The next use of the verb *voir* comes with the husbands, who "*seeing* their wives smart and beautiful, / Seek to erase from their minds / All learning" ("*voyans* leurs femmes doctes-belles / Desirent effacer de leur entendement/ Les lettres," 66-68, emphasis mine). When the husbands see their wives thriving, they become envious and decide to make their lives miserable. This passage is followed by the citation discussed earlier, where the husbands, seeing their wives miserable, exacerbate the situation by laughing at them. Catherine reveals the husbands' true character through the men's reaction to how they perceive their wives. As previously discussed, this reaction is contrasted with Agnodice's reaction: pity.

The verb *voir* is again repeated several lines later when Catherine comments that "it was then forbidden for women / To practice the arts, or even to read about them" ("il estoit lors aux femmes interdit / De pratiquer les arts, ou les *voir* par escrit," 90-91, emphasis mine). Not only are women forbidden from practicing the arts, but also from simply seeing them in writing. Again, sight seems to be privileged, but in this instance, as a conveyor of knowledge. Women are not even allowed to see the books, let alone read them. As we shall see later in the chapter, Agnodice changes how

[11] This is interesting to consider in relation to the blazon portion of the text, as sight again functions as a conveyor of pleasure. However, in that context, when the women gaze at Agnodice's body, the negative connotations disappear.

sight functions within the poem. Instead of perpetuating sin (gluttony, pride, envy, etc.), sight becomes a means of healing.

Acquiring Male Expertise

Only after describing Agnodice's character and what drives her does Catherine mention Agnodice's physical and intellectual transformation. In the introductory lines discussed above, reader learns that Agnodice "hid the twin apples [of her bosom] / so that she could study, disguised as a man" (brackets in the original; "couvrit sa double pomme / Afin d'étudier en accoustrement d'homme," 88-89). Having dressed herself as a man, Agnodice conceals the remaining sign of her femininity: her golden hair.

> Ceste Dame, cachant l'or de sa blonde tresse
> Aprist la medecine, et s'en feit grand maistresse.
> Puis se resouvenant de son affection,
> Voulut effectuer sa bonne intention,
> Et guerir les douleurs de ses pauvres voisines
> Par la vertu des fleurs, de feuilles et racines,
> D'une herbe mesmemement qui fut cueillie au lieu
> Où Glauque la mengeant d'homme devint un Dieu. 92-99
>
> This young woman, hiding the gold of her blond locks,
> Learned medicine, and became quite expert at it.
> Then, remembering her original intent,
> She wanted to carry out her plan
> To heal the sufferings of her poor sisters
> By the special virtues of flowers, leaves, and roots,
> Especially with an herb picked on the very spot
> Where Glaucus from a man became a God after eating it.

Agnodice's gender is never in question. Even though she dresses as a man, she is still clearly referred to as a woman ("Dame," 92). In fact, by describing Agnodice's hair as gold, Catherine emphasizes both its color and value. Agnodice's hair and breasts becomes some of her most distinguishing features and powerful symbols of her

femininity. While in Hyginus's version Agnodice cuts her hair off as part of her transformation, in Catherine's version she simply covers ("couvrit," 88) and hides ("cachant," 92) the signs of her femininity.[12] As the repeated moments of covering and uncovering will show, Agnodice's femininity becomes a quality she can hide or emphasize to suit her needs. Agnodice has the ability to adapt appropriately to whatever situation she finds herself in.

Catherine not only plays with gender expression, but also how gender relates to knowledge. Catherine removes Hyginus' reference to male authority conveyed through the figure of Agnodice's instructor Herophilus and instead simply writes that Agnodice "learned medicine" ("Aprist la medecine," 93). While this revision is itself remarkable, Catherine makes it even more radical through a play on words. "Aprist" should, first and foremost, be interpreted as the conjugation of the verb *apprendre* (to learn) in the *passé simple* (simple past). However, it happens to be a homophone of the *passé composé* (compound past) of the verb *prendre* (to take): *a pris* (took). As such, Agnodice not only learns medicine, but in a certain way, takes it too; she games the system in order to access an education and to procure knowledge that would normally be denied to her. Catherine makes a point of stressing that Agnodice "becomes quite

[12] Tilde Sankovitch provides the following reading of Catherine's "double pomme": "The physical description of this figure stresses both her erotic and her motherly aspects, not as contradictory, as convention would often have it, but as one. This erotic/maternal joining is clear in the emphasis Catherine places on Agnodice's breasts. The 'twin apples' are a sign of bonding with other women in pleasure and nourishment, and in the shared body/mind experience of victimization and of desire: the desire of the forbidden Book, which the mother may restore to her deprived daughters." "The Dames des Roches," 64-65.

expert at it" ("s'en feit grand maistresse," 93). This line, in French, is grammatically (and phonetically) incorrect. The adjective "grand" is masculine, while the noun "maistresse" is feminine. Either "grand" should be "grande" (with an "e" on it) to make it agree with the noun, or "maistresse" should be "maistre" to make it agree with the adjective. Catherine opts for the feminine noun and drops the "e" on "grande" to help her meet rhythmic requirements. "Grand" and "maistre" are both one syllable, while "grande" and "maistresse" are two each; Catherine's combination is three syllables. Yet, this mismatch highlights how Agnodice's gender clashes with her skillset; Agnodice achieves a degree of knowledge usually reserved for men.

Agnodice learns medicine to serve the collective good. Catherine reinforces the point that for Agnodice medicine is a means to an end, not the end itself.

> Puis se resouventant de son affection,
> voulut effectuer sa bonne intention,
> et guérir les douleurs de ses pauvres voisines 94-96
>
> Then, remembering her original intent,
> She wanted to carry out her plan
> To heal the suffering of her poor sisters

"Puis" ("Then") emphasizes that Agnodice's affection and good intention precede and succeed her study of medicine. The verb "se resouvenir" dramatizes this situation since *se souvenir* already means "to remember." Agnodice re-remembers her affection. Perhaps this is why Larsen translates *affection* as "original intent" and "sa bonne intention" as "her plan." Doing so signals back to Agnodice's initial response, to which Catherine is clearly alluding. Agnodice's desire to heal "her poor neighbors" ("ses pauvres voisines," 96) recalls how she was "full of pity at the sight of so many

beautiful faces" ("piteuse de voir ces visages si beaux," 86). [13] These lines echo each other not only thematically, but sonorously; both emphasize *p* and *v* sounds. The adjective "poor" ("pauvre," 96) in the expression "her poor neighbors" ("ses pauvres voisines," 96) functions not as an indication of material wealth but rather as a sentiment of compassion, not unlike how pity was used earlier in the text.

Agnodice wants to use the "virtues" ("vertu," 97) of vegetation—specifically of flowers, leaves, roots, and herbs—to help her cure the wives. Here, virtue needs to be interpreted in the sense of "efficiency, force, vigor, property" ("efficacité, force, vigueur, proprieté").[14] Agnodice plans to use the plants' active properties to heal her sisters. Catherine alludes to the transformative power of these medicinal plants through a reference to Glaucus, a man who—as the text explains—transformed into a god after eating a magical herb. Tilde Sankovitch interprets this reference to Glaucus positively, writing that herb that made Glaucus immortal is "the same herb Agnodice uses to heal the women by admitting them to poetry and immortality."[15] However, I would caution against this reading. The text never states that Agnodice uses herbs to heal the women, only her intention to do so.

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[13] My translation. Larsen translates "voisines" as "sisters."

[14] *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française,* vol. 2 (Paris: Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1694) in "Dictionnaires d'autrefois," *The ARTFL Project* (Chicago: The University of Chicago), s.v. "vertu," accessed November 11, 2020, https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/publicdicos/query?report=bibliography&head=vertu&start=0&end=0. All translations from the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* are my own.

[15] Sankovitch, "The Dames des Roches," 64.

Glaucus's apotheosis is only the beginning the story that Ovid tells his *Metamorphoses*. The herb which gives Glaucus immortality also turns his lower half into a "twisted fish-form." [16] He falls in love with and chases after the nymph Scylla. She, fearful of him, flees his romantic advances. This rejection sends Glaucus to seek out the help of Circe. He asks her to use "the tried strength of efficacious herbs" to make Scylla love him.[17] Glaucus's plan backfires when Circe ends up falling for him instead. He, however, rejects Circe. Envious of his love for Scylla, Circe brews an herbal concoction which she pours into the waters where Scylla comes to rest. Her poison causes barking dogs to replace Scylla's legs.

Behind Catherine's allusion to Glaucus's immortality is a tale of all the harm done to the woman he loved. The women in the poem understandably refuse Agnodice's help when she approaches them with "an herb picked on the very spot / Where Glaucus from a man became a God after eating it" ("D'une herbe mesmement qui fut cueillie au lieu / où Glauque la mengeant d'homme devint un Dieu," 98-99). They are right to fear for their safety. Agnodice, dressed as man and trying to mimic them, represents a threat to the women. She cannot undo the harm the men have done trying to use the same methods that caused that harm in the first place. As Audre

[16] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1916), 13:915.

[17] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* 14.21-22.

Lorde reminds us, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”[18] Agnodice needs to find a different approach to heal the wives.

A Feminine Approach

When Agnodice first approaches the wives, they decline her services because they think she is a man. Only when Agnodice shows them that she is a woman do they accept her help.

> Ayant tout preparé, la gentille Agnodice
> Se presente humblement pour leur faire service.
> Mais les Dames pensant que ce fut un garson,
> Refusoient son secours d’une estrange façon.
> L’on cognoissait assez à leurs faces craintives
> Qu’elles craignoient ses mains comme des mains lassives. 100-105
>
> Having prepared everything, the noble Agnodice
> Humbly offers her services to the Ladies.
> But they, thinking she was a man,
> Harshly refused her help.
> It was readily apparent from their timorous faces
> That they feared her hands as lustful hands.

In order to fully understand the text, several revisions need to be made to Anne Larsen’s translation. “Se presente” translates more literally as “presents herself”; Agnodice humbly presents herself at their service. This is a subtle but important difference from “offering her services.” The original French places Agnodice in a more deferential position, which the adjective “humbly” (“humblement”) reinforces.

[18] Audre Lorde, “The master's tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” in *The Essential Feminist Reader,* ed. Estelle B. Freedman (New York: Modern Library, 2007), 331-35, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uva.x030262936?urlappend=%3Bsignon=swle:https://shibidp.cit.cornell.edu/idp/shibboleth.

Similarly, “pour leur faire service” (literally “to do them service”) places Agnodice in the subordinate position. These formulations again contrast her attitude and behavior with the men’s. While they actively aggravated the situation by making women spin and then mocking and jeering at them, Agnodice is there to serve the women. Ultimately, the women refuse Agnodice’s help. However, they do so “d’une estrange façon” (“in a strange manner”), which is a much more ambiguous formulation than Larsen’s translation of “harshly” would imply.

Despite this initial difficulty in interpreting the women’s reaction, their response becomes more legible in the next line. I would propose an alternate translation of “L’on cognoissait assez à leurs faces craintives” as I believe that both the use of the pronoun *on* (one) and the verb *connaître* (to know) are crucial to understanding the radical shift that takes place within this line. A more accurate translation would read “One knew enough from their fearful faces.” Here, the French “on” changes meaning. It no longer represents the menacing males of “on les faisoit filler” (“they were made to spin,” 79) but rather a shared female perspective that allows the body to be more easily read. Etymologically, *connaître* implies a collective knowledge, as “con” means “with” and “noscere” or “gnoscere” to learn.[19] As one of them, Agnodice can make sense of the visual expression of the women’s fear. Moreover, because of their experience as women, Agnodice, Catherine (as narrator), and the reader can all understand the wives’ perspective. The fact that the women do

[19] *Le Grand Robert de la langue française*, s.v. “connaître,” accessed August 3, 2020, https://grandrobert.lerobert.com/robert.asp.

not trust Agnodice, and her supposedly lustful hands ("mains lassives," 105), does not speak well of the women's previous experience. In fact, it suggests the male doctors had taken advantage of their female patients. This is also implied sonorously through the repetition of harsh *c* sounds in the words "cognoissoit," "craintives," "qu'elles," "craignoient," and "comme" (104-5). The wives' fear of Agnodice's lustful hands also signals back to the male sinners enumerated at the beginning of the poem, and in particular "the young man trapped by his lecherous love" ("le jeune homme surpris de lascives amours," 11). Men are portrayed negatively in both an amorous and medical context, favoring their own pleasure over their partners' and patients' well-being.

Faced with this mistrust on behalf of her patients, Agnodice decides to reveal her true sex to the other women:

> Agnodice, voyant leur grande chasteté,
> Les estima beaucoup pour ceste honnesteté ;
> Lors descouvrant du sein les blanches pommes rondes,
> Et de son chef doré les belles tresses blondes,
> Monstre qu'elle estoit fille, et que son gentil cueur
> Les vouloit delivrer de leur triste langueur. 106-111
>
> Agnodice, seeing their great chastity,
> Esteemed them all the more for their virtue,
> And uncovering then the white round apples [of her bosom], [20]
> And the beautiful blond tresses of her golden head,
> Showed that she was a maiden, and that her kind heart
> Wished to deliver them from their sad predicament.

This anecdote is just as revelatory of Agnodice's character as it is of the women's. Agnodice has a very generous reading of the women's fear. Instead of interpreting their trepidation negatively, she interprets it a sign of their virtue. The women's

[20] Brackets in the original.

chastity prompts Agnodice to unveil the signs of her femininity: her long, golden hair and her breasts. Previously markers of Agnodice's difference that needed to be hidden in order to prevent her exclusion, now her hair and breasts become visual markers of her belonging.

Catherine repeats her description of Agnodice's physical characteristics, but makes several small changes that further emphasize Agnodice's beauty. Catherine transforms the singular "blonde tresse" (92) into "les belles tresses blondes" ("beautiful blond tresses," 109), augmenting at once their quantity and quality. Similarly, the golden color that was previously restricted to her hair now applies to her whole head ("son chef doré," 109), evoking a golden crown or halo. Likewise, Agnodice's "twin apples" ("double pomme," 88) become "white round apples" ("les blanches pommes rondes," 108), adding detail regarding both their shape and color. Agnodice retains her purity through the description of her as a "maiden" ("fille," 110). Typically referred to as a Lady (*Dame*), the appellation "fille" helps establish Agnodice's innocence and non-threatening nature even more. That being said, her mastery of medicine is never in question. In fact, Catherine plays on the multiple meanings of the verb *delivrer* (to deliver) to highlight Agnodice's ability to help the women in both a medical context and in the larger context of their emancipation.

Redefining the Blazon

After this initial revelation of Agnodice's womanhood to the other women, the text dives into the section that has received the most critical attention: the blazon of Agnodice's body. The term *blason* originally comes from the heraldic tradition and

referred to a description of a shield or coat of arms. The *blason* then became associated with "a codified poetic description of an object praised or blamed by a rhetorician-poet."[21] Eventually, this "object praised" turned into a woman. In the French literary tradition, the most famous blazons from the sixteenth century are the "anatomical blazons" popularized by a legendary literary contest,

> "le concours du *blason*," organized by the poet Clément Marot, in exile at the court of Ferrara in 1536. Each of the participants in this contest wrote a poem in praise of one part of a woman's body, "blazoning" it—that is, announcing its merits to the world. Maurice Scève won the prize with a poem on the eyebrow. Eleven poems from the contest were published in the same year with the title *Blasons anatomiques du corps fémenin.* Constantly augmented, the collection was republished five times up to 1543, when it reappeared with thirty-seven *blasons* and twenty-one *contreblasons*, satiric attacks on old and ugly body parts.[22]

Both the *blasons* and *contreblasons* celebrate a singular part of the female body, some expected (the beloved's eyes, nose, lips, hair, etc.) and others more outlandish (her forehead, knee, tooth—or indeed—her eyebrow). As the blazon transitioned from a description of a shield to a description of a woman, the possibility of identification was lost; the detail that originally helped identify, instead obscured.

Ann Rosalind Jones uses Nancy Vickers' work to trace the origins of the *blason* back to Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. Written in the mid-1300s but first published in 1470, Petrarch's collection of poems describes his beloved Laura, but does so through

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[21] Nancy J. Vickers, "'This Heraldry in Lucrece' Face'," *Poetics Today* 6, no. 1/2 (1985): 175. doi:10.2307/1772128.

[22] Ann Rosalind Jones, "'Blond chef, grande conqueste': Feminist Theories of the Gaze, the *blason anatomique*, and Louise Labé's Sonnet 6," in *Distant Voices Still Heard: Contemporary Readings of French Renaissance Literature*, ed. John O'Brien and Malcolm Quainton (Liverpool University Press, 2000), 88.

an insistence on specific body parts. As Vickers argues, "the absence of a coherent, comprehensive portrait is significant. Laura is always presented as a part or parts of woman."[23] Petrarch's "insistence on the particular" results in the beloved's fragmentation, scattering her body throughout the text.[24] References to Laura's hair, hand, eyes, and other disparate body parts abound in Petrarch's oeuvre.

> Petrarch's text, of course, did not constitute the first example of particularizing description, but it did popularize a strategy by coming into fashion during the privileged early years of printing, the first century of widespread diffusion of both words and images. It is in this context that Petrarch left us his legacy of fragmentation.[25]

The sixteenth-century French *blasonneurs* would have read Petrarch's work and been familiar with it. In fact, Maurice Scève, the poet who won the blazon competition, is most famous for his own collection of poems dedicated to his beloved. *Délie, objet de plus haulte vertu* (1544) is considered the first French *canzoniere,* directly inspired by Petrarch's work. When constructing their blazons, French poets writing in the Petrarchan tradition took his legacy of fragmentation to the extreme by writing entire poems dedicated to a single body part.

Whether conceived of narrowly through the genre of the anatomical blazon or more broadly through the male lyric tradition of the renaissance, "the canonical legacy of description is a legacy shaped predominately by the male imagination for the male

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[23] Nancy J. Vickers, "Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 2 (Winter 1981): 266. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343163.

[24] Vickers, "Diana Described," 266.

[25] Vickers, "Diana Described," 277.

imagination."[26] The female figure becomes the focus of a masculine gaze: an object of fantasy, admired and praised for her perfection and beauty. While the male poet may compliment and woo his beloved in the process, he writes primarily to establish his own literary legacy. This is especially evident within the context of literary competition.

> In the contest of male poets, the *blason* isolates and idealises a particular feature through the verbal skill by which each poet intends to outdo his rivals. Such competition does away with any need for particular women. Anatomised in this way, the Lauras and Délies disappear, distilled into the poet's description of a perfect cheek or eyebrow.[27]

In the search for poetic glory, male poets reduce the women's bodies to descriptive imagery, embellishment, and metaphor. Purportedly writing in admiration of the beloved, the male lyric poet instead silences and effaces her.

Female poets challenge this gender dynamic, finding ways to make themselves heard. Anne Rosalind Jones's work outlines the ways in which three French women poets—Pernette du Guillet, Catherine des Roches, and Louise Labé—negotiate a position as speaking subjects. She examines how these women adapt the conventions of the blazon to call into question the role they have been assigned. According to Jones, Du Guillet shifts the gaze by elevating its focus from the body to the mind. She constructs self-referential blazons that display a preference for Neoplatonic love theory, privileging the spiritual over the physical.[28] In contrast to Du Guillet's refined

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[26] Vickers, "'This Heraldry in Lucrece' Face'," 171.

[27] Jones, "'Blond chef, grande conquest'," 91-92.

[28] Jones mostly bases her conclusions on a reading of Epigram 17 from Pernette du Guillet's *Rymes*. See "'Blond chef, grande conquest'," 95-96.

approach, Catherine adopts a more critical one. Within *Les Oeuvres*, Catherine writes a series of six allegorical dialogues, the last one of which is a dialogue between Sincero and Charity ("Dialogue de Sincero et de Charite").[29] In this dialogue, Sincero compliments Charity, who explains that male flattery only serves to silence her. According to Jones, Charity exposes the genre for what it is: a rhetorical exercise that has little basis in truth and serves only as means for Sincero to elevate his own status as poet.[30] Jones sees Labé as adopting yet another tactic, applying the blazon to both herself and her beloved to create a more egalitarian footing between them. Each occupies the role of the lover, beloved, and poet. By highlighting their shared qualities, Labé can claim the same right to recognition as the male poet.[31] Du Guillet, Catherine, and Labé, each in their own way, defy their marginalization by challenging and revising male norms.

These three examples serve to underscore just how unusual Catherine's use of the blazon in "Agnodice" is, even within Catherine's oeuvre. Instead of trying to

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[29] The five preceding dialogues are: 1. "Dialogue between Old Age and Youth" ("Dialogue de Vieillesse et Jeunesse"), 2. "Dialogue between Virtue and Fortune" ("Dialogue de Vertu et Fortune"), 3. "Dialogue between the Hand, the Foot, and the Mouth" ("Dialogue de la Main, du Pié et de la Bouche"), 4. "Dialogue between Poverty and Hunger" ("Dialogue de la Pauvreté et la Faim"), 5. "Dialogue Between Love, Beauty, and Physis" ("Dialogue d'Amour, de Beauté et de Physis"). The "Dialogue between Sincero and Charity" is followed by a series of 30 poems written between the two characters. See des Roches, *Les Oeuvres*, 186-288. For an English translation of the dialogues, see *From Mother and Daughter*, 186-216.

[30] Jones, "'Blond chef, grande conquest'," 96-97.

[31] Jones reads and references several of Labé's works to make her argument, including Elegy 2 and Sonnets 2, 6, 10, 12, 21, 23. See "'Blond chef, grande conquest'," 97-102.

revise the realm of possible discourse between the sexes, Catherine undercuts the very assumption that the blazon only applies to a male-female pairing. Instead, she uses the blazon to express the wives' total admiration of Agnodice.

> Les Dames, admirant ceste honte naïfve,
> Et de son teint doüillet la blanche couleur vive,
> Et de son sein poupin le petit mont jumeau,
> Et de son chef sacré l'or crepelu tant beau,
> Et de ses yeux divins les flammes ravissantes,
> Et de ses doux propos les graces attirantes,
> Baiserent mille fois et sa bouche et son sein,
> Recevant le secours de son heureuse main.
> On voit en peu de temps les femmes et pucelles
> Reprendre leur teins frais, et devenir plus belles. 112-21

> The Ladies, admiring her innocent modesty,
> And the lively whiteness of her soft complexion,
> And the little twin mounts of her adorable breasts,
> And the beautiful golden shine of her blessed head,
> And the ravishing flames of her divine eyes,
> And the engaging gracefulness of her sweet words,
> Kissed a thousand times both her mouth and her breast,
> As they received help from her blessed hands.
> Soon, one could see wives and maidens
> Regain their glowing complexion, and become even more beautiful.

Catherine's blazon of Agnodice challenges many of the conventions of the genre laid out in Jones's work. While the blazon typically creates "a general standard of beauty by which all women can be measured, a standard that effaces the particularities of specific women," that does not happen here.[32] Even though Catherine does not mention Agnodice by name in this passage, there is no doubt to whom she refers. The anaphora "et de son" as well as the repetition of the possessive pronouns *son/sa/ses* before each attribute makes it clear that Catherine is describing one specific woman:

[32] Jones, "'Blond chef, grande conquest'," 91.

Agnodice. Moreover, in her description, Catherine repeats characteristics the reader has already come to associate with Agnodice. Catherine applies the color white, which was previously used to describe "the white round apples" ("les blanches pommes rondes," 112) of Agnodice's bosom, to Agnodice's entire complexion. Similarly, Catherine again turns to a description of Agnodice's breasts and golden hair to identify her.

Catherine does not focus on one particular body part as the male *blazonneurs* do. Rather, she paints a more complete image of Agnodice. In terms of Agnodice's physical features, Catherine moves from her complexion, to her breast, to her hair, to her eyes. Moreover, she sandwiches this physical description between references to Agnodice's character and speech. Catherine prefaces the blazon with a reference to Agnodice's "innocent modesty" ("honte naïfve," 112). She also ends the blazon with a reference to "the engaging gracefulness of her sweet words" ("de ses doux propos les graces attirantes," 117). Not only is Agnodice not silenced, but her speech is actually one of the qualities that draws other women to her. Catherine centers the blazon in the middle of the second half of the poem (the portion that deals with Agnodice), thus giving her ample time to develop Agnodice's character both before and afterwards.

A number of contradictions appear within the language of the blazon. This is certainly the case regarding Catherine's physical portrait of Agnodice, where she juxtaposes contrasting adjectives against each other. For example, Catherine describes Agnodice's complexion as both pale and vibrant ("la blanche couleur vive," 113) and her breast as both little and mountainous ("le petit mont," 114). She also hints at Agnodice's cuteness through both her "adorable breast" ("sein poupin," 114) and her

pleasantness through the adjective *doux.* Meaning both sweet and soft, Catherine mentions both Agnodice's "sweet words" ("doux propos," 117) and "soft complexion" ("teint doüillet," 113). Here, *douïllet*, as a diminutive of *doux*, conveys the broader sense of intimacy and endearment that pervades this passage.

Catherine mixes descriptions that hint at Agnodice's innocence and purity with a heightened sense of sensuality. Kirk Read has pointed out how the detailed descriptions of Agnodice's body change the tone of the poem.

> The story here becomes ever more lyrical, ecstatic, and erotic; the women of Athens are delivered from their "langueur"—the illness induced by the privation of learning—into a state of delirious contentment…the woman's body is touchable, and knowable in a way that flies in the face of accusations of licentiousness.[33]

While Catherine does not shy away from eroticism, she never places either party's virtue in question. The women implicitly look upon and admire Agnodice's body; explicitly they kiss "a thousand times both her mouth and her breast" ("baiserent mille fois et sa bouche et son sein," 118). Agnodice's physicality comes across not only from the comparison of her eyes to "ravishing flames" ("les flames ravissantes," 116) but from a reference to her "graces attirantes" (117). Larsen translates the latter as "engaging gracefulness," but *attirant* could be more faithfully translated as attractive. Here, Catherine plays with the divide between the physical body (attractive) and the spiritual body (graceful). Catherine emphasizes Agnodice's sanctity through allusions

[33] Kirk Read, "Touching and Telling: Gendered Variations on a Gynecological Theme," chap. 3 in *Birthing Bodies in Early Modern France: Stories of Gender and Reproduction* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2011), 92.

to her "blessed head" ("chef sacré," 115) and "divine eyes" ("yeux divins," 116). Her body is both sublimated and embraced—literally and figuratively.

Catherine also alters her version of the blazon through its active and inclusionary nature. As men have conceived it, "rather than advancing a plot, the *blason* freeze-frames the woman."[34] The entirety of Catherine's blazon, however, is framed around what the women do: Agnodice offers her aid but the wives refuse (100-103); Agnodice uncovers her hair and breasts to show she is a woman and wants to help (108-111); the wives admire Agnodice's modesty and of each of her qualities listed in succession through the conjunction *and* (112-117)*;* they kiss her thousands of times (118); they receive her aid (119). In other words, Agnodice is not simply a static image at which the women gaze. Instead, Agnodice and the women interact. There is a certain reciprocity in their actions. Before Agnodice can examine the women, they examine her. Similarly, their visual exchange is paired with a physical one. The women offer Agnodice kisses, she offers them her handiwork.

In this regard, Catherine's blazon of Agnodice's body advances the narrative of the story. Not only do the wives change their point of view regarding Agnodice, they undergo a physical transformation as a result. Agnodice's hands—which the wives interpreted just a few lines prior as the threatening, "lustful hands" ("des mains lassives," 105)—now become "her blessed hands" ("son heureuse main," 119). This phrase is difficult to translate due to the many possible interpretations of *heureux*. As a stand-alone adjective, *heureux* can mean anything from happy, to fortunate, to

[34] Jones, "'Blond chef, grande conqueste'," 88.

excellent. As an expression however, "it is said that someone has *la main heureuse* in something when they almost always succeed at it" ("on dit, qu'une personne a la main heureuse à quelque chose, pour dire, qu'elle y réussit presque toujours").[35] Playing off of these meanings, I would propose "winning hand" as one possible interpretation of this phrase. Regardless of the translation chosen, Agnodice's intervention clearly has a positive effect on the women who "regain their glowing complexion, and become even more beautiful" ("reprendre leur teins frais, et devenir plus belles," 121). This phrase brings the text back full circle and emphasizes the symmetrical nature of the passage. Catherine began her blazon by talking about Agnodice's "soft complexion" ("teint doüillet," 113) and ends it by commenting on the women's new and improved "glowing complexion" ("teins frais", 121). Thanks to Agnodice, the wives' health and beauty has been restored.

Catherine's most drastic revision to the blazon is in terms of audience. She adapts a literary tradition written by men for men and makes it work in service of a community of women. By transforming the male gaze into a female one, Catherine creates a space in which women can actively participate in the visual economy. As Larsen points out, one of the reasons this passage is so striking is because "it centers on women as *readers* of another woman's text. Agnodice's body becomes a text

[35] *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 4th ed, vol. 1 (Paris: Brunet, 1762) in "Dictionnaires d'autrefois," *The ARTFL Project* (Chicago: The University of Chicago), s.v. "heureux," accessed August 3, 2020, https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/publicdicos/query?report=bibliography&head=heureux&start=0&end=0. My translation.

engaging them [the wives] to recover their lost status as readers."[36] Just as the wives become readers of Agnodice's physical body, so too do the readers of the poem. Moreover, they join Agnodice as readers of the wives' bodies. When Catherine writes that "Soon, one could see the wives and maidens / Regain their glowing complexion, and become even more beautiful" ("On voit en peu de temps les femmes et pucelles / reprendre leur teins frais, et devenir plus belle," 120-21) this "one" (*on*) is truly a universal one that includes different female readerships. In this regard, seeing and reading the textual body becomes an inclusive exercise for everyone.

By inscribing the female voice, body, and gaze into her text, Catherine creates a style of writing that resembles *l'écriture féminine*. Hélène Cixous, who first theorized the concept in "The Laugh of the Medusa" ("Le Rire de la Meduse"), maintains that woman "must write her self, because this is the invention of a *new insurgent* writing" ("il faut qu'elle s'écrive parce que c'est l'invention d'une écriture *neuve, insurgée*").[37] As Cixous conceives it, *l'écriture feminine* will be "marked by woman's *seizing* the occasion to *speak*, hence her shattering entry into history, which has always been based *on her suppression*" ("marquera *la Prise de la Parole* par la femme, donc son entreée fracassante *dans l'Histoire* qui s'est toujours constituée *sur*

[36] Larsen, "Catherine des Roches (1542-1587)," 108, italics in the original.

[37] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Summer, 1976): 880, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173239, italics in the original; "Le rire de la Méduse," L'Arc, vol. 61 (1975): 43, italics in the original.

son refoulement").[38] For women, it represents a "return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display" ("retour à ce corps qu'on lui a plus que confisqueé, dont on a fait l'inquiétant étranger").[39] Catherine's blazon exemplifies precisely this "return to the body" that challenges the alienation and isolation imposed upon women.

Catherine takes a tradition rooted in male competition and rewrites it in the context of female collaboration. As Cixous predicted, "everything will be changed once woman gives woman to the other woman" ("tout sera change, lorsque la femme donnera la femme à l'autre femme").[40] Catherine's blazon of Agnodice does not represent the partial, fragmented image of a stranger, but the complete portrait of an intimate acquaintance. Similarly, instead of signifying a woman's silence, she turns the blazon into an opportunity for speech. In this regard, Catherine fulfills Cixous's vision for the woman author: "her language does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back, it makes possible" ("sa language ne contient pas, elle porte, elle ne retient pas, elle rend possible").[41] Catherine uses the blazon to elevate women's beauty, status, and voice. In doing so, she "makes possible" a textual space in which female subjectivity can flourish and creates a collaborative, female-centered reading and writing practice.

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[38] Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 880, italics in the original; "Le rire de la Méduse," 43, italics in the original.

[39] Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 880; "Le rire de la Méduse," 43.

[40] Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 881; "Le rire de la Méduse," 44.

[41] Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 889; "Le rire de la Méduse," 50.

Envy as Contreblazon

After describing how Agnodice heals her female patients, Catherine again turns to the figure of Envy. Ultimately, Envy intervenes in the community building taking place before her. However, instead of immediately describing how Envy stops the care and bonding that sparks her ire, Catherine pauses the narrative in order to present a detailed description of Envy. Positioned directly after the blazon of Agnodice's body, the grotesque description of Envy's body calls to mind a *contreblason*.

> Mais l'Envie, presente à cest humain secours,
> Proteste de bientost en empescher le cours:
> Elle mangeoit son cueur, miserable viande,
> Digne repas de ceux où son pouvoir commande,
> Et tenoit en la main un furieux serpent
> Dont le cruel venin en tous lieux se respand.
> Son autre main portoit une branche espineuse,
> Son corps estoit plombé, sa face despiteuse,
> Sa teste sans cheveux où faisoient plusieurs tours
> De viperes hideux qui la mordoient tousjours.
> Trainant autour de soy ses furieuses rages,
> Elle s'en va troubler les chastes mariages,
> Car le repos d'autruy luy est propre malheur. 122-134

> But Envy, who was present at this scene of human assistance,
> Vowed soon to prevent it from continuing:
> She ate out her heart, a wretched food,
> A meal worthy only of those she commands,
> And she held in her hand a raging serpent
> Whose cruel venom she spread everywhere.
> Her other hand held a thorny branch,
> Her body was leaden, her face full of spleen,
> And her bald head was surrounded by several crowns of
> Hideous vipers who kept biting her.
> Dragging along her raging furies,
> She set out to bring turmoil to chaste marriages,
> For the peace of another is to her a misfortune.

This description stands in stark contrast to Catherine's description of Agnodice. Not only are the passages back-to-back, but in a certain sense they mirror each other. Just as quickly as Agnodice heals the women, so does Envy vow to undo this progress. This symmetry is made clear through the use of temporal adjectives. After the description of Agnodice's body, "Soon, one could see wives and maidens regain their glowing complexion" ("On voit en peu de temps les femmes et pucelles / reprendre leur tiens frais," 120-21); similarly, before the description of Envy's body we see how she "vowed soon to prevent it from continuing" ("proteste de bientost en empescher le cours," 123). Already, the two women are placed in an adversarial position.

The narrative framing also reveals an important difference in how the characters in the poem function. There is a certain reciprocity between Agnodice's and the wives' actions. When the wives first refuse Agnodice's help because they think she is a man, Agnodice interprets their actions positively: "Agnodice, seeing their great chastity / Esteemed them all the more for their virtue" ("Agnodice, voyant leur grande chasteté / Les estima beaucoup pour ceste honnesteté," 106-107). As a goodwill gesture, she reveals her femininity to the wives, who then look upon her body: "The Ladies, admiring her innocent modesty / … / Kissed a thousand times both her mouth and her breast" ("Les Dames, admirant ceste honte naïfve / …. / Baiserent mille fois et sa bouche et son sein," 112, 118). Agnodice esteems the wives, and they admire her. This recognition of each other's virtue sets a foundation of mutual respect between the women and them to embrace each other.

In contrast, when Envy sees this outward expression of aid and affection, the narrative gaze of the poem turns inwards. In this initial reintroduction of Envy's nature in the second half of the poem, Envy does not yet interact with the other characters. Instead, she only acts upon herself, even at her own expense: "But Envy, who was present at this scene of human assistance, / Vowed to prevent it from continuing: She ate out her heart" ("Mais l'Envie, presente à cest humain secours, proteste de bientost en empescher le cours: / Elle mangeoit son cueur," 122-24). In contrast to Agnodice's constructive behavior, Envy acts destructively. She finds any expression of care, compassion, or assistance detestable. Instead, she prefers to revel in her own misery and the misery of others, eating her own heart literally and figuratively.

Ovid as Intertext

Book 2 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* heavily inspires Catherine's account of Envy. In Ovid, the Goddess Minerva calls upon Envy and asks her to infect Aglauros as punishment for "covetous eyes" and "profaning hands."[42] Aglauros tried to extort gold from the god Mercury. Having fallen in love with Aglauros's sister Herse, he came to the house wanting to speak with her. Aglauros, however, demanded payment for his visit. This angered Minerva, who remembered how Aglauros had previously disobeyed her by opening a basket she had commanded to stay covered. Minerva seeks out Envy, who dutifully performs her bidding. Aglauros, consumed by envy of

[42] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2.748, 2.755-56.

her sister, "eats her heart out in secret misery."[43] She sits down in front of Herse's door, denying Mercury entry and refusing to move. Aglauros slowly turns to stone, a stone stained black by the color of her soul.

Catherine takes some of the imagery present in Ovid's text and applies it to her own. As we have already seen, Catherine's Envy eats her own heart much like Aglauros does in Ovid's text. The broader idea of envy functioning as a self-consuming force is present in the Ovidian text. He writes that Envy "gnaws and is gnawed, herself her own punishment."[44] As in Ovid's account, Catherine depicts Envy as her own victim. However, Catherine's version of Envy is more autonomous and more insidious than Ovid's. She does not rely on an external character, like Minerva, for direction. Instead, she acts on her own and even has the power to command others. Moreover, by describing Envy's heart as a "a wretched food, / A meal worthy only of those she commands" ("miserable viande / Digne repas de ceux où son pouvoir commande," 124-25), Catherine adds ambiguity into her text that is not present in the Ovidian version. Who does Envy command? Catherine might be giving us a hint through her use of the masculine plural pronoun "ceux" ("those"). Even though the women's actions initially anger Envy, she does not target the women directly but instead operates through the men.

Catherine continues her description of Envy by making note of what she holds in each hand, starting with "a raging serpent / Whose cruel venom she spread

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[43] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2.806.

[44] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2.781-82.

everywhere" ("un furieux serpent / Dont le cruel venin en tous lieux se respand," 126-7). This emphasis on Envy's hands recalls the earlier emphasis on Agnodice's hands, and in particular the wives' initial misinterpretation Agnodice's hand as "lustful hands" ("mains lassives," 105). While the wives feared Agnodice's hands, in reality it is Envy's hands that are threating; Agnodice's imagined lasciviousness (excessive passion) has been replaced by Envy's actual fury (excessive passion). Envy's other hand holds "a thorny branch" ("une branche espineuse," 128). This combination of a serpent and a staff conjures the image of the rod of Asclepius used to represent the field of medicine. Catherine provides a grotesque representation of this symbol of healing by associating it with Envy, who only causes harm.

Several of the elements that Catherine includes in her description—such as serpents, venom, and thorns—can be found in Ovid's description of Envy. He heavily associates Envy with snakes and venom. For example, when Minerva first sees Envy in her cave, she is "eating snakes' flesh, the proper food of her venom."[45] Moreover, she is surrounded by "snakes' carcasses half consumed" and "venom drips down from her tongue."[46] While in Catherine's version Envy eats her heart instead of a snake's flesh, Catherine clearly reuses the imagery found in Ovid. This is true for Envy's thorny branch as well. Thorns are mentioned twice in Ovid's account. The first reference is to Envy's staff "thick-set with thorns."[47] The second reference is in the

[45] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2.769.

[46] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2.772, 2.777.

[47] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2. 789-90.

description of how Envy poisoned Aglauros. She "touched the girl's breast with her festering hand and filled her heart with pricking thorns. Then she breathed pestilential, poisonous breath into her nostrils and spread black venom through her very heart and bones."[48] Multiple aspects of Ovid's description make their way into Catherine's text. Ovid emphasizes the change that takes place in Aglauros's breast and heart. Catherine however contrasts the image of Agnodice's breast with that of Envy cannibalistically eating her heart. Ovid mentions Envy's festering hand, while Catherine again plays with the juxtaposition between Agnodice's hands and Envy's. In the above quotation, Envy weaponizes thorns to prick Aglauros and weaponizes her breath to spread venom throughout Aglauros's body. Ovid's Envy targets her victims directly, but Catherine has Envy work in more subtle ways.

While Catherine draws inspiration from Ovid, she uses the description of Envy's body as an opportunity to position Envy as Agnodice's opposite. She does this with the line "her body was leaden, her face full of spleen" ("son corps estoit plombé, sa face despiteuse," 129). Ovid only briefly mentions the pallor of Envy's face. By choosing to include this particular detail in her own rendition, Catherine also evokes Agnodice's appearance and "the lively whiteness of her soft complexion" ("de son teint doüillet la blanche couleur vive," 113). It is no coincidence either that Catherine portrays Envy's face as "despiteuse," which the *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1694) defines as "rebellious, disagreeable, subject to act through rancor"

[48] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* 2.798-802.

("mutin, fascheux, qui est sujet à agir par dépit").[49] Catherine consistently plays with the notion of pity (and its derivatives) throughout the poem. In the opening lines, she pronounces Envy "pitiless" ("impiteuse," 2). This contrasts with how Catherine represents the two female protagonists—the foreign Lady and Agnodice. The former provokes Envy when she speaks out publicly to condemn Phocion's countrymen for not burying him properly and to urge the Gods to allow Phocion to take his rightful place in the heavens. As a result of her discourse, Envy, "gazing upon this pitiful lady / Felt a poisonous anger well up inside" ("regardant cette dame piteuse / Dans soy-mesme sentit une ire serpenteuse," 53-4). Envy vows that the foreign Lady will come to regret her actions ("je te feray sentir / De ton hastif secours un tardif repentir," 59-69). This same ethos gets Agnodice into trouble with Envy. Like the foreign Lady, Agnodice offers "human assistance" ("humain secours," 122). Both women offer up aid to others. They stand up against injustice and try to rebuild community relations. Unfortunately for them, fellow-feeling is antithetical to everything Envy represents.

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of Catherine's description of Envy has to do with Envy's serpentine hair: "her bald head was surrounded by several crowns of / hideous vipers who kept biting her" ("sa teste sans cheveux où faisoient plusieurs tours / de viperes hideux qui la mordoient tousjours," 130-31). This imagery does not come from Ovid; he offers no description of Envy's hair. Catherine, however,

[49] *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française,* vol. 1 (Paris: Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1694) in "Dictionnaires d'autrefois," *The ARTFL Project* (Chicago: The University of Chicago), s.v. "depiteux," accessed September 11, 2020, https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/publicdicos/query?report=bibliography&head=depiteux&start=0&end=0.

consistently emphasizes Agnodice's golden hair. Here, she uses the contrast between Agnodice's golden hair and Envy's serpentine hair to further distinguish the two female figures. Serpentine hair is characteristic of the gorgons, the most famous of which is Medusa. Medusa's backstory, told in Book 4 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* is also connected to Minerva. She punishes Medusa after Neptune ravished her in Minerva's temple by converting Medusa's hair—her most beautiful characteristic—into snakes. Medusa's story juxtaposes her beauty with her monstrosity. Similarly, Catherine juxtaposes Agnodice's beauty with Envy's monstrosity.

Once finished with the description of Envy's physical appearance, Catherine moves on to Envy's actions: "Dragging along her raging furies, / She set out to bring turmoil to chaste marriages, / For the peace of another is to her a misfortune" ("Trainant autour de soy ses furieuses rages, / Elle s'en va troubler les chastes mariages, / Car le repos d'autruy luy est propre malheur," 132-34). These lines are again reminiscent of imagery found in Ovid's portrayal of Envy. He writes that "Unwelcome to her is the sight of men's success."[50] Catherine's description is not so blatantly gendered, as Envy targets "chaste marriages" ("les chastes mariages," 133). Given that Catherine has associated women so heavily with chastity, virtue, honor, gentility, etc., the reference to chaste marriages makes it initially seem as if Envy plans to target the wives. However, the gender-neutral noun "autruy" adds a layer of ambiguity to this association, making it unclear whose peace most troubles Envy.

[50] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* 2.780-81.

Catherine could be referring to both men and women. If Envy's goal is to cause trouble for the wives or for Agnodice, she does so in a roundabout way.

Lock Her Up!

Envy operates by creating suspicion in the men's minds. She makes the husbands doubt both Agnodice and their wives. Without any proof of wrongdoing, they condemn her to death.

> Aux hommes elle mist en soupçon la valeur
> De la belle Agnodice et ses graces gentilles,
> Disant que sa beauté de leurs femmes et filles
> Avait plus de faveur que ne doivent penser
> Celles qui ne voudroient leurs honneurs offencer.
> Eux, eprix de fureur, saisirent Agnodice
> Pour en faire à l'Envie un piteux sacrifice.
> Helas! Sans la trouver coulpable d'aucun tort,
> Ils l'ont injustement condamnée à la mort. 135-143

> She made the men suspicious of the worth
> And the gentle grace of beautiful Agnodice,
> Telling them that Agnodice's beauty held more sway
> Over their wives and daughters than was becoming
> To women mindful of their honor.
> The men, filled with fury, seized Agnodice
> To make of her a pitiful sacrifice to Envy.
> Alas! Without finding her guilty of any wrong,
> They unjustly condemned her to death.

The opening couplet of this passage is more ambiguous than the translation would imply. While the men become suspicious of Agnodice's *valeur*, *valeur* can be translated as both worth and valor.[51] Similarly, *grace* can also hold a multitude of

[51] *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, vol. 2 (Pars: Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1694) in "Dictionnaires d'autrefois," *The ARTFL Project* (The University of Chicago), s.v. "valeur," accessed September 11, 2020,

meanings. While there are too many definitions to run through them all, looking at some of the translations offered by Cotgrave's 1611 dictionary provides a sense of the wide variety of possible interpretations. He lists: "grace, favour, good will, good liking, good opinion; credit, reckoning, reputation, also beautie, seemeliness, comelinesse, handsomenesse; a Decorum; a grace in or becoming of; also virtue, honestie, integritie, a good disposition, and inclination unto goodnesse; also a pardon, forgiveness, remission, dispensation."[52] Agnodice's reputation, beauty, and virtue are all at stake within this term. At the same time that Catherine presents the men's suspicion of Agnodice's valor and "gentle grace" ("grace gentille," 136), she also intentionally reaffirms that Agnodice possesses these very characteristics.

Envy warps the narrative to her advantage by reusing some of the lexicon from the previous scenes in the poem. Catherine first introduces Agnodice as "a noble young Lady / whom heaven had made beautiful" ("une Dame gentille, / Que le ciel avoit faict belle," 84-85) and as someone who speaks with "engaging gracefulness" ("graces attirantes," 117). Envy turns Agnodice's beauty, graces, gentility against her. She makes the men suspicious of "the gentle grace of beautiful Agnodice" ("la belle Agnodice et ses graces gentilles," 136). Careful readers will recall how soon after Agnodice's intervention "one could see wives and maidens … become even more beautiful" ("on voit en peu de temps les femmes et pucelles / … devenir plus belles,"

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https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/publicdicos/query?report=bibliography&head=valeur&start=0&end=0.

[52] Randle Cotgrave, *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* (London: Adam Islip, 1611), s.v. "grace," accessed September 11, 2020, http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/cotgrave/.

120-21). Catherine makes it clear that the women's beauty in no way takes away from their virtue. She specifically highlights the innocence and virginity of the girls through her use of "pucelles" (literally "virgins"). Larsen translates "les femmes," which can mean either "the women" or "the wives" as the latter and "pucelles" as "maidens." Personally, given that Catherine's pairing of "femme" and "pucelle," I would have translated the expression as "women and girls" in this particular context.

Envy, however, changes the narrative. She tells the men that Agnodice's beauty "held more sway / over their wives and daughters than was becoming / to women of their honor" ("de leur femmes et filles / avoit plus de faveur que ne doivent penser / celles qui ne voudroient leurs honneurs offencer," 137-39). Changing women and girls ("les femmes et pucelles," 120) to wives and daughters ("leur femmes et filles," 137) reinforces Envy's accusation of unbecoming behavior. It also inscribes the women back into a possessive and hierarchical relationship with the men. The use of the possessive adjective "their" ("leur") in this line also raises questions of whose honor exactly is at stake in the line "to women mindful of their honor" ("celles qui ne voudroient leurs honneurs offencer," 139). Grammatically, the honor should be interpreted as the women's due to the antecedent ("celle"). However, the repetition of the possessive adjective "their" ("leur"), which previously referred to the men, suggests that the men's honor could also be at stake. The wives' actions would reflect poorly on their husbands.

Catherine uses the sentence structure to forefront how much the men have been influenced by Envy: "She made the men suspicious" ("Aux hommes elle mist en soupçon," 135). Catherine inverts the sentence to place the indirect object (the men,

"les hommes") before the subject (Envy, "elle"). This inversion gets corrected in the English translation. A more faithful (albeit awkward) rendering would read "The men, she made suspicious." Envy transfers her furor onto the men, who become the subjects of the next sentence: "The men, filled with fury, seized Agnodice" ("Eux, eprix de fureur, saisirent Agnodice," 140). They take on qualities previously associated with Envy, who held "a ranging serpent" ("un furieux serpent," 126) in her hand and was surrounded by "her raging furies" ("ses furieuses rages," 132). While the men become active agents, Agnodice becomes "a pitiful sacrifice" ("un piteux sacrifice," 141). Here, "pitiful" ("piteux") needs to be understood in its primary meaning: worthy of pity or compassion, and not as inferior. This interjection of the narrator's point of view is strengthened in the next two lines: "Alas! Without finding her guilty of any wrong, / They unjustly condemned her to death" ("Helas! Sans la trouver coulpable d'aucun tort, / Ils l'ont injustement condamnée à la mort," 142-3). Instead of supporting their wives and questioning Envy's motivations, the men instantaneously believe Envy and turn on Agnodice.

Agnodice's Physical and Verbal Defense

While the men try to turn Agnodice into a scapegoat, Agnodice rejects her victimhood. Instead, she retains her agency and fights back against the injustice inflicted upon her. As she did with the women, Agnodice once again shows off her feminine attributes to a skeptical audience.

> La pauvrete, voyant le malheur qui s'appreste
> Descouvrit promptement l'or de sa blonde teste
> Et monstrant son sein beau, aggreable sejour

Des Muses, des vertus, des graces, de l'amour
Elle baissa les yeux pleins d'honneur et de honte ;
Une vierge rougeur en la face luy monte ;
Disant que le desir qui la faict desguiser
N'est point pour les tromper, mais pour authoriser
Les lettres qu'elle apprist voulant servir leurs Dames;
Que de la soupçonner des crimes tant infames
C'est offencer nature et ses divines loix. 144-154

The poor creature, seeing the misfortune awaiting her,
Promptly uncovered the gold of her blond tresses,
And, showing them her beautiful breasts, graceful abode
Of the Muses, of virtue, of grace, and of love,
She lowered her eyes, filled with an honorable shame;
A virginal blush came over her face;
She declared that her intent in taking on a disguise
Is not to deceive them, but only to allow her
To study and to learn, wishing to serve their wives;
And to suspect her of such infamous crimes
Was an offense against nature and her divine laws.

Catherine continues to evoke sympathy from the readers. She creates an implicit bond between Agnodice and the women she helps through the use of the adjective "pauvre." Once working to save "her poor sisters" ("Ses pauvres voisines," 96), Agnodice herself becomes a "poor creature" ("pauvrette," 144). Catherine also copies the same sentence structure she used when Agnodice first encountered the women. In that context, "Agnodice, seeing their great chastity, / Esteemed them all the more for their virtue" ("Agnodice, voyant leur grande chasteté / Les estima beaucoup pour ceste honnesteté," 106-7). Catherine again reuses the gerund form of the verb *voir* (to see) in the line "The poor creature, seeing the misfortune awaiting her" ("La pauvrete, voyant le malheur qui s'appreste," 144). Only this time, instead of feminine chastity and honesty, Agnodice perceives a male threat. Despite the different context, Agnodice reacts in much the same way—by revealing her body.

Catherine hints at this comparison between how Agnodice covers and exposes herself before the women and the men through the verb choice. Throughout the poem, Catherine uses the verbs "couvrir" and "descourvrir" to describe how Agnodice covers and uncovers herself. When she first decided to learn medicine and disguise herself, Agnodice "hid the twin apples [of her bosom]" (brackets in the original; "couvrit sa double pomme," 88). Agnodice gained the wives' trust by "uncovering then the white round apples [of her bosom]" (brackets in the original; "descouvrant du sein les blanches pommes rondes," 108). In front of the men, Agnodice also "promptly uncovered the gold of her blonde tresses" ("descouvrit promptement l'or de sa blonde teste," 145). While the repetition of the verb "descouvrir" sets up a parallelism between the two scenes in which Agnodice exposes her body, a closer examination of the text shows how differently this revelation operates in this new (male) context.

In essence, Catherine rewrites the blazon of Agnodice's body. She describes the same list of characteristics as she did when Agnodice exposed herself to the women, commenting on Agnodice's complexion, breasts, hair, eyes, and speech. However, the purpose of this enumeration is radically different. With the men, whenever Catherine mentions any of Agnodice's physical attributes, she does so in order to establish Agnodice's character. For example, when talking about Agnodice's breasts, Catherine shifts away from an emphasis on their physicality to an emphasis on how they personify her goodness. Instead of accentuating "the little twin mounts of her adorable breast" ("de son sein poupin le petit mont jumeau," 114), Catherine stresses how Agnodice's "beautiful breasts" ("sein beau," 146) function as a "graceful abode / Of the Muses, of virtue, of grace, and of love" ("aggreable sejour / Des Muses,

des vertus, des graces, de l'amour," 146-47). The expression "aggreable sejour" would more closely translate to "agreeable abode," associating Agnodice with notions of pleasure and comfort.

It is worth briefly reflecting on the characteristics Catherine enumerates, and especially the inclusion of virtue among the qualities housed within Agnodice's breast. While Agnodice's virtue has been alluded to throughout the poem, this is the first time that virtue is explicitly associated with her. The first two references to virtue in the poem are in relation to men. Catherine introduced Envy as someone who "upon the virtuous inflicts a thousand wrongs" ("font aux vertueux cent et cent mille torts," 28). She goes on to list how Envy—in one way or another—has mistreated the great Athenian heroes. Amongst these is Phocion, who was denied burial in his homeland by his envious countrymen. A foreign Lady makes a speech which praises Phocion's virtue ("honorant tes vertus de loüanges supremes," 41) and argues that he should receive a proper burial. Catherine inscribes Agnodice within this list of "the virtuous" that Envy targets. By inserting Agnodice into this tradition, Catherine implies that Agnodice is as worthy of praise and remembrance as the men. Moreover, she applies this traditionally masculine characteristic to a woman. Etymologically "vertu" comes from the latin *virtus,* with "vir" meaning man. It denotes both corporal and mental excellence, with strength, vigor, bravery, courage, aptness, capacity, worth, and excellence all given as definitions.[53] However, Catherine does not stop her gender

[53] Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. "virtus," accessed September 11, 2020, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0059%3Aalphabetic+letter%3DV%3Aentry+group%3D22%3Aentry%3Dvirtus.

revisions with Agnodice's virtue. By the end of the poem, virtue (in all its meanings) is passed on to other women as well. The poem closes with Envy continuing to persecute "with an everlasting hatred / All Ladies as virtuous as she [Agnodice]" ("d'une haine immortelle / Les Dames qui estoient vertueuses comme elle," 176-77).

After the description of Agnodice's breasts, Catherine moves on to Agnodice's eyes and complexion: "She lowered her eyes, filled with an honorable shame; / A virginal blush came over her face" ("Elle baissa les yeux pleins d'honneur et de honte; / Une vierge rougeur en la face luy monte," 148-49). The modesty Agnodice displays in front of a male audience stands in stark contrast to the sensuality she displayed in front of her female audience. "The ravishing flames of her divine eyes" ("de ses yeux divins les flammes ravissantes," 116) instead become "eyes, filled with honorable shame" ("les yeux pleins d'honneur et de honte," 148). Again, Catherine focuses on what Agnodice's physical features represent (in this instance, honor and chastity) more than the physical features themselves. Catherine ascribes the very honor that the husbands accused their wives of lacking to Agnodice, and by extension to the other women. The "shame" ("honte") Agnodice shows to the men, just like "innocent modesty" ("honte naïve," 112) she showed the women earlier, has a positive connotation to it and needs to be interpreted in the sense of shamefastness or shamefacedness. This modesty corresponds to the "virginal blush" ("une vierge rougeur," 149) that crosses Agnodice's face. Again, Catherine uses Agnodice's physical features to mark her innocence and, more broadly, her good-nature. This contrasts with "the lively whiteness of her soft complexion" ("de son teint doüillet la

blanche couleur vive," 113) mentioned earlier, which was meant to emphasize Agnodice's beauty and gentility.

Not only does Catherine make changes to Agnodice's physical description, but to her speech as well. The first blazon mentions "the engaging gracefulness of her sweet words" ("de ses doux propos les graces attirantes," 117), but does not go into any specifics in terms of what Agnodice's said to the women. Now, however, the narrator relays the content of Agnodice's discourse to the men.

> Disant que le desir qui la faict desguiser
> N'est point pour les tromper, mais pour authoriser
> Les lettres qu'elle apprist voulant servir leurs Dames ;
> Que de la soupçonner des crimes tant infames,
> C'est offencer nature et ses divines loix. 150-54
>
> She declared that her intent in taking on a disguise
> Is not to deceive them, but only to allow her
> To study and to learn, wishing to serve their wives;
> And to suspect her of such infamous crimes
> Was an offense against nature and her divine laws.

Agnodice explains how she did not wish to deceive the men, but rather to allow the study of letters. As Kendall Tarte has noted, "A play on words with the verb 'authorizer,' which indicates both authority and authorship, draws attention to her goal: to authorize women not to be doctors but to be authors ('authoriser les lettres')."[54] However, this is not the only wordplay in the passage. As she did earlier in the poem (93), Catherine again uses the homophone between "appris" and "a pris" to indicate that Agnodice has not only *learned* the arts, but she had also *taken* knowledge that did not initially belong to her.

[54] Tarte, "From the Salon to the Page," 58.

The vocabulary of Agnodice's speech simultaneously empowers her and holds the men accountable for their actions. As discussed earlier in the chapter, Catherine consistently uses the verb *vouloir* (to want/wish to) to draw a comparison between Agnodice's willingness to help the women and the men's indifference to their suffering. The expression "wishing to serve their wives" ("voulant servir leur Dames," 152) is no different. In fact, it offers an even more poignant critique of the men given that the expression "servir une Dame" means "to give care or assistance to a girl or woman which one loves" ("rendre des soins, des services à une fille, à une femme pour qui on a de l'amour").[55] This definition simultaneous calls into question whether the husbands love their wives and reaffirms that Agnodice does. After all, just a few lines earlier, Catherine described how Agnodice housed love within her breast (147). Catherine reinforces this implicit critique of the men's care of their wives through the use of the possessive pronoun "their" ("leur"). In referring to the wives as "their wives" ("leurs Dames"), Agnodice reminds the husbands (and the readers) of their responsibility to their wives, a responsibility that they have neglected.

Agnodice's usage of "leur" shows how she re-appropriates the same vocabulary Envy used to turn the men against her in service of her own defense. Just as Envy suggested to the men that Agnodice had corrupted "their wives and daughters" ("leur femmes et filles"), Agnodice now turns this familial responsibility

[55] *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, vol. 2 (Paris: Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1694) in "Dictionnaires d'autrefois," *The ARTFL Project* (The University of Chicago), s.v. "servir," accessed September 11, 2020, https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/publicdicos/query?report=bibliography&head=servir.

against the men; she serves their wives because they will not. Similarly, Agnodice also changes the narrative regarding the men's misgivings of her. While Envy "made the men suspicious of the worth / and gentle grace of beautiful Agnodice" ("Aux hommes elle mist en soupçon la valeur de la belle Agnodice," 135-36), Agnodice takes the men's accusations and turns them back against the men. By arguing that "to suspect her of such infamous crimes / Was an offense against nature and her divine laws" ("de la soupçonner de crimes tant infames, / C'est offencer nature et ses divines loix," 153-54), Agnodice implies that the men are the ones in the wrong. She repositions the men's critique as not only an attack against her, but against women and nature. To that effect, there is a potential play on words with the word "infames" ("infamous"). "Fames" sounds phonetically similar to "femme," the word for woman. Since the Latin prefix "in-" can signify negation, "infames" can be read as "in-femmes." The men not only accuse Agnodice of infamous crimes, but unwomanly ones as well.

Agnodice as Medusa

Agnodice's body and speech function yet again as a blazon, but this time not in the poetic sense, but in the heraldic sense of a shield. Her body and speech stop the men's attacks and allow Agnodice to mount a defense. The power of Agnodice's speech comes across in the effect it has on the men; she stuns the men into silence with her discourse.

> Depuis qu'elle eut parlé, oncq une seulle voix
> Ne s'esleva contre elle; ains toute l'assistance
> Monstroit d'esmerveiller ceste rare excellence;
> Ils estoient tous ravis, sans parler ny mouvoir,
> Ententifs seulement à l'ouyr et la voir. 155-59

After she had spoken, not a single voice
Was raised against her; on the contrary, the entire audience
Marveled at her rare excellence;
Everyone was filled with wonder, and no one moved or made a sound,
Attentive only to hearing and seeing her.

Agnodice's speech marks a moment of transition in which the men go from being her adversaries to her admirers. There is no longer any individual or collective resistance to Agnodice: "not a single voice / Was raised against her; on the contrary, the entire audience / Marveled at her rare excellence" ("une seulle voix / Ne s'esleva contre elle; ains toute l'assistance / Monstroit d'esmerveiller ceste rare excellence," 155-57). The enjambment between these lines briefly causes the reader to pause over the meaning of "assistance," which as a noun can mean either audience (those in assistance) or assistance (help/aid).[56] While the following line clarifies the meaning of "assistance" as audience and precludes the translation of "assistance" as "help," this is nevertheless the first time in the poem that the men are even remotely associated with a positive quality. It is Agnodice's speech—and thus the men's silence—that changes the men for the better.

After Agnodice's discourse, the men do not move or make a sound, but only watch and listen to her. Catherine represents Agnodice as a Medusa-like figure who both silences and immobilizes. As Vickers reminds us,

[56] *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, vol. 1 (Paris: Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1694) in "Dictionnaires d'autrefois," *The ARTFL Project* (Chicago: The University of Chicago), s.v. "assistance," accessed November 17, 2020, https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/publicdicos/query?report=bibliography&head=assistance&start=0&end=0.

> Medusa figures in two contexts as a face on a shield: first, Perseus uses a shield to reflect her image and thus avoid looking at her directly, her mediated image permitting her decapitation; and second, when the battles of Perseus are done, he gives the head of Medusa to Athena who bears it on her aegis, an aegis copied by later warriors. As the face one carries into battle, that turns men to stone, that curiously converts life into art, the power of the head of the Medusa resides in its ability to stupefy.[57]

Yet, Catherine's Medusa is not the terrifying Medusa from the mythological tradition. In fact, instead of provoking horror, Agnodice produces wonder. Everyone "marveled at her rare excellence" ("monstroit d'emerveiller ceste rare excellence," 157), implying their astonishment and admiration. This is significant because it shows the men are not completely impassive; they can still feel and show emotion. Moreover, they are "filled with wonder" ("ravis," 158) by what they hear. When Agnodice speaks, everybody is enraptured. As such, the ravishment that the men undergo is not framed negatively, but positively. It is a productive force that allows the men to change their opinion about Agnodice and recognize her "rare excellence" ("rare excellence," 157). If Agnodice stupefies the men, she does so without erasing their subjectivity.

If Catherine writes Agnodice into the role of Medusa, she is nevertheless a Medusa with a difference. Not only does Agnodice "petrify" differently, but she does so through her speech rather than through her looks. Catherine gives her Medusa a voice. This contrasts with how Medusa is traditionally depicted, even in feminist renderings of the myth. For example, in Christine de Pizan's interpretation of Medusa, it is still her looks that draw people to her and her gaze that is threatening:

[57] Vickers, "'This Heraldry in Lucrece' Face'," 182.

> Ceste Meduse, si que dient les anciannes histoires, estoit de si merveilleuse beauté que non pas seulement passoit les autres femmes, mais qui estoit tres merveilleuse choses et sus nature. Elle avoit le regart tant plaisant avec l'autre beauté du corps et du viaire et des blons cheveulx comme fil d'or loncs et crespés que elle attrayoit toute mortelle creature que elle regardoit si a soy que elle rendoit les gens comme immouvables et, pour ce, faigni la fable que de pierre devenoient. [58]
>
> This Medusa, according to the ancient stories, was of such striking beauty that not only did she surpass all other women—which was an amazing and supernatural thing—but she also attracted to herself, because of her pleasing appearance—her long and curly blond hair spun like gold, along with her beautiful face and body—every mortal creature upon whom she looked, so that she seemed to make people immovable. For this reason, the fable claimed that they had turned to stone.[59]

Christine de Pizan makes her Medusa less menacing, but she does so by curtailing Medusa's supernatural powers. She asserts that Medusa's capabilities to petrify have been exaggerated: "the fable *claimed* they had turned to stone" ("pour ce faigni la fable que de pierre devenoient"), when they actually had not. Instead, Catherine keeps Medusa's ability to immobilize, but alters the cause. While Agnodice possesses all the physical attributes of Christine de Pizan's Medusa—"striking beauty" ("merveilleuse beauté"), a "pleasing appearance" ("le regard tant plaisant"), "long and curly blond hair spun like gold" ("des blons cheveulx comme fil d'or loncs et crespés") and a "beautiful face and body" ("beauté du corps et du viaire")—these are not the qualities

[58] Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, original text in *La Città delle dame*, ed. Earl Jeffrey Richards, trans. Patricia Caraffi (Milano: Luni Editrice, 1997), 2.61.5.

[59] Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Earl Jeffrey Richards (New York: Persea Books, 1982), 2.61.5.

that fill the men with wonder. Rather, it is the content of her speech that transfixes the men.

The importance of Agnodice's speech is thrown into even higher relief when Catherine's text is compared to the source material. Catherine rewrites the ending of Agnodice's story in order to give her a more prominent place within it and to emphasize Agnodice's voice and agency. In comparison, the version by Hyginus reads:

> The Areopagites assembled and found Agnodice guilty. She lifted her tunic and showed them that she was a woman. The doctors then raised stronger accusations against her. Because of this the women leaders converged on the court and said, "You are not our husbands but our enemies, for you have condemned the woman who discovered a means to provide for our well-being." The Athenians then changed the law to allow free-born women to learn medicine.[60]

Agnodice is completely vacated from the text by the end. In Hyginus's version, her last act is that of establishing her true gender. Ultimately, Agnodice's patients save her. They occupy the court and give a short but effective speech, which is recounted by the narrator. The women condemn their husbands and advocate on both Agnodice's behalf and their own. The wives' advocacy causes the Athenians to change their policies in regards to who can practice medicine. Kirk Read has rightfully pointed out that Agnodice's role changes significantly in Catherine's rendition.

> Catherine des Roches dispenses with the scene wherein Agnodice is condemned and then subsequently defended by her Athenian sisters; in her version, Agnodice's compelling oratory on her own behalf stuns the men into submission. The storm of controversy surrounding women attending to women is calmed entirely by one learned and persuasive woman. Agnodice singlehandedly transforms the Envy-tainted society that has banished women

[60] *Hyginus'* Fabulae, 274.13.

> from books and learning and begins the work of repairing wounded minds and bodies.[61]

Agnodice has more agency in Catherine's version. She advocates for herself and transforms the men's sentiments towards her and towards women's education.

Righting the Ship

After summarizing the effects of Catherine's discourse on the men, Catherine temporarily pauses the action of the story. In a narrative digression, she presents an analogy of a storm and a ship lost at sea.

> Comme l'on voit parfois apres un long orage,
> R'asserener les vents, et calmer le rivage,
> Quand les freres jumeaux qui regardoient sur mer
> Une piteuse nef en danger d'abismer,
> La sauvant de peril des flots l'ont retirée
> Pour lui faire aborder la rive desirée,
> Les hommes, tous ainsi vaincus par la pitié,
> Rapaisent la fureur de leur inimitié;
> Faisant à la pucelle une humble reverence,
> Ils luy vont demander pardon de leur offence. 160-69

> In like manner one sometimes sees, after a long storm,
> The winds die down, and the waves become calm,
> As when the twin brothers who looked out over the sea
> Noticed a pitiful ship in danger of sinking,
> Saved it from shipwreck, pulled it back from the waves
> And made it land on the longed-for shore,
> So the men, all overcome with pity,
> Appease the fury of their enmity,
> And humbly kneeling down before the maiden,
> They ask her forgiveness for the harm they have done.

Throughout this section—and in fact, throughout the rest of the poem—Catherine changes the subject of the action multiple times. She begins by observing how "one

[61] Read, "Touching and Telling," 93.

sometimes sees" ("l'on voit parfois," 160) the weather changing. Specifically, one sees "the winds die down, and the waves become calm" ("r'asserener les vents, et calmer le rivage," 161). The next subjects to act are "the twin brothers" ("les freres jumeaux," 162), in this instance a reference to Castor and Pollux. Sons of Jupiter, they look after "a pitiful ship" ("une piteuse nef," 163) in danger of sinking and guide it safely to shore. Their compassion saves the ship, and the men on it.

The narrative then shifts back to the men. When it does, we learn that they have been "overcome with pity" ("vaincus par la pitié," 166). The French verb *vaincre* (to vanquish) is a much stronger verb than English translation "to overcome" suggests; it implies a lost battle or war. Given how closely Catherine has associated pity with Agnodice, she implies that the men have been bested by her as well. However, much like their silencing and immobilization earlier, this defeat is not framed negatively. Instead, Catherine frames it as a transformative moment in which the men—like the storm earlier—calm themselves down. Specifically, they "appease the fury of their enmity" ("rapaisent la fureur de leur inimitié," 167). Just as pity is associated with Agnodice, fury is associated with Envy. Thus, pity's victory over fury's foreshadows Agnodice's victory over Envy. The men retain their own agency, but pay deference to Agnodice by "humbly kneeling down before the maiden" ("faisant à la pucelle une humble reverence," 168). Catherine's use of the word "humbly" ("humble") links the men's actions to Agnodice's. It is reminiscent the moment when Agnodice first approached the women. In that context, Catherine described how Agnodice "humbly offers her services to the Ladies" ("se presente humblement pour leur faire service,"

101). It would seem that the men are ready to remedy the harm they have done. Their last action in the poem is to ask for Agnodice's forgiveness.

Catherine leaves much out of the last lines of the poem. She never explicitly states whether Agnodice accepts the men's apology. However, I believe it is inferred through Agnodice's reaction.

> Elle, qui ressentit un plaisir singulier,
> Les supplia bien fort de faire estudier
> Les Dames du pays, sans envier la gloire
> Que l'on a pour servir les filles de Memoire.
> L'Envie, congnoissant ses efforts abbatus
> Par les faicts d'Agnodice et ses rares vertus,
> A poursuivy depuis d'une haine immortelle
> Les Dames qui estoient vertueuses comme elle. 170-77
>
> Agnodice, who felt a singular pleasure,
> Beseeched them urgently to allow
> The Ladies of the land to study, without envying the glory
> Given to those who serve the daughters of Memory.
> Envy, recognizing that she had lost the battle
> To Agnodice and to her rare virtues,
> Has ever since persecuted with an everlasting hatred
> All Ladies as virtuous as she.

As can be seen by the translation, Anne Larsen interprets the phrase "ressentit un plaisir singulier" literally. While it is conceivable to imagine that the men's contrition gives Agnodice pleasure, to me, this reading feels out of character. According to *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française,* "plaisir" can be take the sense of "grace, favor, or good-deed" ("se prend encore pour Grace, faveur, bon office. *Il m'a fait un plaisir, un grand plaisir, un plaisir insigne, un plaisir singulier*").[62] As the examples indicate,

[62] *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française,* vol. 2 (Paris: Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1694) in "Dictionnaires d'autrefois," *The ARTFL Project* (Chicago: The University of Chicago), s.v. "plaisir," accessed November 17, 2020,

"singulier" should be interpreted in the same vein as "grand" and "insigne," meaning "great" and "remarkable" or "notable." Therefore, another possible translation of the line could be "She, who felt an extraordinary grace within her." This interpretation aligns closely with the verb "ressentir," typically used to describe a strong sentiment. Regardless of the exact translation chosen, I believe Catherine intended this line to convey Agnodice's goodwill, kindness, and benevolence towards the men. That being said, Catherine chooses the word "pleasure" ("plaisir") over any of its synonyms for good reason. It allows her to re-establish the link between learning and pleasure. Through the rhyme scheme she pairs the phrase "a singular pleasure" ("un plaisir singulier," 170) with "study" ("faire estudier," 170-71). The pleasure women get from learning is noble and virtuous, like Agnodice herself.

Agnodice, for her part, asks the men to restore women's access to learning. Catherine continues to play with power dynamics through Agnodice's last request. Agnodice beseeches the men ("elle les supplia," 171) to allow women to study. While *supplier* means to beg or plead, it is etymologically linked to the act of bending one's knee [(from *sub* + *plier* (to bend)].[63] While Agnodice does ask the men for something, the etymology of the verb *supplier* recalls the fact that the men knelt before Agnodice and asked her forgiveness for an injustice they committed. Yet again, Agnodice

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https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/publicdicos/query?report=bibliography&head=plaisir&start=0&end=0.

[63] This, perhaps, helps explain Larsen's assertion that "The phallic order is partially reaffirmed at the end of *L'Agnodice* when, upon threat of death, Agnodice throws off her disguise and shows herself a harmless, beautiful maid, unjustly accused, and in need of the husband's protection" See "Catherine des Roches (1542-1857)," 106.

cultivates inclusive, interactive, and reciprocal relationships. The men ask her for something, and she asks them for something. However, Catherine does not give the men a chance to respond to Agnodice's request within the text. She privileges Agnodice's voice and her request that men not envy "the glory / Given to those who serve the daughters of Memory" ("la gloire / Que l'on a pour servir les filles de Memoire," 172-73). Agnodice's formulation in and of itself elevates women's work by assuming that their writing is worthy of glory. Moreover, by again using a universal pronoun (the French *on*, literally "one" but here translated as "those"), Agnodice includes herself and other women within those worthy of glory.

Catherine never explicitly states whether the men comply with Agnodice's request, but presumably they do. Directly after Agnodice's entreaty, Envy recognizes "that she had lost the battle / To Agnodice and to her rare virtues" ("ses efforts abbatus / Par les faicts d'Agnodice et ses rares vertus," 174-75). The French is even stronger than the English implies. The verb Catherine uses, *abattre*, is both a physical and a violent one. It can mean to knock something down or to fell, but is also used to mean to kill, shoot, or slaughter something. Agnodice, through both her actions ("faicts") and her virtues ("vertus"), causes this outcome. On the one hand, Catherine ascribes even more power and agency to Agnodice. On the other hand, she emphasizes that Envy's efforts have been conquered, and not Envy herself. Envy continues to pursue other women with "an everlasting hatred" ("une haine immortelle," 176). This assertion may explain why literary critics like Sankovitch to see a "threatening

precariousness" and "fragility" in the ending of the poem.[64] While Catherine does not present her readers with a happy ending, I would argue she gives them something even more valuable: the possibility to share in Agnodice's virtue.

Catherine uses the last few lines to create an association between Agnodice and female readers of the poem. She ends by mentioning Agnodice's "rare virtues" ("rares vertus," 175) and how Envy "has ever since persecuted… / All Ladies as virtuous as she" ("a poursuivy depuis… / Les Dames qui estoient vertueuse comme elle," 176-77). Catherine's word choice makes these lines slightly peculiar. On the one hand, Catherine inscribes Envy into the future. She has persecuted women since Agnodice's time with "an everlasting hatred" ("d'une haine immortelle," 176) that presumably continues today. Yet, Catherine uses the imperfect tense to discuss how Envy persecutes Ladies who *were* virtuous, like Agnodice. This cements virtue as a quality that women not only *can* have, but *have* had. Catherine invites the reader to reflect on what makes Agnodice virtuous, what other women have been virtuous, and what the reader can do to be virtuous. In doing so, she rewrites the gender paradigm by imagining women in the role of the virtuous heroes. But, perhaps even more importantly, she redefines what heroism looks like.

Catherine's version of heroism is not about manliness, courage, or bravery. It is not about fighting with fists, or swords, or guns. In fact, it has nothing to do with adventure and exploit. Catherine's version of heroism is about fixing what is wrong in the community and connecting with people. It is wanting to help, but being flexible in

[64] Sankovitch, "The Dames des Roches," 65.

what that help looks like. It is about healing past trauma, and encouraging physical and emotional well-being. It about advocating for equal access to education and putting your body on the line when it will help the cause. It is about speaking up, all while knowing how to listen. It is about encouraging humility, grace, empathy, and compassion. It is about giving and receiving. Her version of heroism is modern day feminism.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has examined how two early modern female poets construct themselves as speaking subjects in field that has historically excluded them. I argue that Louise Labé and Catherine des Roches construct alternate poetic communities and create different modes of interaction from those that dominate the male literary tradition. These women poets eschew the narcissistic and competitive poetic models available to them and replace these models with more inclusive, constructive, and relational ones.

Louise Labé and Catherine des Roches challenge two distinct, yet related, literary models. The first, based on poetic narcissism, privileges the individual. The Petrarchan and Neoplatonic poetic models circulating in the early modern period are based on male subjectivity. These models center the narrative around the male poet's desires, struggles, and experiences. His perspective becomes the human perspective; his point of view becomes the universal point of view. He occupies the role of the gazing and speaking subject, while the female beloved becomes the object of his affections. When not idolized or vilified, she is left out of the text completely. In this regard, masculine subjectivity often effaces the other. This model, focused on the singularity and individualism of the male poet, gives rise to a second poetic model based on hierarchy, competition, and the establishment of mastery. Poetic competitions—and the crowning of poet laureates more broadly—create a sense of rivalry among poets and establish hierarchical models of interaction. Since only one author can attain the poetic crown, this kind of competition perpetuates a narrative that one person's speech, power, or success has to come at the expense of someone else's.

Poets seeking to establish their own mastery write out of self-interest and not for their beloved, despite their claims. As male poets craft their legacies, the female figures within their works simply become markers of the male poet's virtuosity. The Petrarchan and the Neoplatonic poetic models privilege the male speaker, whether by emphasizing his suffering or contributing to his glory.

Louise Labé rewrites these masculine models in significant ways. When she constructs her poetic persona, she does not mirror the subjectivity of singular male subject. Instead, she thinks about subjectivity differently, offering a model of poetry that allows for an engagement with the other. As seen through the absence of the "I/me" ("*je/moi*") in several of her sonnets, her poetry is less focused on self and more inclusive of another. Labé, working within the amatory coupling, creates a new poetic model that allows for both male and female participation. When Labé takes on the role of the speaking subject, she does so in a way that does not silence her beloved. Instead, she gives place to the other, even at the expense of the poetic self. Her poetry privileges dialogue and interaction. She shows that poetic excellence and inclusion into the poetic tradition does not have to be a zero-sum game.

The relationality suggested by Labé's work comes into full view in Catherine's narrative poem "Agnodice." In the first half of her poem, Catherine shows the pitfalls of the competition-oriented mode of being. She incorporates Envy into Agnodice's story to show just how destructive this model of interaction is. Envy, described as the worst of all sins, has plagued humanity. She has caused the deaths of many ancient Greek heroes, among whom is Phocion. While Plutarch has Phocion's wife advocate for his burial, Catherine has a foreign Lady do it. Not only does the foreign Lady

model compassion and community building, but she does so outside of the romantic couple. However, her entrance into the public sphere provokes Envy, who then makes husbands envious of their wives. They take away women's access to books and learning, causing them incredible pain and torment.

In the second half of her poem, Catherine extends female participation beyond the male-female pairing to a larger community of women. Agnodice (and her prototype, the foreign Lady) emphasize qualities such as communication and empathy. In contrast with Envy who destroys community, Agnodice rebuilds it. She heals the women by verbally and physically interacting with them. Catherine plays with poetic genres like the blazon in order to create a more inclusive community that emphasizes female collaboration and cooperation. Catherine inscribes the female body and voice into her text, using her writing to form communities of care that serve the collective good. This practice is not without risk, as Agnodice further proves Envy's ire and is condemned by the men to be put to death. However, through a stunning verbal and visual display, Agnodice convinces the men to allow their wives to study letters. In doing so, Agnodice rewrites not only how men and women can interact, but also how women can interact with each other.

This way of thinking about writing is not limited to these two poets, but can be observed in a broader range of authors. For example, Madeleine des Roches' work contributes to this less self-centered and more inclusive mode of writing. Her poems share similarities both with Labé's and with Catherine's. Labé highlights the precarious position she holds as a female speaking subject by strategically and conscientiously writing herself out of the poems I analyze. Madeleine also uses her

poetry to describe her precarious subjectivity and openly addresses her subjugation in relation to various oppressive institutions. Within her sonnets, she layers the different types of suffering she has experienced from her marriage, from her physical ailments, from her legal battles, and from the violence of the French wars of religion. Madeleine exposes the structural oppression women face and transforms these various sources of effacement into opportunities for empowerment and poesis. The way in which Madeleine presents her suffering demands interpretation. She uses ambiguity as a rhetorical strategy to build a community of active and engaged readers. By writing a sonnet that allows for multiple meanings, Madeleine forces the reader to adopt active reading practices and intervene in order to construct meaning out of her verse. Not only does Madeleine use her effacement to construct her poetic persona, but to create an opportunity for female literary engagement more broadly.

This community of readers transforms into a community of writers when Madeleine uses her maternal role to inscribe Catherine into the poetic tradition. In her first poem, "Epistle to my daughter" ("Epistre à ma fille"), Madeleine remakes a male poetic tradition based on notions of hierarchy and singularity into a female one based on equality and multiplicity. Madeleine uses her epistle to replace an exclusionary literary tradition with a more inclusive one. She troubles the gender hierarchies inherent in lyric poetry. Madeleine encourages her daughter to write and creates a new, female poetic lineage so that both she and her daughter can be included in literary history.[1] Madeleine exercises her own authority to fuse their identities, yet

[1] On a biographical note, it would seem that this encouragement got through to Catherine. Much to the chagrin of her suitors, she famously never married and instead

without reducing Catherine to simply a part of herself. Madeleine eventually transforms Catherine from a mirror image of herself into a source of succor. By acknowledging that Catherine provides her with solace from her torments, Madeleine essentially reverses familial roles; instead of the mother supporting the child, the child supports the mother. Within the mother-daughter context, Madeleine's self-effacement leads to an intentional role reversal, one that aggrandizes her daughter and shows off both women's poetic accomplishments.

Together, Louise Labé and the Dames des Roches reimagine what it means to be women writers and poets in the early modern period. Their insistence on communal forms of writing that emphasize female cooperation continue to hold relevance for modern feminists today. The model of authorship developed by these women writers establishes modes of literary engagement in which women take on more active, relational, and inclusive roles, thereby creating more ethical poetic models from which modern-day scholars can continue to learn.

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chose to devote herself to her intellectual pursuits. Estienne Pasquier lamented this fact, by writing: "There is only one thing that displeases me in this house, that being the daughter beautiful in perfection, as much in body and as in mind, rich, as she who must be the unique inheritor of her mother, requested in marriage by an infinitude of honorable personages, nevertheless refuses these request [literally: puts all these requests under her feet]" ("Il n'y a qu'une chose qui me desplaise en ceste maison, qu'estant la fille belle en perfection, tant de corps que d'esprit, riche de biens, comme celle qui doit ester unique heritiere de sa mere, requise en marriage par une infinite de personage d'honneur, toutefois elle met toutes ces requestes sous pieds"). In Madeleine and Catherine des Roches, *Missives*, ed. Anne R. Larsen (Genève: Droz, 1999), 348.

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