

# Early Sixteenth Century Poetry and the Reformation

Dr. Alan Haffa

# Overview

- Renaissance Defined
- Italian Influence and Petrarch an Sonnet
- Medieval forms of poetry
- Political and Religious censorship
- As the Reformation and Counter Reformation advance, poets are more cautious about religious themes.
- Secular themes and vernacular language
- Admiration and competition with ancients

# Clement Marot (1495-1544)

- Served Francis I and Marguerite de Navarre
- Christian Humanist
- Affair des Placards, 1534; Fled to Ferrara
- Met Calvin at Ferrara, 1536
- 1539 Pope Paul III persuaded Francis to allow Huguenots back if they recanted
- Translation of Psalms
- Sorbonne condemned Psalms; flight to Geneva 1543
- Lived in Geneva in the 1540s before leaving due to the strictness of life there



# **"Chant royal de la conception Nostre Dame" 1533**

- Chant royal: Medieval French Form
- Imagines a beauty contest for the selection of Mary as the Mother of Christ
- Deliberately recreates the Judgment of Paris from Greek Myth
- "Dedans Syon au Pays du Judée  
Fut un debat honneste suscité  
Sur la beaulté des Dames collaudée  
Diversement par ceulx de la Cité"

- Song of Songs is echoed, as the choice is made by virtue of the sound of the women's voices: "My dove, hiding in the clefts of the rock in the coverts of the cliff, show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet and your face is beautiful."
- A reference to Ulysses and Sirens, and how Mary's voice surpasses them.
- Le divin Verbe est la voix, & alaine,  
Qui proceda d'organe non vilaine  
C'est de Marie, où tous biens sont compris.



- Sister of Francis I, King of France and grandmother of King Henry IV
- Patron and protector of Calvin, Marot, and Rabelais and other protestants
- *Heptameron*: Stories emphasize Chastity as pathway to God
- “Mirror of the Soul” 1548; condemned by Sorbonne but revoked after King’s intervention; Narrator confesses to her own image—the Word in her. Elizabeth I, Tr.

## Marguerite de Navarre (1492-1549)



# Introduction to “**Le Miroir de l’âme pécheresse,**” 1531

- Si vous lisez ceste œuvre toute entiere,  
Arrestez vous, sans plus, à la matiere,  
En excusant la rythme et le langage,  
Voyant que cest d'une femme l'ouvrage,  
Qui n'a en soy science, ne sçavoir,  
Fors un desir, que chacun puisse voir  
Que fait le don de DIEU le Createur,  
Quand il luy plaist justifier un cœur :  
Quel est le cœur d'un homme, quant à soy,  
Avant qu'il ayt receu le don de Foy,  
Par lequel seul l'homme a la congnoissance  
De la Bonté, Sapience et Puissance.

- Leader of La Pleiade:  
Modelled on an ancient Greek group of 7 Poets
- Program: Break with the past generation of French poets called Rhetoriquers (who were too Medieval)
- *Used Myth extensively*
- *Used Greek and Roman forms and abandoned French, Medieval forms*
- <http://www.tonykline.co.uk/PITBR/French/Ronsard.htm>

## Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585):





# ON HIS LADY'S WAKING, 1550

My lady woke upon a morning fair,  
What time Apollo's chariot takes the skies,  
And, fain to fill with arrows from her eyes  
His empty quiver, Love was standing there:  
I saw two apples that her breast doth bear  
None such the garden of the Hesperides  
Yields; nor hath Venus any such as these,  
Nor she that had of nursling Mars the care.

Even such a bosom, and so fair it was,  
Pure as the perfect work of Phidias,  
That sad Andromeda's discomfiture  
Left bare, when Perseus passed her on a day,  
And pale as Death for fear of Death she lay,  
With breast as marble cold, as marble pure.

# Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542)



- Poet and Diplomat
- Lover of Lady Anne Boleyn; Wyatt imprisoned
- Patron, Sir Thomas Cromwell executed in 1541
- Wyatt imprisoned and then reconciled with King.

# Wyatt's Poetic Accomplishments

- Pioneered English Blank Verse
- Translated Petrarch's Sonnets
- Adapted the Italian verse forms by adding a political or courtly subtext to love lyrics, as in Whoso List to Hunt; the "deer belonging to Caesar" refers to Anne Boleyn.

Who so list to hunt, I know where is an hind,  
But as for me, alas, I may no more:  
The vain travail hath wearied me so sore.  
I am of them that farthest cometh behind.  
Yet may I by no means my wearied mind  
Draw from the deer: but as she fleeth afore,  
Fainting I follow. I leave off therefore,  
Since in a net I seek to hold the wind.  
Who list her hunt, I put him out of doubt,  
As well as I, may spend his time in vain:  
And, graven with diamonds, in letters plain  
There is written her fair neck round about:  
*Noli me tangere*, for Caesar's I am,  
And Wild for to hold though I seem tame.

# Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586)

- From "Astrophil and Stella"
- Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show,

That she, dear she, might take some pleasure of my pain,

Pleasure might cause her read,  
reading might make her know,

Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain,

I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe:





# Observations on Astrophil and Stella 1

- Meter: Iambic hexameter
- Use of Caesura to emphasize flow of ideas
- Repetition of key words from phrase to phrase also makes verse flow and links idea development
- Poetic Idea: Writing as a means to inspire Love
- Importance of expressing one's heart rather than being too learned
- Classic Question: should a poet "feel" more than "study"

# Summary

- Early 16<sup>th</sup> century French poets were influenced by Medieval forms: Ballades and Chansons
- As the Reformation spread, poets were less comfortable writing directly about religion.
- Ronsard, Du Bellay and La Pleiade were the next wave of poets; Catholic in religion, royalists in politics, but advocates of French as a new literary language
- This new generation imitated Renaissance Italian writers like Petrarch and Greek and Roman writers
- The English Renaissance was inspired by the Italian
- English Renaissance writers adapt the Sonnet
- English poets integrate sacred and personal