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*Paloma II*

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE FEMME FATALE

*Chair & Organizer:* DORA E. POLACHEK, STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, BINGHAMTON

CHIMENE BATEMAN, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, CHICAGO

Taking Another Look at Medusa: Louise Labé as Femme Fatale

This paper explores the analogy between the sixteenth-century Lyonnais poet Louise Labé and the famously ambivalent figure of Medusa the Gorgon. In the early modern period, Medusa functioned as a joint symbol of feminine allure and feminine cruelty: the very type of the femme fatale. Interpreting the image of Medusa in the contexts both of classical myth and of modern gender theory, the paper investigates representations of the woman writer as Medusa, in the erotic verse tributes addressed to Labé by her male contemporaries Olivier de Magny and Claude de Taillemont. The paper then turns to Labé's own writings, to examine powerful female figures of a different kind: the "Dames Lyonnaises," whom Labé imagines as her potential critics. The Medusa figures in the poems of Magny and Taillemont call attention to the problem of male reception of female-authored love poetry, while Labé's "Dames Lyonnaises" highlight the problem of female reception.

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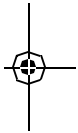
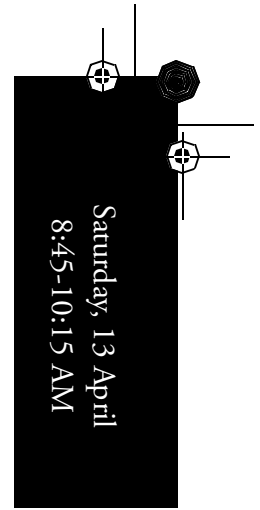
The Femme Fatale as Musician in Sixteenth-Century French Literature

"Birds without wings, and girls without legs, and fish without a mouth [who] nevertheless sing with their lips. . . . She whose form ends in a black fish-tail is a woman of seductions" (Alciato). The Sirens of classical myth lured sailors to their deaths with their exquisite singing. Orpheus and Ulysses devised ways to resist the Sirens' song. Their actions suggest antidotes to the power of the musical femme fatale: male artistic creation and the acquisition of knowledge. Sixteenth-century French court poets explore the implications of the Orphean remedy, which is to create a music that surpasses that of the Sirens. In moralizing texts and images, the Sirens represent worldly pleasures and illustrate the power of flattery — perils that may be avoided through Odyssean recourse to study and travel. These Renaissance Sirens transgress emerging codes for female musical conduct, revealing societal anxieties about women's music-making.

E. BRUCE HAYES, UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

Rabelais's Femme Fatale: Revisiting the Haulte Dame de Paris

Much has been made of the troublesome episode in Rabelais's first book in which Panurge attempts to seduce a "haulte dame de Paris." This Parisian lady has been compared to both Christ (François Rigolot) and Anita Hill (Carla Freccero), all in an attempt to make sense of what happens in this outrageous encounter. I would like to offer a new method for interpreting this scene. To understand this episode, it is important to realize that Rabelais is constructing a farcical episode in which all of the comedic mechanisms of traditional farce are present, and yet the framing of the farce is much more radical in its



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objectives. Panurge's actions serve as a scathing critique of the religious hypocrisies embodied in the Parisian lady. Rabelais's audacity and innovation is to bring together two very different traditions, thus creating both a new form of farce and a new form of humanist satire.

DORA E. POLACHEK, *STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, BINGHAMTON*

Renaissance Perspectives on Renaissance Texts: Brantôme and the *Heptaméron*

Although the *Heptaméron* is experiencing an unprecedented degree of critical attention, no one has examined the seminal role played by Brantôme in the work's reception or subsequent notoriety. The *Recueil des Dames*, Brantôme's gossipy chronicle of French court culture, is filled not only with substantial references to Marguerite de Navarre, but also discussions of a significant number of *Heptaméron* novellas. I shall examine these passages in order to answer the following questions: (1) what do Brantôme's writings tell us of his and his contemporaries' reception of the work? (2) what do his analyses of specific novellas tell us about the interplay between fiction and courtly social practices; specifically, how do Brantôme's remarks crystallize the way the *Heptaméron* was used as a primer for refining a society's adeptness in amatory trickery and deceit? (3) how does Brantôme's reading of the *Heptaméron* continue to structure and shape current approaches to the text?