

Clément Marot and the “Invention” of the French Sonnet: Innovating the Lyrical Imperative in Renaissance France

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Introduction

The Renaissance was a period with little concern for firstness. To the contrary, the writers, thinkers and artists of this era embraced their own cultural secondarity.⁽¹⁾ This is certainly the case in Italy, where the rediscovery of Greco-Roman ideals was held at a much higher premium than any proto-nationalistic aspirations towards originality. For a burgeoning nation such as France, this is all the more true, as the French, imitating Italy’s imitation of classical ideas, found themselves in a situation similar to that of the poet in Book X of Plato’s *Republic*: three times removed from the imitated ideal. In *Pléiade Poetics: A Study in Sixteenth-Century Thought and Terminology*, Grahame Castor goes to great lengths to reveal that, in the Renaissance, the significance of the concept of “invention” was far removed from the romantic idea of firstness it carries today. For the poets of the Renaissance, poetic creation was a combination of *invention* and *imagination*. To make this point, Castor quotes perhaps the greatest poet of the French Renaissance, Ronsard, who writes: “Le principal point est l’invention, laquelle vient tant de la bonne nature que par la leçon des bons et anciens auteurs” (84) [The key point is invention, which comes as much from good nature (*inspiration, imagination*) as from the lessons of good and ancient authors.] In the Renaissance, invention was synonymous with discovery (or, more properly, re-discovery). To repeat Thomas Greene’s vivid image from *The Light of Troy*, the poetic itinerary of the Renaissance was to revivify—but not necessarily renew—a tradition “lit by the dim brilliance of a vanishing city” (88). Eric Gans speaks to the same in his essay on “The Neoclassical Esthetic” in *Originary Thinking*: “The Renaissance was the moment of change in the relative forces of ritual and esthetic culture; it was not the origin or even the ‘rebirth’ of the latter” (150-51).⁽²⁾ So, returning to my title, with our modern conception of invention so affected by the *mensonge romantique*, how is it possible to speak of Clément Marot’s “Invention” of the French sonnet while avoiding accusations of anachronism? The response to this question—and the justification of this study—is located in the Renaissance’s outward

avowal of its secondarity, with its motto: *Innovation par imitation* [Innovation by/through imitation].

Marot's invention⁽³⁾ of the sonnet operates, as this study aims to demonstrate, according to these very principles of *innovation par imitation*, translation giving way to a sort of imitation that allows for poetic innovation to occur. The poems to be analyzed in the paragraphs to follow will be presented in such a way as to trace Marot's poetic evolution and to reveal how his composition of typical French forms (most notably the epigram), leading to his translations of certain Petrarchan sonnets, ultimately produce a poetic effect unique to the French sonnet that I will term *le couplet marotique*. Even if poetic "invention" is no more than a rhetorical gesture in the Renaissance, Marot's French imitation of the Petrarchan sonnet has most certainly presented us with one of the finest examples of lyrical innovation.

Before moving on to analysis of the Marotic sonnet and an explanation of the function of the *couplet marotique*, it will be useful to further expose the stakes of this argument by historically grounding Clément Marot, the literary figure, in a Renaissance context, as well as to offer reasons why the Petrarchan sonnet is an ultimate form of poetic imitation, constituting a lyrical ideal. I will thus divide my study into three sections and proceed as follows: I) Clément Marot and the Lyrical Renaissance in France, II) Marot and the Petrarchian Lyrical Imperative, and III) From the Epigram to the French Sonnet: the Innovation of the *couplet marotique*.

I. Clément Marot and the Lyrical Renaissance in France

While many would agree to the absurdity of the historical idea of an overnight transition from the "Dark Ages" to the Renaissance, in the history of French poetry, such a radical change is traditionally accepted. With the 1549 publication of Joachim Du Bellay's *Deffence et illustration de la langue françoise*, the French lyrical tradition was turned on its head, as the Angevin poet gave examples of which poets, poetic styles, and genres were worthy of imitation for the poet wishing to embellish the French vernacular and render it equal to the cultured Italian tongue and the languages of Antiquity. At the same time praising the Greeks and Romans as traditions to imitate in order to "amplify" the French language (I, 8), Du Bellay denigrates France's national tradition and the poetic output of nearly all of his Gallic forebears (II, 2). To enrich the French tongue, he holds that their "natural" poetic style and "common" language were insufficient, appealing rather to the imitation of the epigrams of Martial, Ovidian elegies, the satires of Quintilian, Virgilian eclogues, Horatian odes, Homeric epics, and Petrarchan sonnets (II, 4-5). Oddly enough, in this treatise that would become the veritable bible for Renaissance imitation theory, formalizing the poetic doctrine of *innovation par imitation*, it is none other than the late Marot (who had succumbed to the plague in 1544), France's first sonneteer (publishing his first sonnet more than a decade before *La Deffence*, in 1538) who would stand in as Du Bellay's straw man example of what not to imitate.

Why single out Marot? The tradition into which Du Bellay was tapping, that of the “Defense” and the “Ars Poetica,”(4) was one in which Thomas Sébillet had found success one year earlier with his *Art poétique français* (1548). In many ways, Du Bellay is responding to—if not trying to subvert—Sébillet’s treatise, which sees traditional, medieval French verse forms as the natural, national products of poetic evolution since Antiquity. For achievement in what was then modern French verse, Sébillet’s model *par excellence* is Clément Marot.(5) Sébillet is justified in this, as Marot belongs to a group of poets that Jean Vignes labels as the *derniers rhétoriciens* (83), the sons of the *Grands rhétoriciens*, a group that included Clément’s father Jean Marot and whose poetic virtuosity was unparalleled in the French tradition, but, at the same time, whose simplistic poetic forms were derived from medieval rhyme schemes and who were more interested in playing rhetorical games than putting forward a nationalistic agenda. For his part, Clément Marot finds himself on the cusp, straddling the back end of the *rhétoriciens*, a tradition from which he never aimed to divorce himself (Vignes 87), and the front end of the poetic revival to be ushered in by Du Bellay and the Pléiade Brigade in the 1550s. In fact, Christine Scollen-Jimack has labeled Marot as follows:

[A] Janus-like figure who both looks back to the Middle Ages (his earliest works perpetuate late-medieval poetic traditions, and he edited Villon and the *Roman de la Rose*), and at the same time ushers in the first phase of the French Renaissance (he translated Virgil, Ovid, and Petrarch, and he may well have been the first to write sonnets in French). (502)Needing a clean break between the Middle Ages and the new poetic revival founded in imitation in order for his manifesto in *La Deffence* to take root in France, Du Bellay realized he had to eradicate Marot:

Marot me plaist (dit quelqu’un) pour ce, qu’il est *facile*, et ne s’éloigne point de la *commune* manière de parler. . . . Quand à moy, telle *superstition* ne m’a point retiré de mon Entreprise : pour ce, que j’ay tousjours estimé notre Poësie Françoise estre capable de quelque *plus haulte*, et *meilleur* Style, que celui, dont nous sommes si longuement contentez. (II, 1: 120-21, my italics)[I find Marot pleasing (someone will say) because he is *easy* and is never too far removed from the *common* manner of speaking. . . . For me, such *superstition* has never caused me to withdraw from my Enterprise: for I have always esteemed our French Poetry to be capable of a *higher* and *better* Style than that with which we have for such a long time contented ourselves.(6) (my italics)]

In a document aimed at enriching and expanding the French vernacular, with the ultimate objective of rendering it equal to Classical tongues, there was simply no room for poetry that emphasized that which is *facile* and *commonplace*.

Margaret Ferguson makes an important case in favor of this explanation in her reading of Du Bellay’s *Deffence* as an “*Offensive Defense for a New Intellectual Elite*” (194, my italics):

The attacks on Marot highlight the complexity of Du Bellay's concept of the vulgar and his ambivalent feelings about his potential readers. Most of Marot's initial readers had been members of the court during the reign of Francis I (1515-1547), the patron of art and literature. To blame Marot's idiom for being vulgar, capable of pleasing because it was 'easy,' close to 'the common manner of speaking,' was therefore a challenge to elite readers of the new reign of Henri II: they would betray a lack of cultivation if they failed to alter their taste. There were in fact fewer differences between du Bellay and Marot than the rhetoric of [*La deffence*] suggests. In addition to French medieval genres, Marot had imitated Italian and classical models with considerable versatility—not only the elegy, eclogue, and epigram, but most especially the Petrarchan sonnet, which he introduced into France. (194-95)

In another, more sinister interpretation than the nationalistic explanation presented above, Du Bellay and Ronsard effectively kill off and displace their oedipal father in order to succeed to the poetic throne of 16th-century France. This is the thesis of William J. Kennedy's chapter on Du Bellay and Marot "Totems for Defense" from *The Site of Petrarchism*, where the situation is defined as "illustrat[ing] the social psychology sketched by Freud in *Totem and Taboo*" (94), for which, ironically, "The result would be nothing less than a struggle for supremacy in the French canon and a potential setback to developing a national culture" (94). Claude Thiry couches this dismissal in the following terms: "On bâtit sur l'œuvre des prédécesseurs, on innove éventuellement à partir d'elle, mais on ne la répudie pas, et ce jusqu'à la génération de Clément Marot: le rejet du père, en poésie française, n'apparaît qu'avec la Pléiade" (2). [We build on the works of our predecessors. We eventually innovate from them, but we do not repudiate them. This remains true through the generation of Clément Marot: the rejection of the father in French poetry does not appear until the Pléiade.] Marot, a poet so celebrated, was the only one—the phallic father—Du Bellay needed to mention, in that he was the most recent, the most difficult to surpass, and all other "medieval" poets fell far within the reach of his great poetic wingspan. To do away with all potential competition, Du Bellay simply had to eliminate this central figure. Marot thus becomes a straw man for Du Bellay, who effectively singles out his predecessor in an *ad hominem* assault that would radiate negatively on this great, nodal poet in the French tradition. Marot biographer Pauline Smith laments this same reticence on the part of the Pléiade—and the French cultural memory, by connection—to recognize the role of Marot in Renaissance poetics:

However great or understandable their reluctance to admit it, the poets of the *Pléiade* received a considerable legacy from Marot. His innovations went far to realize the poetic 'reforms' which Ronsard was later to claim as his own. Far from being the first to break with the traditions of the *Rhétoriciens* and with everything that was medieval in the poetry of their predecessors, the *Pléiade* poets were themselves denied this role by one of these same predecessors. They recommended the cultivation in French poetry of the genres of Classical Antiquity and of Italy when Marot had already written the first French elegies, had

introduced the epithalamium, the eclogue and the sonnet, had established the epigram and composed in his *chansons* and *cantiques* which differed only in name from those which Ronsard was later to call *Odes*. [...] And long before the *Pléiade's* Petrarchist and Anacreonic phases, Marot's poetry introduced into French the conceits of the Italian love poets [...]. (273, her italics)

More succinct and evocative in his imagery, Gérard Defaux, in his "Introduction" to the Garnier Classiques edition of Marot's *Œuvres complètes*, seconds this opinion of the *Pléiade's* indebtedness to Marot, pointing to many of the same contributions as Smith did above and claiming that Marot "avait en somme fait le lit dans lequel Du Bellay et Ronsard n'eurent plus qu'à se coucher" (I: clxviii). [(Marot) had, essentially, already made the bed in which Du Bellay and Ronsard would have to do nothing more than lie down.] Regardless of which interpretation, if either, one decides to accept, it is difficult to overstate the long-obscured importance of Marot to the *Pléiade* poetics. While it is still premature to proclaim him the "inventor" of the French sonnet, it is impossible overlook his contributions to the poetic reforms that the *Pléiade* claims for itself and to recognize, as did Jean Balsamo, that, in all actuality, "Marot inventait le pétrarquisme français" (50). [Marot invented French Petrarchism.]

Moving from general poetics to the great Petrarchan verse form that is the central interest of this study, the sonnet, it is of note that in the 1550 edition of his own volume of sonnets, *L'Olive* (the first collection in the French tradition composed entirely of sonnets), Du Bellay—whether deliberately or not—takes the distinction of introducing the sonnet to the French tradition from Marot, attributing it to his more innocuous contemporary Mellin de Saint-Gelais: "(L)e sonnet italien [est] devenu français, comme je croy, par Mellin de Saint Gellais" (Ed. Caldarini 230) [The Italian sonnet became French, I believe, with Mellin de Saint-Gelais.] Both adopting and providing evidence of the virtual effacement of Marot in the sonnet tradition over the centuries, Max Jasinski, in his 1903 *L'histoire du sonnet en France*, suggests that: "Comme du Bellay le premier en avait donné la sensation nette, avec talent, et dans des conditions favorables, on fit de lui le premier sonnettiste français, l'inventeur même du genre" (58)! [Since Du Bellay was the first to have clearly rendered its sensations, with talent, and under favorable circumstances, we call him the first French sonneteer, even the inventor of the genre.] Displaying a distinctly romantic conception of invention, Jasinski fails to account for the "re-discovery," imitation and innovation that were paramount to the Petrarchan sonnet's entry into the French tradition. This is especially true when we consider that Du Bellay, himself, employed the *couplet marotique* (a concept I will soon explain) in his own sonnets. More than anything else, Marot's contributions to the Petrarchan verse form enabled it to become recognizably French.

II. Marot and the Petrarchian Lyrical Imperative

With the aim of building to an explanation of Marot's invention of the French sonnet, an

examination of the “lyrical” as a concept and Petrarch’s codification of the 14-verse structure as the ideal lyrical form is prerequisite. In so doing I will make explicit what is at stake in the current study and respond to the over-arching questions it poses: What is it about the sonnet that makes it such an important and universally-imitated verse form? Why does it remain the most-and perhaps the lone-recognizable fixed poetic form(7) amongst the educated public? Why for centuries up to the present, when a poet has wished to articulate his anguish relating to, while immortalizing the image of, his inaccessible dearly beloved, is the logic of the constrained Petrarchan form his preferred choice? The response is found in the fact that-both structurally and thematically-Petrarch’s sonnet gets to the very heart of lyricism, rendering the imitation of this form an imperative for the aspiring poet.

I have entitled the poetic tendency to imitate Petrarch and his sonnet “The Petrarchian Lyrical Imperative,”(8) referring at a secondary level to the fact that the Petrarchan sonnet, as a lyrical form, operates linguistically and poetically as an imperative plea or command. I shall demonstrate this by, first, establishing a working definition of what is “lyrical,” followed by a explanation of how lyrical poetry operates linguistically as an imperative speech act, in order to ultimately reveal how the Petrarchan sonnet is logically germane to the lyrical pose of the poet.

In the title of a recent *PMLA* article (Jan. 2008), Jonathan Culler poses a very poignant question: “Why Lyric?” Lamenting the abandonment of the study of poetry in academia, where “narrative has become the norm of literature” (201), Culler calls for a rehabilitation of verse and an expropriation of the constitutive parts that separate the lyric from the more diegetic narrative forms of discourse. Following a diagnostic evaluation of the problem and before offering an antidote, Culler continues by defining the terms of this question and suggesting a series of answers to another important question: What is the Lyric? To this question, he offers at least four categories that characterize the lyric, which are as follows: 1) Direct Address, as “The classical lyric was generally addressed to someone [and] treats the poem as an event addressed to an audience, performed for an audience, even if it idealizes situations of social ritual” (204); 2) Rhetorical Transaction, or a “characteristically extravagant, perform[ative] speech act” (205); 3) Linguistic Event, where subjectivity is founded through the peculiar “givenness, the untranscendability, of a particular language” (206), which is the lyrical experience (as opposed to the translatable nature of narrative structures); and, finally, 4) Memorable Language-“made memorable [and, thus, repeatable] by its rhythmical shaping and phonological patterning” (206). Constituting the *lyric* as a clearly defined category of poetic creation, Culler ultimately prepares to prescribe the remedy for this critical malaise: a return to the study of the lyric.

Timely in its publication, perhaps even overdue, Culler’s article raises questions crucial to understanding what separates the lyric from discursive forms of literary creation while also resurrecting domains of genre theory that have lain dormant for some decades. Examined perhaps most famously by Northrop Frye in his canonical essay “Theory of Genres” (from

Anatomy of Criticism, 1957), where he divides literature into four categories: *Epos*, Fiction, Drama and Lyric (248-49), the determining difference between genres depends upon what he terms the *radical of presentation*, the crucial divider in the relationship of the author (subject) to the audience (object). According to Frye, unlike ostensive or discursive forms of expression, “The lyric is the genre in which the poet . . . turns his back on his audience” (271). In other words, the lyric depends upon a separation between the desiring subject and the desired object-expressed linguistically as the imperative.(9)

In an article on Sappho and the origins of the Greek lyric, “Naissance du Moi lyrique” [Birth of the Lyrical Self/Ego], Eric Gans speaks of the separation between the subject-poet and the divinized, desired object that results in the creation of the lyrical genre:

(Ce qui) [...] donne naissance à la poésie lyrique est sans doute une prière ou invocation adressée à une divinité qui d’une manière ou d’une autre la somme d’être présente. La prière proprement dite prend une forme *impérative*; on demande quelque chose à la divinité, et en premier lieu sa présence, ne serait-ce que pour l’écouter. (129, his italics)

[That which engenders lyrical poetry is undoubtedly a prayer or an invocation addressed to a divinity, which in one way or another beckons its presence. True prayer takes the form of an *imperative*; one asks something of the divinity, first of all its presence, if only for it to hear the prayer.]

Operating as a prayer, the lyric aims to make present the non-present—for a present subject to evoke a non-present object through language. Returning to Frye, the lyric is, rhetorically, as analogous to prayer as the *epos* is to a sermon (249): “The radical of presentation in the lyric is the hypothetical form of what in religion is called the ‘I-Thou’ relationship” (248-49). Tylor defines prayer as “the soul’s sincere *desire*, uttered or unexpressed” (364, my italics). What J. L. Austin or John Searle would, in their philosophical theories of language, refer to as an illocutionary act, the imperative aims to accomplish something with words: to make present the non-present through linguistic evocation. “Imperatives intend an action on the part of their addressee. This intention goes in the word -> world direction [of Searle]; yet, its action is clearly less direct than that of the designative ostensive” (Gans, *Originary Thinking* 70).(10) Continuing to elucidate the connection between lyrical origin and the originary scene, Gans offers a phenomenological explanation for the lyrical:

Les éléments de base d’une phénoménologie de la situation lyrico-rituelle sont donc les suivants: la communauté se rassemble dans la présence de tous ses membres . . . ; mais, cette présence [sacrée] est en même temps un lieu d’absence, du manque non d’un être réel dont l’avènement pourrait le combler, mais d’un être transcendantal qui ne saurait être présent que par la re-présentation. (“Naissance” 129)

[The fundamental elements of a phenomenology of the lyrico-ritual situation are as follows: the community gathers in the presence of all its members . . . ; however, this

[sacred] presence is at the same time an area of absence, of lack-not necessarily of a real being whose coming would be capable of satisfying the lack, but rather of a transcendental being who could not be present except through re-presentation.]

Even when this sacred center is invoked verbally through the imperative form, the actual presence of the invoked deity (in this primitive case communally-evoked) remains an impossibility; but, it is still in the ritual act of invoking that the sacred center retains its sacrality in the communal imaginary. Lyrical poetry is, therefore, perpetually virginal in that it is a desire that is never physically satisfied, only esthetically deferred (through representation). Gans speaks to this feature in noting that “[...] cependant l’être qui garantit le succès de l’opération n’existe [...] qu’en imagination. Le lyrique rituel est une tentative pour stimuler cette imagination qui risque d’être défaillante” (129). [(N)onetheless, the being that guarantees the success of the operation exists only in the imagination. The ritual lyric is an attempt to stimulate this imagination which could otherwise prove ineffective.] As a primitive, sacred model, the *lyrique rituel* would exist as a guarantor of the primacy of the sacred center, which is evoked but never appropriated, desired but never attained.

From this sacred, anthropological model of the lyrical imperative-as-prayer, we advance to a model of secular poetry,[\(11\)](#) where the question of the *imperative* remains crucial. In *The End of Culture*, discussing the secular esthetic culture of Greece, Gans once again examines Sapphic lyrical verse and offers the following observation: “The poem is a prayer to the goddess; but the modern unbeliever will read it as a love poem addressed in fact to the beloved, as was so often the case in the Renaissance” (277). The one could be said to stand in for the other, as in the case of the “crypto-religious compartments” of the non-religious man explained by Mircea Eliade (24). Lyrical poetry, in a secular world, becomes a vestige of a sacred past while at the same time serving a very personal, subjective, and profane purpose. The collective sacred center is replaced by a (supposedly) individually-desired feminine sacred, equally inaccessible to its evoking poet. In *Love and the Western World*, Denis de Rougemont saw the great codifier of the verse form as providing lyrical poetry “an entirely pagan breath! Pagan, and not in the least heretical!” (180). The tradition from which Petrarch was distancing himself with his sonnet, that of the medieval performative lyrics of the Provençal troubadours, was not only excessively allegorical but was also too closely involved with the public and didactic in design. A personal, modern, secular lyric would necessarily be more reflective of personal desire; and, the desired object would not be a universally inaccessible god, but rather a personally inaccessible feminine counterpart. As it evolves, the lyrical form no longer evokes God, but, as Gans suggests in *The Origin of Language*, “is often addressed directly to the object of the Subject’s desire” (241).[\(12\)](#)

Desire remains key in this secular model, for Gans clarifies that “[le] rapport du couple lyrique est une relation de désir, non de fait; leur intimité n’est jamais que potentielle ou lacunaire” (“Naissance” 130). [The relationship between the lyrical couple is one of desire, not fact; their intimacy is never anything more than potential or lacunary.] Thematically

removed from the communal scene, the physical intimacy of the couple remains entirely out of question. Passionate love can only exist *in absentia*—and the lyric is the poetic expression of passionate love. Desire for the inaccessible is all that can ever truly be expressed. However, in the same way that tragic theatre can communally display—in the *ostensive* sense—the scene of creation, the lyrical poet can likewise verbally occupy the scene of creation. The very failure—or negative resolution—of every truly lyrical poem assures that he will continue to create, if not physically reproducing, at least through representation. In this same article, Gans states it thus:

La poésie lyrique la plus intime reproduit donc la situation fondamentale du rite. Ce n'est pas l'intimité du couple mais la *réciprocité* potentielle du désir érotique qui fait la différence essentielle entre le lyrisme laïc et ses sources liturgiques. On peut imaginer à partir de signes divers la présence d'une divinité, on peut même la faire parler, mais on ne peut pas lui attribuer un *désir* qui répondrait à celui de son suppliant. Le rapport du couple possède à l'encontre de celui entre l'homme et Dieu un dénouement potentiel dans la réciprocité (de l'amour, de l'acte sexuel). ("Naissance" 130, his italics)

[The most intimate lyrical poetry, therefore, reproduces the fundamental situation of the rite. It is not the intimacy of the couple but rather the potential *reciprocity* of erotic desire that makes the essential difference between secular lyricism and its liturgical sources. Considering diverse signs, one can imagine divine presence, even to the point of making the divine being speak; however, one can never allocate to divinity a *desire* that would respond to that of the beseeching subject. The connection shared between the couple butts up against that between a man and God on the grounds of potential reciprocal fulfillment (in the form of love, the sexual act).]

Still, while the belief in a potential reciprocity does exist at a sacred level (Why would a believer pray if she felt she would never be answered?), it is not presented in erotic terms but rather in the granting of tertiary desires. For the secular (or human) subject, it is a mutual, reciprocal possession of the divinized object—in personal sexual fulfillment—that is sought after. Although it is never really believed in, it is endlessly pursued. In this *leurre* of cat-and-mouse, this passionate conquest to never be fulfilled, the poet-lover occupies the sacred scene, perpetually recreating it through verse.

Clearly and intimately understanding the dilemma of impossible reciprocity in absence, Petrarch embeds it—formally and thematically—into his lyrical pleas for Laura, creating a parsimonious poetic scene of desire that minimizes anguish and achieves resolution in a constrained 14-verse structure: the sonnet. While the creation of the sonnet—the marriage of two popular Italian forms, the eight-verse *ottava* and six-verse *strambotto*—is traditionally accredited to Giacomo da Lentini and the *scuola siciliana* of Frederick II in the *duecento*, and the sonnet was practiced by Dante, Cavalcanti and others before Petrarch,⁽¹³⁾ it fell to the exiled Tuscan to codify both the theme and structure of impossible, passionate love into

the verse form for which he would henceforth be the ultimate reference.

Thematically, the Petrarchan sonnet would sing of anguish at Laura's inaccessibility, but others had already successfully accomplished this using other lyrical forms. To produce the ideal form in which to express lyrical frustrations, it was also necessary to formally recreate the asymmetrical, imperative situation of presence and absence. This was achieved in the form of the sonnet. Italian poetry operates on a numerical system of versification (as does French)—that is to say that each verse bears the same number of syllables and rhyme is determined by a phonemic homophony between at least two verses at the level of the final stressed vowel and all sounds that follow. For the Petrarchan sonnet (unlike the crossing rhymes of Giacomo), the *ottava* would be a dually-repetitive stanzic pair of embraced quatrains: ABBA ABBA. While this symmetrical, uniform series of rhymes would seem to be able to continue *ad infinitum*, stanza after stanza (ABBA ABBA ABBA...), in the sonnet it is violently ruptured in the tenth verse with the introduction of a new rhyme (C): ABBA ABBA CDE CDE.⁽¹⁴⁾ In violating the continuous rhyme, the poet introduces a sudden change that allows the poem to run its teleological course to resolution. Symmetry (or an illusory reciprocity) is, therefore, sacrificed to bring an end to the lyrical suffering of the poet.

Interpreting the stanzaic divisions as competing wills or mirrored desire (ABBA ABBA), in GA terms, the introduction of the C rhyme would be the moment of deferral that allows for peaceful resolution. This tripartite division of the sonnet can be said to operate as a syllogism. Understanding that, in the Renaissance, poetry was commonly known as “the art of second rhetoric,” it should come to surprise that poetics of the period readily recognized the sonnet's syllogistic qualities (Gendre 7). In the classic example of syllogism, “All men are mortal/ Aristotle is a man// Therefore, Aristotle is mortal,” a more general first premise is followed by a more specific second premise leading to a logical conclusion. For the syllogistic sonnet,⁽¹⁵⁾ one quatrain (Q1) would offer a premise of objective generalities and the other (Q2) another a premise of more subjective particularities that would together build to a conclusion in the tercets (T) that would resolve—albeit negatively—the dilemma of the desiring subject-poet. Reading this structure into the Petrarchan thematic, the sonnet could break-down as follows: My desire for her is powerful (Q1)/ She is inaccessible to me (Q2)// Because I desire her, I am predestined to suffering (T).

Contained within the 14-verse structure of the sonnet, this syllogistic form (that responds to and recreates the lyrical thematics) is minimal, parsimonious, and repeatable.

Teleologically-driven within a set mold, it allows for the poet to express his suffering while offering a resolution that is ritualistically repeatable in a subsequent sonnet. What is the *Canzoniere*, Petrarch's collection of *Rime sparse* (Scattered rhymes), his *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (collection of vulgar fragments), or later, the French *recueil d'Amours*, after all, but an anthologized collection of ritualistically repetitive, failed imperative pleas? This perpetually negative resolution of the sonnet enables its continuity. As Gans writes: “Les poèmes lyriques se répètent à l'infini, mais le désir qu'ils expriment est chaque fois

nouveau, indépendant de toute norme rituelle ou simplement sociale” (“Naissance” 131). [Lyrical poems infinitely repeat themselves, but the desire they express is new each time, independent of any norm, ritualistic or merely social.] Within the constrained 14 verses of a sonnet, desire is recreated, represented and resolved—and can be born anew in each subsequent sonnet.

Advancing from theoretical exploration to analytical demonstration, I shall examine this phenomenon of the self-contained lyrical desire of a syllogistic sonnet in the work of its master: Petrarch. This first sonnet, the 18th poem of the *Canzoniere*, is a fine example of the lyrical imperative:

Quand’io son tutto vòlto in quella parte (A)
ove’l bel viso di *madonna* luce, (B)
et m’è rimasa nel pensier la luce (B)
che m’arde e strugge dentro a parte a parte, (A) 4
i’ che temo del cor che mi si parte, (A)
et veggio presso il fin de la mia luce, (B)
vommene in guisa d’orbo, senza luce, (B)
che non sa ove si vada et pur si parte. (A) 8
Cosí davanti ai colpi de la morte (C)
fuggo: ma non sí ratto che’l *desio* (D)
meco non venga come venir sòle. (E) 11
Tacito vo, ché le parole morte (C)
farian pianger la gente; et *i’ desio* (D)
che le lagrime mie si spargan sole. (E) 14

[When all of me is drawn in the direction/ of that place where my lady’s sweet face shines,/ and in my thought there shines the lingering light,/ that burns and melts me inside bit by bit,/ I, fearing for my heart that breaks to pieces,/ and seeing my day’s light is soon to end,/move forward like a blind man, without light,/ who knows not where he goes but all the same./ And so it is before the blows of death/ I flee, but not so quickly that desire/does not come with me, as it always does/ I go in silence, for my deadly words/ would make all others weep, and I desire/ that all my tears be shed in solitude. (Musa 19)]

In this lyrical plea to an inaccessible, desired, and divinized woman, *madonna* (literally, “my lady,” but with clear reference to the Virgin), the desiring subject, the poet, “move(s) forward like a blind man, without light,/Who knows not where he goes but all the same” (Musa 19), only to be burned, melted and broken (*m’arde e strugge*; v. 4) before shedding his tears in solitude (*le lagrime mie si spargan sole*; v. 14). Speaking of her effect on him in the first stanza (her light that both attracts him and burns him), the second, mirroring embraced quatrain appeals to his efforts to find asylum despite his broken heart and his

ardent passion for her. Between the two, an antithetical play on the word *luce* (the B rhyme; “light”) first references her divine radiance a stanza before the poet shuns light altogether for the unbearable anguish its unavailability causes him. From these two quatrain premises of “her” and “me,” the poet interrupts the ABBA ABBA continuity with a new, C rhyme in the 9th verse that is introduced with an interjecting transition, *Così*, and continues to explain what measures he will now take to cope with his desire. From the destructive premise in its first quatrain to the self-salvaging efforts of the poet in the second, the Petrarchan sonnet reaches its syllogistic conclusion after the *volta* in two asymmetrical tercets set off by an interjection. Here, death, *morte*, first as a foreboding object (v. 9) and then as an adjective describing his unspoken words (v. 12), constitutes the homonymic C rhyme; and an emphasized desire, *desio*—as a noun (v. 10), then a verb (v. 13)—makes up the D rhyme, thus, in a sense, marrying desire to death. In addition, Petrarch drives home this rhetoric in a sort of cause-and-effect figure of style with the enjambment between the 13th and 14th verse, as the phrase “*i’ desio*” [I desire] is continued through the use of the relative pronoun *che* [that]: *che le lagrime mie si spargan sole* [That all my tears be shed in solitude].” Because the poet *desires* and cannot have, his sole refuge is solitude—which, a lone subject, he finds in the very scene of creation. In the final rhyme, E, again light (this time sunlight, “*sòle*” (v. 11) is equated with the poet’s original—and final—situation: solitude [*sole*] (v. 14). The unwitting torture of the “you” premise from the first stanza, the self-preserving “me” of the second, desire and suffering all converge in a logical, syllogistic structural presentation that supports and justifies the Petrarchan thematic of passionate love and unfulfilled desire.

For another Petrarchan example that will provide a segue into our discussion of Marot, “Chi vuol veder...,” the 248th poem of the *Canzoniere* is a significant sonnet in that it is one of the most commonly imitated in the French tradition. In addition to famous versions by Pléiade poets Ronsard and Tyard, our poet Marot made an earlier translation of this sonnet, one of six Petrarchan sonnets he chose to translate (to be examined below). First, let us begin with Petrarch’s original:

Chi vuol veder quantunque pò Natura (A)
 e ’l Ciel tra noi, venga a mirar costei (B)
 ch’è sola un sol, non pur a li occhi mei, (B)
 ma al mondo cieco che vertù non cura; (A)
 et venga tosto, perché Morte fura (A)
 prima i migiliori et lascia star i rei: (B)
 questa aspettata al regno delli dei (B)
 cosa bella mortal passa et non dura. (A)
 Vedrà, s’arriva a tempo, ogni vertute, (C)
 ogni bellezza, ogni real costume (D)
 giunti in un corpo con mirabil tempre; (E)
 allor dirà che mie rime son mute, (C)
 l’ingegno offeso dal soverchio lume. (D)

Ma se più tarda, avrà da pianger sempre. (E)

[Who seeks to see the best Nature and Heaven/ can do among us, come and gaze on her,/ sole sun, and not for my eyes only but/ for the blind world which does not care for virtue;/ come quickly now, because Death steals away/ the best ones first and leaves behind the worst:/ this one awaited in the kingdom of the gods,/ this lovely, mortal thing will pass, not last./ He'll see, if he arrives in time, all virtue,/ all loveliness, all regal-mannered ways/ joined in one body, tempered marvelously;/ then he will say that all my verse is dumb,/ my talent overcome by too much light./ But if he waits too long, he'll weep forever. (Musa 353)]

Addressed to an unidentified, anonymous listener/reader—one qualified by the relative pronoun *Chi (vuol veder)* [Literally, “Who desires to see”; or, as translated by Musa, “Who seeks to see”], this sonnet does not make its imperative appeal to the absent desired woman. Rather, it sings of her inaccessibility and praiseworthiness as it invites the reader to come quickly to bear witness to the finest work of Nature and Heaven (“quantunque po Natura/e 'l Ciel tra noi”; vv. 1-2). If the first stanza compares her to a universal sun for all—even the blind world—to see and for which virtue has no regard, the second speaks of her ephemerality, as it begins with the imperative *et venga tosto* [“Come quickly now”]. Therefore, unlike the sun, universal beauty is mortal, limited in duration, and prone to death: “cosa bella mortal passa et non dura” (v. 8) [“this lovely, mortal thing will pass, not last”]. At the place of the *volta* between the quatrain pair and the tercets, two premises have been presented concerning Laura: first, her beauty is Nature’s finest creation, and, second, he who wishes to bear witness to it must come quickly, for mortal life is limited. Following the syllogistic model of the sonnet, we anticipate a conclusion in the tercets.

Petrarch does not disappoint, as he marries and reconciles the two syllogistic premises after the *volta* in the first tercet with a hypothetical *si* clause, “s’arriva a tempo” (v. 9). If he who wished to behold Nature’s finest achievement arrives in time, he will witness *all* beauty, *all* virtue and *all* regal-mannered ways tempered into one creation, one body (“Vedrà . . . ogni vertute,/ ogni bellezza, ogni real costume/giunti in un corpo con mirabil tempre” vv. 9-11). In the final tercet, the transition *allor* [“thus” or “then”] sets up the ultimate conclusion for the sonnet in a pure example of *therefore*. In this case, he who wishes to see beauty will be, much like the poet, overcome by the light emitted from the source to the point of being unable to recognize the poet’s craft in the poetry: “dirà che mie rime son mute,/ l’ingegno offeso dal soverchio lume” (vv. 12-13). Physical and poetic blindness are the results of exposure to the finest creation of Nature and Heaven. Still, the final verse holds a worse fate for him who fails to arrive in time: to him is given the poet’s plight of weeping forever (*da pianger sempre*).⁽¹⁶⁾ In either event, with the syllogism and the sonnet attaining its logical end, the poet is prepared to recreate the scene of forever weeping in a subsequent sonnet—something achieved more potently, I argue, in the form of the sonnet as created by Marot.

III. From the Epigram to the French Sonnet: the Innovation of the *couplet marotique*

One can scan the pages of Clément Marot's most famous work, his *Adolescence clémentine* (1532), and find only the simplistic "medieval poetic forms" for which he is condemned by the Pléïade. One major point his critics fail to consider, however, is blatantly announced in the collection's title: these *adolescent* attempts at *rondeaux*, *ballades*, *chansons*, etc. were just that—the juvenilia of a burgeoning but already masterful poet. His invention of the French Petrarchian sonnet would date from a later, much more difficult time of his life, when he was exiled in Venice and Ferrara from 1536-37 for his "Lutherian tendencies." It is most likely during this sojourn in Italy, where Marot was protected by Renée de France and would frequent Calvin, Rabelais and Budé, that the poet would adopt the sonnet form and pen its first versions in the French language. What is believed to be the first published French sonnet appeared in Marot's *Second livre des epigrammes*, appearing in Lyon the year of the poet's return to France, 1538. While placing the *invention* of the French sonnet (as rediscovery) with Marot in 1538 is a mere exercise in archival, historical research, examining its *innovation*—and explaining Marot's all-important *couplet marotique*—requires an additional level of analysis. The remainder of this essay will break down the process of Marot's *innovation par imitation* with regard to the sonnet.

Rather than proceeding chronologically with Marot's first sonnets, it may be useful to begin with one of his "translated" *Six sonnets de Pétrarque* (1539): Marot's third, a version of *Chi vuol veder quantunque pò Natura* (as studied above). Upon demonstrating the effectiveness of the *couplet marotique* through analysis of this poem, I will then offer an explanation of the evolution of Marot's novel take on the fixed form, concluding with the analysis of two of the sonnets from 1538.

First, I reproduce Marot's Petrarchian version of the Petrarchan original:

Qui voudra veoir ce que peult Nature, (A)
Contempler vienne une qui en tous lieux (B)
Est ung soleil, ung soleil à mes yeulx, (B)
Voire aux ruraulx qui de vertu n'ont cure. (A)
Et vienne tost, car mort prent (tant est dure) (A)
Premier les bons, laissant les vicieux, (B)
Puis ceste cy s'en va du reng des dieux: (B)
Chose mortelle et belle bien peu dure. (A)
S'il vient à temps, verra toute beaulté, (C)
Toute vertu et meurs de royauté (C)
Jointz en ung corps par merveille secret: (D)
Alors dira que muette est ma ryme, (E)
Et que clarté trop grande me supprime: (E)

Mais si trop tarde aura tousjours regret. (D) (II: 495-96)(17)At a thematic (and syllogistic) level, Marot's translation is so true to Petrarch's text as to make analysis of its content unnecessary. Moving on to form, then, we notice that the similarity continues in Marot's attempt to maintain the structural order of stanzas and verses; he even makes an effort to use the same rhymes when possible (*Nature/cure* from *Natura/cura*; vv. 1 and 4).

Schematically, through the quatrains, the French poet holds to the rhyme disposition of his Italian forebear: ABBA ABBA. The difference is found in the *rime plate*, the CC *distique* of the 9th and 10th verses—the *couplet marotique*. Even with the near verbatim translation, the inclusion of the hypothetical *si* clause and the continuation of *Alors* and *Mais* to bolster the Petrarchan syllogism, Marot's translation is more poetically and syllogistically rigorous, as this doubled violent rupture in symmetry provides a "therefore" moment that gives way to another embraced quatrain with a new rhyme. As the sonnet's objective is to minimally resolve the crisis of desire, the Marotic syllogism of ABBA ABBA CC DEED is, indeed, logically more resolute than Petrarch's ABBA ABBA CDE CDE and can therefore be considered an improvement upon the Petrarchian Lyrical Imperative. While using another language to say the same things as Petrarch, Marot's rhetoric is more concise as he introduces the *couplet marotique* to the Petrarchan form.

In his article "Sonnet ou quatorzain? Marot et le choix d'une forme poétique," John McClelland asks an interesting question as to the development of the sonnet by tracing it to a common, unfixed poetic form of 14 verses: the *quatorzain*. Obviously, by its very nature, the sonnet is far more constrained and complex than the 14-verse epigram. The basic epigram is a poetic building up of successive *rimes plates* or *rimes croisés* to a final verse or couplet that delivers a conclusive *mot spirituel*, a witty punch-line. While this comical form neither corresponds to the *passions graves* called for by the sonnet nor does it employ rhetorically grouped forms, it does function as a sort of set-up in the same way as the sonnet does. Comically, the epigram builds to a final resolution in a *mot spirituel*; and, as we know, the first rule of comedic rhetoric is timely delivery. As an example of set-up and delivery in the epigram, let's examine one of my personal favorites, "De Jehan Jehan," where Marot plays with a stock image of a common idiot (*un Jehan*; likely written in response to someone named Jean), whose misery is doubled by the fact that he is also a cuckold (Defaux, II: 1148n):

Tu as tout seul, Jehan Jehan, vignes et prez.
Tu as tout seul ton cueur et ta pecune.
Tu as tout seul deux logis dyaprez,
Là où vivant ne pretend chose aucune.
Tu as tout seul le fruict de ta fortune.
Tu as tout seul ton boire et ton repas.
Tu as tout seul toutes choses fors une:
C'est que tout seul ta femme tu n'as pas. (II: 348)

[You have all alone, Jehan Jehan, vineyards and fields./ You have all alone your heart and riches./ You have all alone two colorful lodges,/ There where no other living soul can pretend any claim./ You have all alone the fruit of your fortune./ You have all alone your drink and your meal./ You have all alone all things save one:/ This is that your wife, all alone, you have not.]

In eight verses of couplets, Marot catalogues all of the private possessions that this certain Jehan enjoys: vineyards (*vignes*), fields (*prez*), heart (*cueur*), money (*pecune*), two lodges (*deux logis*), the fruit of his fortune (*le fruict de ta fortune*), his drink (*ton boire*) and meal (*et ton repas*), building one upon the other in a series to the final revelation: he does *not* possess his wife all alone (“Tu as tout seul toutes choses fors une:/ C’est que tout seul ta femme tu n’as pas”; vv. 7-8). Witty and comical, the progressive listings are completed with a significant interruption in the fourth verse to ultimately deliver *le mot final* in the final verse. The sonnet is not dissimilar, as it also sets up and prepares a final resolution and does so, in French, with the intrusion of the *couplet marotique*. A master of the epigram, Marot would have certainly been acutely attuned to the importance of set-up and delivery needed for resolution in a poetic form, like the sonnet, built upon constraints.[\(18\)](#)

Aside from the set-up and delivery Marot carries over to his sonnet, we also recognize the form of the tercets—a *distique* followed by an embraced quatrain—in others of Marot’s poetic forms. A couple of epigrams from the *Quatriesme Livre* bear witness to this AABCCB form: one entitled “De Macé Longis” (II: 356) and another “De Pauline” that I reproduce here:

Pauline est riche et me veult bien (A)
Pour mary : Je n’en feray rien, (A)
Pour tant vieille est que j’en ay honte. (B)
S’elle estoit plus vieille du tiers, (C)
Je la prendrois plus volentiers: (C)
Car despesche en seroit plus prompte. (B) (II: 357)

[Pauline is rich et very much wants me/ for a husband: I will do nothing,/ For so old is she that I am ashamed./ If she was even older by another third,/ I would voluntarily take her:/ For being rid of her would be much quicker.]

These two sentences couched in six verses set up another humorous situation where a *rime plate* introduces a situation that is developed and nuanced in an embraced quatrain, where the repetition of the B-rhyme in the sixth verse delivers the punch-line: While I won’t marry this rich woman because she is too old, if she was even older, I’d do so because I could more quickly inherit her money! In using Marot as his example, Thomas Sébillet was quite adroit in suggesting that structurally the sonnet “n’est autre chose que le parfait épigramme de l’Italien” (II: 107). [(The sonnet) is nothing more than the perfect Italian epigram.] However, concerning its subject matter, Sébillet offers some clarification:

(S)ache que la matière de l'épigramme et la matière du Sonnet sont toutes unes, fors que la manière facétieuse est répugnante à la gravité du sonnet qui reçoit plus proprement affections et passions graves, même chez le prince des Poètes italiens [Pétrarque], duquel l'archétype des Sonnets a été tiré (II: 107-08).

[Know that the subject matter of the epigram and that of the sonnet are all one, with the exception that the facetious manner (of the epigram) is repugnant when compared to the sonnet, which more honestly receives affections and grave passions, even with the Italian Prince of Poets [Petrarch], from whom the archetype of the sonnet was taken.]

While the Marotic epigram did prepare the way to parsimoniously build to and deliver a final thought, it did not preserve the gravity and seriousness called for by lyricism. For this, Marot had other verse forms.

To answer the ends of passionate verse and solemn tone in his lyrical output, Marot would turn to Hebraic imitation with the translation of his *Psaumes de David*.⁽¹⁹⁾ In his psalms, Marot not only interpreted David's hymns from the Hebrew original, he improvised—as he did with the sonnet—with the form in making them French. In fact, two of his psalms bear the same sestet AABCCB rhyme scheme we saw in the sonnet and epigrams. Without analyzing the translated meaning of Marot's "Pseaulme Trentesixiesme," I reproduce the first stanza in order to outline the use of this rhyme scheme to establish a thought through a *distique* and nuance it in an embraced quatrain:

Du maling les faictz vicieux (A)
Me disent que devant ses yeux (A)
N'a point de Dieu la crainte : (B)
Car tant se plait son erreur, (C)
Que l'avoir en hayne, et horreur, (C)
C'est bien force, et contraincte . . . (B) (II : 642)

[Of the evil one, his vicious deeds/ Reveal to me that before his eyes/ Is no fear of God:/ For, so pleased is he with his errors/ That to feel both hatred and horror/ For him one is both forced and obligated.]

What's more is here we recognize a 3 : 3 division in the sestet that translates over to his French sonnets (written at roughly the same time in his poetic career). For establishing and delivering a final idea, Marot's *distique* and embraced quatrain was yet again quite effective.

Alas, Marot never composed any sonnets I would qualify as purely lyrical—considering both structure and thematics. His only real lyrical sonnets are translations of Petrarch. He did, however, through his innovation, provide a model that would come to be the norm for the French sonnet. The *couplet marotique*, while a product of *bricolage* from various other

poetic forms, was truly an “innovation” in the Renaissance sense of the term in that it was not a rediscovery (*invention*) but a change—even an amelioration—of the form being imitated. In *Évolution du sonnet français*, Gendre states it thus:

[...] (L’)innovation française de la rime plate aux vers 9-10 (abhorrée des Italiens) ne serait pas une invention appropriée à une nouvelle forme, mais le prolongement d’une habitude . . . (34)

[The French innovation of a *rime plate* in verses 9-10 (abhorred by the Italians) would not suitably constitute an invention of a new form, but rather the continuation of an existing habit . . .]

In spite of the disdain displayed by the Italian Petrarchist poets for the *couplet marotique* of the French sonnet, Marot’s CC-rhyme became the model *par excellence* for the French avatar of the 14-verse lyrical structure (Gendre 18) and is today known in France as the *sonnet régulier* [regular sonnet].[\(20\)](#)

Having laid out and developed the theoretical apparatus surrounding Marot’s poetic innovation, prior to concluding, let us now turn to two examples where Marot used this form to compose original sonnets. Of the four original sonnets penned by the poet, two actually have a claim to firstness in the Marotic *œuvre*. Let us begin with the sonnet that is currently generally accepted as the first French sonnet (Villey 538; Mayer 481; McClelland 591), most likely composed in exile in the summer of 1536 (Kennedy 126; Roubaud 18; Defaux 1099n), Marot’s “Sonnet à Madame de Ferrare”:

Me souvenant de tes graces divines, (A)
Suis en douleur, princesse, à ton absence: (B)
Et si languy quant suis en ta presence, (B)
Voyant ce lys au milieu des espines. (A)
O la douceur des douceurs feminines! (A)
O cueur sans fiel! ô race d’excellence! (B)
O dur mary remply de violence, (B)
Qui s’endurcist pres des choses benignes. (A)
Si seras tu de la main soustenuë (C)
De l’Eternel, comme chere tenue, (C)
Et tes nuysans auront honte, et reproche. (D)
Courage, doncq: en l’air je voy la nue (C)
Qui ça, et là s’escarte, et diminue, (C)
Pour faire place au beau temps, qui s’approche. (D) (II: 297-98)

[Remembering your divine graces/ I am pained, princess, by your absence:/ And so languished when in your presence/ Seeing this lily amidst the thorns./ O the sweetness of feminine sweetnesses!/ O heart without guile! O excellent race!/ O brutal husband full

of violence,/ Who hardens next to benevolent things./ Therefore shall you be sustained
by the hand/ Of the Eternal One, like precious attire,/ And those who wish you harm will
have shame and reproach./ Courage, then: in the sky, I see the cloud/ That here and
there moves away, and diminishes/ To make room for the lovely weather, that draws
near.]

Written for the court of Ferrara, where Marot had taken exile to escape charges of
“Lutherianism,” and addressed to Renée de France, daughter of king Louis XII and Anne de
Bretagne and wife of the cruel duke Ercole II d’Este, this sonnet did take as its subject an
inaccessible and absent woman; however, needless to say, so inaccessible was Renée that
this poem lacks the verisimilitude that would make it’s desire imitable or believable.
Therefore, it cannot be considered entirely lyrical or Petrarchian. Still, it does operate
syllogistically to present two conflicting premises that parsimoniously resolve themselves
through a *couplet marotique* followed by a concluding quatrain. The first stanza adopts a
laudatory tone as it tells of her absence and its effect on him as the poet-subject, one that is
doubled in the presence of her sorrow as he introduces her as the lone lily in a valley of
thorns. The second stanza expands on this image as it makes an apostrophic appeal to her
feminine sweetness and lack of guile, juxtaposing those with the hardness of her abusive
and unappreciative husband. This embraced pair of quatrains (ABBA ABBA) is interrupted,
however, in verse 9, when (perhaps for the first time ever) Marot introduces a doubled CC-
rhyme to this repetitive *ottava*. Not only does he interrupt this continuity poetically, he also
does so linguistically with the interjection *Si* (“Therefore” or “Hence”): “*Si seras tu de la
main soustenue [...]*” With the introduction of an interjection, the syllogistic nature of the
sonnet is reinforced. To the first two syllogistic premises (P1: She is a divine lily in the midst
of thorny company/ P2: He is a cruel and unworthy husband to such a sweet being), Marot
prepares a conclusive resolution with *Si*. Whereas the first two quatrains speak of, first, the
poet’s distress at the absence of his graceful duchess, and, second, the sorrow in her life
despite all her virtues, the first *rime plate* (vv. 9-10) responds to the sorrow expressed in the
second quatrain, as it evokes the allegorized Hand of the Eternal that would-while doubly
divinizing her with its touch-avenge her shameful wrongdoers (“*Et tes nuysans auront honte
et reproche,*” v. 11). Closed with a period, the syntax of this first tercet prepares for
another, final tercet to close the sonnet. With a second *couplet marotique* (CC), the poet
appeals to the repetitive *dédoublement* of the epigram and prepares the reader for the final
mot, expressed in a quasi-imperative: “*Courage, doncq: en l’air je voy la nue/ Qui çà, et là
s’escarte, et diminue,/ Pour faire place au beau temps, qui s’approche*” (vv.12-14). He prays
her to “Take courage,” chiastically referring back and responding to all her *graces divines*
from the first quatrain and assuring her that the divine hand that avenges her will also clear
out the gloomy clouds, making space for the *beau temps* on the horizon. As we see, even
with a very different thematics, the dual interruption of the repeating quatrains with the
tercets-here, prepared by two *couplets marotiques*-allows the poem to abruptly change
pace and ushers it to a resolute end. Written more for the novelty of its poet’s having been
in Italy, this sonnet, with all its epigrammatic qualities that allow for its decisive, syllogistic

end, is very effective in conveying its message.

Now, let us turn to another Marotic sonnet, one undoubtedly written (given its subject matter in the city of Lyon) after Marot's return from exile and the first ever published French sonnet, "Pour le may planté par les imprimeurs de Lyon devant le logis du seigneur Trivulse":

Au Ciel n'y a ne Planette, ne Signe, (A)
Qui si à point sceust gouverner l'Année, (B)
Comme est Lyon la Cité gouvernée (B)
Par toy, Trivulse, homme cler, et insigne. (A)
Cela disons pour ta vertu condigne, (A)
Et pour la joye entre nous demenée, (B)
Dont tu nous as la liberté donnée, (B)
La liberté des Thresors la plus digne. (A)
Heureux Vieillard, les gros Tabours tonnans, (C)
Le May planté, et les Fiffres sonnans (C)
En vont louant toy, et ta noble race. (D)
Or pense doncq, que sont noz volontés, (E)
Veu, qu'il n'est rien, jusqu'aux arbres plantés, (E)
Qui ne t'en loue, et ne t'en rende grâce. (D) (II: 280)

[In the Heavens there is neither Planet nor Sign/ That so knew how to govern the Year/
As is governed Lyon the City/ By you, Trivulse, great and learned man./ This we say for
your virtuous merit/ And for the joy we all express/ Of which you have given us the
liberty, The liberty of most worthy Treasures./ Felicitous Old Man, the great thundering
Drums,/ The staked Maypole, and the sounding Fifes/ Continue praising you and your
noble race./ And yet, think then, that these are our desires/ In view of the fact that there
is nothing, even to planted trees,/ That does not praise you and render its good graces.]

While we are dealing with another laudatory sonnet, considering that this is a *poème d'occasion*, commemorating the traditional practice of erecting a maypole (*planter un mai*) in front of the home of an elected official, (21) there is no need to focus on the thematic disparities between this and the Petrarchian brand of lyrical sonnets. However, structurally, the purposes of the sonnet are served. The first two quatrains build upon each other to establish Pomponne Trivulse as a capable and praiseworthy governor, one who brought liberty and fortune (*Thresors*) to his people—both stanzas representing syntactically individual units, as indicated by the period that concludes each. The first syllogistic premise nods to Trivulse's superlative governing of the city of Lyon, while the second deals with the recognition and appreciation of the governed people who enjoy the fruits of Trivulse's labors. (In this case, the *you* is contained in the first stanzic premise and the *us* in the second.) These two premises prepare an interjecting conclusion in the tercets, which is

introduced with an apostrophic appeal to the “Heureux Vieillard” (v. 9). Poetically, when the *rime plate* in the 9th and 10th verse positions abruptly interrupts the flow of the embraced quatrains, it also marks a movement from passive, conceptual adulation to contemporaneous action (with the gerundive *rhymetonnants/sonnants*) and a work accomplished, “Le May planté,” which is followed in the 11th verse by a continuous action indicated with the use of a gerundive (“Et vont louant...”), which is, again, closed off with a period. As Marot did in the preceding sonnet, this elegiac piece is also concluded with an independent, free-standing tercet that begins with a transition (“Or,” like the previous poem’s “doncq”) and, this time, an imperative command: “pense” (v. 12), which sets up the anticipated *mot final* that justifies the *May planté*: “Veu, qu’il n’est rien, jusqu’aux arbres plantés,/ Qui ne t’en loue, et ne t’en rende grâce” (vv. 13-14). Rather than merely suggesting praise, as the poet does in the first eight verses, with the doubled *couplet marotique*, he assures that due glory will be delivered to the beloved governor. What is more, with the disposition he offers to the resolving sestet (of two separate tercets), Marot allows for a final conciliatory message: that the symbolic actions taken by the Lyon printers (one becoming many planted trees) are reflective of their continued appreciation and praise. With the marriage of the sonnet to the epigram, if Marot lost sight of the Petrarchian thematics of the form, he certainly maximized its structural ability to build to and impressively deliver a point.

Conclusion

As the above analysis of these two of his early sonnets demonstrates, Marot certainly recognized and understood the esthetic potential of the Italian verse form. A memory from his Italian exile, a form unproven, and something, to him, particularly un-French, it is safe to assume that the sonnet was simply not his form of predilection (as evidenced by his limited number of 4 original sonnets and 6 translations that seem to be “perdu[s] au milieu d’un grand nombre d’épigrammes” (Villey 547) [“lost in the middle of a great number of epigrams”]). In the end, Marot still preferred less constrained forms. McClelland offers the following explanation:

Il est tentant, plus exact aussi je crois, d’estimer que la forme fixe du sonnet représentait pour Marot une façon de penser la poésie dont il voulait se libérer A part les rimes, on ne remarque guère de différence entre ses premiers quatorzains et ses premiers sonnets. Avec le temps la conception originale du poème en quatorze vers se scinde en deux: formes complémentaires au début, sonnet et quatorzain finissent par s’organiser chacun selon les critères qui lui sont propres. Chacun signifie une manière particulière d’appréhender et de présenter une réalité affective. C’est l’épigramme qui gagne à la fin, parce que désormais le monde qui entourait Marot-le poète adulte en pleine possession de ses forces-ne pouvait plus s’exprimer par de rigides structures intellectuelles et esthétiques. (607)

[It is tempting, and I believe more correct, to consider the fixed form of the sonnet as representing for Marot a conception of poetry from which he wanted to free himself. . . . Except for the rhymes, one hardly notices any difference between his original *quatorzains* and his first sonnets. In due time, the original conception of a poem in fourteen verses splits in two: at first complementary forms, the sonnet and *quatorzain* end up each organizing itself according to its own criteria. Each represents a particular way to comprehend and present an affective reality. It is the epigram that wins out in the end because from then on the world that surrounded Marot—the adult poet in full possession of his capacities—could not express himself by means of rigid intellectual and esthetic structures.]

McClelland's explanation for Marot's final choice of the epigram over the sonnet is sufficiently convincing, citing the personality and time period as determining factors for the poet—"Il crut même [en pétrarquisant] devoir [se] sacrifier au goût du jour" (Piéri 55) ["(Marot) felt the need to sacrifice (himself) to the poetic tastes of his day"]; however, his judgment that the early sonnet and *quatorzain* were noticeably similar *except for the rhyme structure* (the thesis of his article), is doubtful, according to our understanding, in that the rhyme structure is what makes the sonnet function. Even if Marot would ultimately prefer the liberties of the epigram, to deny his contributions to the sonnet verse form as it entered into France constitutes a considerable oversight. Jean Balsamo asserts that "Mieux qu'un second Pétrarque, ou qu'un Pétrarque français, Marot avait voulu être un nouvel Ovide, et il voulait surtout être un nouveau David" (51) [More than a second Petrarch, or a French Petrarch, Marot wanted to be a new Ovid, and more especially a new David.] In spite of his poetic wishes or his believed calling, Marot enhanced the "Petrarchian" sonnet structure that would be exploited to positive ends in the Pléiade's love sonnets of the subsequent decades.

In *La Deffence*, Du Bellay called on his contemporaries to innovate through imitation, to rediscover models from the past and incorporate them into the French tradition for the embellishment of the French language. Ironically, they attempted to do this while breaking away from the past, singling out Marot, who was, with the ode, sonnet, elegy, discourse, and other forms, their contemporary master of *innovation par imitation*. Still, with no concern for firstness, Marot, this one, great poetic imagination, "invented" (re-discovered) the sonnet and innovated a French poetic form that would become *the* lyrical form *par excellence* in the tradition of French letters.

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Notes

1. In *Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization* (the English-language translation of *Europe, la voie romaine*), scholar Rémi Brague asserts that Europe's singularity is found in the relationship of cultural secondarity to Hellenism and Judaism that it adopted from Roman culture. His second chapter, "Romanity as Model" (24-42), explains this imitative and appropriative paradigm, stating that "The Romans invented nothing" (29) and outlining the Roman cultural contribution as follows: "(T)he structure of the transmission of a content that is not properly its own. The Romans have done little more than transmit, but that is far from nothing. They have brought nothing new in relation to those two creator peoples, the Greeks and the Hebrews. But they were the bearers of that *innovation*. They brought *innovation* itself. What was ancient for them, they brought as something new" (32, my italics). This is especially evident in the intermittent period between the Middle Ages and the Early-modern world (i.e. the Renaissance, 114-16), where *innovation par imitation*-renewal through appropriation and re-reading-is an official motto. The readership of *Anthropoetics*, with its pronounced interest in "fundamental anthropology" based on the mimetic theory of desire, will be interested to know that, on the back cover of the English-language edition of the text, René Girard offers a the following appraisal of Brague's thesis: "The most characteristic feature of European (and American) civilization is not its originality but its deliberately assumed *secondarity* vis-à-vis Greek and Jewish models. This secondarity is a willingness to learn which itself had to be learned from another cultural model, Europe's most direct model, the civilization that, if I may say, *invented* cultural secondarity, the Roman." ([back](#))

2. I will elaborate on Gans's idea of the secular esthetic displacing sacred ritual in the Renaissance in the second section of this article that treats Petrarch's codification of the sonnet as the ideal poetic form for expressing passionate love. ([back](#))

3. Despite the anachronism inherent in speaking in these terms, questions of firstness and the "invention" of the French sonnet occupy a primary position among-and have expended the intellectual energies of-many Renaissance scholars over the past century. The debate of the sonnet's paternity has indeed *fait couler de l'encre*, with scholars divided between contemporaries Mellin de Saint-Gelais and Clément Marot. The sheer volume and richness of a series of articles, each modifying the findings of the last with new research, seems proof enough, in and of itself, of the supposed stakes of this point. Everett Ward Olmsted's 1897 dissertation at Cornell "The Sonnet in French Literature and the Development of the

French Sonnet Form” claims that both Mellin and Marot were possibly writing sonnets as early as the late 1520s, and posing the question of who wrote what first (20-21), raises doubts as to the long-held belief that Mellin was the “father,” forwarded as recently as 1895 by Marius Piéri in his *Le pétrarquisme au XVIe siècle* on Petrarch and Ronsard (47). Jasinski, in 1903, would attribute the honor to Marot, claiming he wrote the first sonnet in 1530 (37). In 1909, Joseph Vianey’s *Le pétrarquisme en France au XVIe siècle* would offer another nod in the direction of Marot (45-58). The following year l’abbé H.-J. Molinier’s massive work on the life and poetry of Mellin would offer evidence supporting his subject as the first (389-99). A decade later would see the question treated with more historical rigor. Pierre Villey would promote Marot in 1920; N. H. Clement would question his dates but support the same general thesis in 1923 and Walter Bullock would take it a step further in 1924. In 1953, Françon would support Mellin as the author of the first sonnet, only to have Weber contradict him in 1955 (234n) and to enter into a polemic with C. A. Mayer in 1967. While the debate of Françon and Mayer remains open, with neither producing substantial evidence in either direction, modern scholarship—for the most part—goes with the majority and accepts Marot as the first French sonneteer. Although scholarship as recent as 1990 (Zilli’s edited volume of Mellin’s sonnets (lxii), and Jacques Roubaud’s anthology *Soleil du soleil* (15)) and 1993 (Defaux’s edition of Marot (1298-99n.)) reposes the question in tracing over these scholarly footprints, all archival evidence that we have points to Marot *publishing* the first sonnet in 1538 (Villey 547; Roubaud 16; Jasinski 38n; Gendre 34; Balsamo, “François I” 51), and more objective, less partisan scholarship is quick to concede that “The paternity of the sonnet seems thus to lie with Clément Marot” (Rigolot, “The Sonnet” 172). [\(back\)](#)

4. This literary genre, which constitutes another form of imitation for which Horace and Cicero are main sources, was extremely popular in the mid-16th century. Du Bellay’s *Deffence* is truly just one (albeit the most famous) of dozens offering poetic theories on how to embellish the French language. On the “Defense,” Margaret Ferguson’s *Trials of Desire* is a very insightful volume. [\(back\)](#)

5. We will return to Sébillet’s theories on the epigram and the sonnet in the second and third sections of this study. [\(back\)](#)

6. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from French to English are my own. In the case of Du Bellay, in this translation I have preserved his capitalization of certain key words. [\(back\)](#)

7. Granted, the ode, ballad, rondel, dizain, limerick or even the haiku also come to mind. Still, I argue that the sonnet remains the most lyrical of these forms—while also remaining the most recognizable. The sheer length and complex rhetorical structure of the elegiac Pindaric (Greek) or Horatian (Latin) ode generally limit the study (even recognition) of the genre to specialists. The musicality and variations of the popular medieval narrative ballad and rondel tends to be less lyrical thematically, formally less rigorous and, ultimately, less

recognizable as a poetic form. Traditionally reserved for comedic purposes, the limerick, despite its fixed meter and rhyme scheme, is sooner to be found penciled onto truck stop walls than crafted into lyrical verse. And, while conforming to a set syllabic count, the haiku (aside from being non-western in origin) ignores most other formal conventions (rhyme, meter, etc.). ([back](#))

8. "The Petrarchian Lyrical Imperative" is the title of my doctoral dissertation (UCLA 2008), where I study this poetic tendency—beginning with Marot—among the first French sonneteers (1536-1552). Moving away from the traditional spelling of the adjective "Petrarchan," my choice of the alternate spelling "Petrarchian" is deliberate, as I treat imitators of Petrarch, "Petrarchists" or *les pétrarquaisants*, in which case the letter "i" does carry significance in separating works that imitate Petrarch from works by the hand of Petrarch. A *petrarchian* sonnet is, therefore, one that imitates one of the true *Petrarchan* variety. For the poets of Renaissance France, Petrarch is, if only mythically so, a codifier of a form and a figurehead for a structure and a thematic. ([back](#))

9. For another, earlier cultural explanation of this shift from presence to absence, public to private, see Edward B. Tylor's explanation of "Rites and Ceremonies" (362-442) in *Primitive Culture* (1913), where he notes a movement from practical, outwardly expressive performances to a more symbolic, dramatic utterance of "the gesture-language of theology" (362) that would result in the development of imperative appeals, the lyrical genre and, eventually, prayer. ([back](#))

10. Gans continues in *Originary Thinking* to explain in linguistic terms why the imperative subject is participating in a futile task: "'I baptize you...'" actually effects a change in reality; an imperative merely attempts to bring about change through the agency of another. True, the change sought by the imperative is a natural one, not a cultural one like naming or titling; but, precisely for that reason, the words themselves cannot do the job" (70). ([back](#))

11. In the footnotes of "Naissance du Moi lyrique," Gans explains that regardless of the sacred or profane register, the lyrical (or imperative) form is always medial, lingering between the drama and the epic: "(D)ans le cadre rituel, le drame est plus primitif et le récit plus évolué que le lyrique, alors que dans le cadre séculier l'ordre est renversé, le genre lyrique occupant encore la place intermédiaire" (130n). [In the ritual framework, drama is more primitive and the tale more evolved than the lyric, whereas in the secular framework the order is reversed, with the lyrical genre still occupying the intermediate position.] Between the expressive, active participation of the former and the latent, passive absence of the latter, in both cases, dwells the lyrical imperative, the unaccomplished, intermediary form where a present subject linguistically calls upon a non-present, desired object. ([back](#))

12. In a section on "Genres of Discourse," in the sixth chapter of *The Origin of Language*, Gans divides literary genres into three forms that correspond with the evolution of

language: dramatic-ostensive, lyric-imperative and narrative (or epic)-declarative (232-57). [\(back\)](#)

13. For detailed analyses of the lyrical limitations of these early Italian sonnets, please refer to the first two chapters of my doctoral dissertation. [\(back\)](#)

14. With Petrarch, while the quatrain pair is uniformly ABBA ABBA, the disposition of the remaining sestet varies. André Gendre provides a percentage breakdown of the most common tendencies of the 317 sonnets of the *Canzoniere* in his *Evolution du sonnet français*: CDE CDE (38%), CDE DCE (21%) and two-rhyme CDC DCD (36%) (32n). [\(back\)](#)

15. Of course, not all sonnets fit into this model of the syllogism, just like there are many that do not speak of love. In a study that speaks of the Petrarchian ideal sonnet, it is important to remember that the ideal sonnet does not exist. Therefore, such an *a priori* theory should be taken as such-unproven; yet, it remains useful to seeing how the sonnet *can* work as a rhetorical/poetic structure. [\(back\)](#)

16. Petrarch seems to like the term “pianger” that carries significance for both the jilted lover, who “weeps,” as well as the passionate poet, who “cries out vocally” through his imperative verse. [\(back\)](#)

17. In the case of this French sonnet, I will not provide the English translation. As true as it is to Petrarch’s original, Musa’s translation is sufficient to relate the content of both. [\(back\)](#)

18. This point is developed in more detail in the third chapter of my doctoral dissertation. It is truncated here in the interest of remaining focused on the *couplet marotique* and its function in the context of the French sonnet. [\(back\)](#)

19. Marot’s psalms are another of my current projects and a topic on which I will be presenting at a conference later this year. My working title is: “*Être David ou rien: Clément Marot, the Genevan Psalter and the Question of Hebraic Imitation.*” [\(back\)](#)

20. The term *sonnet régulier* can refer to sonnets with the two following rhyme schemes: ABBA ABBA CC DEED (*Rg emb*: régulier embrassé) or ABBA ABBA CCD EDE (*Rg cr*: régulier croisé). In both cases, a *couplet marotique* in the 9th and 10th verse positions is present. [\(back\)](#)

21. A pagan, Celtic practice, derived from the cult of nature, the erection of a totemic *arbre de mai* represents fertility, the coming of Spring and the renewal of the natural cycle. The tree is often planted on the land of a community dignitary. The practice is discussed at length by Frazer in *The Golden Bough* in the section on “The King in the Wood” (pp. 90-97). [\(back\)](#)